This presentation reflects on the power of stories as essential tale-telling in anthropology and a mode of understanding in social interaction. I take “talk story” — a local expression of informal interaction that builds and asserts relationships -- as not only the act of telling, but also the equally important art of listening. In listening we take on the responsibility of the relationships and the stories themselves, becoming part of the bearer of tales. Talk story is not something to be taken lightly or carelessly, but carries with it responsibilities and commitment – in short, kuleana. I expand “talk story” to include tellings that go beyond language and encompass bodies as kinetic tales of selves and others embedded in places, people, communities, and histories. Talk story as a methodology is not merely interviewing. Rather, it involves committed, radical listening. In this way, I take talk story as a form of engaged leadership--flexible, empathic, resourceful. This kind of talk-story leadership builds upon the give and take of listening deeply, even radically. It is about talk story as building relationships of trust and integrity, while recognizing different modes of leadership. There may be leadership in acting, in speaking, in protesting, in listening, in research. There may be leadership in providing sustenance and support, in mentoring those around you, and in receiving the mentorship of the community. Anthropology can play a role in this by recognizing and developing leaders that commit to communities, building upon individual strengths from the bottom up. In this way, I suggest that the highest form of kuleana anthropology may rest in the humility of talk-story leadership, developing radical listening that carves a space of deepest respect and commits to action.

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