

STORY OF SELF

“Why am I called to lead?”



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We welcome your suggestions for improving this guide further for future trainings. We also welcome you to use it and adapt it for your own trainings, subject to the restrictions below. This workshop guide has been developed over the course of many trainings by Liz Pallatto, Joy Cushman, Jake Waxman, Devon Anderson, Rachel Anderson, Adam Yalowitz, Kate Hilton, Lenore Palladino, New Organizing Institute staff, MoveOn Organizers, Center for Community Change staff, Jose Luis Morantes, Carlos Saavedra, Sean Thomas-Breitfeld, ShuyaOhno, Petra Falcon, Michele Rudy, Hope Wood, Kristen Dore and many others.

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PUBLIC NARRATIVE: STORY OF SELF

OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this training, you will...

- Learn the basics of how public narrative works: values, emotion & story structure
- Learn criteria for an effective story of self and coach others on improving their storytelling
- Practice and get feedback on your own story of self

RELATED SESSIONS:

- [Story of Us/Now](#)

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EACH OF US HAS A COMPELLING STORY TO TELL

Each of us has a story that can move others to action. As you learn this skill, you will be learning to tell a story about yourself, the community you organize with, and your strategy that motivates others to join you in creating change. In addition, you will gain practice in listening, and coaching others to tell a good story.

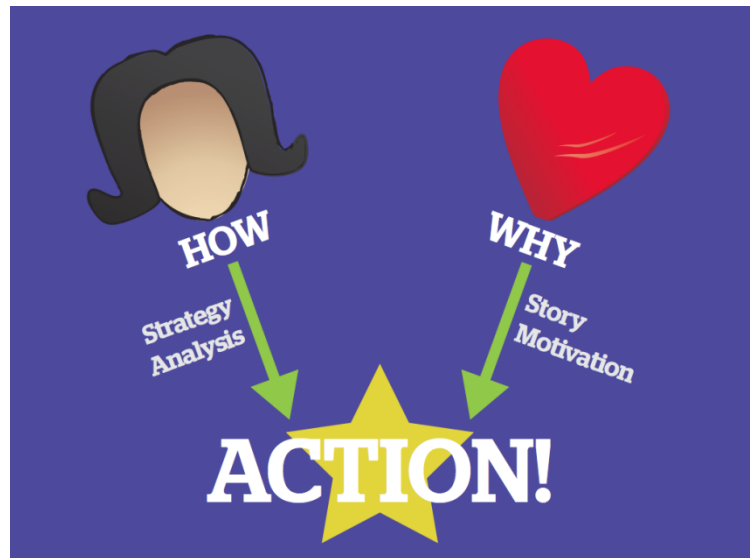
PUBLIC NARRATIVE IS A PRACTICE OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership is about accepting responsibility for enabling others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty. Narrative is how we learn to make choices and construct our identities and purpose—as individuals, as communities and organizations, and as nations.

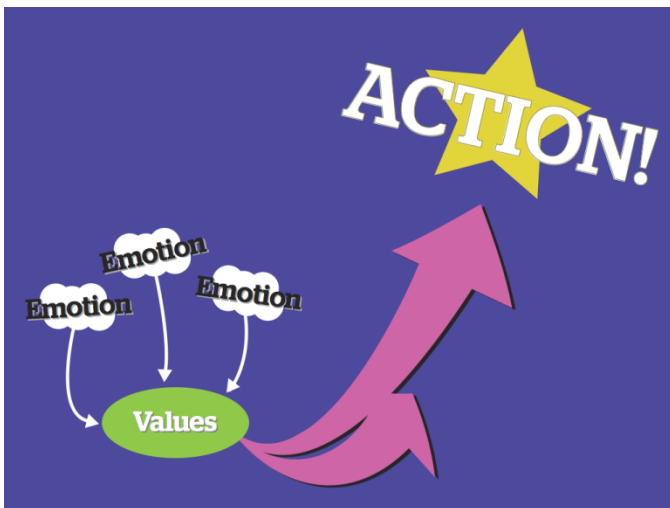
What does public narrative have to do with this definition of leadership? You can't ask others to follow you if they don't understand what your intentions are, and why you are called to lead

THE HEAD & THE HEART

There are two ways we understand the world: through our head (strategy & analysis) and through our heart (story & motivation). To enable others to achieve shared purpose, public leaders must employ BOTH the head and the heart of their constituency in order to mobilize others to act on behalf of shared values. In other words, they engage people in interpreting why they should change their world (their motivation) and how they can act to change it (their strategy). Public narrative is the “why”—the art of translating values into action through stories.



