

Course Materials: Leadership and Storytelling for Grassroots Community Organizer on WhatsApp

From 2019-2020, Grassroot, a civic technology organization based in South Africa, launched a first-of-its-kind leadership development course over the messaging platform WhatsApp. The distance-learning course, *Leadership through Storytelling*, was designed to build the capacity of organizers for sustained community activism. This document includes course materials from the first two sessions. Please let us know if you use the materials (contact@grassroot.org.za).

Suggested Citation: Grassroot. 2020. "Course Materials: Leadership and Storytelling for Grassroots Community Organizer on WhatsApp". Grassroot (South Africa).¹

Related resources:

- **Details on the pilot course and a guide for teaching on WhatsApp:** "Teaching on WhatsApp: Leadership and Storytelling for Grassroots Community Organizers" <https://mitgovlab.org/results/teaching-on-whatsapp-leadership-and-storytelling-for-grassroots-community-organizers/>.
- **Research results on the pilot:** "Training Grassroots Organizers on WhatsApp." <https://mitgovlab.org/results/a-novel-approach-to-civic-pedagogy-training-grassroots-organizers-on-whatsapp/>.

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¹ Course materials were developed by Grassroot with input from curriculum developers Melissa Nefdt and Khwezi Ramela; Katlego Mohlabane, lead facilitator of the Grassroot pilot course; course coaches Mbalenhle Nkosi, Bongani Sibaya, Mamaisa Mbele, and Nyoni Mazibuko; Luke Jordan of Grassroot; and, Alisa Zomer and Kelly Zhang from MIT GOV/LAB.

Legends + Guidelines

See the guide for details on how the course was structured and delivered on WhatsApp:
<https://mitgovlab.org/results/teaching-on-whatsapp-leadership-and-storytelling-for-grassroots-community-organizers/>.

COLOUR LEGEND	
	TEXT
	PARTICIPANT RESPONSE
	GRAPHIC
	VOICENOTE (VN)
	SMALL GROUP CALL

EMOJI LEGEND	
	Beginning and end of a session
	Emoji to indicate we are asking participants to respond to a task either by text or VN. All participatory requests will also be bolded , numbered (1, 2, 3....), and included at the top of a new text message, so easy to follow up
	Emoji to indicate that they should listen to a voicenote
	Emojis to indicate we want them to look at graphic
	Emojis to indicate agreement and/or understanding
	Emoji to set expectations around how much time for response
	Emoji to indicate homework assignment

OTHER CONTENT GUIDELINES:

- Always include multiple options for tasks: Text or voicenotes, text or emojis
- Include text instructions before sending a voicenote or image so people know what to do
- Each text should fit on a single screen and not require users to hit “see more”
- Facilitator should acknowledge responses after a task. Facilitator can encourage participation by commenting on 1-2 people (not enough time to respond to everyone)
- Coaches should only encourage participation in small groups, not in the live session
- Make sure enough time is budgeted for each interaction, will take longer than expected

NOTE: COURSE CONTENT BELOW WAS PASTED DIRECTLY INTO GROUP WHATSAPP CHATS CREATED FOR THE COURSE. WE INCLUDE 2 OUT OF 8 TOTAL SESSIONS.

Pre-Session I (5 days before)

TEXT

👋👋 Welcome, everyone, to the Leadership Through Storytelling whatsapp course! This whatsapp group will be the main platform of learning and communication. My name is Katlego, I'm a community mobilizer for Grassroot, and I'll be your course facilitator.

GRAPHIC

We'll do more introductions in our first class, but here is the team of coaches who will be helping to make our course a success! 🙌



TEXT

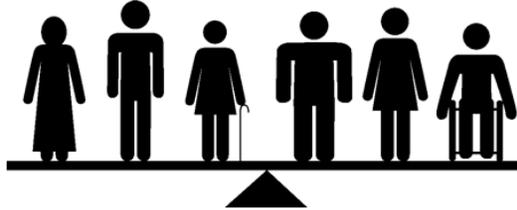
If this community of learners is going to work, we need to create a safe space for engagement. For that we need to lay some ground rules, or group commitments.

Before we begin the course, we'd like you to think about what group commitments or ground rules you'd like to lay regarding communication and group learning on the whatsapp group.

