

Rivers Storytelling

#6 Pulling it all together



Story questions

- What was a turning point in your life that led you to take action?

Or

- When was a time you were moved to feel hope?

**1. Telling stories that bring
people in**

Telling stories that bring people in

“a good public story is drawn from the series of choice points that have structured the 'plot' of your life -- the **challenges** you faced, **choices** you made, and **outcomes** you experienced”

-Marshall Ganz



Telling stories that bring people in

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We need to:

- Dig into the conflict we faced and the choices we made
- Reflect honestly on turning points that shaped our lives

Telling stories that bring people in

- Leaders counter self-doubt by attending to the self-efficacy of others, creating the sense that you can make a difference



Public Narrative

- **Story of Self**
 - Who I am – my values, my experience, why I do what I do.
- **Story of Us**
 - Who we are – our shared values, our shared experience, and why we do what we do.
- **Story of Now**
 - Transforms the present into a moment of challenge, hope, and choice.

Public narratives

Public narratives are the collective (or shared) stories we tell about ourselves as a society, country or community.

They help us interpret what is true, and they also express our worldview.

Importantly, they combine facts and **emotional appeals**.

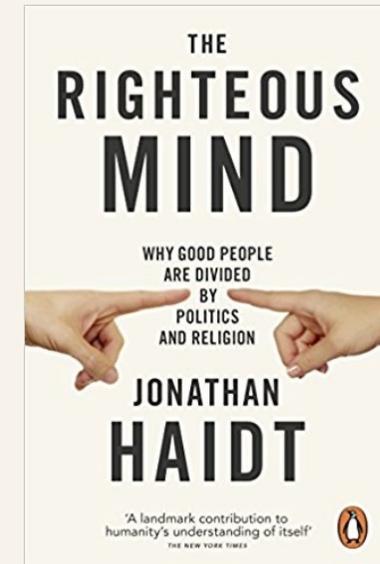
2. Telling stories with emotion

And how emotions drive behaviour

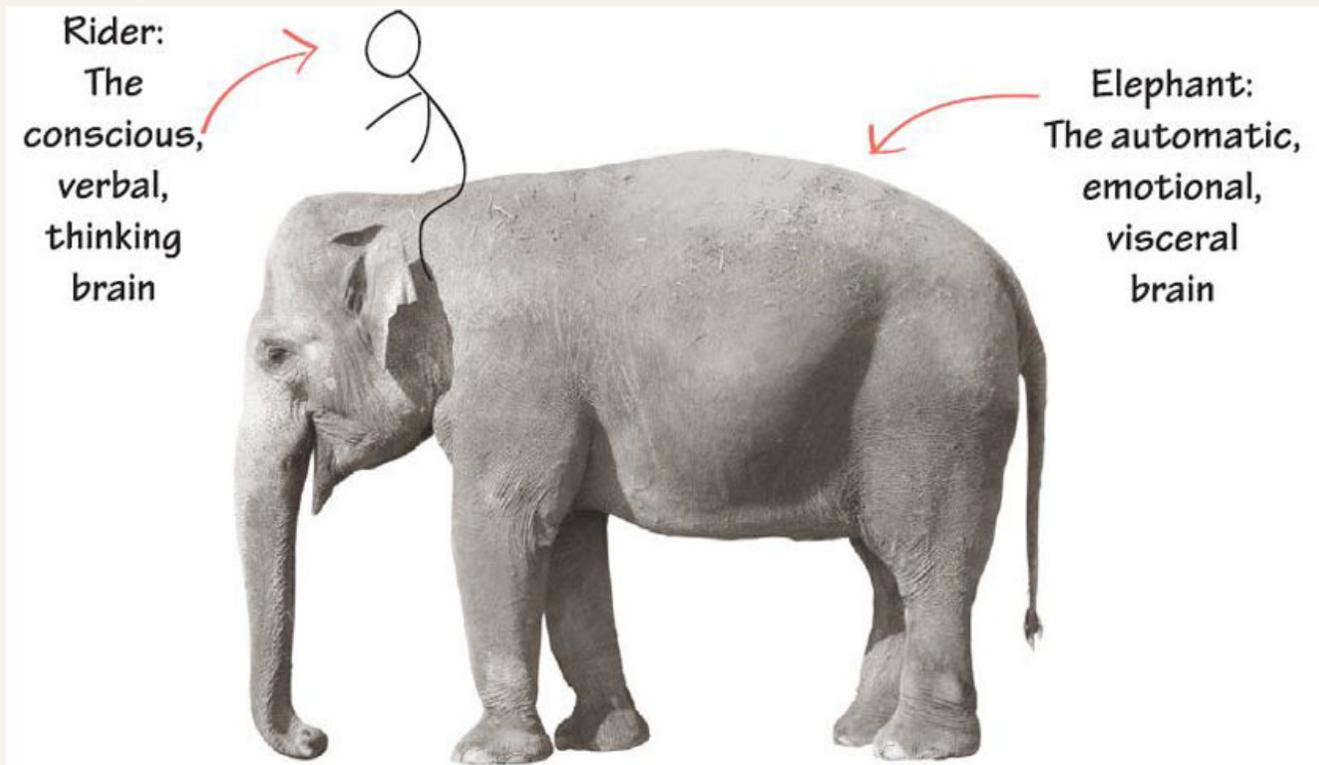
Emotions & Reason

- Moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt:
- Emotional intuition first, strategic reasoning second.
- “The reasoning process is more like a lawyer defending a client than a judge or scientist seeking truth.”

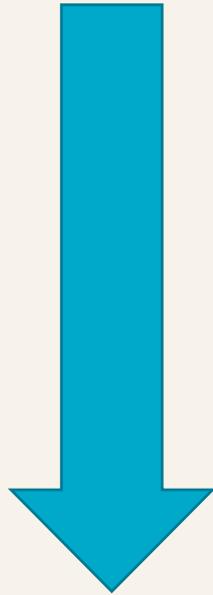
Source: Haidt, 2001. 'The emotional dog and its rational tail: a social intuitionist approach to moral judgment.' Psychol Rev. 2001 Oct;108(4):814-34.



Emotions & Reason



Super simple story structure for political change



- Emotion to care
- Rational problem
- Moral choice?
- Rational solution
- Emotion to act

Telling a story – not telling about a story

“I got up this morning, had breakfast, and came to school.”

Is that a plot? Why? Why not?

Telling a story – not telling about a story

“I got up this morning, had breakfast, and came to school.”

Is that a plot? Why? Why not?

“I was having breakfast this morning when I heard a loud screech outside. At that very moment I looked outside to where my car was parked, but it was gone!!!”

What’s the difference?

Telling a story – not telling about a story

- The more **specific the details** we choose to recount, the more we can move our listeners, the more **powerfully** we can articulate our values
- When we tell a story we enable the listener to enter its time and place with us, see what we see, hear what we hear, feel what we feel.

Telling a story – not telling about a story

- One volunteer from each group: tell your story again but add details (a turning point, a time of hope, Why are you called to work on this? What experiences and values led you here?)