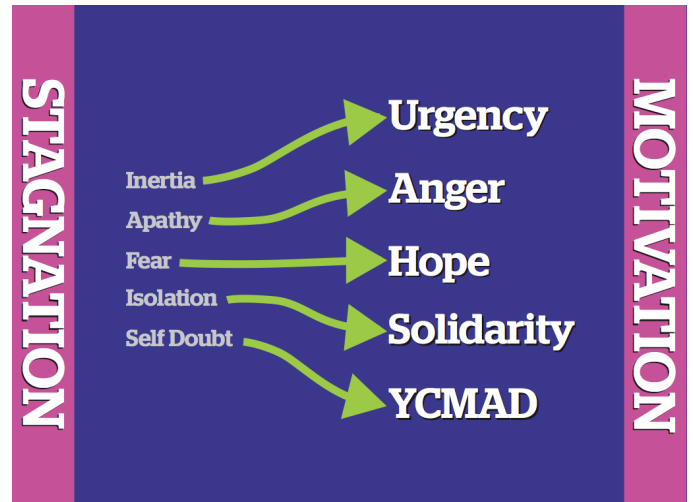
VALUES INSPIRE ACTION THROUGH EMOTION



We don't think our values; we feel our values. Often we don't realize what we value in the world until we hear a story or witness an injustice that stirs emotions within us. Emotions inform us of what we value in ourselves, in others, and in the world, and they enable us to express the motivational content of our values to others. Because stories allow us to express our values not as abstract principles, but as lived experience, they have the power to move others to action.

SOME EMOTIONS INHIBIT ACTION, OTHERS MOTIVATE ACTION

Public leaders often encounter individuals or groups where mindful action is inhibited by inertia, fear, self-doubt, isolation, and apathy. The job of a leader is not to tell people to stop feeling this way but rather use storytelling to move people from feelings of stagnation to feelings of motivation - urgency, hope, YCMAD (you can make a difference), solidarity, and anger. The language of emotion is the language of movement—they actually share the same root word. Stories mobilize emotions of action to overcome emotions that inhibit us from mindful action.



PUBLIC NARRATIVE COMBINES A STORY OF SELF, US AND NOW



STORY OF SELF

By telling a “story of self” you can communicate the values that move you to lead. Public leaders face the challenge of enabling others to “get” the values that move them to lead. Effective communication of motivating values can establish grounds for trust, empathy, and understanding. In its absence, people will infer our motivations, often in ways that can be very counterproductive. Telling our story of self can help establish firm ground for leadership, collaboration and discovering common purpose.

Every one of us has a compelling story of self to tell. We all have people in our lives (parents, grandparents, teachers, friends, colleagues) or characters we love, whose stories influence our own values. And we all have made choices in response to our own challenges that shape our life’s path— confrontations with pain, moments of hope, calls to action.

The key focus is on our choices, those moments in our lives when our values moved us to act in the face of challenge. When did you first care about being heard? When did you feel you had to act? Why did you feel you could act? What were the circumstances, the place, the colors, sounds? What did it look like? The power in your story of self is to reveal something of those moments that were deeply meaningful to you in shaping your life—not your deepest private secrets, but the events that shaped your public life. Learning to tell a good story of self demands the *courage of introspection*, and of sharing some of what you find.

STORY OF US

By telling a “story of us” you can communicate values that can inspire others to act together by identifying with each other, not only with you.

Just as with a story of self, key choice points in the life of a community—its founding, crises it has faced, or other events that everyone remembers—are moments that express the values shared. Consider stories that

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members of your group have shared, especially those that held similar meaning for all of you. The key is to focus on telling a specific story about specific people at a specific time that can remind everyone – or call to everyone’s attention – values that you share. Telling a good story of us requires the *courage of empathy* – to consider the experience of others deeply enough to take a chance at articulating that experience.

STORY OF NOW

By telling a “story of now” you can communicate an urgent challenge we are called upon to face, the hope that we can face it and the hopeful outcome we can create together, and the choice we must make to act now.

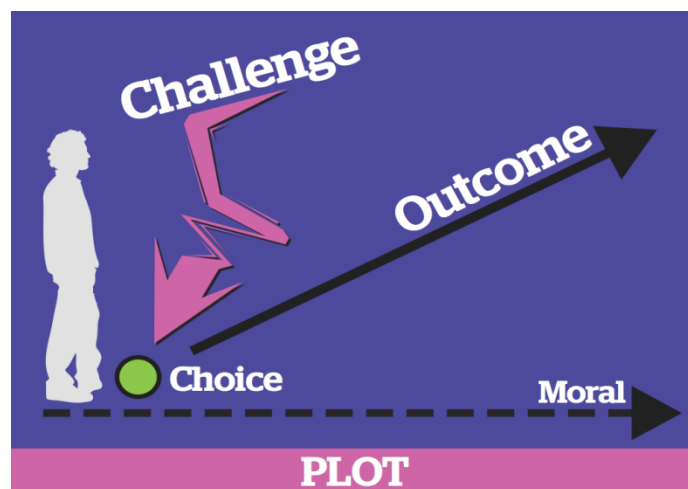
A story of now requires telling stories that bring the urgency of the challenge alive: urgency because of a need for change that cannot be denied, urgency because of a moment of opportunity that may not return. A story of now also offers hope—not make believe hope, but real, plausible hope, often grounded in what others are already achieving, grounded in the courage of others’ actions, and in the strategic vision of what we can achieve together. At the intersection of the urgency and the promise of hope is a choice that must be made – to act, or not to act, to act in this way, or in that. Telling a good story of now requires the *courage of imagination*, or as Walter Brueggemann named it, a prophetic imagination, in which you call attention both to the pain of the world and also to the possibility for a better future.

