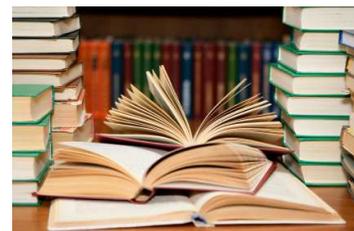


Out of the Box Coaching Newsletter

That's My Story, by Clarence Thomson



Alert coaches listen for the tell-tale phrase that shows up often as clients speak of significant occasions in their lives. "That's the story of my life." They usually go on to "tell a tale" of some recurring pattern that plagues them.

Interestingly, I've heard that phrase many times, but I can't recall ever hearing someone say it about a fortuitous event. It's usually about something they perceive as happening to them coming from an undisclosed cosmic source. "Every time I get a little money ahead, my car breaks down, my child needs dental work, my spouse insists on" or some external event. It doesn't work the other way around quite as well. (You can try this at home: think of a pattern of undeserved good fortune that "always" keeps happening to you. Every time you call your doctor he just happens to be available and has time to talk to you. Right?)

Now it can be told. Every Enneagram style has a corresponding narrative, a story line that supports and fleshes out their Enneagram patterns. I was coaching a successful Three last month and when I asked him about himself, a short story of his life, the narrative sounded like his résumé. His achievements were the story of his life. His reason for wanting coaching? He was retiring and had no idea of what to do next. Of course not, his story was coming to an end. In our Three-ish culture, retirement is often a big deal because our collective story concludes.

My local librarian says 90% of the people who read books read fiction. It's my dark suspicion that they're looking for a better/different story than the one they're living. Not too different, though. We have to believe the story could be ours.

Spend some serious time discerning the narrative that supports your Enneagram style. Make sure you get it as correct and clear as you can because I have some suggestions on how to use it. First, when you articulate it clearly, use it as norm to evaluate your current lifestyle. For example, if you're a Five, you may have a story that has you an intellectual sharing your knowledge for the furthering of the human race. Then compare that with the time you spend playing computer games or collecting baseball cards and see if your activities are furthering aforementioned humanity. Our stories can often picture us as our ideal and, if we're unhappy, can picture us as victims.

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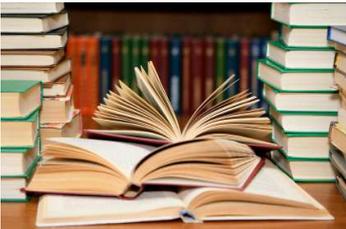
That's My Story (continued)

One interesting exercise is to write your story in one place and, in an entirely different place, write down and perhaps even prioritize your values. Then compare your values with your story. Your story may be that you're a hard-driving businessman who works hard to support his family. If family life is a strong value, you may look at how much time you spend with your family, as opposed to say, working overtime, golfing, or watching TV. Work hard at seeing how and whether the story you tell yourself would be recognized by others. Others here might be family, but might be parent or best friend, too.

It's frequently salutary to see if we can find any evidence that conflicts with the story. All stories are selective, as is our Enneagram style. When I asked the style Three client what he had that he had not earned, he replied, after a long, long pause, "That's hard. I can't think of anything." He's in good health, has a happy marriage and is highly intelligent. On some level he makes the Sun come up every morning.

Finding information that contradicts our story is so helpful because stories perdure through time. Our story becomes predictive. If we don't consciously restructure our story, it will continue to have a powerful repetitive effect on our future. If your story is that you're always an outsider, victimized by narrow-minded people who don't recognize your inner luster, you will select situations that have a lot of narrow-minded people in control of the social milieu.

Specifics deserve praise and attention. Our Enneagram style is, among other things, a generalization. Sevens fear confinement, Eights lust after intensity. Some of the time, under certain circumstances for different reasons, they do, except when they don't. Learning what our narrative is gives specificity to our generalization. This Eight lusts after intensity but loves to cook, which enables him to not be so intense. (Of course if he's in competitive cook-offs, that's "another story.")



So get in touch with your inner story-teller and find out specifically how you flesh out your Enneagram style with specific applications and nuances. Then realize how powerful that story is and enjoy it, use it, or change it. Writing a story-line for the next year might be a whole lot more effective than the usual resolutions we make to start a new year.

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