

Change Your Story to Change Your Life

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Introduction

Here you sit reading this.

And who are you?
Do you know?

I know who you are.

Who you are right now is a sum total of all that has happened in your past.

It's that simple.

In time, there is the past, the present and the future.

We have each had years of different types of experiences that have formed the person each of us are now.

They formed our wants, needs, attitudes, goals, outlook on life, values, hopes, beliefs and everything else.

They also formed how we feel about ourselves and about life.

They formed our self-love or lack thereof.
They formed our self-respect or lack thereof.
They formed our self-esteem or lack thereof.
They formed everything about how we see ourselves.

All of those were formed by everything that has ever happened in our past.

And we cannot change any event that happened in the past.
They are done and cannot be changed.

Does that mean that we are stuck?
Are we always going to be the same as we are right now?

No and no.

In five minutes, this moment will be a part of our past.

What you do now will also be a part of that sum total of who you are in five minutes.

You are always creating who you are.

You are always creating your future.

You have always been creating who you are.

You have been doing that with your beliefs, your goals, the visions that you are working towards and all the other driving forces that you have had in your life.

So what will be so different now?

When you were young, you did not get to choose your beliefs.
You did not get to pick your own goals.
You did not get to work out your own vision of what you wanted life to look like for you.
You never got to pick your own driving forces.

All these were given to you by other people.
You were never given the choices.

That was in the past.

This is now.

Right now is the most important and powerful point in your life.

Right now, you get to choose.

Choose what?

You get to choose the rest of your life.

And THAT is what this book is all about.

Choices

One of the most important things that you are going to get from this book is that you always have and make choices.

Notice that I did not say "Sometimes we have and make choices."

I said that we ALWAYS have and make choices.

I define choices as picking between two or more options.

Let's break that down a little bit.

Picking between two or more options is making a choice.

Do I want to get up or stay in bed?

Do I want to go to work or not?

What do I want to wear today?

What do I want for dinner tonight?

Those are all choices.

To choose not to choose IS a choice.

"What movie do you want to see tonight?"

"I don't care. You pick it."

That is a choice.

The choices we have are always about ourselves.

We do NOT always have choices about the things around us but we DO always have the choices about how to respond to those things.

We cannot choose if it is going to rain or not.

We DO have the choice of how we want to respond to the rain.

We cannot choose if someone is going to be in a good mood or bad mood.

We DO have the choice of how we want to respond to their mood.

I can already hear the arguments against what I just said.

"If someone holds a gun to my head and tells me to give him all my money, I don't have any choice in that."

Yes you do.

You decide which is more important to you.

Your money or your life.
That IS a choice.

"If my boss tells me to go to bed with him or he will fire me, I don't have any choice in that."

Yes you do.

You decide which is more important to you.

Your job or your personal integrity.

That IS a choice.

The choice we have to make might be choosing the lesser of two evils but it is still a choice.

The MAIN reason people feel that they don't have choices is that they don't get to choose the options that they have to pick from.

If it rains out, people get upset because they don't have the choice over if it rains or not.

We DON'T get to choose if it rains out.

We DO get to choose our response to the rain.

Suppose that you were planning a romantic picnic and it started to rain.

What choices do you have?

Take the picnic inside in front of the fireplace and listen to the magical sounds of the rain on the roof.

One of the biggest steps towards personal empowerment is to see and acknowledge that we always have and make choices.

It is important to know that whenever we make a choice we are responsible for the choices that we make.

I'd like to take a moment to look at the word "responsibility".

A lot of people look at the word responsibility as meaning blame.

When we were growing up someone would ask who was responsible for a mess.

That meant the same as who was to blame for the mess.

We were never asked who was responsible for some good thing that was done.

Responsibility equaled blame.

Here is what responsibility means to me.

If I make a choice about something and it turns out good I get the credit for it.

If I make the choice about something and it doesn't turn out the way I want it to I get to clean up the mess and learn whatever I can from it so that I can make a better choice the next time.