Time

Place

What you see

What you hear

What you feel

3. The challenge of telling a new story

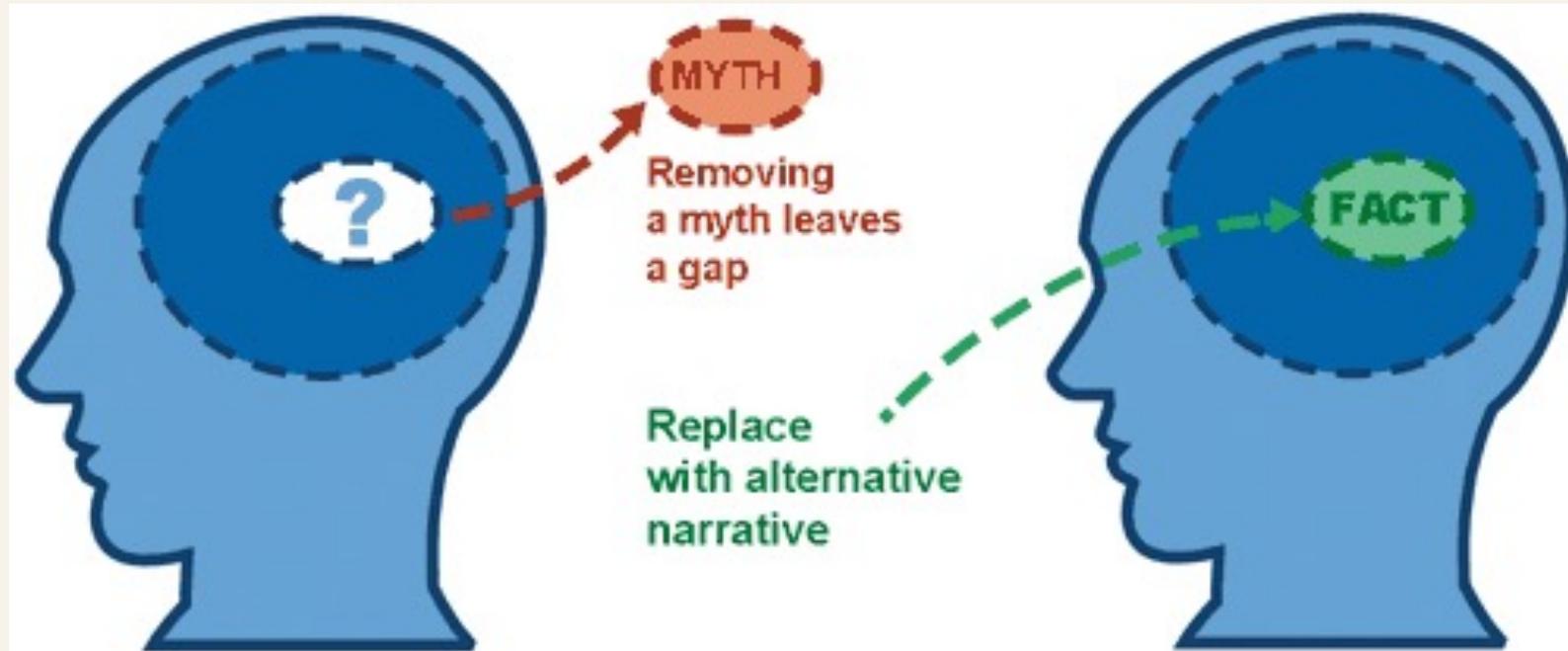
Misinformation is sticky

- It is very difficult to remove the influence of misinformation
- *Continued influence effect* = The persistent reliance on misinformation even when people can recall a correction or retraction
- Johnson & Seifert (1994) – Warehouse fire experiment

'Causal' role of misinformation

- Unless people were given another cause to explain the fire, they stuck with the original false version.
- People prefer an incorrect model over an incomplete model.
- In the absence of a better explanation, they opt for the wrong explanation.

You can't refute a myth, but you can replace it



What not to do

Myth: there is a large amount of voter fraud, including dead people voting

Fact: Voter fraud is extremely rare. The most comprehensive investigation of this was conducted by Justin Levitt, a law professor at Loyola University and fellow at the Brennan Center. He looked at one billion votes cast between 2000 and 2014, and he could find only 31 credible allegations of a voter pretending to be someone else at the polls. That's 0.000003 percent. Even the commission launched by the Trump administration in 2017 specifically to explore the threat of voter fraud uncovered no evidence to support claims of widespread voter fraud. Here in Alexandria, prosecutors convicted a volunteer of submitting falsified voter registration applications in 2016. None of the applications were ever processed.

