

**TIPS  
TO HELP YOU  
SOAR**



**WORKING WITH  
STORY  
PRACTICES**

**Trio Storysharing**

Working with stories is a powerful way to create a field of connection, both between people and with the experience and wisdom they carry about any given topic. I often use trio storytelling specifically to awaken the qualities people are already carrying as part of their lived experience and as a way of working with the aspects of listening, witnessing and harvesting at the same time.

In my recent work, which has been particularly focused on creating the container and capacity for participatory leadership and creating wise action together, the quality of courage and need for supporting each other to exercise courage has been a common thread. This is not the “action hero” brand of courage, but often, the simple acts of everyday courage we need to take to pave the way for something new to happen.

People talk about speaking up for themselves and others. About the ability to say “no” and mean “no”. About believing in themselves enough to step forward, or to follow their dreams. About making connections, saying they are sorry, take an action that’s out of the ordinary. And of course, facing the challenges and traumas that come with the bigger changes in life as well, looking at profound life changes as opportunities instead.

The other common thread has been how we help ourselves – and each other – to see and practice our gifts. The gifts conversation is an important one. Beyond role and responsibility, each of us carry a set of unique gifts. There are some of us who can make people feel welcome simply by smiling at them. There are those who notice the gaps and seamlessly fill them. Some people make you feel better when you are around them. There are those who create beauty anywhere and others who are adept at calling someone else to their unique talents and helping them shine.

These are not skills you will find on a resumé, but they are a unique fingerprint or essence of a person. Sometimes in the rush and challenge of everyday life, we can forget what makes us unique. We can fall so much into our roles and responsibilities that some essential humanness starts to be lost. Being reminded of your gifts, for many people, is like receiving rain in the desert.

Storytelling is an easy way to reawaken our tangible – you might say cellular memory of – what we’ve experienced and who we are. At the same time, once a story is shared, it can begin to be seen in a new light. The way a story is received can make all the difference.

I recall a participant in a New Zealand Art of Hosting training (<http://www.artofhosting.org>) who reported back about a story he had shared in his small circle. He told about taking a job with a US company and moving his family to Colorado in the midst of a snowstorm. About a week later, he accepted what was mooted to be a dangerous assignment in another part of the world. The assignment lived up to its reputation, but he completed the task and arrived home again. Then he stopped for a moment. There were tears in his eyes when he said: “I thought this was a story of my own courage, but my team helped me to see that this was also a story of my wife’s courage. It has been 15 years, but tonight I’m going to go home and tell her what I found out. It has changed everything.”

*Read on for tips on setting up trio storysharing...*

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**Above:** Sample trio question.  
**Below:** Mary Alice describes the role of witness.

## ROLES

There are three roles:

**Storyteller:** Respond to the question.

**Harvester:** Invite the story by asking the question. Focus on the content of the story.

**Witness:** Invite the story by keeping eye-contact with the storyteller. Focus on the person. What essence of the person can you give back to them?

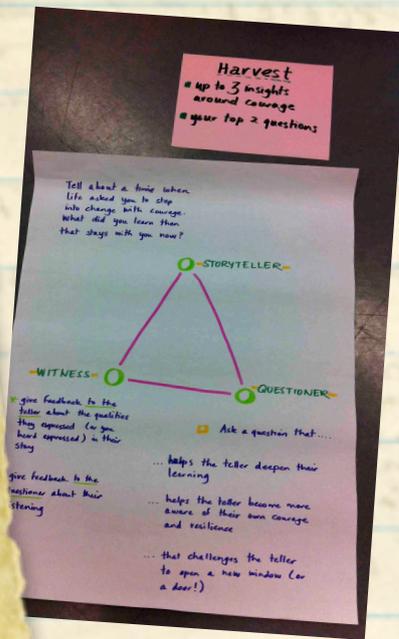
So for example, if the question is "Tell about a time when life challenged you to step up with courage and take leadership. What did you learn about your courage and leadership then and how is it still at work now?", then some points the Harvester might be listening for are:

- What supports us to take leadership? What supports us to be courageous?
- What kind of leadership is demonstrated in this story?

While the Witness might be asked:

- What is the Storyteller's unique "brand" of courage? OR
- What kind of a leader are they?

It is helpful to depict all of this graphically.



### ASK

**WHAT'S THE PURPOSE?  
WHAT ARE WE NEEDING TO  
DISCOVER TOGETHER?**

### ESTABLISH

**INTENTION & FOCUS  
CLARITY OF ROLES  
THE DESIRE TO LISTEN FULLY**

### FIND

**A COMPELLING QUESTION  
A DIVERSITY OF PARTICIPATION**

### Working in story in trio circles

For this exercise to be as powerful and connecting as it can be, the set up is important. A solid set up helps people feel supported enough to be self revealing. At the same time, a group of three can be more intimate and supporting than a larger group.

This example is an hour-long exercise. It is a rotating roles exercise, meaning each person will take on each role during the time. Each storyteller is the focus for 15 minutes – with about 10 minutes for the story and 5 minutes for the others to feed back – and the final 15 minutes is when the trio prepares what it will bring back to the full group.

### The question

First, get clear on your question. What is it you want to focus on or awaken in people? I most often use appreciatively framed questions because I most often want to support people in waking up their own innate wisdom and experience.

Here are some questions I've used in the past:

- Tell about a time when you had the courage to take a risk or have a conversation on a difficult topic that mattered. What did you learn then that stays with you now?
- Tell about a time when life challenged you to step up with courage and take leadership. What did you learn about your courage and leadership then and how is it still at work now?
- Tell about a time when being part of a community challenged you to reveal your gifts. How have your gifts been unfolded and what have you learned about community as a result?
- Tell about a time when you learned something significant about yourself that enabled you to step forward through change. How are you still practicing now?

### About listening

The quality of listening can make or break a story. I often say that a grandchild who loves their grandparent is the ideal role model – you know that look of absolute wonder and enjoyment they wear? You don't have to look like that on the outside, but it pays to look like that on the inside! You are listening with awe and wonder to find someone else's brilliance.

### Bringing it back

The final 15 minutes of the trio gives the group a chance to consolidate its harvesting feedback to the full group and to complete. Each group might bring back two – three points about the subject we've been working on to share. That means they have an opportunity to dig more deeply into what the stories have shown them.

Coming back together as a full group gives everyone a chance to share what we've learned about the quality or qualities we've been exploring, leading to deeper discussion.