Think about whatsapp groups you've been a part of before, what you did or didn't like about those. We'd like our commitments to be guided by the following principles 🙌

GRAPHIC

PRINCIPLES OF GROUP
COMMITMENTS



- Fair and appropriate use of the platform
- Create an encouraging environment for sharing
- Respect everyone's time, data and different ways of learning

TEXT

You will soon be put into a smaller whatsapp group led by your course coach. He or she will be in touch about arranging a time for a group call to discuss your ideas for the group commitments.

Please be prepared with your suggestions by the time of your group call. We will then compile all the suggestions from the smaller groups and discuss and adopt them in the first session on [day].

💡 ***Everyone understand? If you understand, send a thumbs up 👍 or text "I understand!" or "Clear". If you're not clear, send a thumbs down 👎 or ask a question.***

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

TEXT

Great! Thanks everyone. I'm excited to get started in a few days with our course Leadership Through Storytelling. See you in the next one! 🙌🙌

Pre-Session II (3 days before)

SMALL GROUP CALLS (15 min)

Course coaches call the participants at a pre-arranged time. Facilitate a discussion around possible group commitments/ground rules. Ideas for prompts may be:

(Eg. No whatsapps after 7pm

No gifs or jokes or non-course related content

No inappropriate/offensive language or personal attacks

2-way conversations to be had privately and off the group chat

Equal airtime (no dominating the conversation))

Session 1: Introduction

TEXT

👋👋 Welcome, everyone to Leadership through Storytelling course. My name is Katlego, I am a community organizer at Grassroot and I will be facilitating our 8 session course on WhatsApp.

(1-2 min)

GRAPHIC



So you can put a face to a name, here is a picture of me speaking at an event.

TEXT

Let's start off by reading through our class rules. 👁️

GRAPHIC

CLASS RULES

-  **1. Attendance.** Each class we will take attendance.
-  **2. Active participation.** Respond to *every* question in the session.
-  **3. Engage with others.** Comment to encourage your classmates.
-  **4. Homework.** Complete each homework assignment.

 Good class attendance and participation will be recorded.

(1-2 min)

TEXT

If you Agree, send a thumbs up 👍 or text "I Agree!". If you disagree, send a thumbs down 👎 or ask a question.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(1-2 min)

TEXT

Great thanks for agreeing to attend and participate in class! We have about 16 participants in this class, including: ***[ADD NAMES].***

💡1. To start, we will take attendance. Please say "Present!" to let us know you are here. Feel free to send a hand wave 🙌🙌

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(1-2 min)

TEXT

Glad everyone could join today. If we missed your name or got your name wrong, please let

me or your coach know.

Now we will start the course by listening to a quick voice note. 🗣️

VOICENOTE

Welcome, everyone to Leadership through Storytelling. My name is Katlego, I am the outreach and campaigns coordinator at Grassroot and I will be facilitating for the duration of the 8 weeks of the course.

Today's session will be all about introductions - Introductions to the course, introducing what you can expect - so I thought we could start with a quick round of introductions to who we have joining today. Please can you tell us your name and where you're from, what you do and how you are involved in your community. Please can you type it instead of sending a voicenote so we have a record of who is here.

(5-7 min)

TEXT

💡 2. Please can you tell us your name and where you're from, what you do and how you are involved in your community.

🕒 3 minutes to answer by text

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(5-7 min)

TEXT

Thank you, everyone for introducing yourselves. We have a great group of leaders! Next, we'd like to know more about the communities you come from.

💡 3. Please send a voicenote or text no longer than 30 seconds about your community.

You can include:

- Size
- Issues affecting your community
- Rural/urban
- Local industries
- Local government involvement, etc.

