

Model Overview - Part 1 - What's the story I'm telling?

Three Questions to help you understand yourself and those around you

“Everyone longs for the authentic. It's always here... There's nothing you can do to obliterate it. It's the listener, the one without a story. I call it love, and we can tell all the stories we want about how it doesn't exist, but it does. When you oppose it, you create the only suffering you can experience.”

Byron Katie, [A Mind at Home With Itself](#)

Introduction

“Can you believe she's wearing that?”

“You're not going to believe what happened!”

“When am I ever going to be free of this?”

“What's his story?”

“What's the story I'm telling myself?”

A common human failure is the inability, or resistance, to feeling authentically good. It's not that we feel bad every second of the day, although sometimes it feels like it. Instead, we all have areas of our lives that we are constantly struggling with. We may quietly contend with our struggles while putting on a happy face, or perhaps living with a bitter



outlook. Sometimes, it's a bit of both. These struggles could be in relationships, at work, with personal finances, or how we view ourselves. Yet, the common denominator is the nagging feeling that we're stuck. It can feel like a minor irritation or something far stronger.

In these areas we have a tendency to feel afraid, powerless, and victimized by our surroundings, even if it's our inner thoughts. And because we are embarrassed at how we might be perceived, we're desperately afraid of being seen by others the exact way we see ourselves. We have a tendency to feel like we are alone in our struggles and that no one else will possibly understand.

In this lies the catch-22. If we don't address how we're feeling-- our issues directly, we suffer. Our desire for no one noticing us masking our problems simply creates further anxieties. Sadly, we often don't recognize we're doing this, inevitably making us oblivious to our own strategies for denying and avoiding our problems.

The Protector

A part of our personality owns these negative thoughts. The Protector doesn't want to shed light on our issues, but prefers to hide our struggles in the dark. The Protector wants us to pretend that everything is "just fine"... but it's not.

On the other side of the coin, The Protector is incredibly judgemental of anything that threatens our shield of denial. It is ready to lash out without a moment's notice to protect us from the world. This is often referred to as "the ego", which is simply our personality's core motivation to protect us from ourselves and the cruel version of the world we may have created.



What's amazing about this part of our personality is how consistent it is across the human experience. In its quest to protect us, it creates the exact conditions that it wants to avoid. Plus, because of this universal behavior, we have a tendency to suffer in these areas rather than address them. In essence, this part of our personality prefers to hide in ignorance rather than examine things in the light. This part of our personality, while doing its best to protect us from the darkness, is also the part of our personality that creates the darkness.

“Devil inside
The devil inside
Every single one of us
The devil inside”
- INXS

What's going on?

How can we increase our clarity and lessen the confusion we feel? Why aren't we more aware of what motivates our behavior and what moderates our reactions onto others? Why do we beat ourselves up in some situations, and then deny our responsibility in others? Why do we hope our problems will remain boxed up somewhere no one will see them, especially not ourselves, while we impatiently wait for them to magically disappear? How can we honestly and objectively increase our awareness of self and others in a way that leads us to address our struggle and allow for a more whole, centered and grounded self to emerge? How do we “get out of our heads” and move to a place of peace and contentment in our lives?

Three Questions

Over many years I have been working to develop a deeper understanding of myself and those around me. By asking myself three simple questions, I've been able to change my views, and as a result, how I live my life.

These questions have led me to a greater understanding and acceptance of who I am, plus the people and circumstances around me, and have helped me become less judgemental of myself, as well as others. In doing so, I have been able to find a place that is far more centered and grounded to live my life. Life isn't completely perfect, but armed with these questions, I continue to become a better version of myself. I feel far more at peace with myself and the world around me. I am able to see more and more of it with increased clarity.

The questions are deceptively simple:

- What is the story I'm telling? - To explain my behavior and the behavior of others.
- Is this story serving me in this moment? - Regardless of whether it has served me in the past.
- Am I able to create a story that is more authentic? - And can I begin to stop telling the stories that don't serve me, that I tell over and over in the process?

I will go into much greater detail below, however, it's important to understand the impact they can have on us.

With these three questions, we have the power to dramatically improve our well-being and create far more meaningful moments in our lives. We can move forward and redefine our lives, while simultaneously allowing ourselves to let go of the things we can't control with far more ease and grace. We possess much more power to change our lives than we know.

Viktor Frankl, a holocaust survivor and psychiatrist wrote:

"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."



- Viktor Frankl, Man's Search For Meaning

It still astounds me that in “the space” Frankl mentions, we're free to create stories that serve us and our environment. I see myself and those around me with far less judgement and with far more appreciation and love.

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

- Reinhold Niebuhr

What's The Story I'm Telling?

