

Edit Your Story to Build Influence, Episode 168, TRANSCRIPT

Hey friend, welcome!

This week, I wanted to reflect with you on something I've been thinking a lot about: story. We've heard from some amazing storytellers on this podcast, and have talked about the impact understanding and mastering the power of story can have as we think about building and sustaining influence.

But, another element also strikes me as critical — it's not just the story...it's the edits we make to our story as we evolve. Which parts do you keep and which ones do you let go?

Ever have an idea capture your attention and then pop up over and over again in interesting ways? I find this happens when I learn something new that really sticks with me.... and then I feel like the universe keeps serving it up again and again in new ways. Ever have that happen? It happened to me recently.

Our stories — especially the ones we tell ourselves — are such a critical part of how we view ourselves...and how we believe we fit into the world around us. These stories matter. In fact, we may be our own most important and influential audience. That little voice inside your head can be a harsh critic, but she's also an active audience member.

This was a topic in my conversation with author and professional storyteller Kindra Hall in Episode 166-- and it's actually the subject of her soon to be released new book, which I'm excited about. It's called "Choose your story, change your life."

This idea of the stories we tell ourselves is also a direct tie into the concept of mindset. How we think about the experiences we're having and have had, and how we frame them... how we reflect on them and remember them and use them going forward.

When we tell ourselves we are not capable... when we tell ourselves it's never been done before, so why try.... When we tell ourselves we are not good enough. What's the impact of all those negative thoughts? V. what happens when we tell ourselves it's never been done before so WHY NOT TRY? Or when we think "why do this because I'm destined to fail." v. I'm going to try because what I will learn will help me improve the process going forward....

Then in my conversation last week, with Dr. Samantha Boardman in episode 167, she talked about this idea of being willing to be the un you. Meaning to reframe the way you are thinking about an experience in order to aspire to become the person you hope to be. To be clear, she isn't saying -- nor am I -- to fundamentally change who you are, but instead, be willing to aspire to something different in the interest of personal growth, and getting you out of your comfort zone. And, if you listened to our conversation you'll recall that she used this technique to deal with self doubt she was having around public speaking. She would channel her inner Barbara Walters and think to herself "what would Barbara do in this circumstance?" She would even

write BW on every page of her script to remind her of what she was aspiring to. She wasn't dilusional, and didn't think she was trying to be Barbara Walters, but instead to channel those traits that would help her build strength and confidence in the moment.

Samantha also shared a story about being a young medical student, and being asked by her professor "what is the purpose of therapy?" She answered "to change our present?" "Wrong," the professor answered. "To change our future?" Samantha asked. "Wrong," he answered again. "The answer," the professor told her "is to change your past." To rewrite the story you've told yourself, especially when it's not serving you well.

Samantha talks about this concept in her book as well. But it really got my attention and I started digging a bit more deeply into this idea of the stories we tell ourselves.

It's not just about telling our stories, but it's also about editing and deciding which parts to keep and which ones to edit. It's also about reframing — changing the way we think about what happened. Was I a victim or was the experience something that is setting me up for something bigger? Preparing me for something I hadn't expected. Bottom line: We can choose the story.

Then last week, I moderated a panel as part of an amazing organization that I'm privileged to be part of called The Policy Circle. It's a collaborative women's personal and professional development group that is focused on empowering women to build their confidence by learning about civic engagement and digging into issues that impact our communities. I've included a link link in the show notes if you'd like to learn more.

The group held its annual summit, and I was delighted to host a conversation about the power of our stories.

I started thinking about my own story and evolution and how in some ways a career evolution like mine is like writing a new script for yourself. You can take the pieces that make sense, and from which you've learned and utilize them very differently than you might originally have imagined.

In thinking about my own story The idea of influence which I focus on in this podcast ... has always intrigued me. What makes someone influential.... What are the building blocks.... thinking about this and learning it has been a big part of my life for three decades -- really my entire career. Way back when I was working in my first big job after college as a press secretary on capitol hill.... When I was shaping how policy stories and stories about senators I worked for would be written ... later becoming a corporate lobbyist and representing the interests of a global accounting firm ... Understanding influence, seeing it done well -- and not so well -- thinking about the times when I've really mastered it and times when I could have done better All of those experiences Have culminated to this point where I can share a thoughtful perspective and USE THAT KNOWLEDGE TO HELP OTHERS. I'M HOPING THAT AS YOU LISTEN TO THIS PODCAST THIS PERSPECTIVE IS HELPFUL AS YOU THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN JOURNEY AND INFLUENCE.

I was thinking about all of this as I prepared for my panel at the Policy Circle and was struck by yet another interesting element... an element that not only reinforces the power of story, but also of connection ... and how connection and mentorship can impact the trajectory of our stories. Not just the trajectory of our stories, but also how we and the way we edit them, even the way we might envision our life going forward.

