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choice

the magazine of professional coaching

COACHING
THE
**WHOLE
SYSTEM**

Hormones,
neurotransmitters
& coaching

THE IMPACT
OF COACHING
ON THE **BRAIN**

**BODY,
BRAIN &
BEHAVIOR**

Changing Minds

How coaching
changes the brain,
body and more



What's the Story?

Engaging the three brains with stories from the future

By Brian Gorman, CPC

When was the last time you told a good story? Usually when I ask people this question they reply, "Oh, I'm not a very good storyteller." The truth is, we are all good storytellers ... and we are telling ourselves stories all the time. Not only do we tell ourselves stories; we believe them. Perhaps it's the story of the difficult client you will be coaching tomorrow. Or the story of the discourteous cashier you encountered at the supermarket. It may even be the story about how you were unsuccessful at

enrolling that prospective client you met with yesterday, or getting a date with the "special someone" you saw in the coffee shop.

When we believe our stories they often become our truths; sometimes they become our limiting beliefs. As a boy and a teenager, I had a story about how I couldn't learn to swim. Despite years of swimming lessons at the local YMCA, I never learned ... until I changed my story so that I could earn the Boy Scout merit badge for swimming and eventually become an Eagle Scout. Changing our stories can change our lives.

STORIES CONTRIBUTE TO COACHING SUCCESS

You know the power of a well-told story. Whether reading it, watching it on the screen or listening to it, stories can stir your emotions, make the hair stand up on the back of your neck, and bring you to laughter ... or to tears. Neuroscience tells us that a well-told story affects the brain in the same way that actually experiencing the event would. This is not surprising. After all, from the earliest edges of civilization, storytelling has been a fundamental form of communication.

Because storytelling is so much a part of my clients' lives – even when they are not conscious of it – I find it a powerful tool to use with them as they seek to make significant changes in their lives. I begin by listening for the stories. What is the story of his current life? What are the facts of the story? What are the empowering beliefs? What are the limiting beliefs? How does he see himself? How does he see himself in the context of the world around him? What is the story of the change he wants to achieve through coaching?

I invite my clients to share with me the source of their stories; where they feel them in their bodies. Stories about who they are and the world around them tend to come from the heart and the gut. Listening to these stories, I can hear, feel and see the emotions. Those stories that are future focused tend more often to be mind-based. They sound flat, analytical, they are not felt, and frankly they are not convincing to either me or my clients.

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Sometimes we will explore limiting belief stories using the “Dickens Technique.” This tool, introduced to me by Ryan Eliason, is modeled after Ebenezer Scrooge’s experiences in Charles Dickens *A Christmas Carol*. I invite my client into a guided meditation where he explores the ways in which the limiting belief will play out in his life over time. I then invite him to replace the limiting belief with an empowering one, and play it out over time once again. Clients who emotionally engage in the meditation often reverse lifelong limiting beliefs in one session in this way. That’s the power of story!

CREATE A STORY FROM THE FUTURE

I am a transformation coach. The chang-

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING STORIES FROM THE FUTURE

- 1 **Engage the head, heart and gut.**
- 2 **Create the story as if the future has been achieved.**
- 3 **Acknowledge key struggles along the way to reaching the destination.**
- 4 **Activate all five senses in the story.**
- 5 **Focus on the experience, not the activities.**

es my clients seek to make through coaching are not easy ones. Will Rob come out of the closet in his seventies as he is approaching his fiftieth wedding anniversary? Will Jan – fired in her mid-forties – successfully launch and grow her own for-profit business after spending her entire career in the non-profit world? Will Tom and his wife be able to move to Costa Rica after he was laid off in his late fifties?

Once again, story plays a critical role in success. Rob, Jan and Tom each intentionally created a story of achieving their transformational goals. But these were not “stories of the future”; they were stories *from* the future.” “When I do this” is a story of the future, and a story from the mind. “I did it!!!!” is a story *from* the future, and is a story from the mind, heart and gut. It is a story that exudes emotion. It is a story that I can feel when I listen to it. More importantly, it is a story that my client feels when telling it.

While most of my clients create their stories with words, I do not limit them. Some are better at expressing themselves visually through painting, drawing or even video; some stories are told through music. Allowing my client to work in their medium – their “language” – allows them to create a much more meaningful and powerful story. While these stories acknowledge the struggles of the journey, they are also about having achieved success.

FUTURE STORIES ENGAGE THREE BRAINS

The brain in your head is not your only brain. Your heart contains approximately 40,000 neurons; it “speaks” to the head brain much more than the head brain speaks to it. The heart brain can sense, feel, learn and remember. Your third



OUR THREE BRAINS Neuroscience has now proven that we have three brains. The cephalic brain is the one we most often think of; it is located in the head. The cardiac brain is in the heart, and the enteric brain is in the gut. “Listening to your heart” and “listening to your gut” are not foolish alternatives to listening to what your head is telling you. Rather, listening to your other brains can be beneficial; each has its own wisdom.

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“ When we believe our stories they often become our truths; sometimes they become our limiting beliefs. ”

brain is the “gut brain,” consisting of 100 million neurons located in the intestines. Like the heart, it communicates to the head brain much more than the other way around. Research indicates that a large part of our emotions are influenced by what we feel in our gut.

Stories from the future, when well crafted, engage all three brains. The more they engage the brains, the more the brains can help guide us from the present to the future, and the more they can help overcome the challenges that will be encountered along the way. For this reason, I encourage my clients to embody their stories. To tell the story to themselves and others over and over and over again. To feel the struggles along the way, and to experience the joy of success. To know the sounds, the smells, the tastes, the touch, the sights that occur on the journey, and which are there when they arrive at their destinations.

Not surprisingly, many transformation stories begin with an awakening. Rob’s story began, “I can’t believe it. This morning I woke up in my own bed knowing that for the first time in my life I can live today fully, totally, openly, honestly me! Tears of joy run down my face as I sit in amazement at what I have achieved.” Tom’s began, “I can smell the ocean as the breeze blows through our bedroom window. It is the first morning of our new life in Costa Rica. We did it!” How will your next client’s story begin? How will you coach her to create her story from – and for – the future? •



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