

Story Telling

The Art of Weaving Wonder

An Introduction to Therapeutic Storytelling

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The Power of Stories

A recent TED talk by Emily Esfahani Smith presented the research on happiness that reveals a paradox: those who pursue happiness as a goal in life are less happy, on average, than others. Those who rated themselves the happiest were happy not as an end in itself, but as a by-product of seeking another primary goal: Meaning or purpose. Smith went on to discuss the four pillars that contributed to a deep sense of meaning and purpose in life, and therefore, greater happiness:

- Belonging
- Purpose
- Transcendence
- Storytelling



It makes sense that storytelling is on the list because it is through stories that we make meaning of our lives and place our experiences into a larger context of life where we can have a sense of belonging, purpose, and transcendence.

How We Make Sense of Our Lives

Listen to everyday conversation and you are likely to hear an exchange of stories. The ongoing flow of moment-to-moment, day-to-day life that could seem random and pointless as a series of passing experiences. Stories create sequence, punctuating our lives into discernible vignettes that are much easier to digest. Stories are what we use to explain events in our lives, explain or justify our own and other people's behavior, and to put things in context in our lives and to make sense of life in general.



Stories Structure Experience

Stories structure experience in three ways:

1. By _____ the flow of life.
2. By _____ events to _____
3. By creating a _____ to organize and understand events

Punctuating The Sequence of Events

Life is a flow, we mark certain events out from the flow as a beginning or an ending in our lives and, to a certain degree, rightfully so. The birth of a child, enrolling in college, graduating, getting married, the death of a parent, and so on. All these events serve as markers and we often build stories around them. Our story minds make sense of life by cutting the flow of events into sequences with beginnings and endings, and with an arc in the middle that often includes drama, tension, conflict, humor, etc. These are the ingredients in good storytelling and our minds love drama, mystery, suspense and even terror. But sometime, we put ourselves at the mercy of our storied lives.

We are pattern detectors and we use our story mind to describe perceived patterns in life. Often, we punctuate a sequence of events and then generalize the story as applicable to our lives as a whole using what linguists call “universal quantifiers”— words like “always,” “never,” etc. More often than not, these generalized patterns are self-defeating. Perhaps you have heard someone say, or you have said, “this always happens to me.” That opening word, “this,” encapsulates a pattern: a story in our minds with a beginning, a middle, and an end.

In other words, we have punctuated the sequence of events in our lives in a certain way. This punctuation takes the flow of our lives, marks out a perceived “sequence,” and we then apply the sequence, or its effect, to our life as a whole. It may have some validity. But it is, at best, an occasional truth, and certainly not the whole picture. Life goes on. Once we have punctuated a sequence and generalize it, we run our lives as if it is true. In other words, we turn it into a self-fulfilling prophecy.

How we punctuate a sequence of events makes all the difference in the meaning we make out it. Linguistically, punctuation helps the reader to make sense of a string of words when read on the page, telling the reader what group of words go together, how groups of words relate to one another, when to pause, and when one sentence or idea ends and another one begins. It is an incredibly helpful way to convey meaning as intended. Consider the string of words:

Re- Punctuating

In life, one of the easiest ways to change our story is to change how and what we punctuate, especially beginnings and endings. For instance, if someone says, “Every time I get ahead, something happens and life knocks me down,” she has encapsulated a sequence creating a story that begins with “getting ahead” and ends with being “knocked down.” Of course, this is a generalization based on perception, evaluation and the meaning the person attaches to experiences. And it is unlikely to be true of every incident that could be identified as “getting ahead.”

Even more interesting, it ends with being “knocked down.” For this sequence to be true at all, it also must be true that whenever she gets “knocked down,” she also manages to get going and “get ahead” again. Cognitive scientists have found that the way we end a story retroactively colors the experience. Ending the story with being “knocked down” casts a pale over the whole effort whereas ending with “getting ahead” lightens and lifts the spirit.

