




CREATING SHARED STORY: Story of Self

Who am I? Why am I called to serve?



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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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, Shuya Ohno, Petra Falcon, Michele Rudy, Hope Wood, Kristen Dore and many others.

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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 their storytelling
- * To practice and get feedback on your own 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

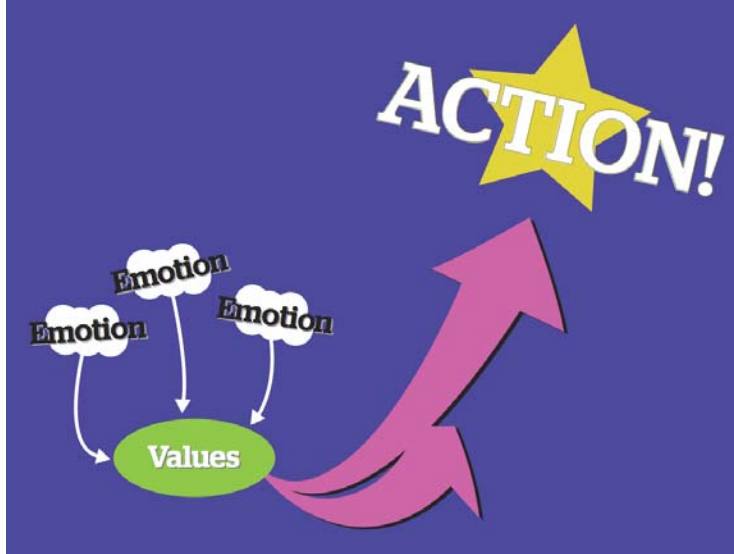
Leadership is about accepting responsibility for enabling others to achieve shared purpose in the face of uncertainty. Narrative is how we learn to make choices and construct our identities and purpose— as individuals, as communities, as nations.

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.



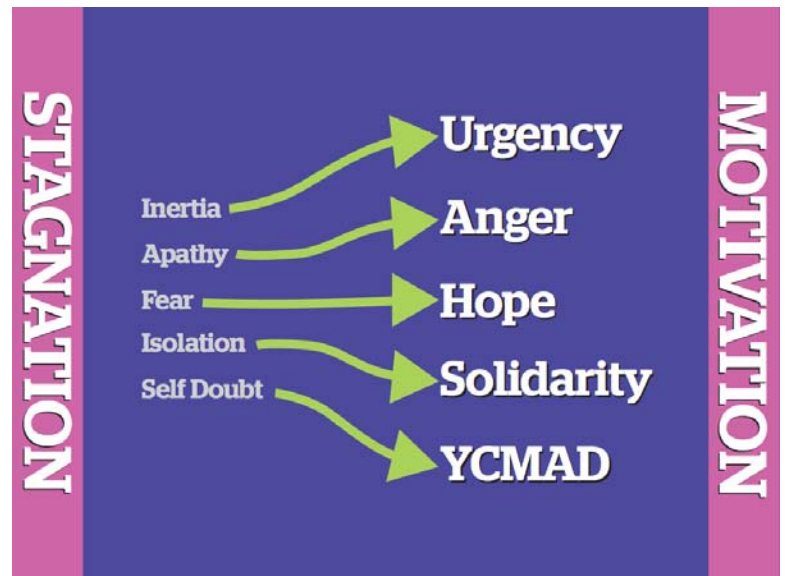
The key to motivation is understanding that values inspire action through emotion.



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.

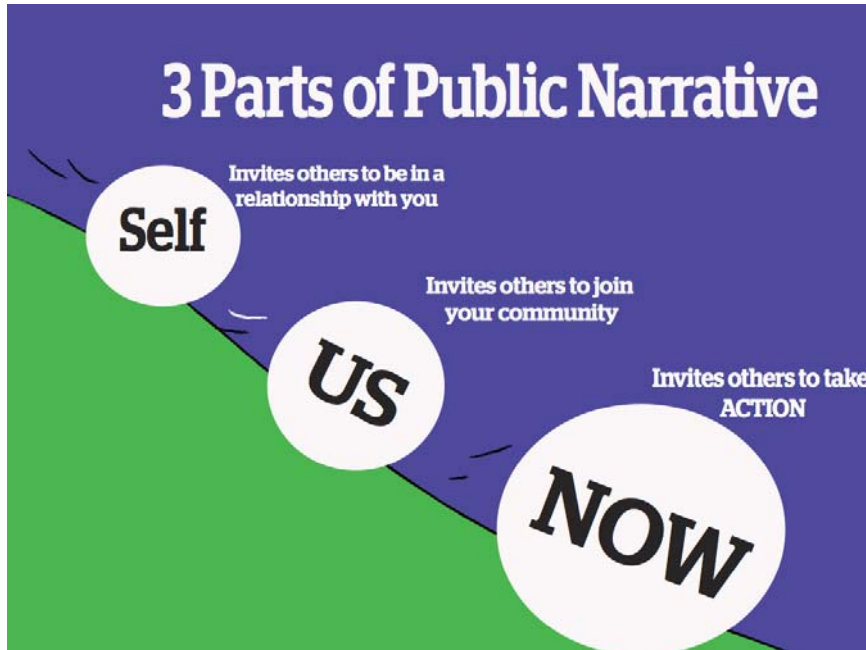


Public narrative combines a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now.

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 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 we 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? 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.

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 faced, or other events that everyone remembers - are moments that express the values shared. Consider stories 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. 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 alive. Urgency because of a need for change that cannot be denied, urgency because of a moment of

opportunity that may not return. 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.

