

How To Write My True Personal Story

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The Agenda

- 1) The theory of the brain, personal narratives and how words, language and stories function.
- 2) Where stories begin and how they come into being.
- 3) The story you have been living.
- 4) The significance and methodology of “Success Stories.”
- 5) How to start writing your True Personal Story.
- 6) The importance of audience in strengthening your story.
- 7) Insights, feedback and wrap-up.

Quote – Eugene O’Neill’s play “A Long Day’s Journey Into Night.”

“None of us can help the things life has done to us. They’re done before you realize it. And once they’re done, they make you do other things until at last, everything comes between you and what you’d like to be, and you’ve lost your true self forever.”

Fortunately, this quote is not true.

For years, the medical community viewed the brain as a static, unchangeable machine.

Dr. Norman Doidge, in his book “***The Brain That Changes Itself,***” explains that the brain can reorganize and adapt. It is not hardwired.

The current word used to describe the brain is “**neuroplasticity.**”

Neuro stand for neuron, the nerve cells in our brain and nervous system.

Plastic is for changeable, malleable and modifiable.

The way the brain works is that it creates neural pathways called “maps.”

Because plasticity is a normal phenomenon, our brain maps are constantly changing.

The brain allocates processing power according to the competitive principle of “use it or lose it.”

The competitive nature of plasticity affects us all. If we stop exercising our mental skills, we do not just forget them: the brain map space for those skills is turned over to the skills we practice instead.

Each time we repeat a word, thought or story, the brain claims more control of that map and prevents the use of that space for a different word, thought or story.

There is competition for cortical real estate and brain resources are allocated according to the principle of “use it or lose it.”

Conclusion:

The story we use takes over!

The Post Modern Social Constructionist Viewpoint

- Realities are socially constructed
- Realities are constructed through language
- Realities are organized and maintained through narrative

A story is a map that is an interpretation of experience.

We are the interpreters of our own experience.

Experientially speaking – our life story is our life.

Each time we share words, we give legitimacy to the distinction or meaning that those words bring forth.

Those words gain legitimacy and then we forget other words and other concepts that are equally possible and equally valid.

Erikson believed that there are many experiential realities and that through language we constantly re-author our lives.

Our interpretations have the potential to not only be helpful, but also harmful.

Quote – Adrian Dix, BC NDP Leader – Toronto Globe and Mail, May 2013

“I learned that you have to fill in the story of your life, because other people are determined to do that for you.”

Quotes from Alan Parry and Robert E. Doan’s book “Story Re-visions.”

- Freud found people carrying around and using other people’s words – primarily those of their parents.
- We internalize other people’s words.
- Our “Old Story” is largely shaped and informed by the narratives and meanings of others.
- To fail as a human being is to accept somebody else’s description of oneself.

Problem: (Prisoner of your own perception)

Once the brain creates a map, often programmed early in life, the person becomes blind to any information that contradicts this problem saturated description of themselves and their relationships, and they will be predisposed to attend to and select out “facts” that support these long-standing definitions of themselves and others.

These narratives are called the “Old Story.”

Another way of saying this is;

“You are the words that you accept.”

Once you accept the “Old Story,” any incoming information is interpreted through this lens which keeps you looking backwards for direction, rather than facing forward to meet what is coming.

Problems, lies, false messages stand between people and their knowledge of themselves in such a way that they lose preferred aspects of their identities.

In this way, a dominant negative story can oppress and limit your life.

Note: **People are not their problems.**

Narrative therapy is based on the belief that every human being is unique and special.

Virginia Satir’s poem called “I Am Special”

“I am special. In all the world, there is nobody like me.

Since the beginning of time, there has never been another person like me.

Nobody has my smile. Nobody has my eyes, my nose, my hair, my voice.

I am special.

No one can be found who has my handwriting.

Nobody anywhere has my tastes – for food or music or art.

No one sees things as I do.

In all of time there’s been no one who laughs like me, no one who cries like me.

And what makes me laugh and cry will never provoke identical laughter and tears from anybody else, ever.

I am the only one in all creation who has my set of abilities.