We all tell stories. Whether it's about what we did last week, the last time we escaped a tough situation, or how our relationships are going, we love to share our stories. Stories are how we create and articulate meaning in our lives. However, the most important stories are the ones we rarely recognize; they are the stories we tell ourselves. It could be a story about an area in our lives that's thriving, or one that's suffering, it can influence our interpretation of the world.

Using the story metaphor, we can start to create self-awareness and ease our struggles by asking, “What's the story I'm telling?” It's a simple question that has given me the ability to elevate myself from a place of ignorance. As a result, I'm able to define clearly what's going on, not only around me, but also within me. It brings me to a place where I can observe my thinking and move to a more objective and self-determined place.

The Narrator of Our Stories



The stories we tell most often are also the ones we tend to not recognize. With the brain's capacity for language, we are provided an ongoing narrative that is constantly coloring the pictures we see in our heads, and the world around us. Some of these stories feel really good to tell, while others make us feel worse. Our mind's capacity to color any situation can be deemed an amazing gift or a dreaded perspective.

Take a look at someone you know that tells very positive stories that don't seem authentic, stories that don't serve them. If you question these individuals, you'll notice that they often become defensive and treat your question as a challenge.

Then there are the people who seem to constantly live in a negative world. They generously share stories of their powerlessness and victimhood, and they are always blaming their circumstances, or how others behave towards them, rather than taking on responsibility.

As we enter adulthood, we still tell ourselves stories we create in order to cope with troubled situations. Yet, simultaneously, we also create nurturing and authentically positive stories of nostalgia. Whether we choose to acknowledge it or not, these stories affect our relationships, our work, and our finances.

As we begin to ask and answer this simple question, we start to recognize the role we are playing in coloring in our inner world and in the "real world". And color our world, we do! All in an effort to serve that basic wiring in our heads that simply wants to protect us.

This question allows for objective assessment. We must break the cycle of believing each of our thoughts as absolute facts. Asking this question increases the space between stimulus and response, thus creating that pause button we've always wished for. In this, we also free ourselves time



to consider whether the story serves us. If it doesn't, can we find a way to create a more authentic story?

Does This Story Serve Me In This Moment?

How do we evaluate whether a story serves us? It seems that it should be obvious. Yet, we have to remember, The Protector overreacts at times. It's important to be aware of how well-embedded in our psyche these stories are. We've been listening to these stories that we've authored by past experiences for a long time. When we begin to ask this question, we may get an immediate, "Of course this serves me!" But if we take the time to examine why we asked the question in the first place, we can reconsider whether this is true.

We must question the effects of our stories gently and without judgement by being light and inquisitive. As time goes on, we get better at not resisting the truth. If we use this simple inquisitive approach, we may lighten up and become amused in knowing our Protector is overreacting. It can diffuse the Protector's resistance by offering a closer examination at the story.

With this open perspective, we also have a transparent and authentic view of those around us. We begin to see when others are telling stories that don't serve them or us. When we see that it doesn't serve anyone, we need to smile and recognize that The Protector within them is acting up.

Increasing our ability to see how our stories can undermine us and others, we start to let go of the judgement we place on ourselves and onto others; this is a milestone accomplishment. When we understand that this is The Protector at work, we recognize that our Protector doesn't need to jump in with both feet, even though it desperately wants to! Instead, we move to



the next step of telling an authentic story. Over time as we practice this, The Protector becomes more comfortable with the questions because he doesn't feel the need to be "on the lookout".

In this moment

Why do we include "in this moment" as part of the question? It is an integral part of the question because it allows ourselves the ability to not factor the angst of our past experiences or the fear of what the future may hold into our situation. The Protector works from a place of fear, and therefore is masterful at seeing both the past and the future from a fearful perspective.

When we focus only on this moment, we begin to move the protective part of our personality into balance and depower the fear. In doing this, we transition to a place of openness where we are able to see the full picture of what is going on within and around us. We begin to realize so many of these fears simply don't apply.

Some of our old embedded stories might not apply "in this moment." Thus, "the space" grows, giving us the ability to grow and find freedom when we put The Protector's fears into perspective. It is here that we recognize that our lives then become a practice of questioning and listening for authentic answers.

Feelings Aren't Facts

One of the ways we become a slave to our stories is by assuming that what we feel is a fact. There is a tendency in all of us to view both what we're seeing, and as a result feeling, as facts. "That's just the way it is." And when we buy that line, we instantly reduce our ability to become aware of how we are coloring our world. When we see what's going on around us as factual, we become the powerless ones. This develops into complaining



about why a particular behavior makes us feel bad, or how we can't feel good until something outside of our control changes. We see this behavior all the time, especially in others. When our emotions are facts, we are subject to their whims.

