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AND  
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**A TRAINER'S  
COMPANION**

**STORIES TO STIMULATE  
REFLECTION  
CONVERSATION  
ACTION**

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A Trainer's Companion: Stories to Stimulate Reflection, Conversation, Action

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# INTRODUCTION

God so loved stories that he created man.

–Quoted in Roland Barth’s *Learning by Heart*

Our goal in life is to gather all the awareness one can, and then to pass it out freely to those who are interested.

–Manitonquat, Keeper of the Lore for the Assonet Band of Wampanoag Nation

## WHY STORIES ARE IMPORTANT

This is a great question for leaders. Many business leaders and consultants (Michael Fullan, David Whyte, James Autry, Max DuPree, Peter Block, Robert Bly, and Roland Barth – to name just a few) believe that stories help create positive working climates for many reasons.

Stories create openings for people to talk and think, to wonder and reflect on their work and workplace. Stories help create healthy rituals, knit personal meaning, and build community by sustaining common experiences and language. The stories told in communities help initiate newcomers, provide operational norms, and pass on the kinds of historical understandings that serve as the underpinnings for cultural wisdom. This can be positive or negative, depending on how behavior is demonstrated based on the story.

The stories in this collection provide personal insight to understand change, to develop a healthy balance between work and personal life, to deal with conflict, to promote diversity, and to reframe traditionally negative experiences into positive opportunities. The stories herein will reinforce democratic values in the learning community because we all talk as peers, leaders, and co-workers.

Stories become a form of shorthand that represents what fables and myths once did in many human cultures. Think of phrases like “crying wolf,” “opening Pandora’s box,” or “Achilles heel.” Storytelling facilitates an exploration of organizational values and helps people identify and articulate what is important and meaningful. Think of how stories have been used – and are still being used – in indigenous cultures. They transmit beliefs and values to young and old alike.

Stories can prompt insight into knotty problems and challenges, as well as create new openings for change and growth. Alan M. Webber, founding editor of *Fast Company* magazine, notes that increased productivity and effectiveness in organizations often are the results of frequent conversations.

It’s important to us that our workplaces include deeper, older wisdom about life and the way things are – “code,” in effect, for the deeper, often hidden or unappreciated dynamics of life. Stories open windows into these misty and mysterious aspects of life. These stories and sayings “articulate the intuitive” and are enjoyable ways to captivate people and interest them in what

is significant in their work and lives. They provide powerful and innovative ways of seeing situations and alternative ways of seeing issues. This shift in gears helps reframe situations, people, problems, and challenges. Pathways open for us to take action as we awaken from our daily thinking patterns to a more conscious, mindful way of being with difficulties.

Stories help us connect the heart and the head while inviting us to consider additional dimensions of life that are often ignored: commitment, feelings, aesthetics, ethics, and spirituality. Stories engage the right hemisphere of the brain, eliciting holistic approaches that sometimes lie dormant in our data-based world. The press and rush of the oft-frenetic workday muffle the subtle, softer realities. Stories pierce the foggy veil to build pathways for creativity and wonder, for imagination and nonlinear thinking.

Our aim here is to build the individual and organizational capacity to communicate, practice dialogue, and sustain collaborative group processes. Practicing new and different ways of talking to one another helps widen perspectives and incorporate diverse thoughts. It also can lead to collaborative problem solving.

We often think of stories as being for children. Yet we have found that adult learners, rich in experience and insight, can easily relate to the point or moral of a story. Recall the last workshop you attended. What do you remember most vividly? The research or the stories? What has had a longer-term impact on you – stories or data?

Stories offer bite-sized learning experiences that are short and to the point; they frequently come to us in metaphor. As Bob Samples wrote years ago in *The Metaphoric Mind*, the brain processes information using metaphors. Stories are a familiar cultural form. We attend plays and movies that tell stories; we read stories to our children and tell stories at the water cooler; and we're engaged with stories in the news, magazines, and popular books.

Welcome to the world of stories. Use them well, and do good work.

Skip Olsen  
Bill Sommers

## WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

We've organized the stories into categories based on themes that are of paramount importance in workplaces:

- Reframing
- Diversity
- Conflict
- Balance
- Change

Each section's introduction contains a general overview of the issue, resources for deeper

understanding, and pertinent quotations that you might use for additional activities or discussions. The point is to make explicit the resources that are readily available on the Web for further study or to enrich discussions. For example, many of the articles cited could be used for study circles or jigsaw activities (e.g., individuals summarizing particular readings for the larger group). Many of the books lend themselves to book clubs at school or the workplace, promoting both learning and collegiality.

Each story is introduced with a brief discussion about why we see the story as pertinent to important issues in any organization. There is space to note why you are choosing the story to read now; why does the story fit with your work now? As you develop a familiarity with the stories, you will see connections between them and possibilities for their use with other groups and situations.

Stories are best when they come from the heart with passion and energy. They are constructive in nature and offer possibilities. This will help you see or create many more stories. Make notes to develop your own journal and to refine your practice. Insights are sometimes like a meteor in your peripheral vision: While you didn't see it clearly, you are certain something bright and glowing was there. Make notes often, or you risk forgetting important discoveries.

