

Story of Self Workshop

What is a Story of Self?

You tell a Story of Self to enable others to “get you” – to experience the values that call you not only to serve the cause you serve but to accept the responsibility to lead. The key is to focus on choice points: moments when your values counted in choices you made in response to challenge, to uncertainty. When did you first care about being heard, about others, about abuses of power, about poverty? Why? When did you feel you had to do something? Why did you feel you could? What were the circumstances? The power of a story of self is due less to the “high” or “tragic” drama than it is due to the courage you show in allowing others to see something of yourself. What you reveal to your listener does not have to be your deepest secret but instead should be the key shaping moments in your life.

Incorporating Challenge, Choice, and Outcome in Your Own Story

Ask yourself questions to focus on choices you made along the way that brought you to this point in time as a leader. Once you identify a specific choice point that is particularly meaningful to you, dig deeper by trying to answer the following questions.

Challenge: Why did you feel it was a challenge? What was so challenging about it? Why was it your challenge?

Choice: Why did you make the choice you did? Where did you get the courage (or not)? Where did you get the hope (or not)? Did your parents’, grandparents’ or others life stories teach you how to act in that moment? How did it feel?

Outcome: How did the outcome feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

A word about challenge. Sometimes people see the word challenge and think that they need to describe the misfortunes of their lives. A struggle can be of your own choosing – a high mountain you decided to climb, not just a valley you managed to climb out of. Any number of things may have been a challenge to you and can be the source of a good story to inspire others.

Before you decide what part of your story to tell, think about these questions:

1. Why am I called to leadership? What is my purpose in calling on others to join me in action? What will I be calling on them to do? Focus on the major project on which you are working with your team. Why did you decide to tackle this specific social problem? What stories can you tell to answer these questions?
2. What values move me to act? How might they inspire others to similar action?
3. What stories can I tell from my own life about specific people or events that would *show* (rather than tell) how I learned or acted on those values?

What are the experiences in your life that have shaped the values that call you to leadership in this campaign?

FAMILY & CHILDHOOD

Parents/Family
Growing Up Experiences
Your Community
Role Models
School

LIFE CHOICES

School
Career
Partner/Family
Hobbies/Interests/Talents
Experiences Finding Passion
Experiences Overcoming Challenge

ORGANIZING EXPERIENCE

First Experience of Organizing
Connection to Key Books or
People
Role Models

A good public story is drawn from the series of choice points that structure the “plot” of your life- the **challenges** you faced, **choices** you made, and **outcomes** you experienced.

Challenge: Why did you feel it was a challenge? What was so challenging about it? Why was it *your* challenge?

Choice: Why did you make the choice you did? Where did you get the courage—or not? Where did you get the hope—or not? How did it feel?

Outcome: How did the outcome feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

Use the space below to help craft your story using the structure of challenge, choice, and outcome.

If you'd like, you can try drawing pictures here instead of words. Powerful stories leave your listeners with images in their minds that shape their understanding of you and your calling. Remember, articulating the decisions you make in the face of challenges is what ultimately communicates your values.

Challenge:	
Choice:	
Outcome:	

For Further Reflection



We all live very rich and complex lives with many challenges, many choices, and many outcomes of both failure and success. That means we will never be able to tell our entire life story in two minutes. The challenge is to learn to interpret our life stories as a practice, so that we can teach others based on reflection and interpretation of our own experiences, and choose stories to tell from our own lives based on what is appropriate in each unique situation.

Take time to reflect on your own public story, beginning with your story of self. You may go back as far as your parents or grandparents, or you may start with your most recent organizing and keep asking yourself why you got involved when you did. Focus on challenges you had to face, the choices you made about how to deal with those challenges, and the satisfactions—or frustration—you experienced. Why did you make those choices? Why did you do this and not that? Keep asking yourself why.

What did you learn from reflecting on these moments of challenge, choice, and outcome? How do they feel? Do they teach you anything about yourself, about your family, about your peers, your community, your nation, your world around you—about what really matters to you? What about these stories was so intriguing? Which elements offered real perspective into your own life?

What brings you to this campaign? When did you decide to work to advance the movement for global health equity? Why? When did you decide to volunteer? Why? When did you decide to give up a weekend to come to this workshop? Why?

Many of us active in public leadership have stories of both loss and hope. If we did not have stories of loss, we would not understand that loss is a part of the world; we would have no reason to try to fix it. But we also have stories of hope. Otherwise we wouldn't be trying to fix it.



Practicing Your Story of Self

While giving feedback to others on their Story of Self, remember to balance both positive and constructive critical feedback. The purpose of coaching is to listen to the *way* stories are told and think of ways that the storytelling could be improved.

DON'T simply offer vague “feel good” comments. (“That was a really great story!”)

DO coach each other on the following points:

THE CHALLENGE: What were the specific challenges the storyteller faced? Did the storyteller paint a vivid picture of those challenges?

“When you described _____, I got a clear picture of the challenge.”

“I understood the challenge to be _____. Is that what you intended?”

“The challenge wasn’t clear. How would you describe _____?”

THE CHOICE: Was there a clear choice that was made in response to each challenge? How did the choice make you feel? (Hopeful? Angry?)

“To me, the choice you made was _____, and it made me feel _____.”

“It would be helpful if you focused on the moment you made a choice.”

THE OUTCOME: What was the specific outcome that resulted from each choice? What does that outcome teach us?

“I understood the outcome to be _____, and it teaches me _____. But how does it relate to your work now?”

THE VALUES: Could you identify what this person’s values are and where they came from? How? How did the story make you feel?

“Your story made me feel _____ because _____.”

“It’s clear from your story that you value _____; but it could be even clearer if you told a story about where that value comes from.”

DETAILS: Were there sections of the story that had especially good details or images (e.g. sights, sounds, smells, or emotions of the moment)?

“The image of _____ really helped me identify with what you were feeling.”

“Try telling more details about _____ so we can imagine what you were experiencing.”



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ENGAGE

As you hear each other's stories, keep track of the details of each person's story. This will help you to provide feedback and remember details about people on your team later.

Name	Values	Challenge	Choice	Outcome