Professor Marshall Ganz
Organizing Course (2006)

Motivation, Story and Celebration

What Is Interpretation?

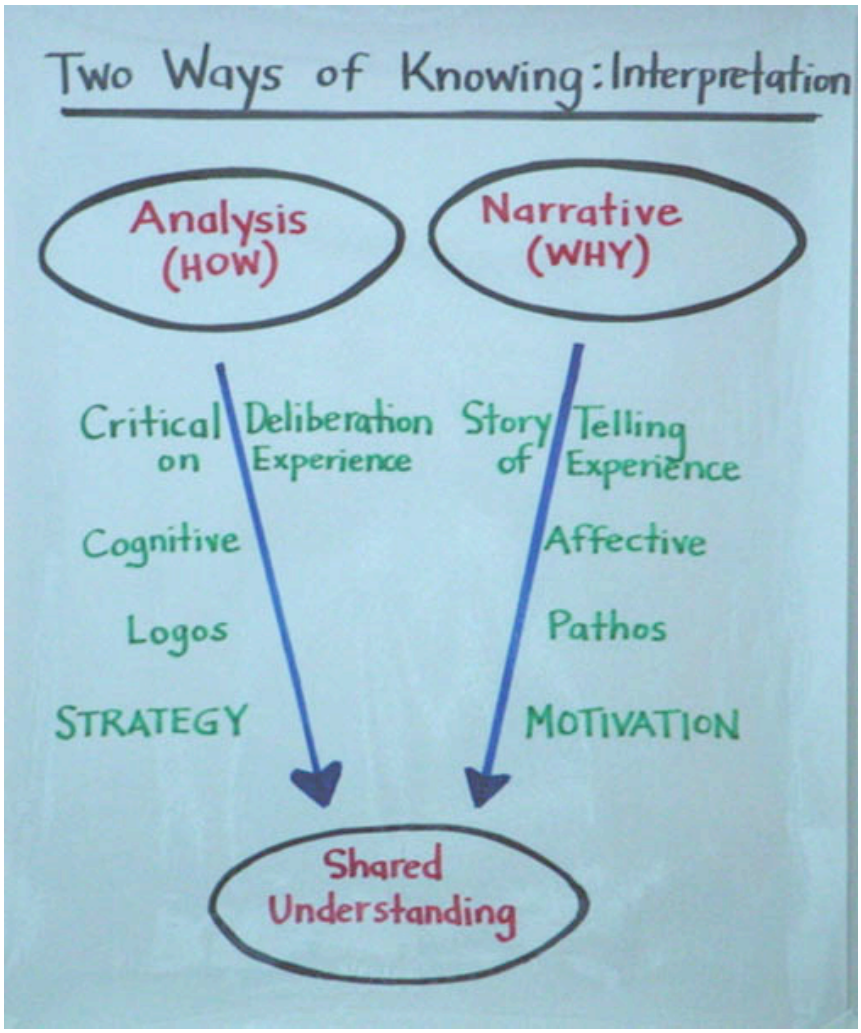
We turn now to the interpretive work of organizing: enabling people to determine what conditions of life they want to change, and how they want to change them. Understanding of ourselves, others and the world is shaped not by raw data, but on how we interpret the meaning of data for us- is it good, is it bad or is it irrelevant. We interpret data by contextualizing it within patterns of understanding that influence what we remember, what we attend to, and what we expect. These schemata or “frames" give meaning to the discrete pieces of information that we encounter. Because they give us our “grip” on the world, once they are formed, they resist change.

Two Ways of Knowing: Why and How

We interpret the world in two ways – as narrative and as analysis -- as shown in Interpretation Chart #1. We develop our understanding who we are, where we are going, and why as narrative. Narrative articulates how we feel about things (affect) more clearly than what we think about them (cognition). Its “truth” is in that which “moves” us, and it dominates fields of religion, literature, poetry, and politics (yes, politics). Psychologist Jerome Bruner argues that narrative engages us because it teaches how to cope with uncertainty, especially with respect to others. An ancient form of interpretation, we enact share stories in symbols, rituals, and celebrations. This way of knowing helps us answer the question of WHY we should act – our motivation.

The analytic (a privileged in the university) consists of the application of rules of critical reason to understanding data in the world. It articulates what we think about things (cognition) better than how we feel about them (affect). It is governed by rules of logic, assesses data as evidence and is constructed as an argument. It dominates the natural and social sciences. Although its “truth” rests on the extent to with data confirms of falsifies its hypotheses, our acceptance of the authority of those who invoke this logic also influences its persuasiveness. It is most persuasive when it "works" - helps us achieve the outcomes we want. In organizations we often do analytic work through deliberation, the job of many meetings. This way of knowing helps us answer the question HOW to act – our strategy. This week we focus on motivation and next week on strategy.

Interpretation: Chart 1



We begin our consideration of motivation by reflecting on a scene said to have occurred on St. Crispin's Day Eve, October 14, 1415 at Agincourt, near Calais in Northern France. Young King Henry V faces his band of exhausted, discouraged Englishmen, outnumbered many times by fresh French troops they must face in battle the next day. All night long, in disguise, he has wandered from camp to camp, listening to his men. He asks for a hand, climbs atop a cart, and begins to tell a story. But it is a new story, one in which he and his men are the principal characters, and it is a story of hope. The outcome of the battle may well depend on the hope he can inspire, regardless of the odds. Perhaps their Welsh longbows could give them a tactical advantage over the mounted, armored French, but only if they have the courage to stand and fight. And that's why King Henry has become a storyteller.

This story shall the good man teach his son;
And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by,
From this day to the ending of the world,
But we in it shall be remember'd;
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition:
And gentlemen in England now a-bed
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

Henry V, Act IV, Scene 3
William Shakespeare

So what can we learn about motivation from Henry V's talk with his men?

What's his problem? What are his men feeling? How does he challenge those feelings? Why does he have to challenge those feelings? And what kind of feelings does he call on? And one last question, does he ever demonize the French? So what is he doing?

And how does he do it? Does he tell them everything will turn out okay? Does he give them lots of facts and figures? Does he lie about the facts? Or does he alter the meaning of the facts? And how does he alter their meaning? By interpreting them through the lens of one set of values or feelings as opposed to another set of values or feelings.