🕒 3 minutes to answer by voicenote or text

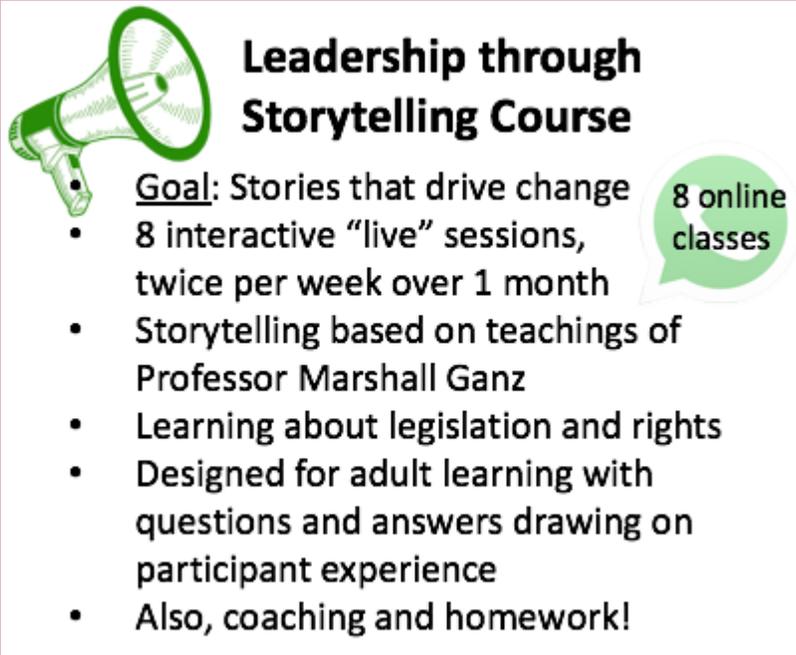
PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(3 min)

TEXT

Welcome, everyone! We're looking forward to hearing more about the work you do over the length of the course, and learning from your experiences.

Please take a look at this graphic explaining what this course will be about. 

GRAPHIC

 **Leadership through Storytelling Course**

- Goal: Stories that drive change
- 8 interactive “live” sessions, twice per week over 1 month
- Storytelling based on teachings of Professor Marshall Ganz
- Learning about legislation and rights
- Designed for adult learning with questions and answers drawing on participant experience
- Also, coaching and homework!

 8 online classes

(3 min)

TEXT

Listen to this voicenote explaining what this course will be about. 

VOICENOTE

Throughout the course, we will be talking about how we can become better leaders by learning to fire people up to take action through storytelling. As Africans, we are natural storytellers. We tell stories everyday - to entertain, to explain, to relate, to inspire. Each of us has a story that can move others to action. Through this course, you will learn to tell a

powerful story about yourself, your community and the need for urgent action that can be used as a tool when leading your community to create change. We will explain how story works, you will observe a model of storytelling, you will then practice your own story, share it with us as a group and then debrief your learning experience with us.

TEXT

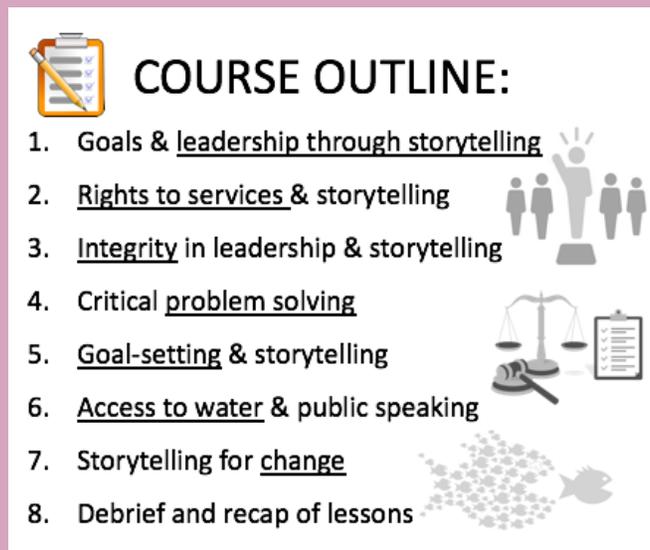
Why are we holding this course? As community activists, we know we have rights to housing, water, and other basic services from the Constitution. But, having rights is NOT enough to get fair access to the services our communities need.

One problem is that there is not enough public pressure on government officials to do their jobs. This course is designed to help us motivate our communities to organize better so that we can act together for change.

TEXT

Please take a look at this graphic with a course outline of our 8 live sessions. 

GRAPHIC



COURSE OUTLINE:

1. Goals & leadership through storytelling 
2. Rights to services & storytelling 
3. Integrity in leadership & storytelling
4. Critical problem solving
5. Goal-setting & storytelling 
6. Access to water & public speaking
7. Storytelling for change 
8. Debrief and recap of lessons

(5-7 min)

TEXT

Now that you have some idea of what the course is about, we'd like to hear what your expectations are.

*💡 **4. What are you hoping to gain from the course? By the end of the course, what knowledge are you hoping to build, or skill are you hoping to take away?***

Please type your expectations for the course, so we can have a written record of them.

