

Public Narrative: Story of Now Individual Tool

Using Narrative to Call Others to Action

This tool offers guidance about how to develop a stewardship team's shared purposes and to build values-based relationships among individual leaders through public narrative. Its purpose is to explain how to use narrative as a sustainable leadership practice to motivate others to work together effectively.

Learning Objectives:

- To explain why narrative matters
- To understand how the leadership practice of public narrative works
- To develop your own public narrative and to coach others in theirs
- To identify opportunities to apply narrative in your leadership work

Phase(s): This tool is best used by individuals who are a part of a group engaged in a Phase 1 effort along the Pathway for Transforming Regional Health

How to use this tool

This tool is most effective when completed by people engaged in the regional change effort, such as those who are part of the core stewardship team leading the effort, or part of the backbone or integrator organization.

We introduce the core ideas behind the power of narrative and the purposes of a Story of Now, and then offer a tool to help you to develop your personal own Story of Now. This tool is geared towards individuals. For a process that enables the development of a shared narrative in a stewardship team, see the Tool: "Story of Now: Stewardship Team Crafting a Shared Vision."

The Story of Now tool begins with an overview of narrative and its three components: (1) story of self, (2) story of now, and (3) story of us. The overview defines narrative, explains why it can be a powerful tool, and offers guidelines for when to use narrative in practice. This tool focuses specifically on the second narrative component, "Story of Now," and the last section offers a step-by-step guide to develop your own story.



Why Narrative?

One of the challenges facing multi-stakeholder stewardship teams is forming relationships, sometimes in a context of little existing trust, with other leaders from other organizations—relationships that can withstand challenging and difficult subjects and the hard work of leading change over time. A second key challenge is arriving at a compelling shared purpose that is genuinely motivating for leaders who work together, and that can supersede individual and potentially competing interests. That purpose must be clear and shared to guide collective work.

Narrative provides a method to identify the shared values of a diverse set of stakeholders. It offers a framework for developing a clear and collective vision guided by those values. It invites and inspires new leaders to join in action. Narrative builds a values-based culture around the effort. It identifies and sustains stakeholders' intrinsic motivations to steward shared resources over time. Using narrative recalls leaders to their core values, which are sustaining in the face of differences, conflict, and complex decision-making. It reminds leaders of what unites them as equals, and how together they can make a difference.

What Is Narrative?

Narrative is the skill of creating a shared story around our common values to motivate others to join us in action.¹ It involves three core components: personal stories that illustrate our own values ("story of self"); collective stories that illustrate shared values ("story of us"); and stories that illustrate both the challenges a group faces and the hopeful actions groups can take to address those challenges ("story of now"). In this tool, we focus specifically on the third narrative: Story of Now.

How Does It Work?

Narrative establishes a foundation on which to: (1) lead; (2) collaborate with others; and (3) discover common purpose and vision to take action.

Narrative is how individual leaders learn to access their own moral resources—and courage—to make choices in the face of urgent challenges. Because it connects leaders to their individual motivations to act ("story of self"), it is critical to sustaining voluntary commitments in change efforts.

Hearing one another's stories allows leaders to build empathetic connections and collective capacity. Stories have the power to move others because they allow leaders to express values through their lived experiences.

¹ Ganz, Marshall. (2010). Leading change: Leadership, organization, and social movements. In N. Nohria & R. Khurana (Eds.), *Advancing Leadership*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston: MA.





Narrative allows leaders to discover common purpose, or a motivating vision, to act on. Leaders tell stories to motivate others to join them *in action*. As one coalition leader stated, “It’s not just telling a story for a story’s sake; you are trying to accomplish something with it.” In other words, narrative is a motivational “call to action,” through which leaders describe the urgent challenges they face, a hopeful vision of what is possible, and the specific choices that they have made to move toward that vision.

Using Narrative in Practice to Build Values-Based Relationships and Call Others to Action

Leaders can use narrative to develop a team’s shared purpose. To engage leaders in narrative with each other, ask them to tell a brief story to the group that illustrates:

- **Challenge:** What challenges, obstacles, or difficulties did you experience in your history that can teach us something about why you feel called to lead change toward a healthy health system?
- **Choices:** What choices did you make that illustrate that calling?
- **Outcomes:** What happened as a consequence of your choices? What might happen if we work together toward some shared purpose? Why are you hopeful that it is possible?

These stories allow members of stewardship groups to understand each other’s aspirations as people and to begin to construct a collective vision around the values that will motivate their choices.

Leaders often share stories about loved ones who experienced harm in hospitals (for example). They describe personal trials navigating the health system themselves, or as children of elderly parents, or as parents of young children. They tell stories about patients whose lives could have been saved by population health efforts, whose families went bankrupt paying for care, and whose surviving caregivers suffered secondary mental and physical health problems. They share personal, yet universal, moments of grief and loss—and how those moments transformed them as human beings and as professionals.