And how does he make is case? Does he do it by making an argument? Does he present lots of facts and figures? Or does he do it by telling a story – not just his own story, but also the story of his people; a story not about the past, but about the future; a story not of despair, but of hope**.**

Knowing Why: Emotion, Motivation, and Action

To understand motivation – that which inspires action – consider emotion and their shared root word "motor", to move. Just as we map the world conceptually by noticing patterns, contrasts, and commonalities, we map the world emotionally, by distinguishing the bad (threatening) from the good (promising) from the irrelevant. Using emotional information we map the value that different aspects of the world – including our behavior - hold for us. Psychologists argue that the "affective" information with which our emotions provide us is in part physiological -- our respiration changes, our body temperature alters; in part cognitive – we can describe what we

feel as fear, love, desire, and joy; and in part behavioral – we are moved to act, to go toward, to flee, to stand up, to sit down. Because we experience value through emotion, emotions provide us with vital information about how to live our lives – not in opposition to what we learn through reasoned deliberation, but more as a precondition for it.[i]

Political scientist George Marcus focuses on two key neurophysiologic systems that govern our emotional responses – disposition and surveillance.[ii] Our dispositional system operates along a continuum from depression to enthusiasm, influencing how hopeful we are. Our surveillance system compares what we expect to see with what we do see, tracking anomalies which, when observed, translate into anxiety that calls our attention. Without this emotional cue, he argues, we simply operate out of habit, unmindful of what we do. When we feel anxiety, however, it is a way of saying to ourselves, "Hey, pay attention! You can't be on autopilot if there's a bear in the doorway". The big question, however, is what we do with that anxiety. That's where the dispositional system – and its continuum from hope to despair – comes in. How do you react if you are a despairing mode when you experience the anxiety of anomaly? Fear, withdrawal, defensiveness – not very adaptive behaviors. On the other hand, how do you react if you experience anxiety when you are hopeful? Curiosity, a desire to explore, an opportunity to learn – very adaptive behaviors. So Marcus argues that sound, not to say, creative, reasoning requires both anxiety – a stimulus to reasoning as opposed to acting out of habit – and hopefulness. This is very different way of looking at how reason and emotion interact than trying to take all the emotion out of it.

Moral philosopher Martha Nussbaum argues that because we experience value through our emotions, making moral choices – how we "ought" to act - in the absence of emotional information is futile.[iii] She is supported by data on the experience of people afflicted with lesions on the amygdale, that "old" part of the brain central to our emotions. When faced with decisions, people with this disability come up with one option after another but can never decide because decisions are ultimately are based on values and if we cannot experience emotion, we cannot experience the values that orient us to our world. So our readiness to deliberate, our capacity to deliberate successfully, and our ability to act on our decisions rest on how we feel. As St. Augustine observed, "knowing" the good is not the same thing as "loving the good", being moved to act on it.[iv]

Although how we feel about something influences what we think and what we do about it, because of the power of habit, how we feel about something may have little to do with the present, but is a legacy of emotional lessons we learned long ago. Suppose that, as a four-year-old, you are playing on a swing-set at the park when a bigger kid tries to kick you off. You run to

your parent for help, but your parent laughs at you. In that moment you trod back to the swing-set, angry and embarrassed, convinced that your parent didn't care - and you may have learned the lesson that counting on others to help you is a bad idea. So in evaluating what to do about a pay cut, for example, you fear counting on others, based on past experience, make it unlikely you will join other workers to protest. You may even tell yourself you deserved the pay cut. And when it happens again, you can reassure yourself that you were right to be afraid all along. And if an organizer comes along and tells you that with a union you could keep the employer from cutting your pay, but you are still in the grip of fear, you'll see the organizer as a threat, her claims as suspect, and her proposals as hopeless.

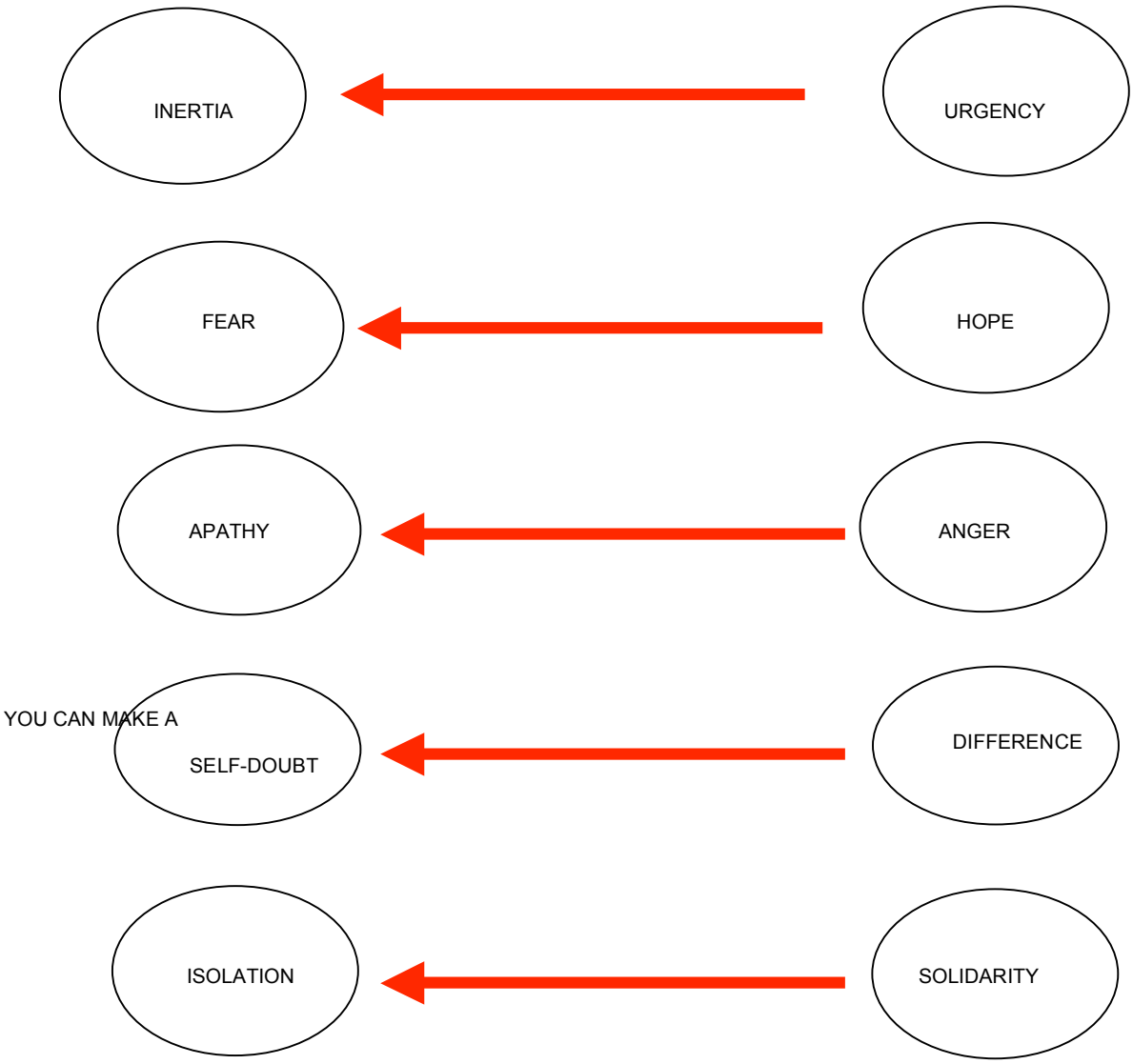
So what does Henry V do with his men, gripped as they were by feelings of despair? As he spoke with them, he engaged them in an "emotional dialogue", drawing on one set of emotions (or values), grounded in one set of experiences, to counter another set of emotions, (or value), grounded in different experiences. This "dialogue of the heart" eventually enabled his men to see their circumstances differently, find hope, and rise to the occasion. Far from being "irrational", this dialogue restored choices to his men that they had abandoned in their despair.

