

Creating Shared Story

Originally adapted from the works of Marshall Ganz of
Harvard University and presented with permission.

INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC NARRATIVE & STORY OF SELF

Goals for this session:

- * To learn the basics of how public narrative works: values, emotion & story structure
- * To learn criteria for an effective story of self and coach others on improving the storytelling
- * To practice and gets feedback on one's story of self

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 as 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 – as individuals, as communities, as nations.

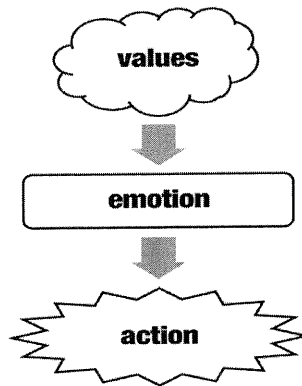
Why Use Public Narrative? Two Ways of Knowing (And we need both!)

Public leaders employ both the “head” and the “heart” in order to mobilize others to act effectively 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.



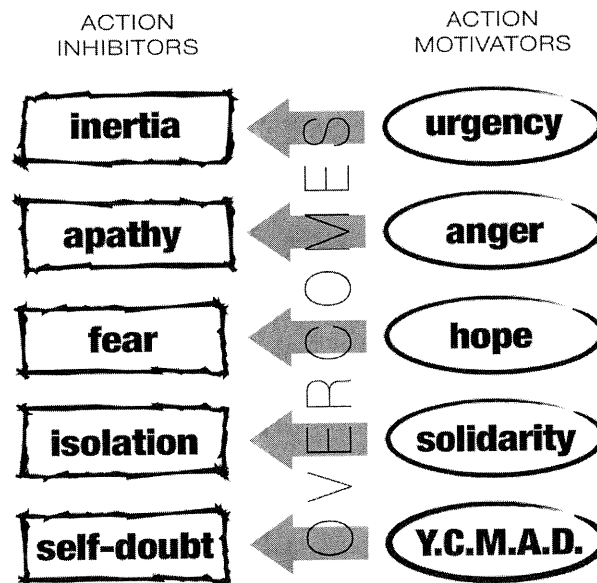
The key to motivation is understanding that values inspire action through emotion.

Emotions inform us of what we value in ourselves, in others, and in the world, and enable us to express the motivational content of our values to others. Stories draw on our emotions and show our values in action, helping us *feel* what matters, rather than just thinking about or telling others what matters. Because stories allow us to express our values not as abstract principles, but as lived experience, they have the power to move others.



Some emotions inhibit action, but other emotions facilitate action.

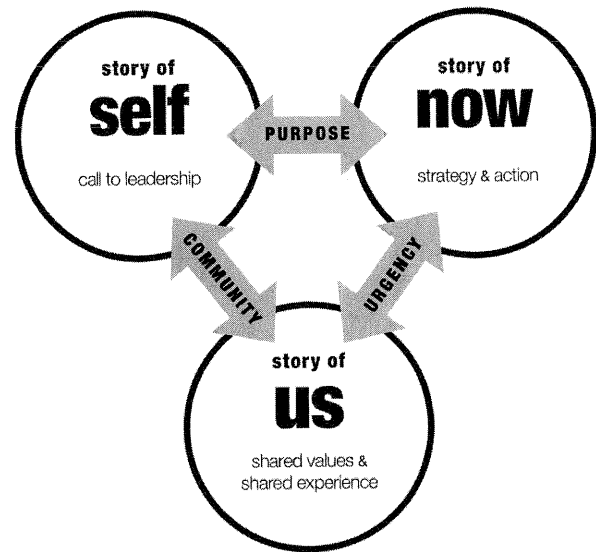
The language of emotion is the language of movement—they actually share the same root word. Mindful action is inhibited by inertia, fear, self-doubt, isolation, and apathy. Action is facilitated by urgency, hope, YCMAD (you can make a difference), solidarity, and anger. Stories mobilize emotions of action to overcome emotions that inhibit us from mindful action.



Public narrative combines a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now.

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 upon which to lead, collaborate with others, and discover 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 of challenge influence our own values. And 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.

Public Narrative

The key focus is on our choice points, those moments in our lives when we can recall the experience of our values moving us to act in this way or that 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? 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’s trajectory —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.

By telling a “story of us” you can communicate values that can inspire others to act in concert 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 faced, or other events that everyone remembers - are moments that express the values that it shares. Consider stories of experiences that 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

against which what is going on in the world can be measured. Telling a good story of us requires the *courage of empathy* – to consider the experience of others deeply enough to take a chance of articulating that experience.

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 choices we must make to act.

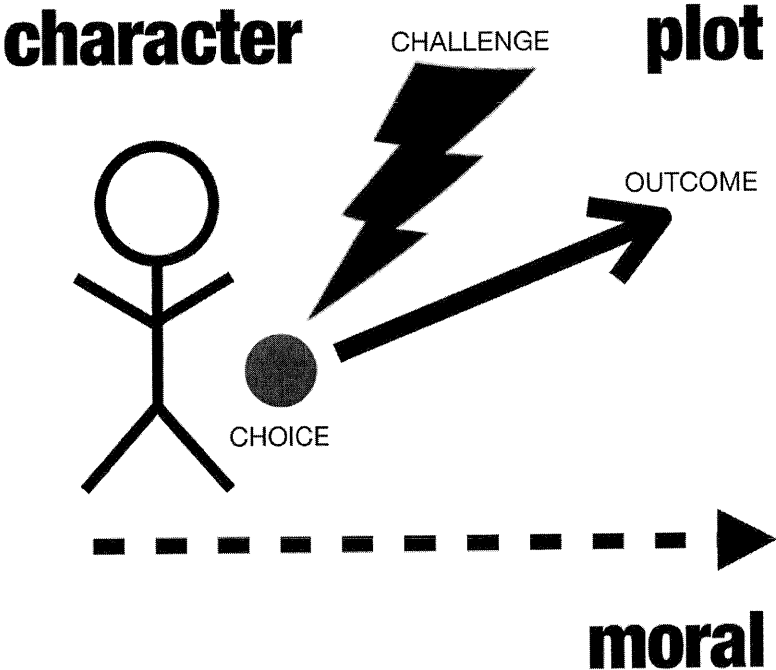
A story of now requires telling stories that bring the urgency of the challenge you face alive – urgent because of a need for change that cannot be denied, urgent because of a moment of opportunity to make change that may not return. At the intersection of the urgency of challenge and the promise of 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.

The Three Key Elements of Public Narrative Structure: What turns recounting an event into a story? Challenge – Choice – Outcome

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

Because we can empathetically identify with the character, we can “feel” the moral. We not only hear “about” someone’s courage; we can also be inspired by it.

The story of the character and their effort to make 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.



Narrative Structure

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 point, perhaps your first true experience of community in the face of challenge, or your choice to do something about injustice for the first time, 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 that they need to describe the misfortunes of their lives. Keep in mind that a struggle might be one of your own choosing – a high mountain you decided to climb as much as a valley you managed to climb out of. Any number of things may have been a challenge to you and be the source of a good story to inspire others.