

Overview

TIME

60-90
MINUTES

MATERIALS

HANDOUT,
WRITING
UTENSILS

SETUP

~
FLEXIBLE

Topic:

Harnessing the power of your own story as a tool for building credibility and advancing change.

Audience:

Adolescents through adults who are engaging in community change-making.

Conceptual Aim:

Participants will understand that the story of self communicates the key formative experiences that shaped you and the values that are calling you to act. A story of self is built around one or two key “choice points,” moments of large consequence in your life when you faced a challenge of some kind, made a choice based on core values, experienced a consequence, and learned something of basic importance.

Experiential Aim:

Participants will shape their own public narrative and experience the power of telling that story (and hearing others' stories).

Facilitator Prep:

Practice writing and telling your own story of self.

Related Content:

The Danger of a Single Story workshop may be a useful precedent to this one.

Materials:

Handout, paper, pens, a way to watch YouTube video content.

Procedure

INTRODUCTIONS (3 MIN)

Presenters introduce themselves to full group, participants introduce themselves to neighbor

AGREEMENTS (5 MIN)

Invite participants to suggest agreements to create a safe discussion environment. They may include:

1. Stay engaged (Remove distractions.)
2. Speak your truth (Talk about your own self, life, and story, rather than those of others.)
3. Experience discomfort (Stay in the conversation, even when you are uncomfortable.)
4. Expect/accept non-closure (Some things will remain unclear.)
5. Ouch! (We may feel hurt by what we hear – please speak up when this happens.)

OPENING (5 MIN)

“Public Narrative” is an idea developed by long-time civil rights activist, community and labor union organizer turned Harvard professor Marshall Ganz. It has become a resource for change-making around the world. Narrative, writes Ganz, is the process “through which individuals, communities, and nations make choices, construct identity, and inspire action. It can both instruct and inspire – teaching us not only how we ought to act but motivating us to act.”

Public narrative is different than an individual story. “Some of us may think our personal stories don’t matter,” says Ganz. But “if we do public work we have a responsibility to give a public account of ourselves – where we came from, why we do what we do, and where we think we are going.” Ganz insists that the telling of the story, and the experiences of being deeply understood and of having an impact, are crucial. Public stories need public stages.

Public narrative has three parts – “story of self,” “story of us,” “story of now.” Today we will focus on the story of self.

Story of self tells of the key formative experiences which shaped you, “communicating the values that are calling you to act.” Story of self is built around one or two key “choice points,” moments of large consequence in your life when you faced a challenge of some kind, made a choice based on core values, experienced a consequence, and learned something of basic importance – “a moral.”

WATCH (5 MIN)

Show Joy Cushman’s example story of self via YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H0wq5VVxAFk>), and share another example or tell your own story.

REFLECT (15 MIN)

Ask participants to reflect on their public story of self, knowing they can decide what to share or not to share later. This is different than a private story—what of your narrative do you think is publicly relevant?

A. My Story Began:

- You got here somehow. Today is not an isolated event. Where did the story of where you are now begin?
- Consider your life, your childhood, your growing up, your education or early work.
- Take 5 minutes to write, meditate, draw, thinking about the following: “My story started with . . .”

B. Choice Points:

- What are one or two key experiences that forced you to make a choice?
- When did you face a challenge, experience an outcome, or learn a moral?
- It can be a positive or negative experience. Be as concrete and specific as possible.
- Take another five minutes, thinking about the following: “I made the choice to. . . .”

TELL YOUR STORY (10-20 MIN)

- Your public story of self will likely change over time—our experiences and story evolve, plus it takes practice to develop and tell your story.
- What you share will also depend on who you’re talking to and what is relevant to the situation.
- Have the group form pairs and:
 1. Take turns telling one another your story. Include at least one “choice point.”
 2. Take five minutes each. Listeners, practice active listening.
 3. After the speaker is done, you may ask clarifying questions, but do not discuss.
- Repeat with new partners, if time allows.

GROUP DEBRIEF (15 MIN)

- When you were listening, what were the characteristics of the person in the story? (Do not share the specifics of the story – just use descriptive words: brave, uncertain, loving, compelling, worried, etc.)
- When you were telling your own story, how did you feel? What did you notice in your body?
- How does knowing this person’s story impact the way you think about them?
- How could their story give them power? How could your story give you power?