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

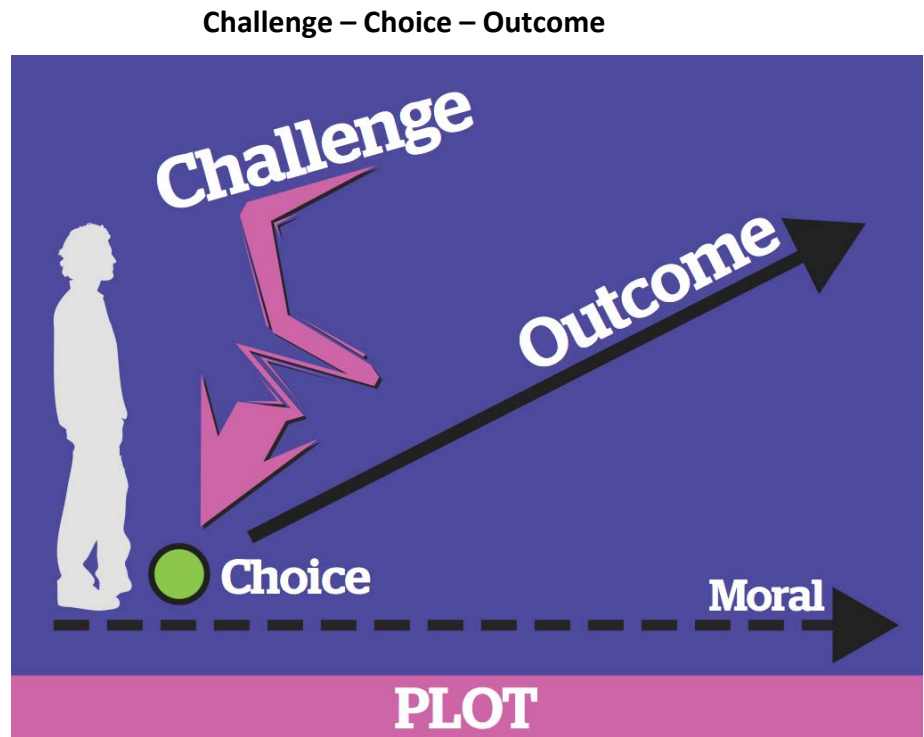
A plot begins with a challenge that confronts a character with an urgent need to pay attention, to make a choice for which s/he is unprepared. The choice yields an outcome, and the outcome teaches a moral.

Because we can empathetically identify with the character, we can “feel” the moral. We hear “about” someone’s courage; we are also inspired by it.

The story of the character and their 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 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 can be the source of a good story to inspire others.

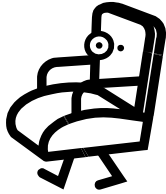


VIDEO REVIEW: BARACK OBAMA’S 2004 DNC SPEECH

We'll be watching the first seven minutes of Barack Obama's 2004 DNC speech. While you watch it, think about the elements of SELF – US – NOW that you hear in his story.

SELF	US	NOW
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>What are his experiences and values that call him to the national stage?</i>• <i>What choice points does he include to show, rather than tell us his values?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Who is the “us” that he identifies?</i>• <i>What are the common values he appeals to? How?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>What challenge to those values does he identify?</i>• <i>How does he make that challenge real?</i>• <i>What gives us hope that we can do something?</i>• <i>What is the first step that each person can take to be part of the solution?</i>

1. **What was Barack Obama’s purpose in telling these stories? What was he moving people to do?**
2. **What values did his story convey?**
3. **What details or images in particular reflected those values?**
4. **What were the challenges, choices and outcomes in each part of his story? What morals do the outcomes teach?**



TEAM BREAKOUT SESSION: STORY OF SELF 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**. Do **quick introductions** (name and hometown). **Set norms** for how you'll work together as a group during this training. 10 min.

Have your facilitator tell their 2 minute story of self as an example.

2. Take some time as individuals to **silently develop your "Story of Self."** 10 min.
Use the worksheet that follows.

3. **Choose a partner.** 15 min.

Practice telling your story of self.

- 2 minutes each to tell your story

* Focus on the values you want to convey—what specific experiences shaped those values in your life?

- Be specific & give lots of details

Use the worksheet "Coaching Tips: Story of Self" to help guide your feedback.

- 3 minutes each for feedback:

* What values did the storyteller convey? How specifically?

* What is the **Challenge, Choice, Outcome** in each story? Write them in the boxes.

* 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 story teller do to more effectively convey why they are called to leadership in this campaign?

4. As a team **go around the group** and tell your story one by one. 30 min.

For each person:

- 2 minutes to tell their story

- 3 minutes to receive feedback from the group

NOTE: You have just 2 minutes to tell your story. Stick to this limit. Make sure your timekeeper cuts you off. This encourages focus and makes sure everyone has a chance to tell their story.



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 EXPERIENCE

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. 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.

CHALLENGE:	CHOICE:	OUTCOME:

For Further Reflection

We all live very rich, complex lives with many challenges, many choices, and many outcomes of both failure and success. That means we can never tell our whole life story in 2 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's 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 in particular 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 frustrations - 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, about what really matters to you? What about these stories is so intriguing? Which elements offered real perspective into your own life?

What brings you to this campaign? When did you decide to do the work you've done now? Why? When did you decide to volunteer? Why? When did you decide to give up time for this training session? 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, and 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.

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

Challenge: Why was it 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?



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.”

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