🕒 3 minutes to answer by text

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(3 minutes)

VOICENOTE

(Facilitator addresses the expectations, which are accurate and which (if any) will remain unaddressed by the course. 1 minute)

(5-7 minutes)

TEXT

By now you've all had group calls regarding the group commitments. Thank you all for your suggestions as to how we can create a safe environment for learning through ground rules. We've compiled and aggregated them and these are the group commitments you've come up with *[List of group commitments]*

*💡 **5. Can we all agree to these? If you agree, send a thumbs up 👍 or text "Agree". If you disagree, send a thumbs down 👎 or type "Disagree".***

(If anyone sends thumbs down, ask them why and discuss until everyone gives thumbs up)

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

TEXT

Our group commitments are now adopted and must be strictly followed by all. We are all responsible for calling out those who break them, and repeated failure to follow them could result in exclusion from the course.

*💡 **6. All agreed?***

(👍 = yes, 👎 = no)

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(5-7 minutes)

TEXT

Now let's look at the main theme for the rest of this course: Storytelling for Leadership. Unless stated otherwise, from now on all questions can be answered via voicenote or text (typing your answers). Feel free to use your mother tongue.

*💡 **7. Firstly, as a community leader, what are some of your challenges when it comes to mobilising others?***

If you are not a community leader, you can tell us about the challenges you face when trying to get things done in your community.

 3 minutes to answer by voicenote or text

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(5-7 minutes)

TEXT AND PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

Thanks for those examples. We see that many of us share the same challenges mobilizing. Feel free to comment or like 👍 others' challenges.

8. I'm going to send some statements. If you agree, send a thumbs up 👍 or text "Agree". If you disagree, send a thumbs down 👎 or type "Disagree".

*💡 **8.1 Sometimes I feel I lack the public speaking skills to communicate my passion and purpose to get others on board.***

[Participants send ticks or not]

*💡 **8.2 Sometimes the people I'm speaking to have heard so many stories and so many promises of change that they no longer believe anything anyone says.***

[Participants send ticks or not]

*💡 **8.3 But still, I believe that the right story can reach right to their hearts and minds, and make them believe that change is possible again.***

[Participants send ticks or not - comment on agreement/disagreement]

(5-7 min)

TEXT

💡 9. Have you ever been inspired to act through hearing someone's story? Tell us about it by sending a voicenote.

🕒 3 minutes to answer

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(5 minutes)

TEXT

Great stories. Now please check out some graphics below 🖱️ and listen 🗣️ to voice notes on how storytelling and sources of hope relate to our work as leaders and community organizers.

VOICENOTE

Why are we spending time on storytelling?

In my experience as a community organizer, I see and hear the many challenges faced by our communities -- no housing, no electricity, no clean water. We often feel powerless to do something to change our future.

Storytelling provides one way to connect with our communities, to give them hope for change, and to create a vision for a better future. In this course, we will learn to tell three important stories. First, we will tell the Story of Self - a story that explains your personal motivation, your hope. Second, we will learn, Story of Us - this is the story of your community, the challenges they face, and their vision for change. Third, we will learn the Story of Now which is all about where we are today and how we will work together for a better future.

An important element of our stories is where we find hope in difficult moments. Even when everything seems to be going wrong, we have sources of hope or inspiration that motivates us to keep going. We will be working together to tell personal stories about what gives us hope.

(5 minutes)

TEXT

We see that stories are a powerful tool for creating change. The model of storytelling we use in this course was created by Marshall Ganz and based on what he calls **“Public Narrative”**. Dr. Ganz is an American professor and a community organizer, who created the successful grassroots organizing model and training for Obama's winning 2008 presidential campaign. 🖱️

GRAPHIC

"A story communicates fear,
hope, and anxiety
and because we can feel it,
we get the moral not just
as a concept, but as well as a
teaching of our hearts.
That's the power of a story"