Accepting responsibility for our choices is the start of having personal power.

We stop being victims.

We start thinking about the possible outcomes of the different choices we have.

There can be no personal empowerment without responsibility.

--WARNING--

This is the point where people start feeling bad and beating themselves up about choices and decisions they have made in the past.

Don't do it.

In the past you didn't have the knowledge that you have now. You made your choices with whatever information you had on hand at the time.

We all did.

You did the best you knew to do.

We all did.

The past cannot be changed.

We can celebrate the good things and grieve the bad things but we can't change the past at all.

Congratulate yourself for the good choices you've made and forgive yourself for the bad ones.

We can't change the past.

The best that we can do is learn from it and let go of it.

It has been said that this moment is the end of your past and the beginning of the rest of your life.

The most potent point of power each of us has is right now.

And each moment is a now.

In each moment we can and do make choices and decisions.

In each moment we decide about our future.

That is where our true personal empowerment lies.

Personal empowerment comes from saying "I choose!"

Personal empowerment comes from saying "I take responsibility for this choice!"

Now it's time to see why we have made the choices we have in the past.

The Mind

We are going to take a diversion here and talk about the mind.

You will need to know about this in order to understand the work that we will be doing latter.

The mind has two parts.

They are the conscious mind and the subconscious mind.

They have been called by many other names but for our purposes, that is what we will call them.

The conscious mind is the one we have access to on an aware basis.

It is the part of the mind that has memories we can access easily.

It is the part of the mind we think and plan with.

It is the part of the mind we reason with and make conscious choices with.

It is the surface mind.

The subconscious mind is the part of the mind that we don't have ready access to.

It is the storehouse of all the memories of everything we have ever experienced in any way.

It has memory of everything we were ever told, saw, heard, felt or experienced in any way.

All of our original beliefs are there.

Everything we have ever leaned in whatever way is there.

It deals with the autonomic nervous systems.

It also deals with our habits.

We don't have access to most of it on a conscious level, but it is there anyway.

It is the deeper mind.

In a sense, the mind has been compared to a computer. (Or maybe the computer has been compared to the mind.)

A computer has the programs that I can see and work with.

It also has the programs that I know nothing about working in the background that keep it running.

When we were born, we had a certain amount of "programs" which helped us to survive.

The programs for the autonomic nervous systems were already in

place.

They controlled our different bodily function such as breathing, heartbeat, excretion and other things.

Everything else is what we have been taught in one form or another throughout our lives.

Those new programs are the beliefs that we live our lives by.

And they all live in our subconscious mind.

The strongest base operating program we have is survival. That is the highest built in goal. Everything else comes after that. Without survival, there IS nothing else.

After survival, the next most important goals are to get pleasure and avoid pain.

If we can survive, get pleasure and avoid pain, we are happy campers.

If it's that simple, what's the problem?

The problem is that we end up with too many conflicting programs.

You know that when you get conflicting programs on your computer, it crashes. When you get too many conflicting programs your life crashes.

We have been taking on programs from the day we were born.

When we were born, we were helpless. We depended on other people to supply whatever we needed. Without them we would not survive. To us, they were powerful. To us, at that time, they might as well have been gods.

We learned at a very early age that if we did things they liked we would receive acceptance. When we were accepted, we received more pleasurable things.

When we did things they didn't like, we would get rejection. When we were rejected, we lost the pleasurable things and sometimes received pain in various forms.

We ended up with a strong program that said:

"Acceptance equals pleasure and enhances survival.
Rejection equals pain and threatens survival."

In most of us, that program is still running.

We will go deeper into the effects of acceptance/rejection later.

Since we didn't have the communication skills at that time to work out some sort of an agreement on how to act, we tried to come up with different ways to keep being accepted so we could keep getting the goodies.

The problem is that the rules seemed to change from day to day. One day we would get all kinds of praise (acceptance) for acting a certain way. The next day we would get yelled at (rejection) for doing exactly the same thing.