In using narrative, leaders view their peers differently. With an emphasis on values, narrative provides a way to connect on equal footing with others from very different groups and constituencies. As one leader remarked, “Different people [in our coalition] are motivated to participate for a range of reasons—a belief in the Triple Aim, a market motivation, a population health mandate. But it is the use of narrative that connects us around a shared moral purpose, and everyone is united by that.”





Story of Now (Individual Tool)

Individual Practice

A "Story of Now" Illustrates the Challenge We are Called to Face Now

The story of now focuses on an urgent challenge that requires action, a hopeful vision for a better future, and the choice we are calling upon others to make. In a story of now you call on others to join you in action.

Learning Objectives:

- To identify the urgent challenge
- To call others to action
- To coach your learning partner(s) in telling theirs

Telling the Story

A Story is Lived and Breathed in the Details

Stories are specific and visual. They evoke a time, place, setting, and mood as well as colors, sounds, textures, and tastes. The more you can communicate this visual specificity, the more power your story will have to engage others. This may seem like a paradox, but like a poem or a painting or a piece of music, it is the specificity of the experience that can give us access to the universal values or insight they contain.

The Craft of Narrative Involves Being Authentic and Speaking from the Heart

Learning the craft of public narrative is not learning a script, developing a message, or creating a brand. It is not a formula, but a framework. Our public narrative changes as our lives, communities, and challenges evolve.

Once Again: Why Stories?

You may think that your story doesn't matter, that people aren't interested, that you shouldn't be talking about yourself. But when you do public work, you have a responsibility to offer a public accounting of yourself—who you are, why you do what you do, and where you hope to lead. If you do not author your public story, others will, and they may not tell it in a way that you like.

A good public story is drawn from the series of "choice points" that have structured the "plot" of your life—the challenges you faced, choices you made, and outcomes you experienced. Your story gives others emotional and intellectual insight into your values, why you have chosen to act on them in this way, what they can expect from you, and what they can learn from you.





By telling our stories, we also become more mindful of our own moral resources. And because stories enable us to communicate our values not as abstract principles but as lived experience, they have the power to move others to join us in action now.

Story of Now Example

Please watch the first 10 minutes of this TED talk by Dr. Mark Hyman from 2012 TED MED. Think about the following elements of **NOW** that you hear in his story.

VIDEO REVIEW: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lhkLcpJTVgM>

Consider the Story of Now you just heard and answer the following questions. These are some key ideas that can help you think about creating your own Story.

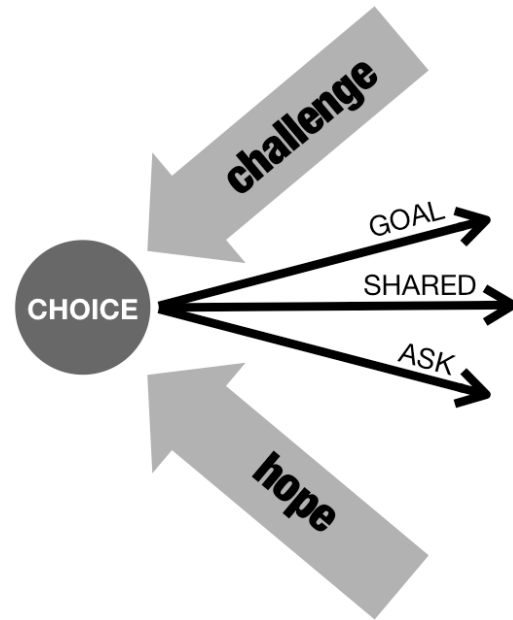
1. What are the values that underscore Dr. Hyman's "now"? Are these values shared?
2. How does he make the "threat" real? Do you remember specific images?
3. Think about what Dr. Hyman asks of the crowd. Is it something doable? Also, does this "ask" seem significant? Will it make a difference?
4. Think about how Dr. Hyman weaves together his own story of self. Does he own his authority? How does he put himself on the same level as the group? How does his story connect to the cause he is calling for action around?



The Elements of a Story of Now

The “character” in a story of now is you, the people in the room with you, and the broader community you hope to engage in action.

- **Challenge** (or “nightmare”) – A vivid image of what the future could be if we fail to act now (made real through stories not just statistics)
- **Outcome** (or “dream”) – A vivid image of what the future could be if we do act
- **Choice** – A strategic “hopeful” choice that each person in your audience can make right now



Why it Matters

The choice we’re called on to make is a choice to take strategic action now. Leaders who only describe problems, but fail to identify a way to act and bring others together to address the problem, aren’t very good leaders. If you are called to address a real challenge, a challenge so urgent you have motivated us to face it as well, then you also have a responsibility to invite us to join you in action that has some chance of success. A “story of now” is not simply a call to make a choice to act—it is a call to **hopeful** action.