-Marshall Ganz



GRAPHIC

PUBLIC NARRATIVE & LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT
HOW WE DEAL WITH **CHALLENGE + HOPE**



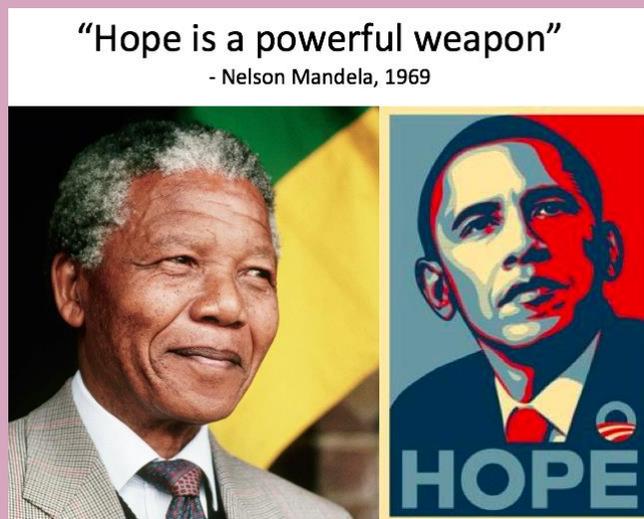
Understanding how we deal with ***challenge*** and ***hope*** is critical to our roles as leaders and organizers and how we engage with our communities.

(3-5 minutes)

TEXT

Now please check out 👁️ some graphics below to see how leaders use hope to inspire change. For your homework, you will be telling us more about what gives you hope.

GRAPHIC



In the 2008 Obama campaign, hope was a key message that inspired many people. Sources of hope are important in finding courage to act. Hope helps us motivate our communities for change.

TEXT

Assignment

 ***Post a 1-2 minute voicenote by 7 PM tomorrow in which you examine what gives you hope.***

- Where did you learn hope?
- Where did you get the courage?
- Who helped you see that life could be different from the challenge you were experiencing?

💡10.If you understand the assignment, send a thumbs up emoji 👍 or text “I understand”. If something is unclear, send a thumbs down emoji 👎 or type “Unclear”. Please text any questions.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

TEXT

Extra! If you have time, watch this 5 minute video on Dr. Marshall Ganz:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSw-8JjZq0> 👁️

Good luck with your assignment and see you for our next session. Bye for now! 🍌🍌

Before next session:

TEXT

 ***Don't forget your to post your assignment by 7 PM. Please share a 1-2 minute voicenote in which you examine what gives you hope.***

- Where did you learn hope?
- Where did you get the courage?
- Who helped you see that life could be different from the challenge you were experiencing?

Session 2: Legislation, Story of Self

SESSION REMINDER

TEXT

👏👏 Reminder that we will be starting our next session in 2 hours. Look forward to seeing everyone! Don't forget to send your homework assignment 📖 and please listen 👂 and comment or 👍 on your classmate's voice notes.

📖 ***Post a 1-2 minute voice note in which you examine what gives you hope.***

- Where did you learn hope?
- Where did you get the courage?
- Who helped you see that life could be different from the challenge you were experiencing?

(1-2 minutes)

TEXT

👏👏 Welcome to Session 2 of our course, everyone. First a reminder of our rules 👉

CLASS RULES

- ☑️ **1. Attendance.** Each class we will take attendance.
- ☑️ **2. Active participation.** Respond to *every* question in the session.
- ☑️ **3. Engage with others.** Comment to encourage your classmates.
- ☑️ **4. Homework.** Complete each homework assignment.



Good class attendance and participation will be recorded.

TEXT

Thanks to everyone who participated in the last class. Here's a list of everyone. Hopefully we got everyone this time, but let us know if we missed your name. 👉

And, a big THANK YOU for sharing your homework assignments about what gives you hope. We received assignments from [ADD NAMES]. Great job! Completing the assignments will help you get a top grade in the class

(1-2 minutes)

TEXT

💡 1. To start, we will take attendance. Please say “PRESENT!” to let us know you are here. Feel free to send a hand wave 🙌🙌

 1 minute to answer

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(5-7 minutes)

TEXT

Today we want to look at some practical issues to do with rights and legislation. Thereafter we will continue with our learning journey on the topic we started last week, Leadership through Storytelling.

Let's start by looking at what the Constitution says about our general access to services.

💡 2. What do you know about your right to basic services? Please share with the group in VN or text.

 3 minutes to answer

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(2 min)

TEXT

Thanks for sharing!

Everyone in South Africa has the right to be provided with basic services. These include access to adequate housing, water, sanitation and electricity. You are entitled to these Rights which are found in the Constitution of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) and other legislation. Your right to basic services is found in Sections 26 and 27 of the Constitution.

Check out the graphics below of Section 26 and Section 27 in more detail 🙌

GRAPHIC


*Constitution of South Africa
(Act 108 of 1996)*

Section 26:

- (1) Everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing.
- (2) The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of this right.
- (3) No one may be evicted from their home, or have their home demolished, without an order of court made after considering all the relevant circumstances. No legislation may permit arbitrary evictions.



