



## Write a new story for your life

1 December 2020

Well here we are, starting the last month of what has been a truly bizarre year. A lot of people will be giving a huge sigh of relief, and probably even more will be hoping that 2021 will be a lot more predictable and easier than 2020.

We have been through such a lot of turmoil this year, and this sort of an experience can play havoc with our brains and our mindset. We all tell ourselves stories about what is happening around us. We do this even if we are not aware of these stories. We do this because we interpret what is happening around us and to us. We don't just absorb sensory information, such as what something looks like, tastes like, sounds like, smells like, or feels like. We absorb the sensory information, and together with information that is stored in our memories, we interpret what is happening. We tell ourselves stories. These stories are sometimes called narratives. We have narratives constantly running through our minds.

*....the stories we tell ourselves*

It becomes very easy, when things are so “out of the ordinary”, to tend towards the negative (which unfortunately our brains tend to do). We may be saying to ourselves, “I will never get out of this crisis”. Or we could be replaying over and over again the thought, “I have lost my business and can't find a job. I am financially ruined. This is the end of everything.” We could be thinking, “This is so hopeless I can never come back from so great a setback.” You may have a very pessimistic narrative about your current situation. You may have several negative narratives going on at any moment. Take some time to think about the stories going on in your mind; the stories you are telling yourself about this year.

Now a story may be based on certain facts, but we usually always embellish it with historical information stored in our memory as well as what we hear from others around us. If you have gone into serious debt this year, one narrative you may have is that you've blown it and now your life is ruined. Another story may be that it will be a tough few years ahead, but you can come out of debt and make a start at a great new life. Both stories rely on the same set of facts – you had to borrow a lot of money this year or in the past years too. But they have completely different interpretations and, depending on which story you tell yourself, you will feel differently and take different actions going forward.

Now you don't want to deny reality. Never do that. All that does is keep you in a mess. If you have debt you have debt, so don't pretend otherwise. However, you can take the reality of a situation and write a story in a positive and constructive way, that helps you move forward into a better life situation. A story that helps you feel better and stronger, and able to move forward with hope and optimism.

*.....change your story*

Change your narratives. Take control of the stories you tell yourself. Some thoughts you could include in your new narrative are: I can reset and reboot my life. There are new opportunities out there. This crisis has made me a better person because I am stronger, more resilient, and innovative. I have learned and grown throughout this year. I have the opportunity to rethink my life and realign it with the way I truly want it to be. I will bounce back.

*.....entrench a new story.....*

Then to entrench your narrative so that it becomes your predominant way of thinking you want to repeat your narrative to yourself every day, first thing in the morning and last thing at night. These are the times when you are usually most in a trance-like state and what you tell yourself is more readily absorbed into the subconscious mind. It is not that difficult to change your narrative. You think what you do, because you have repeated those thoughts over and over again. If you change what you tell yourself, and tell yourself the new story over and over again, through repetition that will become the new way in which you think.

It doesn't even have to be this year that is a negative narrative you tell yourself. It could be something that happened to you in the past. Our mindset influences how we feel and how we act. If you think your life is ruined, then you will feel sad and miserable, and you will tend to be passive and not take steps to create and enjoy a successful and happy life. If the story

you tell yourself is that you are getting stronger and more resilient, you are learning more about life and how life works, and you have the capability to take advantage of new opportunities that open up with the change brought about by the pandemic, you will feel optimistic and hopeful, and you will take actions to help those positive stories you tell yourself materialise.

So, think about what you tell yourself. What narratives go through your head over and over again? Then if they are stories that pull you down, change them. Make them stories about hope, about new opportunities, about growth, about getting better and better, and about creating a future you can enjoy.