Ideas will come in at least two ways. First, when you read the story yourself in preparation, connections will become apparent. Second, as you go through the story with other learners, questions and differing interpretations will add even more ideas. It's important that the process be as developmental and reflective as possible in order to leverage the full power of the stories in your learning community.

## ARTWORK AND SYMBOLS

The artwork on our pages is intentional and important. We include the art of indigenous people because of its symbolic nature and relation to our work. It's a reminder that we're going back to the deeper ideas of community at the core of humans living together.



The circle on the Introduction page represents the journey all of us are on – a finite journey, with a beginning and an end. It's a reminder that our time is limited and acting on what matters most is vitally important.



The winged figure that marks every “Resources for Deeper Understanding” section is a dragonfly that frequently represents growth. It helps us communicate our desire that you deepen your understanding of the issues at hand.



The diamond-shaped figure that sets off the title of the stories represents the insights or wisdom of the shaman. Hence, we associate that symbol with the wisdom in the stories.



Kokopelli, the Anasazi flute player, is the trickster, the master of surprise, laughter, and the sensual. Clearly, Kokopelli would love stories and might even join in with his music to give us more to think about!



The hand is associated with the guiding questions and conversation surrounding the story. It's a reminder of how much energy and new learning we create along the way when we work with something. It's with hands that we work life: We touch each other, we create art and conduct symphonies, we cradle our young.



The circle of human beings connected to one another on the title page is based on the design of the Washington Covenant Belt (Iroquois), which was used as a covenant of peace between the 13 original United States colonies and the Six Nations. It symbolizes for us our interdependence.

### WHAT IF ...

Playing with “what if” statements is a healthy way to gain insight into possibilities and alternatives. The story and the perceptions about your environment get worked from different angles with different insights and values when you ask “what if ...” We’ve posed two “what if” questions for each story to help you start the process. We urge you to use these and also to create your own during discussion. What different endings might there be? What ending would you like to see? Why? How do you combine differently? What other possibilities exist? Which “what if” questions jump out at you?



**REFRAMING:  
THE ART OF SEEING DIFFERENTLY**

The world of education is a very difficult place to work these days. As a matter of fact, it's getting more difficult each year. There are increased demands, reduction in funding, and more vocal criticism of what educators are doing.

People who choose to be professional educators want to make a difference in the lives of young people. Educators want to help students learn, to prepare them for a productive and fulfilling life; they genuinely want to do the best by students and their families. Despite the noble intentions and hard work, however, business, government, the media, and other members of our communities are increasingly critical of schools and educators. While some of the ideas are welcome and helpful, many are not. Some are selfish, one-dimensional, and "crazy-makers" for schools and educators. When we can't control other people's actions but are held responsible for the consequences, the double bind keeps many staff members stuck in powerless situations.

A similar thing can happen to students. U.S. research professor Martin Seligman, author of *Learned Optimism*, writes about learned helplessness. Enthusiasm wanes and depression occurs when children or adults perceive life as not going well and feel that the condition is permanent, hopeless.

Reframing helps people continue to work, even with negative feedback. When we change the game we're playing, sometimes those attacking us don't know how to adapt. Reframing has been used both as a therapeutic process and a creative-thinking skill. The process involves looking at an issue from different perspectives. People are energized by seeing things differently, recognizing more options, and creating capacity to take positive actions.

When people start seeing problems from another point of view, they begin having an optimistic attitude that fosters even more change. British educational consultant and author Edward de Bono believes that creativity is the most important skill to develop. Business leaders look for creative people because they understand that innovation in developing new products is the lifeblood of a company's success.

The following stories will provide a few examples of reframing – to be used with staff, students, and community.



## RESOURCES FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING

### ◆ ARTICLES

NSDC (National Staff Development Council) Library: School Culture available at <http://www.nsd.org/library/school.html>. Here's a sample of articles that have been available. Titles change from time to time. Of course, all are available online with a membership in NSDC – highly recommended. The articles are generally shorter (appropriate for busy educators) and useful (in both content and process) for various staff development requirements.

DuFour, Rick, & Burnette, Becky. (2002). Pull out negativity by its roots. *Journal of Staff Development* (PDF version). Summer.

Hirsh, Stephanie. (1996). Creating a healthy school culture is everyone's business. *Innovator*. October.

Pardini, Priscilla. (2002). Stitching new teachers into the school's fabric. *Journal of Staff Development* (PDF version). Summer.

Peterson, Kent D. (2002). Positive or negative. *Journal of Staff Development* (PDF version). Summer.

Richardson, Joan. (1999). Harness the potential of staff meetings. *Tools for Schools*. October/November.

Richardson, Joan. (1996.) School culture: a key to improved student learning. *Innovator*. October.

Richardson, Joan. (2001). Shared culture. *Results*. May.

Student learning grows in professional cultures. (1998). *Tools for Schools*. August/September.