*Constitution of South Africa
(Act 108 of 1996)*

Section 27:

- (1) Everyone has the right to have access to—
 - (a) health care services, including reproductive health care;
 - (a) sufficient food and water; and
 - (b) social security, including, if they are unable to support themselves and their dependants, appropriate social assistance.
- (2) The state must take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realisation of each of these rights.
- (3) No one may be refused emergency medical treatment.

(5-7 minutes)

TEXT

*💡 **3. Is there anything in Sections 26 or 27 that surprises you? How can this information be useful in your work?***

🕒 3 minutes to answer. VN or text your answer.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(6-8 minutes)

TEXT

It's one thing to know your rights, but sometimes it's hard to remember them when you are faced with a difficult situation. Let's practice applying some of these rights in context, through responding to some scenarios in this voicenote. 🗣️

VOICENOTE

You are walking down the street in your community and you hear an argument. There is an elderly woman and a middle-aged woman standing outside a small house. You approach and ask what the argument is about. The middle-aged woman says that she is the landlord of this house, and the elderly woman rents from her, as she has no children to look after her. The landlord has reason to believe that the elderly woman is a witch and is performing witchcraft services for others from the house, and thus the landlady is evicting her.

What are you going to tell the landlady and the elderly woman? You will have 5 minutes to answer by voicenote or text.

TEXT

*💡 **4. What are you going to tell the landlady and the elderly woman?***

🕒 5 minutes to answer. VN or text your answer

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(3-5 minutes)

TEXT

[COMMENT ON ANSWERS]

Going through rights and legislation each week may be a tool that can assist you in your community work. Others of you will be revising what you already know, and hearing new perspectives from your fellow learners.

💡 5. Are there any aspects of the constitution, rights or legislation that you'd like to cover for future courses?

🕒 2 minutes to answer. VN or text your answer

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(2 min)

TEXT

Now, we are going to switch topics. Storytelling can be a powerful tool for inspiring action. In this section, we are going to ask you to create a **“Story of Self”** that you can share with others to motivate and empower them. One way to structure a Story of Self is in 3 parts:

1. Challenge

2. Choice and Source of Hope

3. Outcome

Let's listen to an example of my Story of Self and try to identify the 3 elements 🗣️

VOICENOTE

Facilitator/coach shares their pre-prepared and pre-recorded STORY OF SELF.

TEXT

💡 6. First, what was the CHALLENGE in the story?

🕒 3 minutes to answer by text

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

TEXT

Good answers! Yes, the challenge was not being heard and feeling like my voice didn't matter.

💡 7. What was the CHOICE in the story? And, what was the source of HOPE?

🕒 3 minutes to answer by text

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

TEXT

Yes, that's right. My choice was to act because it was a do or die moment. I chose to speak up for the group because a lot was at stake. My source of hope comes from my late friend and how he was always able to speak up against people who were older, bigger, or richer than he was. He was able to get his voice heard.

 ***8. And, finally, what was the OUTCOME of the story?***

 3 minutes to answer by text

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

(1-2 min)

TEXT

Definitely! The outcome of my story was realizing that speaking up actually makes a difference. I realized my calling was to join organizations that speak up for others and help make a change.

Great job walking through the 3 elements of Story of Self. To recap:

1: Define the Challenge:

First, think about a personal challenge you faced. This is not necessarily the *most* difficult challenge that you've ever faced. This can be a less difficult challenge, but one where you were able to overcome obstacles to achieve your goal. Consider

- When did you first need to be heard and believe that you could be?
- When did you have to care for someone else and found out you could?
- When did you have to stand up to someone bigger than you?

What makes a story of self powerful is not "high drama" or "tragedy" but the extent to which you allow yourself to be vulnerable, to let others see something real about your sources of caring and of courage.

(1-2 min)

TEXT

2: Describe the Choice.

