Phoenix Rising
The Art and Science of Telling Personal Stories in Suicide Prevention

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THE PHOENIX HOPE, CAN WING HER WAY THROUGH THE DESERT SKIES, AND STILL DEIFYING FORTUNE'S SPITE;
REVIVE FROM ASHES AND RISE.

MIGUEL DE CERVANTES
Goals

1. Why personal stories in suicide prevention?
2. Preparation
3. Steps: Structure and art
A candle loses nothing from lighting another candle.
Science and Stigma
Good for the Storyteller

Narrative Psychology
Impose structure on chaos
Self-empowerment
Build community

Coherent and redemptive = healing
“Angel’s Cocktail” (David Phillips) - hormones release

- **Dopamine** increases focus and motivation when we build suspense
- **Oxytocin** increases bonding and trust when we create empathy
- **Endorphins** helps people relax and become more creative when we make them laugh
Brains Hardwired for Stories

- 150K years of evolution
- Neural story net
- “Makes sense” mandate
GAINING MASTERY OVER THE VOICES OF THE SELF ALLOWS EMPOWERMENT

Lewis Mehl-Madrona #ElevateTheConvo
Good for culture

“Neither revolution nor reformation can ultimately change a society, rather you must tell a more powerful tale, one so persuasive that it sweeps away the old myths and becomes the preferred story...” ~Ivan Illich
Discernment Question #1

WHAT IS MY WHY?

• What is my motive?
• When I think about sharing my story, what do I feel?
• What do I want to accomplish by telling my story?

Magic Wand — you’ve told your story for it’s biggest impact: What is different?
Discernment Question #2

AM I READY?

• Where am I in my recovery and healing journey?
• What does “going back into the forest” look like?
• Have I told my sponsor/therapist?
• Have I created a self-care and safety plan?
• How will I know when I’m being helped by storytelling? I will I know it’s not the right time?
Discernment Question #3

HAVEN'T I THOUGHT IT THROUGH?

• Once it’s out, you can’t reel it back
  – Possible benefits and consequences to me
    • Jobs, relationships, housing, parenting
    • Filter all behavior gets seen through
  – Consequences on others
• Are there parts where I need to ask permission to share?
• Are there parts to keep for myself?
Before you start

- Tell therapist or sponsor
- Get speaker buddy (NSA/Toastmasters)
- Self-care
- Get supplies: notebook, recording device
- Sculptor mindset
Structure of Story

• Core message
• Three support stories to support three main points (short, medium and long versions)
• Heart story: Hero’s Journey
• 20/80 – despair to hope ratio
• Bring recovery to life
What is the Message of You?

• What is the point?
• Why should people listen to you
• What’s in it for them?
• Core promise: What is your call to action that will help or convince your audience
Heart Story

• Intense intimacy and solidarity
• Speak to a dear friend
• Walk right up to tears
• Conclude with single call to action that inspires and motivates
Hero’s Journey

- Great reward
- Set the stage
- Trials & tribulations
- Downward spiral & darkest day
- Guides & Magic
- Turning point
What is Your Hero’s Journey?

OUTLINE

• Set the stage? (what was life like before?)
• Downward spiral/darkest day
• Turning Point
• Guides and magic
• Trials and tribulations
• Great reward
Qualities of effective stories

- Engagement
- Transportation
- Relevance
- Influence
Art of Storytelling

- Sensory details: including taste and smell
- Present tense
- Conversation with dear friend
- Authentic
- Metaphor
- Dialogue - inner and outer
- Humor: comedy is in the details
- Hook and unhook:
  - 1st 30 seconds
  - Leave them with goosebumps
Words Make Worlds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Say this</th>
<th>Instead of this</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Died of Suicide</td>
<td>Committed Suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Death</td>
<td>Successful Attempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide Attempt</td>
<td>Unsuccessful Attempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person Living with Suicidal Thoughts or Behavior</td>
<td>Suicide Ideator or Attempter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>Completed Suicide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Describe the Behavior)</td>
<td>Manipulative, Cry for Help, Suicidal Gesture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with</td>
<td>Dealing with Suicidal Employee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sculpt Your Story

• Pick a scene of your heart story (turning point moment)
• Mind map sensory experiences
  • Setting (details — see, hear, smell, taste)
  • Characters (what wearing, how sound, facial expressions)
• Inner and outer dialogue
• Draft a paragraph
Practice

- Write story out
- Practice and record
- Practice in front of safe audience: seek critique
- Practice in front of strangers

Review

- Thesis is lesson learned
- 20/80 ratio despair to hope
- Hero’s journey stages covered?
- Helpful resources/healing action explained: why did they work?
- NO: pejorative language, glamorizing, romanticizing, description of means or “hotspot”
Optional Practice
Books and Resources

- TED Talks
- Judy Carter “The Message of You”
- Judy Carter “Comedy Bible”
- Doug Stevenson “Story Theater Method” and “Never Be Boring Again”
- Lewis Mehl-Madrona — Coyote series, “Healing the Mind through the Power of Story”
Join United Survivors

- www.unitesurvivors.org
- Twitter: @UniteSurvivors
- Facebook: @UniteSurvivors
- YouTube Video: https://youtu.be/K58P8Cu8pqI
There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.

Maya Angelou
THANK YOU!
Stay connected
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