

# INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC NARRATIVE

## Creating A Public Narrative

Goals for this session:

- Learn WHY Public Narrative is an essential leadership skill
- Learn HOW Public Narrative works: values, emotion & story structure
- Learn HOW TO learn to tell your public narrative.

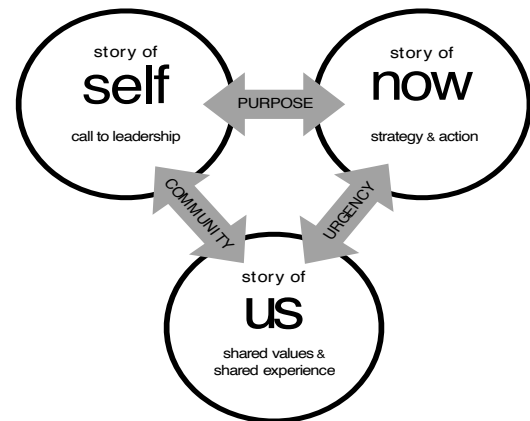
If I am not for myself, who will be for me?

When I am only for myself, what am I?

If not now, when?

- Hillel, 1<sup>st</sup> century Jerusalem sage

Crafting a complete public narrative is a way to connect three core elements of leadership practice: story (why we must act now, heart), strategy (how we can act now, head), and action (what we must do to act now, hands). As Rabbi Hillel's powerful words suggest, to stand for yourself is a first but insufficient step. You must also construct the community with whom you stand, and move that community to act together now. To combine stories of self, us and now, find common threads in values that call you to your mission, values shared by your community, and challenges to those values that demand action now. You may want to begin with a Story of Now, working backward through the Story of the Us with whom you are working to the Story of Self in which your calling is grounded.



*Public Narrative*

## Public narrative as a practice of leadership

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

## 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 compelling story about yourself, your constituency, and the need for urgent – and hopeful – action. In addition, you will gain practice in listening, and coaching others to tell a good story.

## Learning Public Narrative

We are all natural storytellers. We are “hard wired” for it. Although you may not have learned how to tell stories “explicitly” (their structure, the techniques), you have learned “implicitly” (imitating others, responding to the way others react to you, etc.). In this workshop you will learn the tools to make the implicit explicit. We will use a four-stage pedagogy: explain, model, practice and debrief. We will explain how story works, you will observe a model of story telling, you will then practice your own story, and you will then debrief your practice with others.

You will learn this practice the way we learn any practice: the same way we learn to ride a bike. Whatever we read, watch, or are told about bike riding, sooner or later we have to get on. And the first thing that usually happens is that you fall off. Then, and this is the key moment, you either give up or find the courage to get back up on the bike, knowing you will continue to fall, until, eventually you learn to keep your balance. In this workshop you’ll have the support of your written materials, peers and coaches.

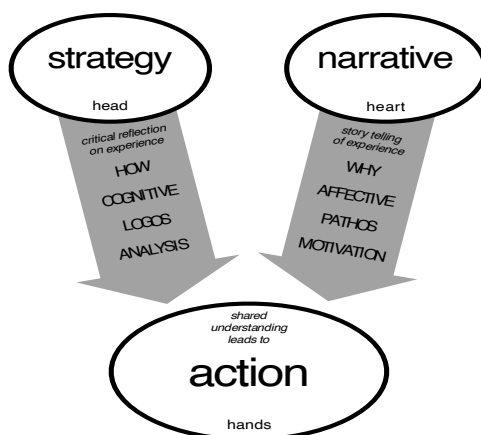
You will also learn to coach others in telling their stories. We are all “fish” so to speak in the “water” of our own stories. We have lived in them all our lives and so we often need others to ask us probing questions, challenge us to explain why, and make connections we may have forgotten about so we can tell our stories in ways others can learn from them.

We all live rich, complex lives with many challenges, choices, and outcomes of both failure and success. We can never tell our whole life story in two minutes. We are learning to tell a two-minute story as the first step in mastering the craft of public narrative. The time limit focuses on getting to the point, offering images rather than lots of words, and choosing choice points strategically.

### How Public Narrative Works

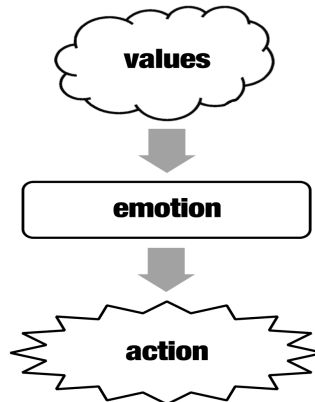
#### Why Use Public Narrative? Two Ways of Knowing (And we need both!)

