

YOUR PERSONAL STORY

Module 5

It's a safe assumption to understand every person on this earth has experienced a different life from the day they were born. There's also no way for us to know what a person has experienced to this point.

And most importantly, that person's experiences will weigh their perspective and thus how they react to their reality. A friend who's a psychologist shared with me this statement, "We think, we think we know." Now, what does that mean? Our reality is determined by either our experiences or what we've been taught to believe. Notice I said, "Our reality." Perception is the key. Inside of all of us we have a story that we believe to be "correct."

In this story, we are the star and everyone else are all secondary characters on our stage. In this story we are the writer, director, and producer, and all we want - like everyone else - is a happy ending to the story.

If you've ever had the distinct pleasure of jury duty, you know that the selection process is long and involved. You know that the jurors are asked questions about their lives, their activities, and their opinions on potential matters that relate to the case.

Here's what's interesting. There's a purpose for this process. It also takes a while, and so many candidates are brought in as potential jurors because pre-constructed perspectives have such an impact on the way you and I see the world, and the way we make decisions. Check this out. It makes such a big difference that jury consulting is a 2-billion-dollar industry. By the way, this is where Dr. Phil McGraw got his start. He founded a company called Courtroom Sciences. The venture helped trial lawyers build cases via mock trials, behavioral analysis, jury selection and mediation. He was hired by Oprah to assist her against the beef industry lawsuit in 1996 and the rest is history.

These pre-constructed perspectives are called the internal narrative. Where do narrative opinions come from? How do we navigate them and even influence them in our favor?

Pre-constructed perspectives come from several places. From most influential to least influential, they are, in order: **society, authority, associates, and self.**

SOCIETY. Societal pressure is a powerful thing--it can set out expectations of what is "right" and "wrong", "moral" and "immoral", or "acceptable" and "unacceptable". The persuasion of society impacts people on a fundamental, human desire to be accepted by our peers. It's an incredibly strong influencer of our perspective, by making us ask ourselves "what would people think?" These snapshots into other's lives have impacted many of our decisions to impress people who we don't even know.

AUTHORITY. When we talk about authority, it's the impact of people whose opinions we trust, but who we might not know personally. Whether we're researching or simply consuming information, we sort out the most reliable sources from the least reliable sources. Here's a great statement to make when you want to leverage "authority sources" when sharing what you believe to be true, but at the same time you don't want to sound like you're throwing out only *your* opinion. "We have found most people/companies understand when they..." Fill in the blank. Using outside staffing resources actually add profit to their bottom line. That simple statement hints that most companies experience something positive and it will share proof because you're not saying it. You're sharing what this outside authority is saying. You'll find more people will accept that fact as proof versus you stating, "I know this to be true"

So why do we believe what others say?

We do this *automatically*, as our brains take into account how trustworthy, educated, and informed the person is. We will automatically give extra trust to industry professionals, people with professional titles, and leaders. We also can call these individuals "influencers." But there's a challenge with this notion. It's called the halo effect, where we might give greater credence to a person's opinion even on subjects where they're *not* an expert. Be on the lookout for that when you find yourself forming a narrative while looking at outside experts. Don't assume and always verify the facts.

ASSOCIATES. These are the people around us: our coworkers, friends, family, business associates, and our clients. Associates are different from Society because these are actual individuals rather than a vague idea of "people".

An opinion influenced by an associate might make you ask yourself "what would this person think?"

These are people who have already built rapport with us. For example, if your neighbor has a flourishing garden, you would probably trust his opinion on the best soil to grow tomatoes. The beautiful part of associates is that they typically have your best interests in

mind. It doesn't always mean they're right, but you typically will have an honest opinion. Plus, there's a comfort level in place where you are less likely to question credibility. Any chance in business where you can bridge your prospect as an example to someone they see as a peer or associate, you will have a greater chance of them listening to you.

SELF. We trust our own experiences and we form a lot of initial opinions from what we can see, hear, and touch.

What's most interesting about the self is that it's the least impactful on our perspective. Think about it. Most people will trust society at face value. Mostly because in our minds, if the majority of people are doing it, then it must be true.