Oh, there will always be somebody who is better at one of the things that I am good at, but no one in the universe can reach the quality of my combination of talents, abilities and feelings.

Like a room full of musical instruments, some may excel alone, but none can match the symphony sound when all are played together. I am a symphony.

Through all of eternity, no one will ever look, talk, walk, think or do like me.

I am special. I am rare.

And in rarity there is value

Because of my great rare value, I need not attempt to imitate others.

I will accept, yes, celebrate – my differences.

I am special.

And I am beginning to realize it's no accident that I am special.

I am beginning to see that God made me special for a very special purpose.

He must have a job for me that no one else can do as well as I.

Out of all the billions of applicants, only one is qualified, only one has the combination of what it takes.

That one is me.

Because I am special."

Narrative Therapy helps the person understand the “Old Story,” see other possible meanings, change the perspective and help the person move to a more helpful preferred story.

Hebb’s Law

“The neurons that fire together, wire together!”

The story that you use grows stronger.

Freud learned that, even though Old Stories can still be in place years later, they can be altered by subsequent events and even be re-transcribed.

Kandel proved that learning led to neuro plastic strengthening of the connections between neurons. (Wire together)

Conclusions:

- Narrative is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful.
- We construct our own story by interpreting life and accepting words – often other people’s words.
- Our story is who we are.
- We do not need to be stuck in an “Old Story,” because the brain is changeable.
- We can re-write our story based on truth and rewire our plastic brain to embrace a preferred reality.

2. Where Stories Begin

If our realities are socially constructed, then our family of origin is our first social influence.

If we were born and immediately set aside with no human contact, we would not learn much and our growth would be very, very limited.

The first big influences are:

- mother
- father

How we learn is by listening and watching our parents and imitating them.

Transactional Analysis, a psychological system, talks about the “Parental Voices” inside our heads.

Similarly, the culture of the society in which we live provides the “lens” through which we interpret the world.

Perceptions are sorted into “types.” – male and female

Types then become institutionalized – for example – motherhood

The types and institutions are legitimized over time by the social context in which we live.

The language used to express the social construct produces our beliefs and views of the world.

These narratives can be nurturing and lead to satisfying growth, and conversely, some narratives can be oppressive, dominant, unhelpful, unsatisfying and lead to unhealthy growth.

How Stories Come Into Being

You cannot not do Narrative Therapy.

The internal roadmap is designed to help us survive.

What you believe is real to you because your precise reality comes from what you live and experience every day.

If we never become consciously aware of the constructs that we have accepted, we are bound to live in them forever.

As Dr. Phil McGraw says in his book “Self Matters”

“You cannot change what you cannot acknowledge.”

The starting point is uncovering and discovering what interpretations and perspectives we have consciously and unconsciously accepted.

The interesting discovery is that a relatively small number of decisions, words and experiences have significantly shaped our stories.

To help you learn what has shaped your story, we are going to have you reflect on three things:

- Ten defining moments in your life – turning points
- Seven critical choices that you made
- Five key people who significantly influenced your life

Exercise # 1 – Ten Defining Moments

The first tool that you will use is called the Life Line chart.

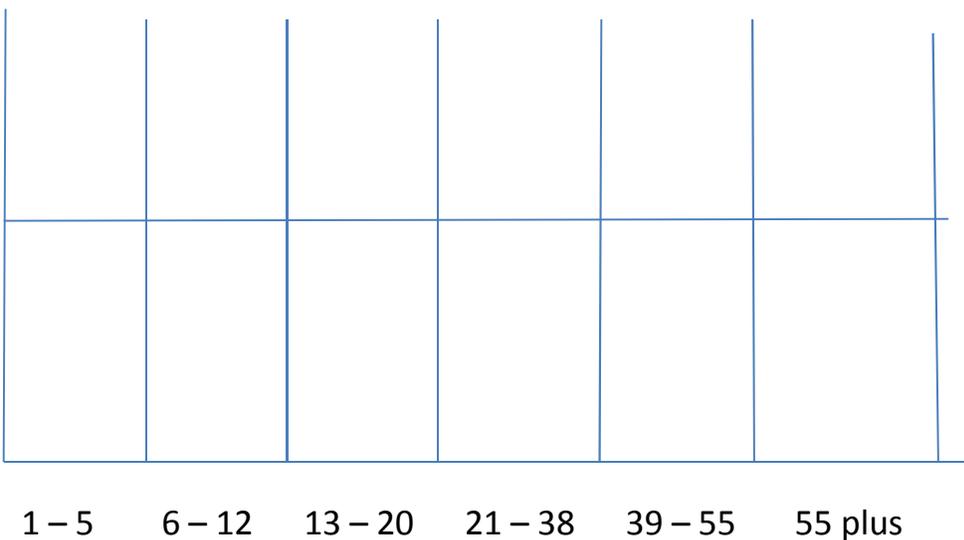
The Life Line chart will help you graph your 10 defining moments in your life and place each moment on the age grid according to your assessment as to how positive or negative the experience was for you.