CLOSING (5 MIN)

Going around the circle, ask each participant to share one word reflecting how they are feeling now.

RESOURCES

- “Public Narrative Worksheet” by Marshall Ganz, <http://marshallganz.usmblogs.com/files/2012/08/PublicNarrative-Worksheet-Fall-2013-.pdf>
- “Public Narrative Participant Guide” adapted from Ganz by Serena Zhang & Voop de Vulpillieres, <https://www.ndi.org/files/Public%20Narrative%20Participant%20Guide.pdf>

This workshop was adapted by Seed Coalition (formerly Iowa & Minnesota Campus Compact) staff based on workshops developed by Derek Johnson and Harry Boyte, adapted from the works of Marshall Ganz of Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. The agreements in this workshop have been adapted from Glen Singleton’s Courageous Conversations.

We welcome your suggestions for improving this guide further for future materials. We also welcome you to use it and adapt it, subject to the terms below.

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Public Narrative: Story of Self

Stories are powerful because they connect to your “heart” in addition to your “head.”

- Stories draw on our emotions and show our values (pathos), rather than just analyzing or thinking (logos) to say what matters.
- It’s vital to connect your “heart” and your “head” to show what you care about, what to act on.
- Ganz argues that your story of self is a big part of your ethos—your credibility.

Every person has their own unique story, and it is more than just a combination of the different parts of your identity—race, gender, sexuality, where you have lived, etc.

- Every story is unique, and we all have our own journey or story.
- Story can be like a poem or music.
- Stories evoke a time, place, setting, mood, texture, and five senses.

This is your public story of self—you get to decide what to include and what not to.

- This is different from your private story—what of your narrative do you think is publicly relevant?
- There may be important parts of your story that you don’t want to share publicly—that is ok.

Connect your story of self around choice points—when you faced a challenge, made a choice, experienced an outcome, or learned a moral.

- Choice points can stem from positive or negative experiences.

Story of self will likely change over time—our experiences and story are changing.

- It takes practice to develop and tell your story of self.
- Developing this is an iterative and not a linear process.
- Focus on 2-4 choice points or elements of your story (at least to start).

Prompts or possible places of inspiration for your story of self:

- Think about key choice points in your life.
- Reflect on your sources of motivation, your most crucial values: Why is this value so strong?
- You might start with your parents and their story—their choices perhaps.
- Are there family stories that you have heard repeatedly that have shaped you?
- What are salient memories you have from when you were a child? Engage all your senses.
- List jobs, projects, activities that you have been involved in, hobbies, etc. Are there some common threads from this list that can be explored in relation to your story?
- Is there a key person you feel that has shaped you or guided you? A story that comes to mind?
- What gives you a feeling of hope? Or, a story of a time when you felt great hope?
- Is there a time when you felt great loss, failure, or frustration that has shaped you?
- What are times when you have made pivotal decisions in your life?

It takes practice to develop your story.

- Make an outline or notes to guide you.
- Solicit feedback from others—what would make the story richer?
- Does it bring together the heart and the head?
- You also will likely have different versions of your story of self in different contexts.
- Understand that your story will change over time.



Workshop Survey

Thank you for taking time to attend this Civic Agency workshop. We are very interested in receiving your feedback. *If you have participants complete evaluations on paper, please scan them and send them to team@seed-coalition.org.*

My primary role: (Circle one or more.)

Student Faculty Staff Administrator Community Organization Staff AmeriCorps/VISTA
Other:

My Institution or Organization:

Workshop Title/Topic:

Date of Workshop:

Please indicate how strongly you agree/disagree with the following about your experience with the workshop you participated in:

I felt welcomed and included.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I learned about one or more leadership tools or resources.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The tools and exercises I learned about are valuable.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I feel capable of using the tools and exercises I learned about.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I intend to use at least one thing I learned here.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Other participants in the workshop helped me see things from a different perspective.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I developed new or deeper connections with others.	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

What else would you like us to know about your experience with this workshop?