

Personal Narrative Training Preparation



The importance of storytelling.

Data tells us what. Stories tell us why, which is ultimately the root of all motivation. Stories give *meaning* to data by connecting it with emotions that reveal our values.

This is because: “we experience value through emotions, therefore making moral choices in the absence of emotion is futile”

Not all emotions motivate us to act. Some have the opposite effect. We must tell stories that **challenge** those emotions that prevent action and **replace** them with those that motivate.

CHALLENGE		ENGAGE
Inertia	→	Urgency
Fear	→	Hope
Apathy	→	Anger (outrage)
Self-Doubt	→	Confidence (YCMAD - You Can Make a Difference)
Isolation	→	Solidarity

Personal Narrative/Story of Self:

“We teach values our choices reveal not as abstract principles but as our lived experience”

- Marshall Ganz

Our personal story sets the tone and builds our relationship with our audience. The success of the rest of our gathering can hinge upon whether we tell our own story well. The purpose of our personal narrative is:

- to build trust and connection with our audience
- to connect our audience with values within them that will motivate them to act
- to contextualise facts and data in ways that are meaningful and memorable
- to sow seeds and evoke curiosity to learn more
- to hold a mirror to our audience that encourages them to self-reflect.

It is also an opportunity to reveal a new frame; to show, rather than tell.

A story has three key elements:

- 1) character(s)
- 2) plot
- 3) moral

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Character

In a personal narrative the protagonist is yourself. As with any story, in order to engage, the protagonist needs to be someone the audience identifies with or relates to. In a personal narrative, the protagonist also needs to be someone they trust. It is important, as you craft your story to think about your audience and what you can reveal about yourself that will build that trust. You want to reveal things that invoke the following qualities:

- 1) vulnerability
- 2) credibility
- 3) relatability

Vulnerability

Vulnerability creates intimacy. It immediately sets a tone for the evening as a safe time and space to reveal oneself to others. If someone trusts you with personal information about themselves, it makes you want to do that trust justice by trusting back and by behaving in ways that are worthy of that trust. Examples of vulnerability include: personal information such as your age or that you are contemplating having children or how you felt about something that happened in your life.

Credibility

Credibility is information that gives you authority to speak on the subject matter. It can be a qualification or a personal life experience. It is particularly powerful if it is unexpected. For example, if you are not from a background that one would normally associate with environmentalism or climate change, such as working for a mining company or being from a conservative family.

Relatability

People will tune out or even dismiss you if they do not identify with you. They will constantly look for cues that tell them you are like them or different than them. Be conscious of your audience and look for 'universal' experiences that you can draw upon. If you do need to include information about yourself that might reveal you as 'different' think about how you present it in a way that builds confidence rather than alienates.

Plot

A plot is not a list of events: "I got up. I got dressed. I had breakfast. I went to school." A plot is created by the unexpected - when our protagonist is faced with a **challenge** and must make a **choice** that leads to an **outcome**.

In a personal narrative, the plot is our moral journey. It is the story of the moments in our lives that forced us to make a moral choice about how to respond that have led to outcomes that have ultimately brought us to where we are now.

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Moral

As Marshall Ganz explains:

“Stories teach. “And that is the moral of the story.” Have you ever been to a party where someone starts telling a story and they go on...and on...and on...? Don’t you want to shout, “Point? Point! Get to the point!” We deploy stories to make a point, to evoke a response, to make something happen.”

The moral is the point of your story, in this case, how it is that you are sitting in front of your audience, giving up your time and exposing yourself to their reactions to guide them through the issue of climate change.

Only the Necessary Details

Every part of a story is there for a reason: to help tell the story. Every part of the story is there to prepare the audience get to the moral at the end of the story.

Your audience will expect every detail you share to be relevant either to who you are, or to the unfolding of the story. If you simply include it as part of the chronology, but never connect it up to the moral of the story or building your character, people will be left wondering why you told them that and wondering why you won’t get to the point.

Your story needs to be crafted with your endpoint (your moral) in mind. Every element is leading to that point and must have some relevance to it.

Activity # 1 - Finding the Point:

Answer the following 3 questions.

1. *What do you want your audience to be motivated to do?*
2. *What do you want them to reflect upon?*
3. *What are your 3 key messages/questions that you want your audience to get from your story?*

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Activity # 2: Your Plot

Fill in the table with the key moments of realisation that brought you to where you are now:

What was the moment? eg: you read a book; had a conversation...	What did you realise and how did you feel?	What did you do and how did that make you feel?

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Activity #3: Your Character

Answer the following three questions on your own, then discuss with another person to decide whether you include the information or not and if so, how?

1. *What makes you credible?*

2. *What makes you relatable?*

3. *What makes you unrelatable?/ What might be a red flag for your audience?*

Activity #4: Craft your Story:

On a blank piece of paper, in dot points:

- 1) Write your moments or realisations in chronological order evenly spaced down the page with some space between them and some space either side
- 2) Add any joining information that is important to make your plot make sense
- 3) Mark in different coloured pens opportunities to add:
 - vulnerability
 - credibility
 - relatability
 - values
 - emotion
- 4) Circle any red flags
- 5) Check your story against your original goals. Are your 3 key messages clear?
- 6) Trim the story down. Go through and remove unnecessary details or parts of the story. Ask yourself if each part of the story is necessary to tell the story and your 3 messages, if not, remove it.