Next, take a moment to think about a specific choice you had to make in encountering this challenge and what values influenced your decision. Remember, we don't want to get into all the details here, but just to describe what happened more generally. Consider:

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

(1-2 min)

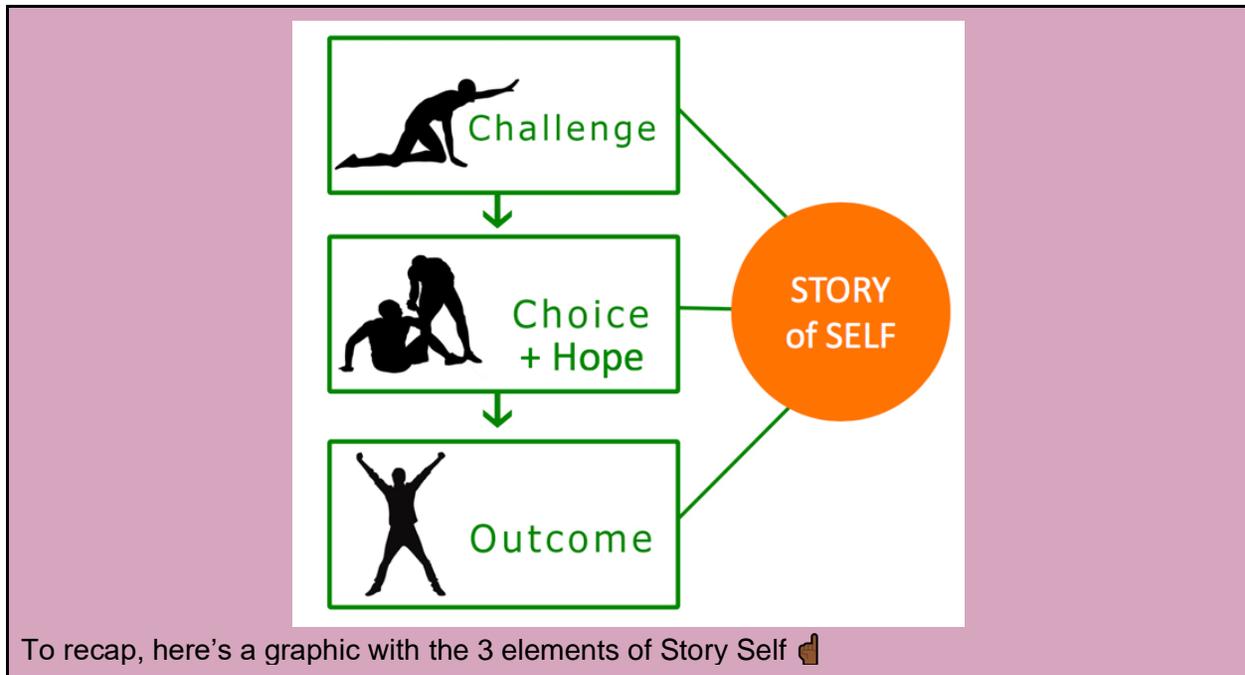
TEXT

And finally, ***3: Describe the Outcome***

Now take a moment to think about the outcome or result and how you felt when you achieved it. You can also let us know if you haven't achieved the outcome or result you want yet and you are still working towards it. Consider:

- How did the outcome feel?
- Why did it feel that way?
- What did it teach you?

GRAPHIC



TEXT

We just reviewed the 3 elements of a Story of Self together putting together elements of challenge and hope.

Assignment

 ***Create your own Story of Self in a 1-3 minute voice note by 7 PM tomorrow.***

- Tell us about a turning point in your life, a time when you faced a challenge. Please describe the details of the place and time - details help make a good story!
- What was the challenge? Why was it challenging? How did you feel in the moment?
- Why did you make that choice? How did it feel before and after you acted?
- What gave you the hope or courage to act (or not act)?
- What was the outcome of your choice? How does it relate to your calling?

This story should be about you. We will get to the stories of the community later.

TEXT

Please listen to all the voicenotes shared in the group before the next session so we can discuss them as a group.

Your coaches will also arrange a Q&A session in your small groups, so that you can ask any questions or get feedback on your draft stories.

💡9. If you understand the assignment, send a thumbs up emoji 👍 or text “I understand!”. If something is unclear, send a thumbs down emoji 👎 or type “Unclear”. Please text any questions.

PARTICIPANT RESPONSE

TEXT

Thank you all for joining, and we'll see you next for session 3. We look forward to hearing your Stories of Self! 🙌🙌

Between sessions:

GROUP CALL

Group call to be held in the small whatsapp groups, day and time to be set by the coach, which participants can attend to ask questions about the assignment. They can share what they are struggling with, share their draft stories and receive guidance from the coach on how to proceed.