I was joined on stage by two amazing women -- Jenna Lee who is the founder of SmartHER News -- who will join me on she said/she said podcast soon, and The Policy Circle founder Sylvie Legere. Sylvie actually joined me on my very first episode of she said/she said podcast . She also happens to be the person who encouraged me to start a podcast in the first place. She knew I was looking for an outlet to have a different kind of conversation, she knew that I wanted to create a collaborative, engaged community, and she knew I wanted to add value to others and hopefully leave them uplifted and inspired. She encouraged me to embrace podcasting -- A medium that I honestly knew next to nothing about. That matters because Sylvie saw aspects of my story that I could use to revise my narrative. She saw, and helped me see, how a podcast could enable me to use my existing knowledge, experience and my story and to share those things in ways that might help me reach a broader audience.... To collaborate with others and to really challenge myself in a new way.

Fast forward almost 4 years to the day from when she called me and said you need to start a podcast Today, I have a successful podcast which is growing into a larger media platform. Sylvie's nudge and mentorship helped me revise my story.... and see it differently. Essentially redeploying those things I knew in a new and different way.

Since that time my friend Sylvie has herself embraced the power of story in a new way to tell her own story and share her journey of starting The Policy Circle. She talks about how the act of writing her story pushed her to embrace her vulnerability as a new author-- something she had to do in order to fully share what she's learned in an effort to help and inspire others. Her new book is called "Trust Your Voice: A roadmap to focus on influence."

As I thought about all of this last week, it struck me that when we're learning and growing we're editing and revising our stories . We're picking the details that are most important and that help us lay the groundwork for our next big adventure. We're pulling those threads that make us who we are and help us become the best versions of ourselves even and especially when those threads include the mistakes we've madeour failures ... those times when we let ourselves and others down. When we frame and edit those experiences in ways that are positive, we can absolutely deploy them as strengths....even and maybe especially when they are painful in the moment.

What isn't particularly useful is when we let those setbacks define us IN A NEGATIVE WAY, or when we let the NEGATIVE stories we tell ourselves become self-fulfilling. Said another way, Beliefs become actions, and actions can determine our destiny.

The trick is to become more self aware about the stories that live in your head including the ones that you may not be as consciously aware of. You can increase your self awareness by journaling, and by working to become more aware of those moments when you feel at your best and at your worst. Those feelings that impact how you approach a new challenge, and how you think about yourself as a result ...BUT, IT'S REALLY IMPORTANT TO LEARN TO EDIT THOSE THINGS ABOUT YOUR STORY THAT ARE NOT SERVING YOU WELL.

When I bought my first podcast microphone and sat down to record for the very first time, I thought what in the heck am I doing? What do I know about podcasting? Practically nothing was the answer....and those first few episodes are evidence enough of that fact, but what became clear to me very quickly was that while many of the technical aspects of podcasting were new to me, there were many other aspects of this work where I saw how I could use what I knew and what I was good out to create content that could be useful to YOU.

I saw how I was able to draw from experience and knowledge gained over a long career and use it differently. I saw how I could take my ability to put others at ease and build a rapport and use that in these conversations. I saw how what I had learned about building influence, could be shared to help others.

That last point is perhaps the most important. Rewriting my story enabled me to evolve to create a new passion, and that passion motivates me to share what I've learned, but also to challenge myself — and maybe you too!

Those are the things that still keep me coming back to the mic even when I feel unsure or when self doubt bubbles up, I'm reminded of all the incredible advice from this very podcast about how to tackle that doubt and lean into it and why I'm always better on the other side when I do.

But I had to redefine OR EDIT another aspect of my story.... I had to rethink how I defined success for myself. It required a different measurement than I had been using.

Because I want to share something that's actionable with you as part of this conversation, here's a great exercise to help you focus in on the stories that may not be serving you so well, and to understand what they are.

This is especially helpful for those contemplating a career pivot.

Think about a time when you were at your best. Those times when the work you were doing, or the project you were tackling, was leaving you challenged and fulfilled AND ABLE TO TAP INTO YOUR GIFTS AND STRENGTHS. MAYBE EVEN A time when even if you were exhausted you felt more filled than depleted. Then think about those times when that wasn't the case.

Also, think about those topics that have always inspired you. Maybe it was in your way way back. Something you might not have thought about for a while.

You might even ask friends and family and mentors for their input as well. What do they remember really resonating with you as a kid?

Next, look at your journey thus farthink about how you define yourself and your work today.....and how are those stories -- the ones you have written and tell yourself helping you create more influence? How are they helping you tackle goals, boost your confidence, or help you climb back on when you fall off?

How do your stories impact or inform your emotional responses? How do they impact your ability to manage yourself? They are often the reason why we react the way that we do. They inform and give context to our emotions.

Self awareness is the first major lever of influence. And story, and how we think about our stories falls squarely into this bucket.

Breaking free of a negative narrative by finding a way to shift and reframe YOUR story can be incredibly liberating, and critical to your future success and happiness.

I'm curious how you think about your own story....are their stories you tell yourself that are worthy of some edits? I'd love to hear And I'd love to hear what's resonating with you as we continue to dig into influence.

Next week, I'll be welcoming Wharton Professor Katy Milkman, author of "How to Change" to the podcast.

In the meantime, have a great start to your week!

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