

# The Practice of Stories That Serve You!



## The Little Stories that keep us from what we want

I've just finished reading *The 5 Second Rule* by Mel Harris. I discovered her recently on a TEDx talk from 2011. She got my attention with her title: "How to stop screwing yourself over." Her words resonated for me in the way they applied to my finances. I have been wondering for a long time about how and why I undermine my own financial matters.

Many years ago, I came to the realization that the things I struggle with are not anyone's responsibility but my own. For at least the last 10 years, I have never looked past my own nose for a reason "out there" as to why I haven't done better financially. If I had a vendor that did a poor job, I had no problem recognizing that I knew long before the problem came along that there was an issue. If business wasn't what it should be, I knew in retrospect that the lack of sales met my expectations. No problem out there. If it was to be, it was up to me. My Lesser Self held me back. While negative stories about ourselves may come from outside of us, we keep them alive by internalizing and tending to them.

Over the years, as I developed the Oh The Stories We Tell model, I came to recognize how my Lesser Self fed me stories to undermine myself in matters of business and finance in order to protect me. These stories came mostly from my parents as I was growing up. They were stories that assured me I was inept and lacked accountability with money. Along the way, my business and financial issues, responding to my stories, confirmed them, even if at a barely conscious level.

As a result of these Little Me stories, I have struggled with fear and inaction in the work and financial areas of my life. While I understand the negative effects of these stories, I managed only temporary successes in making significant financial progress. I continue to struggle to make an income that in any way reflects my value. Occasionally there is the exception, but it certainly isn't the rule. Much to my dismay and that of my wife and family, the model explained my dilemma well, but the inaction remained.

Proof of the model emerged every now and then, when my Lesser Self would let down its guard and tasks that usually overwhelmed me became easy, fluid and even satisfying. When the Little Me stories were quiet, I was able to focus and work productively for hours at a time.



So, I'm reading Mel's book, which in its simplest form says, when the feeling to do something arises, countdown from five to one, say, "Go" and do something small... take the next little step and watch what happens. Why count down from five? Five seconds is the time it takes for you to engage your prefrontal cortex, the solution part of the brain. From the perspective of my model, as you count down, you move from Little Me to Authentic Me thinking: From problem oriented to solution oriented thinking.

Mel has many examples of how people have used this simple technique with great success. So, for the last few days, I have added this to my practice... just starting tasks that I felt resistant to with "5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Go". Frankly I've been amazed at what I have accomplished. Things sitting on my desk for months, are either in process or done! Almost no resistance and when there is, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Go. It seems silly how simple it is, and there is the epiphany. The bottom line for me was recognizing just how many small decisions my Lesser Self has "protected" me from making over the years. Yikes

While I was reading Mel's book, I sat down after two months of not doing invoices, and started. As Little Me took a back seat, and the full force of of my Major Self was right there to make billing an easy and pleasurable experience! Before I even wrapped up the task the weight of the world was off my shoulders and Authentic Me was in the house. When these tasks were done I felt amazing for the rest of the day. The Little Me stories not rearing their ugly little heads, I was in rarified air. Amazing... so why couldn't I stop screwing myself over on a regular basis? Hi Mel, damn glad to meet you!

It's not the big things that keep us hogtied. It's our Lesser Selves' telling us that the overall job is too big and it's going to be really painful and likely impossible, to complete. I call this a Secondary Story, in that it is simply in a supporting role of a Primary story, but likely doesn't stand on its own. It's in service to the larger story. And so, those Secondary Stories keep us from doing the relatively easy little steps. The steps that, one by one, often feel almost effortless and turn into a completed project. Even with the big stories in place, Little Me works to convince me the small steps are just a route to disappointment. And there is the issue! With the big stories Little Me has tended for so long, they eventually become the fall back to the current story of, "What is the point of beginning?" Wow.

With the approach of the Five Second Rule, I'm able to let my Lesser Self off the job of protecting me, because I'm shifting the focus from the overall project to the little tasks at hand, which, with the help of Mel's technique, my Lesser Self doesn't feel the need to



protect me from. I have moved the focus of my Lesser Self from the overall project, to what I can do in the next five minutes (which regularly becomes a much longer period of time). The countdown takes Little Me off the protection detail.

When we have a strategy for tackling little details, the big stories begin to lose their power, even if it is temporary at first. Additionally, we all know that the process can be as rewarding as the completion of a project. With focus narrowed to the task at hand, the process becomes far more enjoyable because we don't have our Lesser Self chattering away with its inherent negativity. We don't tell the story of completing our vacation, we tell the story of the vacation, typically with the toughest parts being the most fun to share.

What is so fascinating is that in knocking all this stuff out easily and happily, so many of the stories I tell about hating this or that part of my job... simply... aren't... true. But I've been certain that I don't like what I do for a long time!!! What is this??? Is billing my favorite part of my job? Nope. But is it nearly as painful as my stories have made it out to be? Nope! In order to justify my inaction and procrastination, I tell myself stories that are simply not true. These stories keep me from taking the first little steps, the suffering continues, and everything looks grim.

So while I definitely have stories that came from growing up with a narcissistic dad, a mom who wanted to make everything alright... and money was a big issue... there is the second set of stories which are all about justifying my in-the-moment inaction. When we are able to let go of the resistance, "5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Go", we begin breaking the cycle and enter an open place, where the stories evaporate. Amazing what a big impact a simple little technique can have.

If you're like me, your Lesser Self is screaming, "This guy is whack! That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard!" Little You believes all those lousy stories about you and wants to protect you from failure by reducing inertia... Little You. Can you feel the resistance? Is that going to stop you? No, choose a simple task and "5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Go."

And there it is... Little Me, so dedicated to doing things one way, and criticizing anything that doesn't fit with its narrow definition of the "right way" to do something. And yet, doing something so "simple" and so "silly" is the key to getting our Minor Self back in balance with our Major Self.



An Authentic story might go something like this: “Funny how allowing myself to try things that seem silly, gives me the opportunity to find places to clean up areas of my life where I feel stuck. And if I can do that, no matter how silly the method seemed at first, I see it genuinely works and was surely worth a try. To my Minor Self, I say, ‘Let’s work together, with my Major Self, and it will be a whole lot more in-joy-able’”

Wrapping up, it's clear that we hobble ourselves in ways we never imagined. Little Me, hard at work “protecting” us. To step beyond this is just a matter of getting started on the next simple task.. Let those stories become a mere whisper as our Minor Self is brought back into balance with our Major Self. The dark switch is turned way down and the light of our Major Self shines through, letting us begin to flourish in the ways that are personally meaningful to us.

Thanks for the “5 Second Rule” Mel Robbins! 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Go!