MOBILIZING HOPE

Which emotions inhibit action and which emotions facilitate action? Inertia causes us to ignore signs of a need for action. Fear can paralyze, driving us to rationalize inaction. Amplified by self-doubt and isolation, we may become victims of despair. On the other hand, urgency gets our attention hope inspires us and, in concert with confidence and solidarity, can move us to act. As shown in Motivation Chart #2, organizers engage people by mobilizing feelings that encourage action and challenging feelings that inhibit action. In fact, most of us hold conflicting feelings, some of which are more salient at one time than at another. Mobilizing one set of feelings to challenge another can produce an emotional dissonance, a tension that can only be resolved through action. This is sometimes called "agitation." For example, the value a person places on not upsetting the boss (teacher, parent, employer) because of their dependency on him may conflict with the value she places on self-respect when her boss does something that violates her sense of self-respect. She may become angry enough to challenge her boss, or she may decide to "swallow her pride," or she may get angry with the organizer who points out the conflict. Any resolution can be costly, but one may serve her interests better than another. One of the main ways organizers resolve this tension is with action embedded in the telling of a new story -- a story of hope.

Motivation: Chart 1

BREAKING THE BELIEF BARRIERS



BELIEF BARRIERS: INERTIA, FEAR, APATHY, SELF-DOUBT, AND ISOLATION

The biggest "belief barrier" to action is **inertia,** habit, not paying attention. We process most of the information that comes our way on "autopilot": we hear, we process, we respond as programmed. For much of what we do, this is efficient. But if there is something new going on, something that could be a threat to us, or that could hold promise of us - and we stay on "autopilot" - we may not only miss an opportunity, but we may wind up in real trouble.

Second**,** **fear** of all kinds: threats, danger, standing out, failing, being laughed at, etc. What are you afraid of? If its not going to jail, then what is it? Fear of failure? Fear of losing face? When we are afraid we pay little attention to the new leaflet about all the wonderful benefits a union can bring, for example. And we can be very imaginative at coming up with excuses to justify avoiding having to confront our fear. When coupled with self-doubt, fear easily turns into despair, a sentiment many faith traditions identify as a primary sin.

And how about **apathy**, not caring? Although literally to be "without feeling", more often it describes the feeling that we can do very little about most things. Coupled with self-doubt, it becomes its first cousin - cynicism or, in the elite world, *cynical chic*.

One of the biggest belief barriers is "**self-doubt**" - I can't do it, people like me can't do it, we aren't qualified to do it, etc., etc., etc.

And when we feel **isolated**, we fail to appreciate interests we share with others, we have little sense of access to common resources, we no sense of a shared identity, and we generally feel quite powerless.

How does this make you feel? What can you do about it?

BREAKING THE BARRIERS: URGENCY, HOPE, ANGER, YCMAD, AND LOVE

We can counter inertia – or habit - with **urgency**. Urgency creates the space for new action and unless we find ways to make the important also urgent, the urgent alone will take priority. Urgency is less about time than it is about commitment. Imagine that someone calls you up and tells you he is recruiting for a 100 year plan to change the world, he's just beginning and is considering calling a meeting sometime over the course of the next 6 months and wants to know if you would be interested in coming whenever it happens? On the other hand, what if someone calls you about an election you care about with the news that Election Day is just 7 days away and that within these 7 days, the campaign has to contact and turn out 3000 targeted voters - or about 500/day - in order to win? With help of 220 volunteers who agree to contact 20 voters each they can reach them all. You live near 20 of these voters. If you will come down to the headquarters just down the street from you at 6:00 PM, you'll meet the other people who are part of the effort, and they'll show you exactly how to do it. Urgency recognizes the rhythm of change is "time like an arrow" – the deadlines of campaigns another way to create urgency. Commitment and concentration of energy is required to get anything new started and urgency is often a critical way in which to get the commitment which is required.