Since experts have segmented life into certain developmental categories, we suggest that you start analyzing your life from the earliest category first and then proceed progressively through your life.

Here are the age segments to consider:

Early childhood	-	1 to 5
Adolescence	-	6 to 12
Teenage	-	13 to 20
Early adulthood	-	21 to 38
Prime of life	-	39 to 55
Mature years	-	56 plus

This is an example only of how a Life Line Chart will look



Now, for each significant moment/turning point in your life, record the following details and describe the meaning for you in your life.

Moment/Event # 1

Your Age:

Who was there?

What happened to make it significant?

What was your mental/emotional/physical experience?

Was this positive or negative?

What words did you accept in this moment?

Now place your moment on your graph.

Moment/Event # 2

Your Age:

Who was there?

What happened to make it significant?

What was your mental/emotional/physical experience?

Was this positive or negative?

What words did you accept in this moment?

Now place your moment on your graph.

Moment/Event # 3

Your Age:

Who was there?

What happened to make it significant?

What was your mental/emotional/physical experience?

Was this positive or negative?

What words did you accept in this moment?

Now place your moment on your graph.

Moment/Event # 4

Your Age:

Who was there?

What happened to make it significant?

What was your mental/emotional/physical experience?

Was this positive or negative?

What words did you accept in this moment?

Now place your moment on your graph.

Moment/Event # 5

Your Age:

Who was there?

What happened to make it significant?

What was your mental/emotional/physical experience?

Was this positive or negative?

What words did you accept in this moment?

Now place your moment on your graph.

Moment/Event # 6

Your Age:

Who was there?

What happened to make it significant?

What was your mental/emotional/physical experience?

Was this positive or negative?

What words did you accept in this moment?

Now place your moment on your graph.

Moment/Event # 7

Your Age:

Who was there?

What happened to make it significant?

What was your mental/emotional/physical experience?

Was this positive or negative?

What words did you accept in this moment?

Now place your moment on your graph.

Moment/Event # 8

Your Age:

Who was there?

What happened to make it significant?

What was your mental/emotional/physical experience?

Was this positive or negative?

What words did you accept in this moment?

Now place your moment on your graph.

Moment/Event # 9

Your Age:

Who was there?

What happened to make it significant?

What was your mental/emotional/physical experience?

Was this positive or negative?

What words did you accept in this moment?

Now place your moment on your graph.

Moment/Event # 10

Your Age:

Who was there?

What happened to make it significant?

What was your mental/emotional/physical experience?

Was this positive or negative?

What words did you accept in this moment?

Now place your moment on your graph.

Connecting The Dots

Now, look back over all the above 10 defining moments. Have you overlooked anything?

On a separate worksheet, collect your observations and write down:

What affect have these moments had on your story?

How have these moments defined your story of yourself?

At this point, what Title would you give to your story?

What is the bottom line effect of these moments on your self concept?

Exercise # 2 – Seven Critical Choices

You have had to make choices in your life.

Some of these choices are more significant than others.

Note: Not choosing was also a choice.

All your choices, good and bad, have had the power to be hugely significant in your life.

Unlike defining moments, some of which you had no control over, the choices you made were 100% your responsibility.

Your challenge is to identify the seven most critical choices in your life and notice how your self concept was shaped by the result of those choices.