STORY STRUCTURE: CHALLENGE, CHOICE, OUTCOME

Every human story has a plot. A plot begins with a challenge that confronts a character with an urgent need to pay attention, to make a choice for which s/he is unprepared. The choice yields an outcome, and the outcome teaches a moral.

A good story allows the listener to empathetically identify with the character and “feel” the moral. We hear “about” someone’s courage; we are also inspired by it.

The story of the character and his or her choices encourages listeners to think about their own values and challenges, and inspires them with new ways of thinking about how to make choices in their own lives.



Incorporating Challenge, Choice, and Outcome in Your Own Story

There are some key questions you need to answer as you consider the choices you have made in your life and the path you have taken that brought you to this point in time as a leader. Once you identify the specific *relevant* choice, dig deeper by answering 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 or grandparents' life stories teach you in any way 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 it means describing the worst misfortunes of our lives. Sometimes those are the moments that most shaped us. But keep in mind that a struggle might also be one of your own choosing – a high mountain you decided to climb as much as a valley you managed to climb out of. Many things may have been a challenge to you and can be the source of a good story to inspire others.

TEAM BREAKOUT SESSION

GROUP PRACTICE WORK

GOALS

- Practice telling your Story of Self and get constructive feedback
- Learn to draw out and coach the stories of others

AGENDA

Total time: 65 min

1.	Gather in your team. Choose a timekeeper . *Make sure your timekeeper cuts you off. This encourages focus and makes sure everyone has a chance to tell their story. Remember, the purpose here isn't to tell a perfect story, it's to practice narrative as part of the work of leadership.	5 min.
2.	Take some time as individuals to silently develop your "Story of Self." Use the worksheet that follows.	10 min.
3.	<p>Choose a partner</p> <p>Practice telling your story of self.</p> <p>-3 minutes each to tell your story</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the values you want to convey—what specific experiences shaped those values in your life? • Be specific and give lots of detail <p>Use the worksheet "Coaching Tips: Story of Self" to help guide your feedback.</p> <p>- 3 minutes each for feedback:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What values did the storyteller convey? How specifically? • What is the Challenge, Choice, Outcome in each story? • Were there sections of the story that had especially good details or images (sights, sounds, smells, or emotions of the moment)? How did those details make you feel? • What could the storyteller do to more effectively convey why they are called to leadership in this campaign? 	10 min
4.	<p>As a team go around the group and tell your story one by one</p> <p>For each person:</p> <p>-3 minutes to tell their story</p> <p>-3 minutes to offer feedback from the group</p> <p>*Make sure your timekeeper cuts you off. This encourages focus and makes sure everyone has a chance to tell their story. Remember, the purpose here isn't to tell a perfect story, it's to practice narrative as part of the work of leadership.</p>	40 min

COACHING TIPS:

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 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 was _____, 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.”

WORKSHEET

DEVELOPING YOUR STORY OF SELF

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

1. What will I be calling on others to do?
2. What values move me to take action and might also 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
Your Community
Role Models
School

LIFE CHOICES

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

ORGANIZING EXPERIENCES

First Experience of organizing
Connection to key books or people
Role Models

Think about the challenge, choice and outcome in your story. The outcome might be what you learned, in addition to what happened.

You might draw pictures here or write words. Powerful stories leave your listeners with images in their minds that shape their understanding of you and your calling.

CHALLENGE	CHOICE	OUTCOME

Record Feedback/Comments from Your Team Members Here:

Coaching Your Team's "Story of Self" As you hear each other's stories, keeping track of the details of each person's story will help you to provide feedback and remember details about people on your team later. Use the grid below to track your team's stories in words or images.

NAME	VALUES	CHALLENGE	CHOICE	OUTCOME

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

Videos:

- [Barack Obama, Keynote Address, “The Audacity of Hope”, Democratic National Convention, July 27, 2004, Boston, Massachusetts \(first 7 minutes\).](#)
- [NOI Video resource center: Story of Self](#)

Readings:

- Jerome Bruner, “Two Modes of Thought”, Chapter 2 in *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.11 – 25.
- Martha Nussbaum, “Emotions and Judgments of Value”, Chapter 1 in *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), (pp. 19-33).
- George Marcus, *The Sentimental Citizen: Emotion in Democratic Politics*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002), Chapter 4, “Becoming Reacquainted with Emotion” (pp.49-78)
- Malcolm Gladwell, “Small Change: why the revolution will not be tweeted”, in *The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010. (http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2010/10/04/101004fa_fact_gladwell)
- Ben Brandzel, “What Malcolm Gladwell Missed About Online Organizing and Creating Big Change”, in *The Nation*, November 15, 2010. (<http://www.thenation.com/article/156447/what-malcolm-gladwell-missed-about-online-organizing-and-creating-big-change>)