Where can we turn to find the courage to act in spite of our fear? Trying to eliminate anything that we react to fearfully is a fool's errand because it locates the source of our fear outside ourselves, rather than within our own hearts – an error most moral traditions recognize. Trying to make ourselves "fearless", on the other hand, can be counterproductive if we wind up acting more out of "nerve than brain." Organizers sometimes prepare others for fear by "inoculating" them, warning them that the opposition will threaten them with this and woo them with that. So when it actually happens, the fact that it is expected, shows the opposition is more predictable and thus less to be feared. So what in general can we do about fear. A decision to act in spite of fear is the meaning of courage. And of all the emotions that can help us find courage, perhaps most important is "hope."

So where do you get some hope? One source of hope is an experience of "credible solutions", not only reports of success elsewhere, but also direct experience of small successes, small victories. Another important source of hope for many people is in their "faith", grounded in one's religious beliefs, cultural traditions, moral understanding. It is no accident that many of the great social movements of our time drew strength from religious traditions within which they arose (Gandhi, Civil Rights, Solidarity) and that much of today's organizing is grounded in faith communities. Another source of the experience of hope is in our relationships. Don't you know people who inspire hopefulness in you when you spend time with them? Eeyore, on the other hand, would make a very poor organizer ("Good morning, Eeyore! What's good about it, Pooh?").[v] And isn't "charisma" a kind of capacity to inspire hopefulness in others, inspiring others to believe in themselves? Lots of people have it, but some need to be encouraged to use it. Just as religious belief requires a "leap of faith," Cornel West argues that politics requires a "leap of hope."[vi] More philosophically, the Jewish scholar of the 15th Century, Moses Maimonides, argued that hope is belief in the "plausibility of the possible", as opposed to the "necessity of the probable." [vii]And psychologists who explore the role of "positive emotions" give particular attention to the "psychology of hope[viii].

Motivation: Chart 2

What about apathy?. One way to counter apathy is with **anger** – not “rage”, but “outrage” - indignation with unjust conditions. Sociologist Bill Gamson describes this as invoking an "injustice frame" to counter a "legitimacy frame."[ix] Constructive anger is based on the difference between what “ought to be” and what “is” - the way we feel when our “moral order” has been violated. As scholars of “moral economy” have taught us, people rarely mobilize to protest inequality as such, but they do mobilize to protest “unjust” inequality.[x] In other words, our values, moral traditions, and sense of personal dignity are critical sources of the motivation to act. This is one reason organizing is so deeply rooted in moral traditions.

Organizers counter self-doubt with YCMAD **- you can make a difference**. The best way to inspire the belief that one can make a difference is to ground what you do **in what people can do**, not what they can’t do. If you design a program calling for each new volunteer to recruit 100 people and provide no leads, no training, no coaching and no support, you will only create deeper feelings of self-doubt. It is also very important to recognize specific people for specific contributions at specific times and in specific ways - visible recognition, widely shared recognition. But recognition not based on real accomplishment will degenerate into flattery no one believes. The idea is to spread accomplishment around and then recognize people for that accomplishment.

The 1987 Agnos for Mayor Campaign in San Francisco had an extensive volunteer precinct leader operation. When anyone agreed to be a precinct leader, his name was written on a star that was hung from the ceiling of the campaign headquarters. As the election approached, when you entered the headquarters, you would look up and see hundreds of stars hanging from the ceiling in recognition of the grass roots leaders involved: the real “stars” of the campaign.

There is no recognition without **accountability.** Requiring accountability does not show lack of trust, but is evidence that what one is doing really matters.

Have you ever volunteered to walk a precinct in a campaign? They give you a packet with a voter list, tell you to mark the responses, and bring it back when you're done. One time, I'd been out for 4 hours, did a conscientious job, returned to the headquarters ready to report and was told, "Oh, just throw it over there in the corner, thanks a lot, see you next week." What about all my work? It didn't even matter enough for anyone to debrief me about it - let alone mark it up on a wall chart and try to learn from it. Do you think I went back "next week?"

Training people to do new tasks is often less about giving skills, than about giving confidence. Training is a way of supporting people in a safe setting where they learn that a new task is something they can do.

And finally, we counter feelings of isolation with the experience of **belovedness or solidarity.** This is the role of mass meetings, singing, common dress, shared language, etc. It is also one of the reasons that developing relationships among those whom we hope to mobilize is so important. And because of the "snowball" effect it is much easier to get people to join others who are already in action.

Telling Your Public Story

Henry engages his men not by making an argument, but by telling a story. Why does it work? How does he do it? Why do stories move us to act? What are the components of a story? One thing a story isn't is a "mission statement". Had Henry read his men a mission statement it would have been something like this:

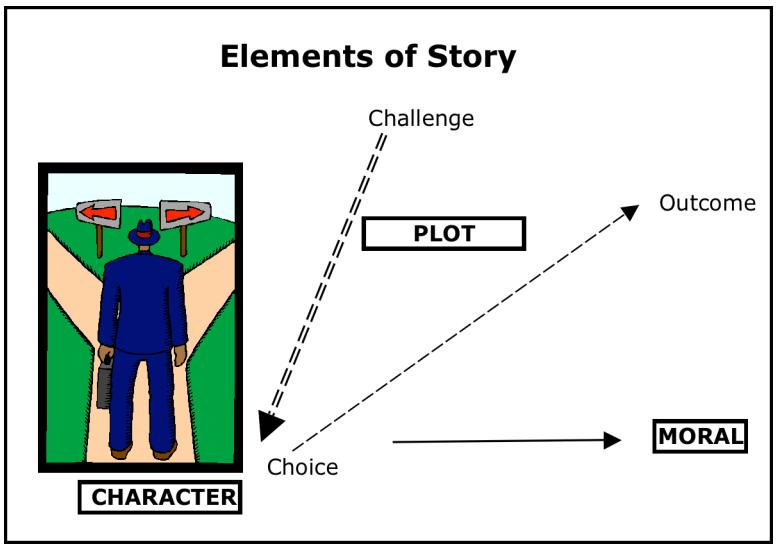
> *The English Army is an organization established to fight the French, preserve the honor of Eng land, and uphold the values of manliness, godliness, and country.*

Pretty motivational isn't it? What about a "values statement"?