Once again, start at the beginning of your life and work through the age categories below and place each point on your second Life Line Chart.

Ages: 1 – 5

Ages 6 – 12

Ages 13 – 20

Ages 21 – 38

Ages 39 – 55

Ages 55 plus

Critical Choice # 1

Your Age:

What was the choice?

What did the choice mean to you?

What was the impact on your self-concept?

What words did you accept from this choice that became part of your story?

Critical Choice # 2

Your Age:

What was the choice?

What did the choice mean to you?

What was the impact on your self-concept?

What words did you accept from this choice that became part of your story?

Critical Choice # 3

Your Age:

What was the choice?

What did the choice mean to you?

What was the impact on your self-concept?

What words did you accept from this choice that became part of your story?

Critical Choice # 4

Your Age:

What was the choice?

What did the choice mean to you?

What was the impact on your self-concept?

What words did you accept from this choice that became part of your story?

Critical Choice # 5

Your Age:

What was the choice?

What did the choice mean to you?

What was the impact on your self-concept?

What words did you accept from this choice that became part of your story?

Critical Choice # 6

Your Age:

What was the choice?

What did the choice mean to you?

What was the impact on your self-concept?

What words did you accept from this choice that became part of your story?

Critical Choice # 7

Your Age:

What was the choice?

What did the choice mean to you?

What was the impact on your self-concept?

What words did you accept from this choice that became part of your story?

Now, connect the dots.

Look back over your 7 critical choices.

Have you overlooked anything?

Now take a separate worksheet and collect and synthesize what you have learned.

What affect have these critical choices had on your story?

How have these critical choices defined your self-concept?

What is the bottom line effect of these critical choices on the development of your story?

Exercie # 3 – Five Key People

Similar to the defining moments and critical choices, dr. Phil did research that shows that in most people's lives there are as few as five pivotal people who have left an indelible impression on your self-concept.

Some of these people are genuinely positive influences and others have had a horrible, negative impact.

This exercise encourages you to remember the five people who have most influenced your life and story.

Key Person # 1

Your age when this person influenced you:

The name of the person:

Describe the person's influence:

Was the influence positive or negative?

What words came into your story as a result of this person's relationship with you? (For example: I learned... I became.... I am

Key Person # 2

Your age when this person influenced you:

The name of the person:

Describe the person's influence:

Was the influence positive or negative?

What words came into your story as a result of this person's relationship with you? (For example: I learned... I became.... I am

Key Person # 3

Your age when this person influenced you:

The name of the person:

Describe the person's influence:

Was the influence positive or negative?

What words came into your story as a result of this person's relationship with you? (For example: I learned... I became.... I am

Key Person # 4

Your age when this person influenced you:

The name of the person:

Describe the person's influence:

Was the influence positive or negative?

What words came into your story as a result of this person's relationship with you? (For example: I learned... I became.... I am))

Key Person # 5

Your age when this person influenced you:

The name of the person:

Describe the person's influence:

Was the influence positive or negative?

What words came into your story as a result of this person's relationship with you? (For example: I learned... I became.... I am))

Connecting The Dots

Once again, on a separate worksheet, collect the key thoughts, words, concepts and influences that have affected your story.

What insights are you gaining through this reflection?

Critical Question

Were you on the list of the five key people who were pivotal in your life?

If not, why not?

Consider what that means.

It may mean that your self-concept has been molded and shaped primarily by other people.

For the remainder of this workshop, put yourself in the number one position for determining the course of your life and story.

3. The Story you Have Been Living

You cannot change history!

But, You can change your response to that history.

You can change your interpretation and perspective.

Labels: (Naming and labelling often pathologizes patterns)

- a)** Other people's labels and words that you accept can affect your story and self-concept.

List the "Labels" that other people have given to you:

-
-
-
-

How have these words become part of your story?

- b)** Self-judgments and labels that you have given yourself that have become a lasting part of your self-characterization.

-
-
-
-

How have these words become part of your story?

Critical Question?

Were you on the list of the five key people who were pivotal in your life?

If not, why not?

Consider what it means.