Changing how we punctuate life is one of the most powerful tools we have to manage our experience in life. It’s easy to do and can make a huge difference in your outlook, your behavior and your results. Try it yourself: Think of a story you tell, especially about a pattern that you say “always” happens or is in the form “every time....” Notice how the story ends. If it ends negatively, consider re-punctuating, using the prior, negative ending as the beginning and moving to a positive ending. Notice the differences in your experience of the two versions.

Exercise:

Think of a story that you tell that ends negatively. One way to get this is to think of times when you say something “always” happens. (E.G.: I am always misplacing things.” That short sentence engages a story line that ends with misplacing things). Tell a brief example of the story line.

With a partner, explore what happens generally after the supposed ending. (E.G. I search for the missing item, upset with myself for “wasting time,” and eventually find it.)

Retell the story using the ending as the beginning. Reframe the middle steps into something positive. (E.G.: When I misplace things, I go into a search mode, like a detective trying to solve a case, and I love the “eureka” moment when I find what I thought I lost.)



Arc of a Story

Every story has an “arc:” a beginning, a middle, and an end. Many storytellers believe there are 5 stages to a story:

1. The _____, which sets the stage for the what is to follow and introduces main story components (people, place, activity, time, and situation). Beginning
2. The “_____” that builds toward a
3. The _____ (the height of conflict or tension). This is followed by the } Middle
4. the “_____” grappling with or dealing with the climactic challenge. Finally ending with } End
5. Some form of _____ or ending.

Story Spine

Another simple way of thinking of the arc of stories is the “Story Spine.” This idea has been attributed to Pixar but did not originate there. It comes from the world of improv theater, but Pixar has used the method as a story telling formula on several occasions.

Prompt line	Fill In Content
	Set ups the character, context, and the situation
	establishes the routine life or the repeated problem or challenge
	introduces an inciting incident, or a trigger that initiates new action or change
	The initial consequences and learning; this can be repeated many times
	Some form of resolution
	Outcome, and could include the moral of the story or long-term benefits.

Story Telling

Create your own story using the story spine:

Prompt line	Fill In Content
Once upon a time...	
Every day,	
then one day,	
and because of that	
Until finally	
And Ever since then...	

Creating Story Moments

Transformation often occurs in the moment, when something in a person's inner world shifts in a way that changes how that person thinks, acts, or feels and results in a new way of being in the world. A story can capture that kind of experience by building up single moment. This can be a dramatic moment filled with emotion or tension, but it can also be an everyday moment.

Exercise pairs (15 minutes total):

Step 1: Each person spends 3 minutes alone in order to:

1.1: identify an everyday moment, like walking into work, ordering tea or coffee in a restaurant, walking in the park, etc. Create a short story with little details about the moment in concrete manner (use sensory words to describe what you see, hear, and feel) and then overlap to ways of perceiving, feeling, and thinking that might go with the moment.

1.2 Identify some universal themes or experiences that are included in the moment (for example, the anticipation of tasting your favorite tea again, or the way we go through automatic routines, etc.).

Step 2: Each person spends 5 minutes telling the story moment and getting feedback: Get together with your partner and tell your moment by describing it from first person ("I"). Insert the universal theme or experience by switching references, (we have all had times when we look forward to something, and it can be a little thing, like the taste of your favorite tea or the sound of a good friend's voice, and how you imagine it in advance, how good it can feel to just imagine it even before it happens...etc.) Get feedback from your partner about how this impacted him or her and then switch roles.

Bringing Your Story to Life

Stories really come to life in the telling. The advantage of telling stories is that you are not limited to the script or to words on the page. You can add dramatic elements into written stories, but you can embody those elements in the spoken story.

Dramatic Effects

The delivery of the story (how you tell it) is also important. In telling metaphors, it is helpful make the story captivating. This can be done by adding or emphasizing:

_____	the listener knows something will happen (usually something distressing although it can be something exhilarating) but doesn't know when
_____	the characters in the story know something but the listener does not know; a situation to which there is several implied solutions or possibilities although the actual solution or situation is unknown)
_____	something unexpected happens which establishes an expectation that something else might happen
_____	Something unexpected that adds humor or seems absurd in some way

These elements will keep the conscious mind distracted and allow the story to work at a deeper level. Some ways of creating dramatic effects include:

- telling the story out of sequence (starting at the end or at some critical juncture)
- creating compelling characters
- building up the thoughts and feelings of the characters
- contrasting characters
- adding conflict (between characters)
- adding a difficulty to overcome
- describing a landscape (jungle; inner city) etc.
- It is not important to provide a solution in the story. The primary purpose is to stimulate an internal search intended to impact the listener in some way.