We know that those authority figures were all knowing and all powerful and that they couldn't be wrong.

Time for a new program:

If something is wrong, it must be me.

If we were raised under any sort of religion we were given another set of programs.

In school we were given another set.

The kids we hung out with gave us another set.

On and on it went.

We tried to follow different programs depending on who we were with at the time.

In the process we were given rules about what was right, wrong, good and bad. Unfortunately, that changed depending on who we were with at the time.

We also picked up habits, judgments, goals, and all the other things we are still guided by now.

We internalized all these programs and used them to structure and run our lives.

They became our beliefs and our truths.

At that time they served us well. They helped us survive.

We are no longer helpless babies!

We no longer need other people to supply all of the things we want or need in life.

We can go out and get all the different things we want or need ourselves.

We can do (or get done) all the different things that we depended on others for.

Yet all those programs still sit in the subconscious mind, working away just like they were meant to do when we got them. We don't even remember what most of them are.

But they are still there influencing all our choices and decisions.

They will continue to be there until we change them.

No wonder life crashes on us sometimes.

Let's see how those old programs or beliefs affect us now.

The Story of Your Past

This part is probably going to be the hardest part of this whole thing to accept.

But it is important to understand if you are going to make the changes that you want in your life.

A lot of your past is a story that you have been telling yourself.

The facts of what happened are probably true

The events that you remember probably really did happen.

All of the rest is just a story that you made up.

Let me explain that.

Any event that happens has two parts to it.

One is the actual event.
The facts of the event do not change.

The other part of the event is what it means to you.
You tell yourself a story about the meaning of the event.
And the story you tell yourself is the most important part of the event.

Let's say that you are 7 years old and at a store with your mother.
You see a toy that you really want but your mother says no.

What is the story that you tell yourself around that?
Your mother doesn't love you?
You are not good enough to have that toy?
You can't get what you want?
You don't deserve to get what you want?
There must be something wrong with you?
There is scarcity in the world?

The list goes on and on.

The fact is that she does not buy you that toy.
Everything else is just a story that you are telling yourself.

Why would we do something like that?

Any time an event happens we will make up a story around it so that we can try to understand how it relates to us or what it says about us.

We use whatever information that we have on hand to understand something.

And the information that we have on hand is all referenced to what we have learned in the past.

And a lot of what we learned in the past is just stories that we made up about events then the same way that we are doing now.

Remember what we said about the subconscious mind?

It remembers everything.

It remembers every event that has ever happened in your past.

Not only does it remember the events, it also remembers all of the stories that you have around the events and all of the emotions that you were feeling at the time.

And it uses those stories and emotions as reference points for whatever comes into your life now.

Let's look at an example.

You are 5 years old and walking down the street with your father.

As you walk by a yard a dog comes running up to the fence barking and snarling and really scares you.

The story that you tell yourself is that dogs are dangerous and scary.

Your subconscious mind now has a reference point that says dogs are dangerous and scary.

One of the jobs of the subconscious mind is to keep you safe.

From that point on, any time you see any dog the subconscious mind has a reference point of danger.

You will feel fear and avoid the dog.

You may not even remember the time that the original dog scared you.

The subconscious mind remembers and responds in a way to try and keep you safe.

Let's look at one more example.

You are 8 years old and visiting your grandmother.

She is baking chocolate chip cookies for you.

You know that she loves you and she bakes you chocolate chip cookies every time that you come over to visit.

The story that you tell yourself is that chocolate chip cookies represent feeling loved.

From that point on the subconscious mind has a reference point of love and caring around chocolate chip cookies.

Any time you smell chocolate chip cookies you feel good.

She is not there to cook them for you now but the feeling remains.

Look back at the story about the toy.

Let's say that when you were 6 years old you did something wrong and your mother withheld something from you and said that you couldn't have it because you had been bad.

The story you told yourself might be that you get denied things when you are bad. That can translate into if you get denied something it means you must have done something wrong.