In essence, there is little space between what we experience and how we respond because we aren't able to recognize that feelings are simply the result of what we are thinking. Instead, if we recognize that feelings are a function of what we're thinking, we also realize that we can change our story to change how we feel. When we take things in stride, we move out of a place where we are ruled by our feelings into a place where we are able to use them as indicators to whether the thoughts are serving us.

This is the epicenter of why we don't focus on feelings when we ask the second question. When we focus on whether our story is serving us, here and now, we are free to look at our feelings as an indicator. In those, we begin to see how the story drives our feelings. It's important to remember that not all things feel good in the moment, but they may be serving a greater good. In no way does this suggest that all stories will feel good. Instead, we are able to reframe our stories from victimhood to ones that serves us. We may not feel good, but we also no longer feel like victims, powerless of change.

When we change the way we think of our feelings, we once again increase the space. In realizing that our feelings, especially negative ones, are simply a result of the stories we are telling ourselves, we can begin to understand that changing our stories has the ability to dramatically change how we feel, moment to moment. Recognizing that the story, not the feelings, are the clay, we get to change the mold and have greater control over our feelings.



Amazingly, any story can have multiple perspectives, whether they are told by us or by others. When we realize that we have the ability to tell a story from multiple perspectives, we are immediately on the road to changing our reality. In doing this, we are able to free ourselves from the tyranny of being a powerless victim, living by default, and laden with uncomfortable feelings.

Is There A More Authentic Story I Can Tell?

Might we, as we practice asking the question of the stories that don't serve us, learn to create more authentic stories?

According to Merriam Webster, authentic can be defined as::

1a : Worthy of acceptance or a belief that's conforming to or based on fact.

2 : Not false or imitation, real, actual.

3 : True to one's own personality, spirit, or character, is sincere and authentic with no pretensions

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/authentic>

Authenticity! When we look at something authentically, we have reached the next level of increasing "the space" - and it's a big one. Authenticity is the ability to see the full range of factors of a given situation, and being able to incorporate them into a more full and rich story that serves you and others involved. It allows us to observe the negative and balance it with the full range of factors, both neutral and positive ones. When we do this, we are freed from the Protector's grip and can change the Narrator's stories to ones that serve us.



But make no mistake, authenticity does not mean positivity. Let me say it again, authenticity is not positivity. The reason positivity by itself doesn't serve us is because the Protector looks at a positive story and is able to easily rip it to shreds. Positivity actually makes The Protector more committed to his version of the story, which is typically negative. When we look at something from an authentic place, there is an "ease" that comes over us, and because we have taken the time to put things in perspective, we land in a non-polarized grey area. We find that we become accustomed to the process of digging a little deeper and not going with our default stories. Every time we do this, we feel more centered and grounded.

Finding the holistic story in ourselves begins to free us from The Protector's grip and sets the stage for real change in the areas we are struggling with. Over time, The Protector recognizes where he is preventing us from real solutions and begins to loosen his grip. When we are able to sit with a story from an authentic perspective, we find that we're being served the same in any given situation, granting us the ability to find a new world of possibilities with deeper meaning.

Authenticity does not condone "bad" behavior, but instead looks for a deeper understanding to put a situation into perspective. We recognize that the road we took to get to the root of our problems has a rich history and deserves acknowledgement. When we try to "stuff the problem" in a pocket, it doesn't serve anyone.

Our Protector, however, tends to see authentic stories as positive ones, because his perspective is so negative. Telling authentic stories takes practice, especially ones that The Protector will be okay with.



It's essential to note the role that appreciation plays with our stories. It doesn't mean that we condone the story, but instead recognizes that they have been arrived for good reasons. Authenticity is trustworthy and doesn't include judgement. It allows for all of these perspectives to be, without embracing or condoning them. It says, "From where I sit, I see why I, or those around me, behave the way they do." It recognizes the stories and the involvement of The Protector in the ones that don't serve us.

Wrap-Up

So often, we hear about people's problems and think, "Thank God that's not me." And yet, when we take an easier look at our own issues through the lens of storytelling, we begin to realize just how much we color our worlds with interpretations of what's going on within and around us. In this critical moment, we realize just how much of that storytelling doesn't serve us.

With these three questions, we have the ability to increase that space between stimulus and response, and recognize that the world really is our oyster. We realize that we have far more power in our lives than we may have ever believed, and to not only have far more personal agency, but to also be able to help others through authentic storytelling.

In my next article, we'll take a look at the model I have developed that helps take these initial three questions and put them into an even better perspective.