Telling a new story

- What is our opponent's story about rivers?
- What is our story?

- Write down any metaphor you hear

Telling a new story with Public Narrative

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It communicates why we are hopeful and powerful together. It sets the ground for calling people to action in the story of now. Because it focuses on the common values it transcends issue silos.

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- Why why are we here together? Why **together** are we moved to leadership and organizing?

4. Listener-Focused ‘theory of change’

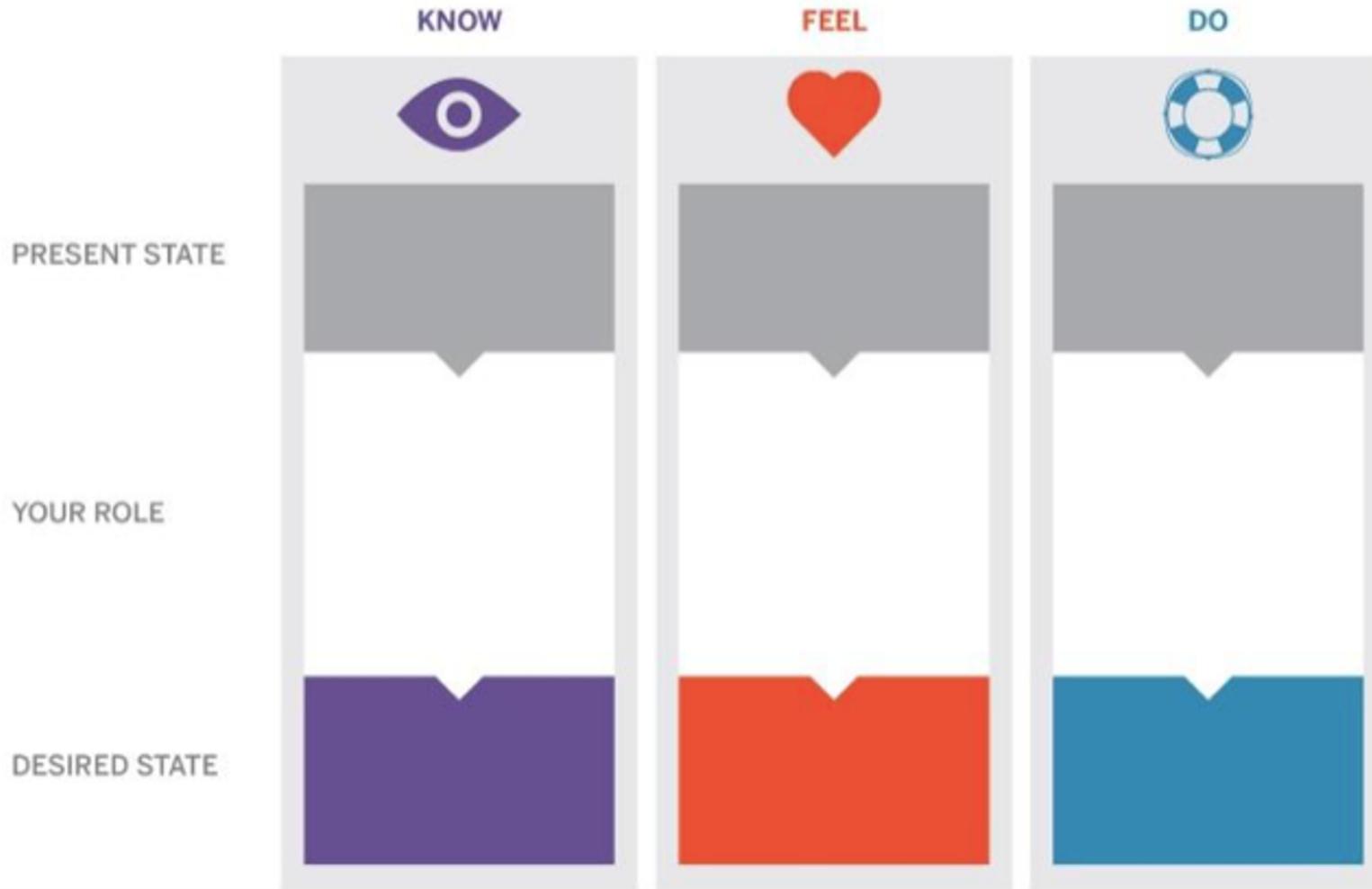
Put the reader at the centre of the story – using effective language and content