When your mother didn't buy you the toy you felt like you were being denied something. If you were being denied some thing you must have done something wrong even if you didn't know what you had done. That is the story you are telling yourself based on the old story. And THAT story will become the reference point for future events.

We Live Our Beliefs

What are beliefs?

Beliefs are pieces of information, from whatever source, that we accept and act upon as truths.

Where do we get this information from?

From the time we are born, we start picking up pieces of information.

They came from everything we ever saw, heard or felt.

Whatever information we got, *from whatever source*, was accepted without question.

And that information formed our beliefs about the world.

At first we didn't have any reference points to work with.

So why would we question the information that came in?

Now that we gained some beliefs those beliefs became our reference points.

Any new information would be gauged against those reference points.

If they did not go against our reference points they could be accepted as new beliefs.

If they went against our reference points they would be rejected.

Remember all those programs we talked about earlier?

You know all the ones we have taken on since we were born.

They have all become beliefs stored in our subconscious minds.

Our beliefs affect our world and our lives.

Our beliefs have an effect on every area of our lives.

We shape our lives according to our beliefs.

Our beliefs are our truths.

We have a lot invested in our truths.

Our truths helped us to survive.

They have been very powerful.

They became the very foundation that we live our lives by.

So what is the problem?

A lot of our truths are not really true at all.

They don't really have any basis in reality.

Much of the information that we got as we were growing up was not based on facts.

It's not as if people were deliberately lying to us.

Their beliefs were just based on people's opinions and what worked for them.

They had their codes of conduct, beliefs and a lot of other things that were important to them.

And they passed them on to us.

It was the same way as it had been passed on to them.

And we took it all as truths that we had to live our lives by.

But a lot of it was not really truths at all.

They were just other people's thoughts and opinions.

Now let's look at the stories that we have told ourselves.

That's where a lot of our truths and beliefs came from.

Remember what I said before.

Any event has two parts.

One part is about the facts of the event.

The other part is the story you tell yourself about the event.

That is the part that gives the meaning of the event to you.

Let's say that you brought home your report card and you got a B in math.

You feel good about that because you had a C on your last report card.

When you show it to your father he says, "That's an improvement but I don't know why you can't get an A. After all, your brother always did."

What are the stories that you tell yourself around that?

I'm not good enough?

I need to be perfect to be accepted?

I always need to compete?

I can never be as good as my brother?

I need to be the best to get my fathers approval?
The list goes on.

And these become the beliefs that you live your life by.

You might not remember them consciously but they are there in your subconscious mind.

You see, part of the meaning that any event has is how you feel it connects to you.

How does it connect to you physically?
What was the physical impact that it had on you?

How does it connect with you mentally?
What stories do you tell yourself around it?
How does it connect with you emotionally?
What emotions do you feel around it?

How does it connect with your beliefs about yourself?

What beliefs do you form about the event?

Let's look at that report card event again.

You brought home your report card and you got a B in math. You feel good about that because you had a C on your last report card.

When you show it to your father he says, "That's an improvement but I don't know why you can't get an A. After all, your brother always did."

How does it connect to you physically?
What was the physical impact that it had on you?

What do you think would have happened to you physically?
Maybe you slumped over a little bit.
Maybe your head dropped a little bit.
Maybe you looked down to the floor.
Maybe your jaws clenched as you held back tears.
Maybe your stomach felt like someone had hit you there.
How much of that do you feel today if someone puts you down?

How does it connect with you mentally?
What stories do you tell yourself around it?

We already looked at some of the stories that we told ourselves

about ourselves.

What stories did you tell yourself about your father?

He didn't care about how hard you were trying.

He didn't support you.

You could never get his approval.

He was mean.

He liked your brother more than he liked you.

You father brought you brother into it and so now you get to make up stories about him.

He is smarter than you are.

He is a show off.

You can never compete with him so why even try.

How does it connect with you emotionally?

What emotions do you feel around it?

