

# STORY OF SELF WORKBOOK



DECEMBER 2020



## PART ONE:

## THE IMPORTANCE OF VALUES AND EMOTIONS

### 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 Is 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 and organizations, and as nations. What does public narrative have to do with this definition of leadership? You can't ask others to follow you if they don't understand what your intentions are, and why you are called to lead.

### The Head & The Heart

There are two ways we understand the world: through our head (strategy & analysis) and through our heart (story & motivation). To enable others to achieve shared purpose, public leaders must employ BOTH the head and the heart of their constituency in order to mobilize others to act 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.

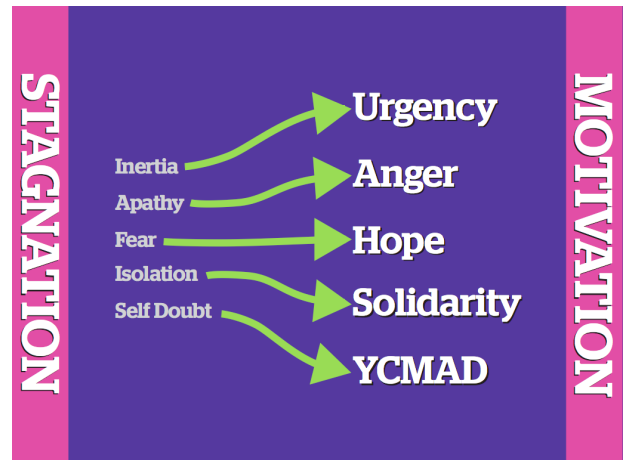
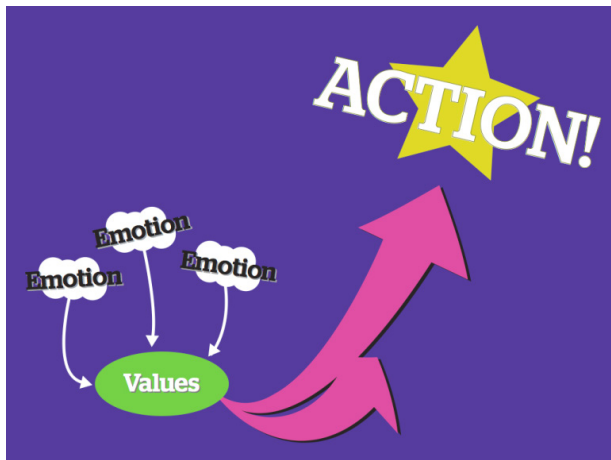


## Values Inspire Action Through Emotion

We don't think our values; we feel our values. Often we don't realize what we value in the world until we hear a story or witness an injustice that stirs emotions within us. Emotions inform us of what we value in ourselves, in others, and in the world, and they enable us to express the motivational content of our values to others. Because stories allow us to express our values not as abstract principles, but as lived experience, they have the power to move others to action.

## Some Emotions Inhibit Action, Others Motivate Action






Public leaders often encounter individuals or groups where mindful action is inhibited by inertia, fear, self-doubt, isolation, and apathy. The job of a leader is not to tell people to stop feeling this way but rather use storytelling to move people from feelings of stagnation to feelings of motivation - urgency, hope, YCMAD (you can make a difference), solidarity, and anger. The language of emotion is the language of movement—they actually share the same root word. Stories mobilize emotions of action to overcome emotions that inhibit us from mindful action.





# WORKSHEET: EXPLORING OUR VALUES AROUND BAIL REFORM

Each situation below reveals a human story connected with cash bail. Review the photos to explore your own feelings and values around these situations. Pay attention to your feelings— what specific emotions do you feel? Did you realize you value something you may not have articulated before? Are you inspired to take action?

Issue	What feelings or emotions does this issue or photo evoke?	What value does this reveal that you hold?
<p><b>Family separation</b></p> 		
<p><b>Being treated as guilty until proven innocent</b></p> 		
<p><b>Losing a job because you were in jail or had the stigma of a record</b></p> 		
<p><b>Wasting money on jailing people because they can't afford bail</b></p> 		
<p><b>Taking out a loan you couldn't afford to pay back because you had no other choice</b></p> 		

## PART TWO:

# OUR STORY OF SELF

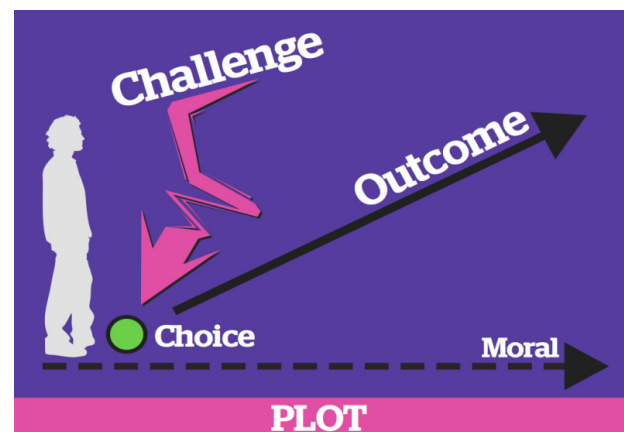
### Story Of Self

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 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 act? 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.