It may mean that your self-concept has been molded and shaped primarily by other people.

For the remainder of this workshop, put yourself in the number one position for determining the words and the course of your life and story.

4. The Significance and methodology of “Success Stories”

We have talked about the “Old Story” and the concept of such a thing as a “preferred reality”

Now that you have learned how your old story has been potentially restricted by other people, their words and cultural influences, it is time to expand and enrich your own life narrative.

Some narratives are more preferred than others.

For example, consider the words:

I am stupid

I am an overcomer

Michael White, The Founder of Narrative Therapy, says,

“There are always sparkling events that people can transform into stories that they can live and in living, know themselves in preferred, satisfying ways.”
(1991)

How To Use “Success Stories’ to find Words for the New Preferred Story.

Step # 1 – Find a time in your life when you felt really good about the outcome of an experience.

Step # 2 - Write down the “content” of the story.

- When did it happen?
- Who was there?
- What happened?
- How did you do it?
- Why do you consider it to be a success?

Step # 3 – Analyze the story and identify what is was about you that made the story a success?

Write down all the “words” that describe you and how you accomplished the specific success.

OK, that is the process.

Now it is time for you to analyze your first success story.

Success Story # 1

Title of the Success Story:

Content of the Success Story:

The Words that describe you that flow from the Success story.

-
-
-
-
-
-

Question?

How do these words feel to you?

Why do they feel Good?

It is because they are true.

Your truth is embedded in your success stories.

Now you need to work through a number of Success Stories to learn more about your true self.

As you analyze additional Success Stories, you will begin to see certain words repeating themselves.

These words are the key words for your new story.

Capture these words as follows;

Step # 1 – the word itself

Step # 2 – Find another example in your life that illustrates that word.

Step # 3 - Take the meaning of this word and the illustration over to your
work book for your New Story

5. How To Start Writing Your Own True Self Story

The act of writing your own story is not a prideful thing to do!

Some people avoid doing this task because they do not want to be seen as vain or pridefully arrogant.

But, look at this command from the Bible:

“Finally, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right; whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” (Philippians 4:8)

Your preferred story is not to be a construction of positive, optimistic or wishful thinking. Your task is to write only what is true, right for you, praiseworthy and excellent words about you.

Unhealthy pride requires a comparison. What we are doing here is not comparing. You are writing whatever truths about yourself that will contribute to a healthy, satisfying story of self.

As Dr, Phil says,

“Your personal truth, your authentic self-concept, just needs to be cleaned-up and rid of the junk, misinformation and lies that you have internalized for so many years.”

Our purpose is to eliminate the distortions of past experiences and write the truth so that your “new Story” can be strengthened.

Realistic Goals

Please realize that writing a story takes time.

What we are doing here in this workshop is only the beginning.

Stories need to be put down on paper and then be edited and edited.

Even the Title of your story may change with time as you gather insights and meaning.

Stories need:

- Words
- Phrases
- Sentences
- Paragraphs
- Chapters
- Summaries and conclusions

The job today is to firstly become consciously aware of the meaning of the words with which you have been living, and look at their source and origin.

Then, you need to start writing drafts that are first attempts at capturing your truth.

Realistically, depending on how hard you work at this project, it may take months and even a year to develop a compelling and vivid story that is detailed, rich and complete enough to fully capture your preferred story.

Your true self will always feel good. Ask yourself the question as you proceed, “Do all these words work together to support a story that I can nod my head to and say, “Yes, this is me!”

OK. Let’s begin.

Step # 1 – A Working Title

Based on words from your success stories, what is your Working Title for your New Story?

“ _____ ”

Step # 2 – Organizing the Chapters of my New Story

There are different ways that you can organize your story.

One way is chronological – starting when you are young and progressing through your life.

Another approach is to collect your talents, skills, unique abilities, strengths and prioritize them and then make each one a chapter.

Another approach is to collect stories that illustrate your true self and present the chapters as mini stories within your bigger story.

Step # 3- Begin by collecting words, meanings, ideas and illustrations

On a draft sheet of paper, for your first chapter, start writing down words, phrases, ideas and illustrations that you want to use to communicate your story. Begin to write sentences that capture the essence of your new insights about your true self.