More than likely you would have felt a lot of different emotions around that event.

You might have felt anger, shame, sorrow, frustration, and resignation just to name a few.

You might have felt anger, jealousy, and resentment towards your brother because (according to your story) your father liked him better than you.

What emotions do you feel today when someone puts down something that you do?

If someone compares you to someone else how do you feel about the person that they compared you to?

All of this comes from the beliefs that you formed from past events.

And most of those beliefs came from stories that you made up about the events.

And these are the beliefs that you live your life by today.

Here You Are Now

You are where you are in your life right now.

All of the things in your past contributed to where you are now.

And if you don't make any changes you will keep going exactly the same way for the rest of your life.

Right now you get to decide about the rest of your life.

Do you want it to keep going the same way it has been or do you want it to be different?

If you are ok with your life going the way it has always gone just keep on doing what you have always done.

If you want your life to be different then you had better start making some changes.

And you can start making those changes right here and now.

What changes can you make now?

If you want to change your future you will need to change your past.

Remember what I said before.

We have each had years of different types of experiences that have formed the person each of us are now.

They formed our wants, needs, attitudes, goals, outlook on life, values, hopes, beliefs and everything else.

They also formed how we feel about ourselves and about life.

They formed our self-love or lack thereof.

They formed our self-respect or lack thereof.

They formed our self-esteem or lack thereof.

They formed everything about how we see ourselves.

All of those were formed by everything that has ever happened in our past.

And we cannot change any event that happened in the past.

They are done and cannot be changed.

What we CAN do is change our response to the event.
We can change the story that we tell ourselves about the event.

Remember the story about not getting the toy?
"Let's say that you are 7 years old and at a store with your mother.
You see a toy that you really want but your mother say's no."

That is just an event that happened.

What was the story that you told yourself?
"Your mother doesn't love you?
You are not good enough to have that toy?
You can't get what you want?
You don't deserve to get what you want?
There must be something wrong with you?
There is scarcity in the world?
The list goes on and on."

You carried that story for years and it has had a negative influence on your life.
And yet you just made it up.

What would happen if you made up a different story about it?

"Let's say that you are 7 years old and at a store with your mother.
You see a toy that you really want but your mother say's no."

You know that your mother loves you and that she would like to buy you that toy.
She didn't bring enough money with her to be able to get you that toy right now.
You are still a wonderful kid.

It's the same event but you are just telling yourself a different story.
This story feels better than the other story.
And who is to say that one story is truer than the other?
Is there any proof either way?
Both of them are just made up stories.

We have made up stories about most every event in our past.
And most of the stories are not based on fact.
They are just stories that are based on other stories that we had told ourselves before that event.

If you want to change who you are now change the stories that you have told yourself about the past.
You cannot change the events but you CAN change the stories.
And changing the stories will change your life.

Give it a try.

Look back at any event in your past.
It can be recent or long ago when you were young.

Tell yourself the actual facts around the event and then see what stories you have been telling yourself about the event.

Let me give you another example.

You are 5 years old and your mother just gave birth to a baby boy.
What are the stories you tell yourself around that?

If I was good enough they wouldn't have had to have another baby.
I'm not good enough.
I'm not getting much attention because they are giving him all of the attention.
I need to compete.
They love him more than me.
I'm not loveable.

Well, that IS one possible story.
Here is another possible story.
They brought home a new baby so that I will have a playmate.
I know that he needs more attention right now because he is so helpless.
They still find time to give me attention and love.
They love me just as much as they do him.
I am good enough and loveable.

Both of them are possible true.
Which one makes you feel better?
Why not believe that one.
You DO have the choice.

Do you feel a little weird about making up stories about your past?

You have been doing it all of your life.

The only difference is that now you are choosing the story instead of just taking whatever comes up for you. Now you get to pick a story that feels better for you.

You get to change your past. And that makes a difference in the person you are now and how you feel about yourself now.

