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“A single death is a tragedy; a million deaths are a statistic.” The quote has been attributed in different versions to both Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin and, probably more accurately, to German satirist and journalist Kurt Tucholsky from an essay published in 1932.

The quote reflects a multitude of things. It underscores the need to create empathy if anyone is to care or be engaged. Put another way, you need to personalize and pull on the heart strings at times. Sometimes the best way to do it is to tell a story, so the listener feels connected.

In ongoing efforts to keep ethics front and center at my organization, I’ve asked folks to read stories about made-up mishaps involving individuals with specific identities. The stories are an attempt to get team members to empathize with the characters as if the unfortunate occurrences happened to them. A good-faith effort in writing about issues in the story gets them entered in drawings for gift cards, quality chocolate, or surprise gift boxes full of goodies.

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