Public leadership requires the use of both the “head” and the “heart” to mobilize others to act effectively on behalf of shared values. It engages people in interpreting why they should change the 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.



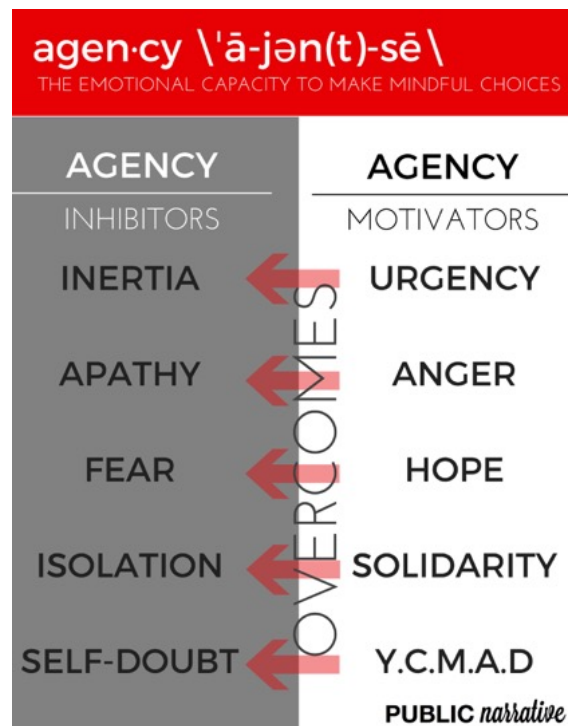
**The key to motivation is understanding that values inspire action through emotion.**

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.

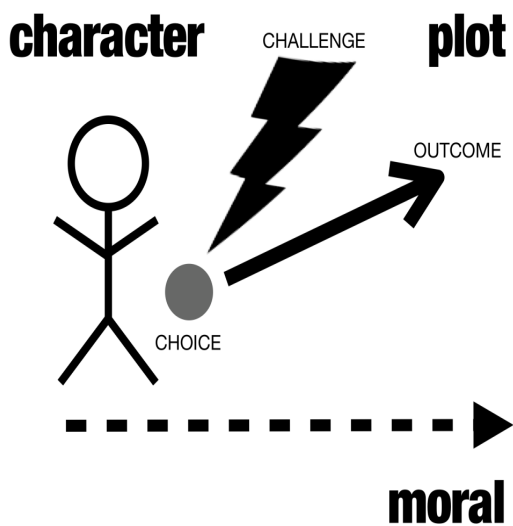


**Some emotions inhibit mindful action, but other emotions facilitate action.**

The language of emotion is the language of movement, sharing the same root word. Mindful action is inhibited by inertia and apathy, on the one hand, and fear, isolation and self-doubt on the other. It can be facilitated by urgency and anger, on one hand, and hope, solidarity, and YCMAD (you can make a difference) on the other. Stories can mobilize emotions enabling mindful action to overcome emotions that inhibit it.



### The Three Key Elements of Public Narrative Structure: 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*

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



*Public Narrative*

**A “story of now” communicates an urgent challenge you are calling on your community to join you in acting on now.**

The story of now focuses on a challenge to your community demanding action now, a source of hope, and the choice of a pathway to action you call on others to join you in taking.

**A “story of us” communicates shared values that anchor your community, values that may be at risk, and may also be sources of hope.**

Just as with a story of self, the values of a community are often expressed through key choice points in its life: founding moments, moments of crisis, of triumph, disaster, of resilience, of humor. Stories of us are accounts of events involving specific people, moments, events, words, etc.

**A “story of self” communicates the values that called you to lead in this way, in this place, at this time.**

Each of us has compelling stories to tell. In some cases, our values have been shaped by choices others – parents, friends, teachers – have made. And we have chosen how to deal loss, even as we have found access to hope. Our choices have shaped our own life path: we dealt with challenges as children, found our way to a calling, responded to needs, demands, and gifts of others; confronted leadership challenges in places of worship, schools, communities, work.



## VIDEO REVIEW: JAMES CROFT

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We'll be watching five minutes of James Croft's Linked Public Narrative. As you watch it, focus on the elements of SELF – US – NOW that you hear in his story.

SELF	US	NOW
<b>What experiences shaped his values? Whose choices were they? Why are they stories?</b>	<b>Who is the "us" to whom he appeals? How does he draw on shared experiences to create an "us"?</b>	<b>What challenges to those values does he describe? What's the source of hope? In what action does he ask us to join?</b>

1. **Why does James Croft begin as he does?**
  
2. **What specific choices does James talk about in his stories?**
  
3. **What details, images, moments bring his stories alive?**
  
4. **What values do these stories communicate?**