### ◆ THE BOOKSHELF

Dauten, Dale. (1996). *The Max Strategy*. New York, NY: William Morrow & Co.

de Bono, Edward. (1970). *Lateral Thinking*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

Goldberg, Marilee C. (1998). *The Art of the Question*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.

- Gordon, David. (1978). *Therapeutic Metaphors*. Cupertino, CA: Meta Publications.
- Hay, Louise L. (1991). *The Power Is Within You*. Carson, CA: The Hay House.
- Johnson, Spencer. (1998). *Who Moved My Cheese?* New York, NY: Penguin Putnam.
- Juster, Norton. (1961). *The Phantom Tollbooth*. New York, NY: Bullseye Books.
- Kegan, Robert, & Lahey, Lisa Laskow. (2001). *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Siegel, Bernie. (1986). *Love, Medicine, and Miracles*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Seligman, Martin E.P. (1990). *Learned Optimism*. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Zander, Benjamin, & Zander, Rosamund Stone. (2000). *The Art of Possibility*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.

◆ USEFUL QUOTATIONS

By adopting strength-based paradigms, we clearly separate negative behavior from a person's worth. In fact, we frequently can scrutinize the problem behavior and discover strengths that lie beneath the obvious weaknesses. This is called reframing:

driven?	no, energetic!
stubborn?	no, determined!
bizarre?	no, creative!
rebellious?	no, independent!
obsessive?	no, organized!
delusional?	no, imaginative!

By reframing negative attributions into positive potentials, we plant a seed and nurture it. Such is our business.

—Joseph Burger, U.S. professor and writer

He who sleeps in continual noise is wakened by silence.

—W.D. Howells, U.S. writer

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It is easier to get forgiveness than it is to secure permission.

–Jesuit saying

It takes nine months to have a baby, no matter how many people you put on the job.

–North American saying

Many a man would rather you heard his story than granted his request.

–Phillip Stanhope, fourth earl of Chesterfield, England

The beginning of wisdom is to call things by their right names.

–Chinese proverb

Almost anything is easier to get into than out of.

–Agnes Allen, U.S. epigrammatist

Just because everything is different doesn't mean that anything has changed.

–Irene Peter, U.S. epigrammatist

A rock pile ceases to be a rock pile the moment a single man contemplates it, bearing within him the image of a cathedral.

–Antoine de Saint-Exupery, French novelist

The opposite of an ordinary fact is a lie. But the opposite of one profound truth may be another profound truth.

–Niels Bohr, Danish physicist

It is tempting to think up futures that don't require getting there from here.

–Harlan Cleveland, U.S. essayist and lecturer

Between what I think,  
What I want to say,  
What I believe I'm saying,  
What I say,  
What you want to hear,  
What you hear,  
What you believe you understand,  
What you want to understand,  
And what you understood,  
There are at least nine possibilities for misunderstanding.

–Francois Garagnon, French jurist

Where you stumble, there your treasure lies.

–Joseph Campbell, U.S. author and mythologist

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All of us, whether or not we are warriors, have a cubic centimeter of chance that pops out in front of our eyes from time to time. The difference between an average man and a warrior is that the warrior is aware of this, and one of his tasks is to be alert, deliberately waiting, so that when his cubic centimeter pops out he has the necessary speed, the prowess, to pick it up.

–Carlos Castaneda, Mexican anthropologist and author

Something we were withholding made us weak  
Until we found it was ourselves.

–Robert Frost, U.S. poet

Things never were “the way they used to be.”  
Things never will be “the way it’s going to be someday.”  
Things are always just the way they are for the time being.  
And the time being is always in motion.

–Alexander Evangeli Xenopouloudakis, character in a novel in progress by Robert Fulghum

We shouldn’t try to do something better until we first determine if we should do it at all.

–Dwight D. Eisenhower, 34<sup>th</sup> U.S. president

No problem can be solved from the same consciousness that created it.

–Albert Einstein, German/Swiss/U.S. physicist

Spectacular achievements are always preceded by unspectacular preparation.

–Roger Staubach, National Football League quarterback

Nobody sees a flower, really – it is so small – we haven’t time, and to see takes time, like to have a friend takes time.

–Georgia O’Keefe, U.S. artist

The little things? The little moments? They aren’t little.

–John Kabat-Zinn, U.S. professor and author

Spend the afternoon. You can’t take it with you.

–Annie Dillard, U.S. writer

Whether you think you can or think you can’t, you’re right.

–Henry Ford, U.S. industrialist

Plans are only good intentions unless they immediately degenerate into hard work.

–Peter Drucker, Austrian/U.S. author and business consultant

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Failure is only the opportunity to begin again more intelligently.

—Henry Ford, U.S. industrialist

Actions lie louder than words.

—Carolyn Wells, U.S. author

Believe those who are seeking the truth. Doubt those who find it.

—André Gide, French novelist

Everybody gets so much information all day long that they lose their common sense.

—Gertrude Stein, U.S./French writer

The reverse side also has a reverse side.

—Japanese proverb

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function.

—F. Scott Fitzgerald, U.S. novelist