So You Made a Mistake

One of the times that we tell ourselves a lot of stories about ourselves is when we make a mistake.

We really get to beat ourselves up when that happens.

Look at some of the stories we get to tell ourselves about that.

I'm a failure.

I'll never get it right.

I'm stupid.

What's wrong with me?

Why even bother trying?

I'm such a klutz.

Other people are going to judge me.

I might as well quit.

I'm just a loser anyway.

Those stories don't make you feel great do they?

Why would we tell ourselves stories like that?

We do it because those were the stories that we were told.

Look at the times in your past when you made any kind of mistakes.

What was the reaction of other people when you made a mistake?

Were you put down?

Were you punished?

Were you told how dumb you were?

Were you called all kinds of different names?

Were you told how incapable you were?

A lot of that happened when you were young and you believed what other people told you.

What they said had to be the truth didn't it?

They taught you that those are the things that are done if someone makes a mistake.

That story became a belief for you.

Now, if you make a mistake and no one is there to do those things to you, get to do it to yourself.

And you wonder why you are afraid of making any mistakes.

Are we stuck with all of this for the rest of our lives?

What can we do about it?

You need to remember something here.

It is just a story that you have been telling yourself.

You have been telling yourself that if someone makes a mistake they need to be put down and punished.

And if no one else is there to do it to them they need to do it to themselves.

Now that you know what the story is you get to change the story.

What would happen if you saw it from a different perspective?

What sort of a new story could you tell yourself?

What would happen if you could see mistakes as just a learning tool and not as a failure?

How could we do that?

Consider this.

Whenever anyone tries to learn something new they make a lot of mistakes before they get it right.

Look at a baby learning how to walk.

How many times do they fall down?

You could look at each time that they fell down as mistakes or failures.

You could say, "Bad baby!"

But you don't.

You encourage them to get up and try it again.

And each time that they fall down they learn something about walking.

They learn a lot of things that don't work and they don't have to do those same things over again.

They also learn a lot of things that DO work and they keep using those things.

Eventually, after they have "failed" enough times and made enough "mistakes", they learn to walk.

It is the same way with anything that we do.

There are times when we WILL fall down.
We will make mistakes.
We will fail at things.
That is inevitable.

The question is what do we do when that happens?

We can beat ourselves up and call ourselves names and quit.

Or we could look at them as things that we can learn from.
We can look at each one and find out why it didn't work.
And then we can try it again with new information to work with.

We can do it again and again until we succeed.
And we WILL succeed.
We never really fail unless we quit.

There is something to understand here.

You are responsible for everything that you do.
That means that you get the credit if it turns out well.
If it does not turn out well you get to learn whatever you get
from it and you also get to clean up the mess.

You are responsible for everything that you do.
It doesn't matter if you are drunk or on drugs.
It doesn't matter what emotions you are feeling at the time.
It doesn't matter what mood you are in at the time.
You are still responsible for everything that you do.

If there is another person involved in a mistake that you make
you are responsible to the other person.
If any damage is done, physical, mental or emotional, you get to
pay restitution or find a way to resolve it.

Now it is time to look back at different mistakes that you have
made in the past from a new perspective.

When you see a mistake that you have made, start to see it as
just an experience that you can really learn something positive
from.

Ask yourself a few questions around it.
What was it about what you tried that didn't work?
What could you have done that might have worked better?

What positive things have you learned from it?
Know that you have learned and grown and that now you know how to do it differently.
Give yourself credit for what you have learned.

Look at the old story that you told yourself around the mistake.
See what you are saying about yourself or whatever negative things other people are saying about you.

Now look at it from your new perspective.
See the whole thing as a positive learning experience for you.
Give yourself credit for trying to do whatever it was.
Tell yourself a new story around the event.
See how that event has actually helped you learn and grow.

Notice how your feelings about the event change as you do this.

The event itself does not change as you change your story.
Your perception of the event DOES change.
Your feelings around the event DO change.
How you feel about yourself also changes.