> *We believe that it is the duty of Englishmen to defend their country, bring honor to their families, and fight for the king. We're all in it together.*

So what's the difference between a mission statement, values statement, and a story? Story telling is action speech – it is how we most directly translate our values into the motivation to act. A story exists in the telling of it and is crafted of just three elements: **plot**, **character**, and **moral**. The effect depends on the **setting** of the story it's telling: who tells it, who listens, where they are, when they are, and why they are there.

Motivation Chart #3



Plot

What makes a plot a plot? A plot engages us, captures our interest, and makes us pay attention. "I got up this morning, had breakfast, and came to school." Is that a plot? Why? Why not? How about this? "I got up this morning and was having breakfast when I heard a loud screeching coming from the roof. At that very moment I looked outside to where my car was parked, but it was gone!!! What was going on?" How about that? What's the difference? Why did you start to lean forward when I got to the screeching?

How does it all begin? An actor is moving toward a desired goal. But then something happens? Things go wrong. It's unexpected. As Chart #3 shows, challenge appears. The plan is suddenly up in the air. The actor must figure out what to do. This is when we get interested. Why at this point? Yes. I know we want to find out what happens. But why do we care?

Dealing with the unexpected – small and large – defines the texture of our lives. The movie theater may be sold out. We may lose our job. Our marriage may break up. In big ways ones are constantly faced with having to figure out what to do about the unexpected. And what the source of the greatest uncertainty around us? Not the weather. Not earthquakes. The greatest source of uncertainty in our environment is other people – and how to interact with other people is the subject of most stories.

As human beings we can be defined as the creature who make choices in the present, based on remembering the past and imagining the future. This is what it means to be an "agent." But when we act out of habit we don't choose. We just follow the routine. When we react without thinking, on the other hand, we are not choosing either. Our amygdale is in charge. So it is only when the routines break down, the guidelines are unclear, and no one can tell us what to do that we are on our own, that we make real choices, that we become the creators of our own lives, communities, and futures, that we become agents of our own fate. But these moments can be as frightening as they can be exhilarating.

A plot then consists of just three elements: a challenge, a choice, and an outcome. And because attending to plot is how we learn to deal with the unpredictable, we remain infinitely curious. Researchers report that most of the time that parents spend with their children is in story telling – stories of the family, "children's stories", the child's stories, stories of the neighbors. Bruner describes this as "agency training": the way we learn how to process choices in the face of uncertainty – as a person, as a member of a family, as of a particular gender, as of a particular faith, and so on. And because the unexpected never leaves us, we remain curious enough to invest billions of dollars a year, not to mention countless hours, in films, in literature, and in sports events – not to mention religious practices, cultural activities, and national celebrations.

Character

Although a story requires a plot, it only "works" if we can identify with a character. Through an empathetic identification with a protagonist, we can experience the emotional content of the story. And it is through that experience that we learn what the story has to teach to our hearts, not only our heads. As Aristotle wrote of Greek tragedy, this is how the protagonist's experience can touch us and, perhaps, open our eyes.[xi] Arguments persuade with evidence, logic, and data. Stories persuade by moving us via empathetic identification with a character. Have you ever been to movie where you can't identify with any of the characters? Pretty boring, isn't it? Sometimes we identify with protagonists that are only vaguely "like us" – like the road runner (if not the coyote) in the cartoons. Other times we identify with protagonists that are very much like us – as in stories about friends, relatives, neighbors. And sometimes the protagonists of a story are *us,* and we find ourselves in the midst of an unfolding story, the outcome of which we have become the authors.

Moral

Stories teach. And that is the "moral of the story." Have you ever been at a party where someone starts telling a story and they go on...and on...and on...? Don't you ever want to shout,

"Point? Point! Get to the point!" We deploy stories to make a point, to evoke a response, to make something happen.

What kind of point can stories make, what kind of moral can they teach? Because of their emotional content, stories can teach the heart, not only the head. The "moral' of a successful story is felt understanding, not simply conceptual understanding. When only stated conceptually, many a "moral" becomes a banality. We do not retell the story of David and Goliath because it teaches us how to fell giants. What it does teach us that a "little guy" can beat a "big guy" – with courage, resourcefulness, and imagination – and Goliath's arrogance. We hear a story about a fearful character that, out of anger, acts courageously and emerges victorious and we feel the character's fear, we feel the character's anger, we feel the character's courage, and we feel *hopeful* for our own life because the character is victorious. We don't often tell stories about people being courageous and losing when we want to motivate action. Stories thus teach how to manage our emotions when challenged – how to be courageous, keep our cool, trust our imagination— rather than the tactics to use in any one case.

So stories teach us how to act in the "right" way. They are not simply examples, illustrations, or cases in point. When they are well told, we experience the point – we feel hope, we feel relieved, we feel connected - and it is that experience, not the words as such, that can move us to action. Because sometimes that is the point – we have to act.

Motivation Chart #4

Elements of Story

Element	**Mechanism**	**Outcome**
Plot	Curiosity	Agency
Character	Identification	Inspiration
Moral	Insight	Action

Setting

Stories are told. They are not a disembodied string of words, images, and phrases. They are not a "message", a "sound bite", or a 'brand" – although these rhetorical fragments may

reference a story. Story telling is how we interact with each other about values; how we share experiences with each other, counsel each other, comfort each other, and inspire each other to action.

As a story is told we evaluate the story, and we find it more or less easy to enter into depending on who the storyteller is. Is it his or her story? We hear it one way. Is it the story of a friend, a colleague, and a family member? We hear it another way. Is it a story without time, place, or specificity? We step back from it. Is it a story we share, perhaps a Bible story, which draws us toward one another? Storytelling is in this way fundamentally relational. We respond. We call up our own stories and tell another in response. And when we retell it, we may "customize" it a bit to bring out our “truth” of what “really” happened – in case those who are listening are “missing the point.”

Story of Self, Story of Us, Story of Now

We can build our public story of three components: a story of self, a story of us, and a story of now. Our story of self allows other to experience the values that move us to lead. Our story of us allows us to make common cause with a broader community whose values we share.. And a story of now calls us to act, so we can shape the future in ways consistent with those values, and not be trapped by it.