Develop Your Call to Action and Coach Others

TOOL: Draft A One-Page Motivating Vision for Your Region (If possible, email it to another leader for feedback)

WHAT URGENT “CHALLENGE” FACES US?

WHAT VISION COULD WE ACHIEVE IF WE ACT TOGETHER?

WHAT “ACTION” MIGHT YOU CALL UPON US TO JOIN YOU IN TAKING?

Narrative is an exercise of leadership that motivates others to join you in action on behalf of a shared purpose. The goal in this tool is to identify the challenge you will call upon others to join you in action to address (Story of Now). A Story of Now is urgent. Its urgency is based on threat or opportunity; it is meant to inspire others to drop other things and pay attention.



Leaders need to do more than describe a problem; they need to inspire us to act together to try to solve the problem. What, precisely, are you asking us to do? Offering a list of “100 things you can do to make the world better” is a cop-out because it trivializes each action. Suggesting that everyone work in their own way ignores the importance of strategic focus in overcoming resistance to change. If you are called to face a real challenge, a challenge so urgent that we are motivated to face it as well, you have a responsibility to invite us to join you in plausible action. A Story of Now is not simply a call to be for or against something—that’s “exhortation”—it is a call to take hopeful action. A Story of Now offers clarity as to what will happen if we don’t act, what could happen if we do, and action each of us could commit to take that could start us in a clear direction right here, now, in this place.

What urgent challenge do you hope to inspire others to take action on? How can we act together to achieve a better outcome? What choice will you call on others to make now, as a first step? How can you connect with others to experience the sources of the values that move you not only to act, but also to lead? Identify key choice points that set you on your path.

A Story of Now works if people join you in action – specific action.

Important note: This tool is not about answering the above questions in order. However, it helps to start with the “ask” in your Story of Now. What you are going to ask of others in joining you in this leadership work? Then develop stories to motivate other to join you in this action. You will almost always end with the ask itself: “Will you join me in _____?”

Also remember that learning public narrative is a process, and it is iterative. This is not about writing a script that will fit all situations. It can be learned only by telling, listening, reflecting, and telling again—over, over, and over. This work will be a beginning.

Complete the Story of Now worksheet below. Email it to your learning partner.

Take a moment to reflect on a challenge in the long-term system of health in your region. What makes that challenge urgent to you, to other leaders, and to residents? On what must you take collective action now?

Use these questions, the introduction to Story of Now, and Dr. Hyman's TED clip to help you put together a Story of Now for your effort.





Why is it important to act together now? What is the urgent challenge or opportunity that faces residents of this region? What specific stories can you tell that make the challenge real for your listeners?

What's the vision of a hopeful future? What would the world look like if you were to succeed? Make it as concrete as you can; use images.

What *choice* are you asking people to make? Be specific. When? Where?

Coaching Each Other

Listening to and coaching stories is just as important (if not more) as telling your own. It is important to ask sharpening questions that can guide the storyteller to consider the effect of their narrative and the values it expresses. And, as you help in another's learning process, you in turn fine-tune your own story.

Below are some coaching tips. Read carefully through the kind of reflective and probing questions that can help bring clarity to someone else's story.

When giving feedback to your learning partner, remember to be curious and genuinely interested. Offer constructive advice where a story needs sharpening, and be positive about what connects you to their story. The purpose of coaching is to listen to the way stories are told and think of ways that the storytelling could be improved.



- **The Challenge:** What were the specific challenges the storyteller identified? Did the storyteller paint a vivid picture of those challenges? Is the challenge clear? Is there a sense of urgency around that challenge, not just for the speaker, but also for us?

"When you described _____, I got a clear picture of the challenge."

"I understood the challenge to be _____. Is that what you intended?"

"The challenge wasn't clear. How would you describe _____?"

- **The Ask:** Was there a clear choice being asked of us in response to the challenge? How does the choice make you feel? (hopeful? angry?) Does it seem significant and doable?

"To me, the choice you are asking of us is _____, and it made me feel _____."

- **The Possible Future:** What is the positive vision of a possible future that the story describes? Is it hopeful? Does the action we are being asked to take together make that vision more possible?

"I understood the vision to be _____. But how does it relate to our work now?"

- **The Values:** Can you identify what the storyteller's values are and where they came from? How? How did the story make you feel? What shared value does the narrative animate? How?

"Your story made me feel _____ because _____."

"It's clear from your story that you value _____"

- **Details:** Were there sections of the story that had especially good details or images (e.g., sights, sounds, smells, or emotions of the moment)? Did you feel like the moment was captured vividly? Or, did the speaker merely explain the circumstances from a certain angle of remove?

"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."

Originally adapted from the works of Marshall Ganz, Harvard University; adapted by Ruth Wageman

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