

Worksheet: Writing Your Story of Self

There are some key questions you need to answer as you consider the choices you've made in your life and the path you've taken that led you to become a reproductive health advocate. Once you identify the specific *relevant* choice, dig deeper by answering the following questions.

Challenge:

Why did you feel it was a challenge? What was so challenging about it? Why was it your challenge?

Choice:

Why did you make the choice? Where did you get the courage (or not)? Where did you get the hope (or not)? Did your parents' life stories teach you in any way how to act in that moment? How did it feel?

Outcome:

How did the outcome feel? Why did it feel that way? What did it teach you? What do you want to teach us? How do you want us to feel?

Ask:

What will you ask others to do? How can they join your movement? How can they be more involved in your story?

A word about challenge:

People might see the word “challenge” and think it means the worst misfortunes of our lives. And some challenges can be unfortunate moments that shaped who we've become. But keep in mind that a struggle might also be one of your own choosing — a high mountain you decided to climb as much as a valley you managed to climb out of. Many things that challenged you became the source of a good story that you can use to inspire others.

Sample Story:

Introduction:

My name is _____. I am from _____, and I'm here today to talk about why I think abortion access is important, essential, and necessary.

Context and relativity with the audience. How can people relate to your situation?

This past year I was in love, but this love was not good for me. We were friends for years before we started dating, always talking late at night on the phone, telling each other our deepest secrets, laughing and joking together. I lived across the country from him but the pandemic moved me back home, where he was. And throughout the years we had always been curious about what it would be like together, we finally had the chance to try it out.

Challenge. Here, the challenge is being faced with a toxic relationship and having a pregnancy scare.

But, he wasn't over his ex, and he didn't treat me the way a partner should. One night he left me alone outside in my car at 2 a.m. as he went inside and closed the door on me, and effectively, our relationship. I was broken. I think most of us have been here. The breakup took quite the toll on my mental health and my body. I couldn't eat, and if I did I couldn't hold it down. This was not a normal stress response for me, so I thought it may be something else.

Strategic Choice. Here, the choice is taking a pregnancy test.

I grabbed a pregnancy test and took it alone in my friend's bathroom. I didn't tell anyone about it. The minutes waiting for the result were excruciating, but I knew that I did not want to be a parent. And having a child would not make this person love me. I decided that if I was pregnant, I would have an abortion. I looked down at the test, full of anxiety, and saw the result. Negative. I sighed with relief. I wouldn't have to go through the process of navigating the already archaic barriers that exist to abortion.

Outcome. Here, it is advocating for other pregnant people.

I'm lucky. I was able to move back to the place I love, get back to my friends and my job. I was finally entirely free from that relationship. But so many people look down at that test and see it is positive. So many people have to face waiting periods, travel hundreds of miles to a health center, and have to pay a lot of money for their abortion and travel. That is why I show up and advocate for people who can get pregnant everywhere.

Call to Action/Ask. What should be done about this? Here, it is telling the state legislature to not pass the ban and asking listeners to attend decision day events.

Now, we are being faced with extreme abortion bans across the country, like one here in _____. It is immoral, inexcusable, and wrong to place barriers on essential health care. I think about all of the people who will be forced to carry their pregnancies because their state does not care about the welfare and autonomy of pregnant people. I am demanding our state legislature not pass such an immoral ban to abortion. I'm also calling on everyone I know to stand with me when the Supreme Court makes its decision in a big case on abortion rights this summer.

Developing Your Story of Self

Before you decide what part of your story to tell, think about these questions:

- What will I be calling on others to do?
- What values move me to take action and might also inspire others to similar action?
- What stories can I tell from my own life about specific people or events that would show (rather than tell) how I learned or acted on those values?

What are the experiences in your life that have shaped the values that call you to leadership in this campaign?

FAMILY and CHILDHOOD	LIFE CHOICES	ORGANIZING EXPERIENCES
Parents/Family Growing up Your community Role models School Your culture/heritage	School Career Partner/Family Hobbies/Interests/Talents Faith Health care decisions (birth control, abortion, STI testing/treatment, cancer screening, gender-affirming care)	First experience of organizing Connection to key books or people Role models

Think about the challenge, choice, and outcome of your story.

The outcome might be what you learned, in addition to what happened. A story doesn't have to be dramatic to be effective.

CHALLENGE	CHOICE	OUTCOME

Coaching Tips and Tricks

Remember to balance both positive and constructive critical feedback.

The purpose of coaching is to listen to the way stories are told and think of ways that the storytelling could be improved. Consider finding a partner to practice your story with and use these tips to help each other out.

DON'T simply offer vague “feel good” comments. (“That was a really great story!”)

DO coach each other on the following points

THE CHALLENGE:

What were the specific challenges the storyteller faced? Did the storyteller paint a vivid picture of those challenges?

“When you described _____, I got a clear picture of the challenge.”

“I understood the challenge to be _____. Is that what you intended?”

THE CHOICE:

Was there a clear choice that was made in response to each challenge? How did the choice make you feel? (Hopeful? Angry?)

“To me, the choice you made was _____, and it made me feel _____.”

“It would be helpful if you focused on the moment you made a choice.”

THE OUTCOME:

What was the specific outcome that resulted from each choice? What does that outcome teach us?

“I understood the outcome was _____, and it teaches me _____. But how does it relate to your work now?”

THE VALUES:

Could you identify what this person's values are and where they came from? How? How did the story make you feel?

"Your story made me feel _____ because _____."

"It's clear from your story that you value _____; but it could be even clearer if you told a story about where that value comes from."

DETAILS:

Were there sections of the story that had especially good details or images (e.g. sights, sounds, smells, or emotions of the moment)?

"The image of _____ really helped me identify with what you were feeling."

"Try telling more details about _____ so we can imagine what you were experiencing."