Motivation Chart #5

Story of Self

What do we teach when we tell our own story? We teach values our choices reveal, not as abstract principals, but as our lived experience. We reveal the kind of person we are to the extent

that we let others identify with us. The more specific our stories, the more powerfully we can communicate our values or what moral philosopher Charles Taylor calls our "moral sources." [xii] A story is like a poem. A poem moves not by how long it is, how eloquent, or how complicated. It moves by offering an experience, a moment through which we grasp the feeling the poet communicates. The more specific the details we choose to recount, the more we can move our listeners.

Some of us think our story doesn't matter, people aren't interested, or we shouldn't be talking about ourselves so much. On the contrary, if we do public work we have a responsibility to give a public account of ourselves - where we came from, why we do what we do, and where we think we're going. When Aristotle argued rhetoric had three components - logos, pathos, and ethos – this is what he meant by ethos.[xiii] The logos is the logic of the argument. The pathos is the feeling the argument evokes. The ethos is the credibility of the person who makes the argument. And we don't really have a choice about whether to have a story of self or not. If we don't author our story, others will – and they may tell our story in ways that we may not like. Not because they are malevolent, but because as others try to make sense of who we are, what we're up to and the why of our actions, they draw on their own experience, especially their experience of people they consider to be "like" us.

Typically a "story of self" is told, in part at least, Barack Obama, for example, told a "story of self" in less than 7 minutes at the 2004 Democratic National Convention. Why did he choose the stories he told? What if he'd left out those stories? How did those stories reveal truths about the person he had become? How did those stories enable the rest of us – who are neither immigrants or of color – identify with his values? Think about his phrase "an improbable love" to describe his parents' marriage. Why improbable? And why make a point of it?

Story of Us

A public story is not only an account of the speaker's personal experience. Any "self" story includes fragments of stories drawn from our culture, our faith, our parents, our friends, the movies we've seen, and the books we've read. Although individuals have their own stories, however, communities, movements and organizations – and nations - weave collective stories out of distinct threads, bound together in a common pattern. Our individual threads intersected the day Kennedy was assassinated or when we saw the planes hit the twin towers because we shared a crisis, we learned the morals about how we are to act and how life is to be lived. Points of intersection can become the focus of a shared story – the way we link individuals' threads into

a common weave. My story becomes “our” story when its project is our project, its crisis is our crisis, or its resolution teaches a moral common to us all.

Learning to tell a “story of us” requires deciding who the “us” is, which values shape that identity, and which of those values are most relevant to the situation at hand. How does the story teller become part of this larger story? Stories then not only teach us how to live, they also teach us how to distinguish who “we” are from “others”, reducing uncertainty about what to expect from our community. In the midst of treacherous weather, earthquakes, disease and other environmental sources of great uncertainty and unpredictability – it is the behavior, the actions and reactions, of the people whom we live among, and our shared stock of stories, can gives us greater safety.

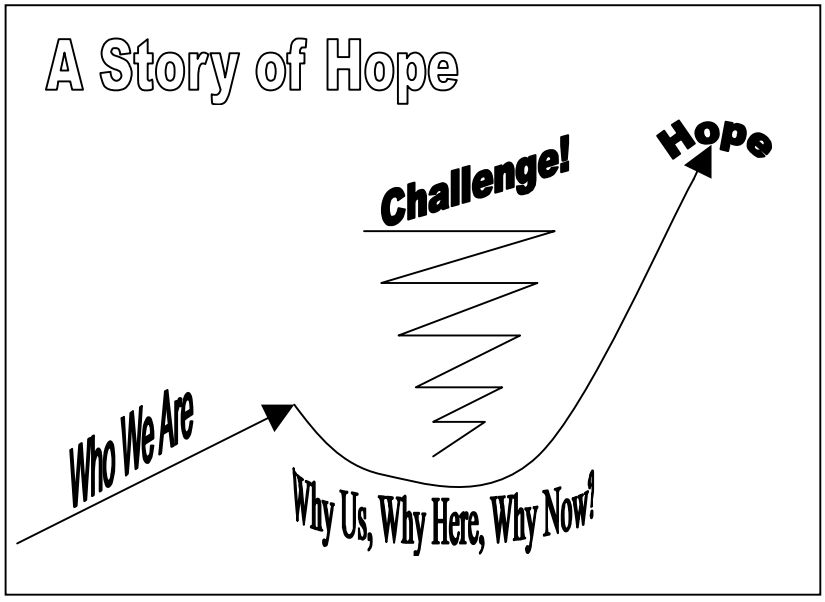
Although many of us identify with Obama as he tells his “story of self”, at a certain point he shifts to a “story of us.” How do we know? Why does he site the Declaration of Independence? Grassroots Sierra Club leaders learning to tell their “stories of us” drew on the inspiration of morals drawn from earlier struggles by their organization for current struggles. Others recounted John Muir’s discovery of his calling, linking it to sense of calling many in their organization share. And one recounted how she felt when she had to speak at a Board of Supervisors for the first time and, as she was standing there, realized that she wasn’t standing alone but with 2800 other members in that county alone. In other words, a “story of us” enables us to experience the values that move us as a community, much as a “story of self” can.

Our cultures are repositories of stories. Community stories are about challenges we have faced, why we stood up to them (our values, our shared goals), and how we over came them (our religious traditions, political beliefs, economic beliefs). We tell community stories again and again as folk sayings, popular songs, religious rituals, and community celebrations (e.g., Easter, Passover, 4th of July). If you look at the Exodus story you'll note God stops the action just as the Israelites are about to cross the Red Sea to instruct them in the telling of the story of what is happening and establish rituals for its annual retelling. Just like the stories of individuals, collective stories can inspire or paralyze, they can inspire hope and generate despair. We also weave new stories from old ones. The Exodus story, for example, served the Puritans when they colonized North America, but it also served Southern blacks claiming their civil rights in the freedom movement. The story of Jesus going up to the Temple to cleanse it of moneychangers became black clergy “going up” to conduct prayer services in the “whites only” county court house to drive out the “money changers” of their day.

