

How to Run a Personal Narrative Training Workshop

What you will need: Whiteboard, ample space for individuals to disperse, paper, pens

Time: 2 hours approx.

Objective: For participants to examine and understand their own story in relation to an issue. To give participants skills to share this personal narrative to encourage others to respond to social justice issues.

STEP ONE:

Welcome participants.

Briefly share why you are present – why you are part of the TEAR Group, church social justice group etc. Keep it short and personal. Ask participants to think for 30 seconds about why they are attending (part of the TEAR Group or other group). Ask people to share.

Invite people to share with the person next to them about why they are here; if in a small group get all to share. Make the point that our motivations for doing this are personal – rooted in our beliefs and values.

STEP TWO:

Give an introduction to story of self and public narrative.

- Each of us has a story to tell, one that can engage others and move them to action.
- In this workshop you will learn how to tell a compelling story about yourself within an issue (be that poverty, climate change, human trafficking etc), your community that you organise with and a story about where you fit in with the present.
- The combination of your personal story, the story of the community you are part of (you can say this is a TEAR Group/bible study), and a story of the present is called your public narrative.
- But let's start with why sharing stories are important.
- Mention that the structure of the workshop is interactive and needs discussion to work.

STEP THREE:

Ask the group to brainstorm why it is important to share stories with others and get the group to discuss.

Things mentioned could be:

- They teach us how to act.
- They help others understand who they are and why they act.
- They inspire us to act.

- They engage us emotionally.
- Sharing our story can foster connection between people.
- Sharing stories is a leadership skill.
- We tap into people's values not just issues.
- They create solidarity.
- They encourage people to believe they can make a difference.
- God has crafted our story.

If some of these were missed, add them at the end.

STEP FOUR:

Discuss the importance of knowing your personal story, the reasons why individuals act.

Mention such things as:

- Individuals feeling purposed in their actions
- Individuals learning their skills, gifts and particular interests within their passion
- Being able to explain their passion to others.

You may also wish to mention some prominent Bible leaders who knew where they came from, their story, when creating change: King David, Moses, Joseph.

Individuals will spend 10 or so minutes in quiet reflection and prayer, taking notes to share afterwards. Ask them to form one sentence summing up why they act, have one experience to highlight as crucial to their story and also to be able to tell their story of self as a progression or chronologically. These three things should add up to around two minutes.

Some questions individuals can consider:

- When did you first become aware of the issue?
- Was there an event that triggered my involvement?
- Was there one person that encouraged me to start acting?
- What was the first action I took?
- When did you start thinking you could make a difference?
- Was there any event in your youth or childhood that brought the issue to your attention?
- What are my values? How does acting on this issue link with them?
- What has God said to me about responding to this issue?
- How has your response changed over the years?

Come together and invite a few individuals to share their story of self, or just their sentences or experiences.

STEP FIVE:

Discuss the importance of a collective story (or a “story of us”) that the group has which:

- fits into a public narrative;
- clarifies the group’s purpose for members;
- clarifies the group’s identity for members;
- gives other groups an example of ways to take action.

Open question for discussion.

Split the group into pairs or triplets. Each group will have 10/15 minutes to answer the below questions pertaining to the group. They can discuss them and take notes or can draw the “story of us” pictorially. If these questions seem too many, split them between groups.

- Who makes up the “us”?
- What do we hope to achieve?
- What have we achieved?
- What challenges have we faced?
- Why do we matter in this effort?
- What has our impact been?
- What are our core values?
- What are our shared experiences?

After 15 minutes or so, have groups share what they produced. From this, the facilitator will draw out the most significant commonalities between the different groups on each question, aiming to have a couple of sentences for each. Have people write them down.

STEP SIX:

Consolidating story of self and story of us. 5-8 minutes.

Put group members in pairs. Get an individual to tell their story of self (in relation to the issue) in two minutes to their pair. Ask them to tell it as a story, to highlight one challenge or experience, and to sum it up in a sentence as before. As part of the story’s progression – the individual will then link the story of self with the story of us (the group) as just discussed. This should take one minute extra and should include the key aspects of the group: purpose, members, values and place in the bigger picture.

STEP SEVEN: The story of now.

The story of now is all about what is current and where we as individuals and as a group fit with the present situation. The questions we must ask ourselves as a group are:

- What has happened recently with the issue? What good news or bad news?
- What action will we focus on taking in the short term (e.g. advocacy around the federal budget, activism leading up to an event etc.)?
- What are some short-term goals?
- What can we do as a group today, next week, next month?

As a group discussion, narrow down a present focus within the issue, and an action that will be taken in response to that focus (e.g. Focus: keep promised aid funding in the next federal budget. Action: raising awareness in different community groups and lobbying key politicians via phone, letter and email in the budget lead-up.).

The group may have existing ideas or projects that will fit in with action points or goals (eg. an event the group will run that they are preparing for). Discuss these as answers to the questions.

Split up into different pairs and repeat step six, but adding on a story of now at the end - including a key focus and action. This is the public narrative that they will use to share with others.

Individuals should be able to say:

Their story of involvement and how their identity is linked with the issue -> what they are a part of and what that group looks like-> what action is being taken in the present. This should take less than 4 minutes all up for each person’s personal narrative.

STEP EIGHT:

The importance of public narrative.

- Forums for public narrative.
- Skills for public narrative.