

Fact or Fiction? Finding the Truth in Our Stories

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Filtering information and plugging in details to fit our narrative is ingrained in human behavior. We all inherently tell stories to process the world around us. The stories we create about others in our clinics can cloud facts and contribute to negative feelings about team members, behaviors and result in unfair labeling. The stories we tell ourselves may contribute to negative self-esteem and feeling confined to behaving in a way that promotes our perceived stories. In this workshop, I hope to define the difference between fact and fiction and provide tools to get to the truth behind those stories.

Why is fiction more comfortable than fact? It's human nature to use information to tell stories about others. Filtering physical cues, behaviors, categorization and cardinal traits we make judgments on those around us. **Do we use our predetermined perceptions to cloud any new information that comes in? Do we disregard anything that doesn't fit those judgments?**

We are typically the star of our own story. Information, behaviors and interactions are usually seen through rose-colored glasses when it comes to our stories. Most of us have the self-perception that we are inherently good or bad. We cling to information that corroborates those stories. It is normal to have a skewed perception of self and grasp on to stories that validate our internal dialogue. It's uncomfortable to stray from personal narrative. When we look to take a step back and look at ourselves as a mix of traits, behaviors, and moods we realize we may be somewhat flawed and that is uncomfortable to come to terms with.

How are stories told? In writing, stories have a basic concept. There are the characters, plot, conflict and resolution. It's easy to use these concepts to shape our ideas about others and ourselves. Conflict is uncomfortable and most people look to apply a band-aid rather than truly reach a resolution. When we start to look at stories, they are rooted in several factors. Perspective is a very unreliable source of our stories. The reason I make such a broad statement is that each individual has their own perspective on information. My perspective is different than yours. Your perspective is different than your colleagues. We naturally gravitate to those who have similar perspectives as us. This is an easy way to keep a consistent story in our mind.

Our past experiences create stories as well. For example, if you have been previously criticized frequently by others, your natural response to criticism may be defensiveness. If you have previously had a good relationship with someone and they become distant, you may look to create a story for why they are acting this way. Stories fill in spaces for things we don't understand or are unsure about. Think about when you were uncertain of why someone did something or behaved a certain way. **Did you use previous experience to influence your assessment of the situation? What contributed to that assessment?**

Our internal dialogue contributes to our personal story. How we think shapes our own personal identity. This often goes back to the concept that the mind can be wired to think positively or negatively about one's self. We believe the stories we tell ourselves so if our self-dialogue tells us we are kind, caring and confident, we act as such. If our inner dialogue self-deprecates or points out our flaws, we identify with those. How we view ourselves shapes how we view the world around us. **Can you think of when your inner dialogue contributed to a negative story about yourself? How could you have shifted your inner narrative?**

Let's Find the Facts

To find the facts in fiction we need to go back to the basics and ask these questions:

Who?

Who was involved in your story?

Who was the main character?

Who were the background characters who played a part in this story?

By doing this we focus on just names, no labels. There is no hero or villain here. Just the characters.

What?

What were the facts in your story?

What happened exactly?

What effect did that have on you?

What effect did that have on others?

Remember these are facts. **What did you see vs. feel when in this situation?**

Where?

Where did this story take place? Was it at work? At home?

Think about where you were and try to remember specific details. By doing this we are looking at physical details rather than the event.

Does why matter? We are naturally inquisitive people. It's common to wonder why this happened.

Why did I respond like that? Why did this person behave in this manner? The why is important when we reflect on our own stories. But be cautious when looking to find the why in the facts in others stories. The only reason we can truly understand their why is to ask. When we look to find out others why, pay attention to if you focus on "I" statements in your responses.

"I felt this way when you acted like that."

"I don't know what you were thinking, can you explain?"

"I" statements can be wonderful when we are communicating emotions. But to truly understand someone's why, we can't allow our emotions to dictate how we respond.

It is normal to tell stories to fill in gaps in information regarding situations that happen every day. By identifying the stories, looking at what creates our stories and asking questions we can begin to understand what truly happened, instead of what we perceived happened. We can begin to strip away assumptions by seeing why we create stories and how they can either create a hero or a villain. Life is not a storybook and we are all merely trying to do the best we can. When we remove the filler and look at the facts, we can see ourselves and others for who they are – people.

Fact or Fiction? Finding the Truth in Our Stories Worksheet

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OBJECTIVES

- Identify the stories we are telling about others and ourselves
- Look at what shapes our stories
- Equip ourselves with tools to find the facts amongst these stories

TOOL KIT

WHY IS FICTION MORE COMFORTABLE THAN FACT?

- What tales do we tell ourselves about others?
- What stories do we create about ourselves?
- Why do we create stories?
- How do stories change our concept of reality and allow us to look over facts?

WHAT SHAPES OUR STORIES?

- How does perspective play into creating stories?
- Does our past determine our future relationships with those around us and ourselves?
- Do we allow our internal dialogue to dictate our story?
- What external influences contribute to adding to our stories?

HOW DO WE FIND THE FACTS?

- Where are the truths?
- What questions can we ask to start looking for facts?
- Where are we making judgments?
- What questions can we ask to start looking for facts?
- Do “I” statements prevent us from uncovering other people’s truths?

KEY POINTS

- We “tell stories” to fill in gaps of information.
- Our stories are shaped by our perspectives, past, internal dialogue and external influences.
- By asking who, what, when and where we can begin to focus on the facts.

Notes

STORY TIME

EXERCISE #1: One Word Story

What one word defines you?

Why? Is that factual?

EXERCISE #2: Stripping the Story

Think of a time you created a story about someone.
What contributed to that story?

Write down four facts that you may have overlooked.

Ask yourself if you were making any assumptions and if so, why?

What questions could you have asked to identify the facts?