We trust thought leaders and influencers as authority figures. If the doctor tells you to do something, chances are you'll do it. Our associates (friends and family) we believe would have our best interests in mind so therefore their narratives will be given from a perspective of love. Yet we somehow value other people's opinions more than we trust our own intuition and experiences.

It's also important to note that whether or not these narratives are based on *fact* is completely irrelevant.

Internal narratives or stories are *real* in every sense, because they come from either personal experiences or beliefs from these outside influences. What is real, to any person, is completely different from what could be true. That's probably worth repeating. What is real, to any person, is completely different from what could be true.

This topic is important because once you understand how to control your internal stories you can make better choices. Don't take anything at face value. A doctor who obviously is an Authority figure AND could be an influencer may have your best interests at heart. But, they may be wrong. You always want a second opinion when possible. The same is true in business. It's best practice to look at these outside sources for you to form a strong narrative on any topic.

But, see how they align by looking at parallel sources. Remember when I said that society, authority, associates, and self were the most influential in that specific order when forming your internal narrative or stories? Well, the fascinating thing is that when you're trying to alter those deep-rooted perspectives, the most effective way to do that is the exact opposite: Begin with self, then associates, authority, and finally society.

This is what I call an inside-out proposition. Self-awareness and understanding of where your opinions are formed gives you insights on others as well. We all are exactly the same on the inside. Every person has the same exact two fears in life.

What if I fail? And What if I am not good enough?

These are rooted in our internal narratives as well as the fear of being judged by others. If this is true, then leverage this knowledge. When you reverse the model and begin with Self, you're actually giving yourself permission to change your internal narrative around a specific topic.

This doesn't mean you shouldn't look at the others for advice, but the order needs to be you first. Then look at your associates because they will at least have your best interests in mind. Once you look at their perspective, it makes sense to discover ideas from authoritative figures or influencers. I personally find society will give you perspective, but rarely will you find long-term success trying to follow the society trends.

What does all of this mean for you? What's the takeaway?

First, you need to be aware that your internal stories are controlling your life. If you want to change your situation, you must change your stories. My life and your life are controlled by the stories we tell ourselves. When you ask yourself a question, your mind will give you the answer based on these internal narratives or stories.

If you ask yourself, "Why am I such a loser?" Your mind will let you know. It'll say, "Well, let's look at society to compare all the reasons why you suck."

Imagine what could happen when you change your internal questions to uncover new stories. You could ask that same question a little differently. "What must I do to achieve my goals?" You see, our mind will only share what it believes to be true. Many of our beliefs are subjective.

Our questions will drive answers. Communication is all about understanding self, first. Knowing what stories can and will impact your decisions. Once you master this, you'll be able to apply to when dealing with others as well.

Think about your internal narratives. Why do you have specific fears or beliefs? Consider how real those beliefs are for you and how they impact others.

Here's a little exercise:

1. Write down a story you know to be true. Here's a basic example. Don't touch the stove or you'll get burned. How do you know this to be true? Have you done it? Think of more of these as examples. Ask yourself how each of these stories have been influenced by society, authority figures, associates, versus self.

2. Look through a different lens by asking yourself different questions. This will allow you to grow by understanding that you control your stories. Here's an interesting perspective. Chances are, since you were little you were most likely verbally scolded when you did something wrong. Your caretaker would say something like, "Why did you do that?" or "Why do you always do (blank)?" Think about how you've felt in the past when someone has asked that. When you ask yourself or other people the same "why" question, they will (even on an unconscious) level feel agitated. Strategically replace "why" with "what" instead. "What are you trying to accomplish by doing that? Versus, "Why are you doing that?" Make sense?

When you do this, it's going to make you a better, more effective communicator in the long run.

It will also strengthen rapport and make your interactions with others more meaningful. It's crazy to think that the most powerful part of communication actually begins with our internal narrative or stories.

Next time you believe something to be true, ask yourself where this story or belief came from. Did you verify or accept it as true? What does your gut say? Did you collaborate with others? Our stories define who we are. If you're not happy with what you have, then change the stories that hold you back from your true potential.