Story of Now

Stories of "now" articulate a challenge we face now, the choice we are called upon to make, and the meaning of "making the right choice", in particular the hope that may be there. Stories of "now" are really stories set in the past, present and future. The challenge is now; we are called upon to act now because of who we have become, a legacy of the past; and the action that we take can shape a desired future. These are stories in which we are the protagonists. We face a crisis, a challenge. It's our choice to make. And, if it is a story of hope, there's hope if we make the right choice. It's not a sure thing, but there's hope… and it's the right thing to do. The story teller among us whom we have authorized to "narrativize" this moment finds a way to articulate the crisis as a choice, reminds us of our moral resources (our stories, stories of our family, our community, our culture, our faith), and offers a hopeful vision we can share as we take our first steps on the journey.

Motivation Chart #6



The Challenge

Like any story, a story of hope begins with recognition that an urgent challenge that we face can become a moment of choice. We feel the uncertainty, but it is combined with a sense of promise. We feel the urgency, combined with possibility: do we act or not? By turning a bad, hopeless, or overwhelming situation into a moment of choice, we have **narrativized** the moment. We have given the moment real significance in our lives. We are in the midst of a new story.

While we may have believed ourselves resigned to an inevitable fate, a story of hope moves us to consider new possibilities. Henry begins his speech to his men by, quite directly, giving them the choice to leave:

> Rather proclaim it Westmorland, through my host
> That he which hath no stomach to this fight
> Let him depart. His passport shall be made,
> And crowns for convoy put into his purse.
> We would not die in that man's company
> That fears his fellowship to die with us.[xiv]

Of course, it's not just about choice. People paralyzed by fear, who do not have the wherewithal to choose, may not have a real choice. If Henry merely reported the odds of victory, and offered his soldiers the choice to leave, many of them would likely have ran for the hills. So along with presenting a choice, an organizer motivates his constituency by rooting that choice in shared values that call them to action. By presenting the battle as a choice – and a noble choice – Henry opens his soldier's eyes to the possibility of everlasting honor. Before the speech they feel resigned to a grim fate. After, they willingly choose to fight for their eternal glory.

Having real choice is an experience of freedom. When, given this freedom, we choose to act in a way that honors certain beliefs over others; certain values over others, those values that we honor grow stronger. But the choice is in the action. The change begins when we act. It's the taking of the action that becomes transformative, that starts a new pathway. Motivation that does not turn into action is meaningless.

The Choice

Why is it that "we" are called upon to choose to face this challenge? What is it in who we are that demands it of us? What is it in who we are that tells us we can do it? Rather than telling tales in flowery phrases, King Henry focused on mobilizing his men's understanding of their pasts, their identities, their aspiration, to face a current challenge in a way that would make a new future possible – as individuals, as part of the "happy few", as warriors, Christians, and Englishmen. These might not be the same "moral sources" that we would draw upon to find courage, but, for his time and place, he knew the moral sources of his men.

And in his telling their story Henry's men become a "we."" Stories are nested. One's own story is never simply an individual account of one's own experience, but it weaves in threads drawn from the stories of our culture, our faith, our parents, our friends, the movies we've seen, and the books we've read. When we feel isolated, we often fail to see interests we share with others, have little access to common resources, have no sense of shared identity, and feel powerless.

The experience of solidarity – or love – can challenge this. By articulating why we, as a group, are called to face this challenge, by calling up stories drawn from our experience, our shared culture, our community, we evoke values we hold that compel us to act. Each individual's life story is linked together through the story of shared struggle. The moment of choice is not only a choice for an individual, but for a group. And, in a sense, by transforming ourselves into courageous actors and members of a courageous group, we also transform our world. And through mass meetings, singing, common dress, shared language, and other rituals, we can foster a sense of collective identity that helps each of us feel supported in the risks we take.

So when we start a new organization, we not only form new relationships and mobilize new resources, we also begin a new story – a story that, if it is successful, will weave together our individual stories with a broader community story. "Organizing stories" bridge individual stories to form a shared story, old frames to new, individual interests to common interests, old possibilities to new ones.

The Outcome: Where' the Hope?

What can we hope for? Where are we going? What's the "vision"?

To act with courage, is to act in the face of fear. Many emotions can help us act in the face of fear, but hope matters most. Hope for the future can trump the fear to risk reaching for it.

Where does "hope" come from? How can we inspire hope in ourselves and in others? It will not work to pass out cupcakes, sing kumbaya, and announce we should "be hopeful now."

Hope is specific, not abstract. When God wishes to inspire the Israelites in Exodus, he doesn't offer vague "hope", but describes a "land flowing with milk and honey".[xv] We can picture it, see it, and imagine what it would feel like. The Prophet Amos tells us that "when there is no vision, the people perish" because a people cannot live without hope.

This is a crucial point at which story and strategy overlap . . . because one key element in "hope," and element of strategy, is a credible vision of how to get from here to there. So the job of devising a story of hope can't be completed until the strategic work is done to articulate a vision of how to move forward. This moment in which story (why) and strategy (how) overlap can be a moment in which, a Seamus Heaney put it, "justice can rise up, and hope and history rhyme."[xvi]

A vision of hope can unfold a chapter at a time. It can begin, for example, with simply getting the number of people to show up at a meeting that you committed to do. It can build by winning a "small" victory, evidence that change is possible. But what turns a small victory into a source of hope is its interpretation as part of a greater vision.

In churches, when people have a "new story' to tell about themselves it is often in the form of "testimony" –a person sharing their an account of their experience moving from despair to hope, the significance of the experience itself strengthened by the telling of it. Sometimes other communities have already won what our community seeks. They can come and tell us about it, giving us far greater hope when we hear from them in person.

How does Henry restore hope to his men? Does he tell them the battle will be easy? Does he rundown the French, telling those men that they're not really up to it? Does he convince them that help is on the way? Does he tell them none will die?

No. Henry doesn't lie about the facts – they are brutally clear. He changes their meaning. He stirs hope in his men's hearts by changing his men's view of themselves. No longer must they remain a few bedraggled soldiers led by a young and inexperienced king in an obscure corner of France who are about to be wiped out by an overwhelming French force. They can become a "happy few", united with their king in solidarity, holding an opportunity to grasp immortality in their hands, to become legends in their own time, a legacy for their children and grand children. How can they turn away? This is their time!

