

Re-write Your Working Story

By Patricia Morgan © 2007

It was when my manager told me, “There’s a mistake in this document,” that I heard an old and diminishing message in my head. “You’re so stupid.” It was a story I told myself often. I had actively collected the evidence to support a tale of being The Village Idiot. Then I learned about re-writing my story—an effective strategy for strengthening resilience.

Stories have themes and players. They include relationships with ourselves, our past, families, friendships, lovers and co-workers. Here we will focus on the work environment.

Let’s imagine you are fired from your job. What might your story be? You could blame the person who fired you, a tale about you being The Victim of The Persecutor. Alternatively you could point all fingers at your inadequacies and tell a story about being The Idiot.

As we repeat a story we strengthen and deepen it. If, however, we awaken to the stories we tell we can deliberately lighten and change them. Take the same scenario and see if you can create a humorous story that features The Clown who somersaults into temporary freedom. Or The Hero who rides off on a white stallion ready to help others face the same fate. Or The Philosopher who ponders the wisdom derived from the experience.

Then there are the collective stories told in the workplaces around the water-cooler or lunch table. Next time you are gathered with your co-workers listen to how moments in time become clustered into a repeated story, a tale that describes a particular perception of the truth.

See if your organization’s mission statement is illustrated in these work day tales. Susan Luke is a ‘corporate mythologist’ who assists organizations to find and share stories that support and demonstrate their vision and values. She is hired because these workplace sagas affect both the well-being of employees and corporations. Learn more about Luke’s work at <http://www.susanluke.com>.

In every group and organization there are stories of how we interact with and influence one another. Like movies, their themes may include biographies, family, fantasy, horror, drama, comedy, romance, mystery, history, news, adventure, crime and war. They are ripe with symbolic slaves, warlords, jesters, workaholics, bullies, victims, rescuers, seductresses and gigolos, lobbyists,

defenders, missionaries, visionaries, leaders, kings, queens, attorneys, defenders, legislators, lobbyists, environmentalists, angels, saviors, godmothers or godfathers.

Just as Luke attempts to do, surely we want to tell stories that enhance our vitality, harmony and work satisfaction. Here is the invitation:

- Emotionally step back from your old and dysfunctional group story.
- Notice the facts, characteristics and dynamics that give rise to the story.
- Identify what role or roles you and others tend to play.
- Name the problem.
- Create a new story that separates the problem from the roles people play yet uses their strengths.
- Try out a different role—perhaps The Hero or The Mediator.
- Use the new story to explore new possibilities of working together.

The old story might sound like this: “We’re in a mess and I (The Rescuer) worry every night. Jane (The Investigator) told me that Alice (The Warrior Woman) is forever opening her obsessed mouth and making this problem bigger than it is while Jack (The Schemer) is busy schmoozing with the manager so he won’t get fired. Jim (The Philosopher) sits around with ideas and does nothing. I don’t know about you but I’m fed up with Joe (The Leader) blaming us.”

Theme: Work Sucks

The new story might sound like this: “There are solutions! I (The Rescuer) see how we can come together. Jim (The Philosopher) told me he has a number of ideas to solve the problem. Imagine if Jack (The Schemer) checks with the manager while Jane (The Investigator) finds out which ideas are plausible. Alice (Warrior Woman) with her enthusiasm is the perfect person to write a proposal with Joe (The Leader) presenting it. Are you as excited about this story’s possible outcome I am, or do you have some other ideas?”

Theme: We Work Well Together

Patricia Morgan is an author, speaker and workshop leader. She helps people and organizations develop light hearted strategies for strengthening resilience. She can be reached at 403-242-7796, patricia@lightheartedconcepts.com or www.lightheartedconcepts.com