### Story Structure: Challenge, Choice, Outcome

Every human story has a plot. 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. A good story allows the listener to empathetically identify with the character and “feel” the moral. We hear “about” someone’s courage; we are also inspired by it. The story of the character and his or her 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.



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## 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 it means describing the worst misfortunes of our lives. Sometimes those are the moments that most shaped us. But keep in mind that a struggle might also be one of your own choosing – a high mountain you decided to climb as much as a valley you managed to climb out of. Many things may have been a challenge to you and can be the source of a good story to inspire others.



# WORKSHEET: DEVELOPING YOUR STORY OF SELF

**Before you decide what part of your life experience to draw on, think about these questions:**

1. What will I be calling on others to do and how can my story inspire them to do what's needed?
2. What are the experiences that have shaped the values that call me to leadership?
3. What stories can I tell from my own life about specific people or events that would show (rather than tell) why I am passionate about organizing for bail reform.

**The purpose of the Story of SELF** is to explain why you are called to leadership. So your goal is to tell a story that helps the listener understands (and gain inspiration from) your:

1. **Values** that bring you to this fight and keep you motivated even when times are tough.
2. **Challenges** that you have faced in your life and connect you to the struggle.
3. **Choices** that you have made in the face of those challenges that made you stronger
4. **Outcomes** that brought you to this place and made you ready to step up to make change.

Use this chart to help you put together your Story of SELF. Try drawing pictures here instead of just words. Powerful stories leave your listeners with images in their minds.

Values:		
<p><i>Think of why you work for bail reform. What motivates you? (values: family, faith, fairness, love, loyalty, etc) How has your family and personal experiences made these values real in my life?</i></p>		
Challenge:	Choice:	Outcome:
<p><i>Why was it a challenge? What was so challenging about it?</i></p>	<p><i>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?</i></p>	<p><i>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?</i></p>

Now that we have developed our story of self, it is now time to tell stories to connect with others and call people to action. To do that, we need to add two more components to our story of self: the story of us and the story of now.

### Story Of Us

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 has 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 at articulating that experience.



### Story Of Now

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 the hopeful outcome we can create together, and the choice we must make to act now. 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. A story of now also offers hope—not make believe hope, but real, plausible hope, often grounded in what others are already achieving, grounded in the courage of others’ actions, and in the strategic vision of what we can achieve together. 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.

### Sharing Our Stories

The traditional format for sharing our stories was face-to-face in individual get-togethers, house meetings or public actions. In this era of social media and social distancing, organizers are exploring other avenues for sharing stories. Review the following list and consider whether any of these options might interest you. Are there any platforms that could be added to the list?

- Facebook and Instagram posts and stories
- Tweets and Twitter threads
- Zoom meetings



## WORKSHEET: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER INTO A STORY OF SELF, US AND NOW

Try writing an outline, NOT a script. Create just enough structure (values, challenges, choices, outcomes) to keep you from rambling on and on, but don't make it so scripted that it sounds robotic. Remember, powerful stories connect heart and head!

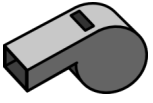
### For Further Reflection

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 or 3 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.

When reflecting on your story of self, you may go back as far as your parents or grandparents, or you may start with your most recent organizing experience. But the important thing is to focus on vivid memories or images that offer perspective into your own life, and to keep asking yourself "why." Why did this challenge impact me so deeply? Why did I choose to do this and not that? Why am I committed to volunteering for this campaign? Why do I keep going?

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 keep trying to fix it.





## APPENDIX: COACHING TIPS

### STORY OF SELF

When you are helping others develop their 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. The purpose is NOT to critique someone's personal experiences.

**Don't** simply offer vague “feel good” comments. (“That was a really great story!”)

**Do** coach them on the following points:

- The Values:** Could you identify what this person's values are and where they came from? What element of our campaign narrative did their story speak to?  
*“Your story made me really understand the importance of housing 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.”*
- 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 US AND NOW:** Who was the Us that connected with the story of self? What action were people to do?  
*“I understood the US was \_\_\_\_\_, and it connected to your story by \_\_\_\_\_. But how does it relate to RUN's campaign now?”*
- 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.”*

*Note: Most of the content and images in this workbook was originally developed in 2011 by organizers working with the New Organizing Institute, Move On, and Community Change.*

*Originally adapted from the works of Marshall Ganz of Harvard University.*

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*Additional notes:*