Henry makes another important choice. He never demonizes the French. Henry enhances his men's sense of their own worth, without robbing his opponents of theirs. One of the greatest inhibitions to action is self-doubt – a belief in one's own inadequacy to handle the task at hand. Self-doubt can be challenged by a call to action that makes clear how one can actually "make a difference" – one can choose, one has a job to do, one is up to the job, and, if done well, together with the efforts of all the others, we will accomplish our mission. And rather than telling tales of jolly old England, he helped his men look to their traditions, their pasts, for the moral resources to reach toward a new future. By engaging his men in telling a new story of who they were, he transformed the meaning of the battle that they faced, turning certain defeat into possible victory. Of course the story didn't do it alone. Victory also required Welsh archers who with their longbows knocked French knights off their horses. But longbows or not, if the English had believed themselves beaten, there is little doubt they would have been.

Finally, for the claim that "you can make a difference" to be credible, the action must begin right here, right now, in this room, with action each one of us can take. It's the story of a strategy, a credible strategy, an account of how, starting with who and where we are, we can, step by step, get to where we want to go our action can call forth the actions of others. And their actions, can call others, and together these actions can carry the day. It's like the old protest song Pete Seeger used to sing,

> "One man's hands can't tear a prison down.
> Two men's hands can't tear a prison down.
> But if two and two and fifty make a million,
> We'll see that day come round. We'll see that day come round."[xvii]

Celebrations

If we do our deliberative work in meetings, we do our story telling in celebrations. If meetings are about thinking, celebrations are about feeling. A celebration is not a party. It is a way members of a community come together to honor who they are, what they have done, where they are going -- often symbolically. Important life celebrations may be at times of sadness, as well as times of great joy. Celebrations provide rituals that allow us to join in enacting a vision of our community -- at least in our hearts. Institutions that retain their vitality are rich in celebrations. In the Church, for example, mass is "celebrated." Harvard's annual celebration is called graduation and lasts a whole week. Of course, celebrations that lose touch with the day-to-day experience of what the organization does can lose their meaning, become formal, and actually emphasize the need for renewal.

Beginnings are when storytelling is at its most powerful– for individuals, their childhood; for groups, their formation; for movements, their launching; and for nations, their founding. The way we interpret these moments of great uncertainty – about the future, about each other, about what we're doing – establish the norms, create the expectations, and shape patterns of behavior that influence all subsequent development of our group, organization, or movement. And we draw on them again and again. Nations institutionalize retelling their founding story as an ever-renewable source of guidance and inspiration. Most faith traditions enact a weekly retelling of their story of redemption, usually rooted in their founding as well. Well told stories help turn moments of great crises into moments of "new beginnings."

Celebrations are a way we can interpret important events, recognize important contributions, acknowledge a common identity, and deepen our sense of community. They can be formal or informal – rallies, fiestas, victory parties, shared meals, mass meetings, or religious services.

Small "celebratory acts" can be introduced into many aspects of an organization's life. In the UFW we learned a "farm worker applause" that celebrated our solidarity, expressed our unity, and identified us as participants in the movement. Certain traditional opening and closing songs can play this role. Amnesty International ends its meetings with a short letter writing session on behalf of one of their prisoners. More important than the number of letters written is the affirmation of what the organization is all about. What sorts of celebrations do your organizations hold? What is celebrated there? How? What is the story these celebrations tell of your organization? How do you conduct celebrations that acknowledge diversity as well as unity?

Conclusion

Organizers can offer leadership to others by motivating others to act in ways that can create new experiences that can create new understanding. Have you ever watched a mama bird and her baby birds when it is time for them to learn to fly? Does she peck gently at their ears, persuading them they have nothing to be afraid of? Does she describe the wonders of flying, hoping to entice them? Usually, with a quick push, they're out of the nest and in the air. They wobble around a little bit, try their wings, go up, go down, but eventually get it. And as they begin to fly instead of seeing the ground as dangerous and distant, they come to see it as a safe place to rest. Instead of seeing the sky as a vast and frightening expanse, they come to see it as a wondrous place to explore. And, as the mama bird would tell you if she could, it isn't just knowing what to do that matters, but when to do it.

QUESTIONS
Motivation, Celebration, Story Telling

1. What motivates you to do the work your project requires?

2. What motivates people participating in your project? What feelings are being tapped into or challenged? What belief barriers are being broken? By whom?

3. If they are not motivated, how do you think they could be?

4. What is your story of what brought you to this project, why the project matters to you, and why it should matter to anyone else?

5. What stories do people in the community tell about your project/organization? How do you tell the story of your project? How do these stories relate to one another?

6. How does your project tell its story? Is it told in raps, orientations, actions, or celebrations? Upon what symbols does it draw, and what do they mean?

[ii] G. E. Marcus, (2002), The Sentimental Citizen. (University Park, PA, Penn State University Press).
[ii] Ibid.

[iii] M. Nussbaum, (2001), Upheavals of Thought: The intelligence of emotions. (New York, Cambridge University Press).

[iv] S. Augustine, (1991), Book 8. Confessions. (New York, Oxford University Press).

[v] A. A. Milne, (1926), Winnie-the-Pooh. (New York, E.P. Dutton & Co).

[vi] West, Cornel, (1994), Race Matters. (New York, Vintage Books).

[vii] Maimonides.

[viii] Martin E.P. Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihaly, "Positive Psychology: And Introduction", American Psychologist, 2000.

[ix] W. A. Gamson, (1992), Talking Politics. (New York, Cambridge University Press).

[x] James C. Scott (1976). Moral Economy of the Peasant (New Haven: Yale University Press).

[xi] Aristotle, The Poetics.

[xii] Charles Taylor, (1989) Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

[xiii] Aristotle, The Rhetoric.

[xiv] William Shakespeare, Henry V, Act IV, Scene 3, "We Happy Few," 140-149.

[xv] The Bible, Exodus 3:9.

[xvi] Seamus Heaney, "The Cure at Troy", Farrar, Straus, and Giroux (1991).

[xvii] Seeger, Pete, (1964), Fall River Music, Inc.