Motivations for sharing come down to the relationships people have with each other.

How to apply this...

1. Focus on people's motivation to connect with each other – not just with your cause/organisation.
2. **Keep it simple:** the message not only has to be straightforward enough to be understood by your audience, it has to be clear enough that those we choose to share it with will understand it.
3. **Embrace a sense of urgency/newness:** sharing has become the new means of information management
4. **Impact is important:** tell people why/how sharing this content will create change (effective Calls To Action)

AUDIENCE:



Matching the problem and solution

Tell people what to do and explain how their action will be effective.

The problem must match the ask...

If it doesn't convince you it won't convince anyone else.



"The river is dying, will you sign my petition..."



"We need to convince x decision-maker to stand up for nature..."

The meaning of this moment with Public Narrative

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The meaning of this moment with Public Narrative

- Story of Now
 - What is the urgent challenge we collectively face? What is the motivating vision for change? *What is the specific commitment can we make towards that change?*

The meaning of this moment with Public Narrative

- Story of now
 - What action are we called to? Be specific.
 - Why now?
 - What happens if we don't act?
 - Why is it meaningful?
 - What am I committing to?

The meaning of this moment with Public Narrative

- Story of now
 - What action are we called to? Be specific.
 - Why now?
 - What happens if we don't act?
 - Why is it meaningful?
 - What am I committing to?
- Make a call to commit to hopeful action. What can we do?

Lessons from what makes the news

- **Timeliness** - It's called news for a reason.
- **Proximity** - The further from the audience the incident takes place, the more dramatic it needs to be.
- **Conflicts and controversies** are interesting, because they allow us to consider different points of view.
- **Human Interest** - People are endlessly interested in other people.
- **Relevance** - People are interested in information that helps them make good decisions.

Lessons from questions editors ask themselves

- **Newness:** How is this different?
- **Impact:** Why should readers care?
- **Timeliness:** Why now, not later?
- **Authority:** Why you? (Expertise or personal experience)

5. Two types of narrative shift

Telling stories that bring people in

Bringing people in to tell a new story

Bringing people in to tell stories

- As a technique, the story circle process evolved, influenced in part by the commitment to "radical" democracy of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, (SNCC), which played a central role in the early civil rights movement.



Bringing people in to tell stories

"The rules of the story circle are the rules of civil participation in society. You agree to listen. You agree to respect."

-John O'Neal

Bringing people in to tell stories

- All participants sit in a circle free of barriers--there are no tables or other objects inside the circle. Sometimes the group leaders suggest a theme prior to the start of the story telling process and sometimes they decide to let the theme emerge as the circle proceeds.
- The immediate goal of the process is to create connections by establishing common ground, along with the chance to share experiences of love, injustice, hope, fear, and other powerful emotions and moments that all participants share.

Telling stories that bring people in

Social movements rely on stories

We can take our existing stories and communicate them with facts + emotions

We can publish these stories in papers and online to put forward a new narrative

We can assert new narratives

We can be a messenger that others identify with

We can give next steps for action

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Social movements also rely on people

We can identify respected leaders in our community that people listen to and come together around rivers

We can tell stories together and find narratives that speak across difference + new messengers

We can assert new narratives

We can support local leaders to be messengers that others identify with

Thanks for coming!