Step # 4 – Write your First Chapter

Now, organize all the words, ideas and meanings that relate to your first chapter.

Lay out a plan in point form showing where you will use each word and illustration

Then proceed to write your first draft of the chapter. It is important to make it as rich, detailed and meaningful as possible.

An Example of A Chapter Written About a Characteristic

Using the Chapter title: Independent

When I was young and living in Toronto, my parents did not drive me to my hockey games. At 11 years of age, I was on the North Toronto Lions hockey team, which was a big thing for me. Our team played in a city wide league with games all over the city – from Weston Arena to Ted Reeves Arena in the east. In order to get to my games, I needed to carry my skates and equipment in a bag and take buses, subways and street cars all over the city. I learned to take care of myself and be self-sufficient at age 11. I never missed a game. And by the way, we won the Toronto Championship that year. I still have the picture.

When I was in high school, Toronto was a much safer place than today. Every school day, I would either hitch-hike or take public transit to get from our home in Lawrence Park (Lawrence and Mt Pleasant) to my school which was located at Bloor and Spadina. It was my job to get myself there and back and I did that without incident for three years.

Today, I am an independent practitioner in the counselling business in Bracebridge, Ontario. As a sole practitioner, I have to find my own clients because I am not part of a larger clinic. I feel comfortable working alone because I learned at an early age how to be independent.

Being independent means that I am not dependent on others. As a self-reliant and autonomous individual, I have the freedom to take my life in the direction that feels right for me. What this has enabled me to do is break free from my family of origin story which was all about business. Every member of our family was in business, which is why I have an MBA. When I chose to go into counselling, I left the business world and started a new career which was much more compatible with who I am. Fifteen years ago, I started Agape Healing International and together, Martha and I have been on 22 mission trips all over the world. We teach a form of inner healing that has helped many people. I feel that my independence gave me the self-

confidence to create this new story for myself that is very different from my family of origin. I still love my family and they have supported me as I have moved in this new direction. I am independent, but not alone.

6. The Importance of Audience in Strengthening Your Story

Freud said, “If we are unconscious of a memory, we are destined to relive the memory.”

Our first step was consciously becoming aware of and paying attention to the words of our Old Story.

The “Old Story” needs to be “not used,” so that those neuronal links and circuits will weaken.

Then, you need to “use” the New Story!

- Stories become transformative only in their performance. (Freedman and Combs)
- Repetition and thoroughness are needed to help a new story emerge. (Freedman and Combs)
- It becomes more real when you say it out loud. (Freedman and Combs)

In Narrative Therapy, every story needs an audience!

When you have a counsellor, the counsellor becomes your audience for your story.

If you don't have a counsellor, then read your New Story out loud every day to yourself, so that the brain map for the New story is strengthened.

Also, find a trustworthy friend who will listen to you read and tell your New Story out loud.

- 1) After you read your story out loud, answer this question:

“What does this story “mean” to me?

The answer will strengthen your story.

- 2) The, ask yourself the question:

“What will this New Story allow me to do?

- 3) Change your reflection from a time perspective:

If I had this New Story before, what would things have been different?

As I continue in this New Story, how will my future be different?

- 4) Then change your viewpoint;

What would the look be on my Aunt or Uncle’s face if he/ she saw me in my New Story?

What would my friend think if I act in this new way?

How will this New Story affect my choices in the future?

How will my New Story affect my relationships with my family, friends?

Use It Or Lose It!

If you do not use your New Story you will lose it.

Nobody can write your story for you.

Nobody can use the story for you.

Belief

Your New Story is the most important asset that you can have.

Treat it with respect.

Work at it.

Expand it.

Develop it.

Express it.

Use pictures which are worth 1,000 words, to add to your story.

Importance

There is no-one more important to whom you to give this gift than yourself.

Take the time.

Don't let it slip.

With time and hard work, you will have something that 99.9% of people living on this earth do not have, your True Authentic Self story on paper, to empower you and enable you to be your best preferred self.

7. Feedback and Wrap-up

Thoughts garnered from the group.

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