The Secrets of Story Delivery

When telling stories, you can elaborate on the content using your voice, your body, and the space around you. You can distinguish between actors in a story by spatial sorting and by acting out parts of the story.

Story Telling Communication

Your voice is one of the most powerful communication tools that you will use as a hypnotist. It is useful to develop a “hypnotic voice.” A hypnotic voice serves both yourself and your clients. You use your voice as a lead for yourself to enter the state or frame of mind that allows you to function most effectively as a hypnotist. This voice also becomes an anchor for your clients to enter trance. Although a wide range of vocal patterns can be used to induce hypnosis or during hypnosis, the following is a set of general guidelines:

<p>speak meaningfully</p>	<p>Utter your suggestions and ideas with conviction and meaning; use your tone of voice to convey the meaning of the words that you are saying; this tends to add impact to your communication and the client is more likely to get the “feeling” of your suggestions in addition to the words.</p>
<p>use voice tone shifting</p>	<p>practice the ability to shift your vocal qualities at will so that you can emphasize certain ideas or suggestions; ideas “marked out” with different vocal qualities are called embedded suggestions and tend to be picked up by your client’s unconscious mind; this creates multiple level communication</p>
<p>use pauses</p>	<p>frequent pauses allow you to observe the client’s responses to your communication; pauses encourage the client to absorb your communication and will build expectancy, especially when the pause is in an unusual place in the sentence</p>
<p>Congruence</p>	<p>Use your voice to match the story content—talk faster and louder to convey excitement or quicken the pace in the story; talk slower and softer to</p>
<p>Characterization</p>	<p>Give separate characters’ different voices both to mark out the character and to add richness and depth to the story.</p>
<p>Personalization</p>	<p>Give inanimate objects personalities with thoughts and feelings.</p>

To My Scheherazade

I am lost without you,
a man wandering in the desert,
unable to recognize mirage from reality.

The place you live in my heart
is an oasis in this desert,
a spring of pure water sourced
from the bowels of the earth.

Your flower blooms perpetually,
gifting me beauty.

Your shade offers respite
from a world forever over me.

Your tent submits delights
I barely dare dream.

I long for 1001 Arabian nights,
my head in your lap,
your fingers stroking my hair,
while I...I am swept away...
in the world of your telling.

About Me

I do not usually toot my own horn and have had the good fortune of having sponsors and others who have spread the word about me and given me work opportunities around the world. I have over 30 years experience as a business consultant, trainer, and coach and strive to bring humor and depth in my mission to create a world where we see and bring out the best in each other. I have been blessed to travel around the world; including Australia, Canada, China, Greece, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Singapore, Thailand, etc. as well as around the USA; to conduct workshops to enhance personal effectiveness, build high quality relationships, manage life's challenges and accomplish goals both individually and organizationally. I am a certified trainer of Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP), and coach and trainer of coaches. I have provided on-site training and consultation to businesses around the world, including AT&T, Holiday Inn Hotels, Merchant Bank of China, PepsiCo International, Prudential Insurance, and many others.

I have authored several books, including "I Owe You, You Owe Me,"(1997) a book on overcoming emotional debts and building abundant relationships; "Co-Creation: How to Collaborate for Results," (2009) a mini-book on the power of perceptual positions to create incredible collaboration; and co-authored, with Tim Hallbom, "Coaching in the Workplace: A Pocket Guide to Strategies for Powerful Change"(2010). I also use poetry as tool for transformation in corporate workshops, in public training, and in private coaching and I have authored seven books of poetry: "Heaven In Our Hearts" (2012); Endless Horizon (2013); Divine Whispering (2014).The Poetry Of Life (2015), The Work Of Being Your Self (2016); Falling Before Grace (2017); and Bearing Witness (2018).

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