

Telling inspiring stories

by Dr. Bernd Schmid

Name of Coaching Tool:

Telling inspiring stories

Short description:

This tool gives coach and coachee the opportunity to deal playfully with problem descriptions and approaches to solutions and thereby use their intuitive competence. It opens up a parallel process on a metaphorical level, which enables those concerned to free themselves of inflexible views and approaches and to rediscover themselves in mutual creativity based on trust and cooperation.

Areas of application:

This method can best be used during the coaching process when a playful stimulation of coaching would be helpful, when intuitive search processes are necessary to broaden the horizon. This is particularly advisable when the trainee is too entangled in looking at certain stages and occurrences and is only looking for solutions on this level. It is always appropriate when problem analysis and options for solution threaten to become too superficially analytical. A change to the metaphorical level counteracts limitations and opens up interaction between conscious methodical and unconscious intuitive approaches both within the persons concerned and in the coaching relationship.

Aims/Effects:

Over and above the solution of a current single problem (horizontal view), it should trigger inspiring and multi-level learning processes that have an effect on many different stages (vertical view) and are important for many other problems (qualitative transfer). The spectrum of one's own description of reality is opened up and creative

approaches to solutions are stimulated. The door is opened to unconscious recognition of control patterns in the background of current behaviour, or rather their creative development, and they become a part of communication. The tolerance towards uncertainty required for complex questions and processes and openness for playful creative impulses can be regained.

Changing to this method of working can also liberate the relationship definition between the coachee and the coach from a hierarchic, rational analysis module and change it to a more playful kind of experimenting between partners.

Detailed description:

In complex situations the formation of relationships and coordination occurs on so many levels that they elude exclusively conscious control anyway. Working with metaphors disturbs the magic of inflexible perceptions of reality and approaches. A change of perspective, multi-layered access to reality and intuitive search processes are stimulated.

This connection can be illustrated, if needed, with the dialogue model of communication (see Schmid 2006). In addition, working with inner images may be helpful.

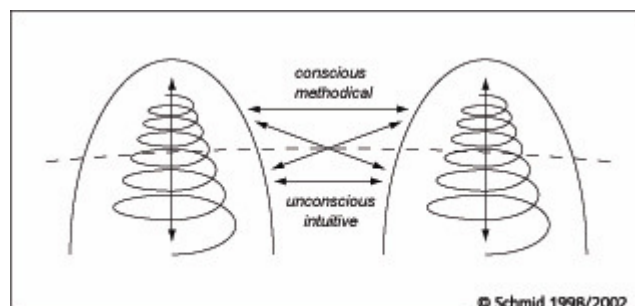


Fig. 5 The dialogue model of communication

Telling inspiring stories as an exercise for pairs

The method of *telling inspiring stories* can either be used in private conversation or as an exercise for pairs when working with a group. In this case, apart from the gain in content it offers a contribution to communication culture and, as experience has shown, stimulates relationships.

The method is described below as an exercise for pairs. It takes about 60 minutes. Analogous to this description, however, it can also be used in coaching conversations in private or in other settings. In this case the coach is B and repetition of the exercise with a change of roles is not applicable.

A + B form a pair

1. 5 minutes: A tells of a scene he/she finds restrictive or problematic and for which he/she is looking for a different end, new scope or solutions. B listens with unfocussed attention and registers his/her own reactions and ideas.
2. 10 minutes: B answers the following questions aloud to him/herself (put the loudspeaker on!) so A can listen in
 1. What are the most important figures, elements, occurrences, experiences in the scene?
 2. Matching metaphor: How can I depict the story in parallel with another story (situations, figures, sequence of events, experiences)?
 3. Leading metaphor: What might be a different, more open variation, a further supplement, a liberating continuation for the scene told in this way?

B thus outlines elements of a script for an alternative orchestration. It is less important that this results in a successful story than that A experiences how B openly thinks about the construction of reality, the elements of known orchestrations and options for new orchestrations.

- 5 minutes: B gets into story-telling mode and tells A the story. Depending on the situation, A can be invited to adopt a receptive attitude in advance by a short relaxation exercise or trance induction. However, this is not absolutely necessary. It might be helpful for B to try and get close to sounding like a story teller, e.g. by remembering childhood story-telling situations or guided fantasies.
A short break for relaxation opens the situation up to new dynamics
- 20 minutes: Now repeat 1 – 3 with exchanged roles.
- 10 minutes: A + B exchange their experiences and observations in both roles: How did I experience the situation of constructing and story-telling as listener / as story-teller? No hit rates or style grades, just experience!

Explanations:

This exercise may be new for both A and B. If so, it is helpful for both to understand the exercise as a mutual loosening-up experiment. Announcing that hesitation is quite normal to start with and that some people are more likely to get ideas in the construction part of the story and others in the story-telling part also helps. Quite often the story told frees itself completely from the constructed copy. The construction part reveals something of the desired development program or of its components. In the story-telling part, multi-layered meanings and a poetic component might be added in which the intuitive, creative powers of the participants meet. Story-telling itself is important and should not be skipped because the story-telling situation itself awakens creative powers.

Example of a presented occurrence and a collecting and a supplementary story:

Occurrence: A coachee reports that she does not dare claim her competence to others unless she is absolutely sure that it will go down well. For this reason, she only reveals what she is absolutely sure about and cuts herself off from more openness.

Matching metaphor: A dwarf lived in a forest in the neighbourhood of other dwarves. He seldom invited them into his cave and ensured that they only got to see the part nearest the opening, which he had fitted out with all sorts of showpieces. But he never got rid of the feeling that they were all somehow bored.

Leading metaphor: One day he had forgotten that he had invited the other dwarves. They came to his cave while he was absent and found it open. Looking for him, they hunted through all the rooms and finally helped themselves to food and drink. When the dwarf returned from the forest, he heard sounds of joyful revelling coming from his cave. He was startled and prepared himself for the humiliation he had always feared. The opposite occurred: his friends were delighted with the interesting things they had found at the back of the cave. Indeed, they were almost a bit reproachful because he had kept them from the most interesting part of his house for so long. Now they were inspired and were looking forward to coming back again soon.

Prerequisites/Knowledge:

Enrichment through story-telling, consolidation through metaphors are elements of all meaning-oriented cultures. Many people have undiscovered talents in this, or do not integrate them in their professional work.

This exercise specifically dates back to the hypno-therapist Milton Erickson's story-telling. Utilizing ways of understanding figures from NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) played an important part in processing it into a transferable method.

If you have previous knowledge in these areas, particularly in working with guided fantasies, trance or creative dialogue with the help of dreams (Schmid 2007), you can integrate this exercise in your own approaches.

However, it is possible to try out this kind of story-telling without any previous experience. It is possible that the participants put themselves under creative pressure, which blocks ideas, of course. An atmosphere of encouragement, curiosity and friendly and respectful contact with one another is important. If it becomes apparent that participants are unsure whether they can fulfil what they think is expected of them, it can also help to point out that people react very differently to this exercise, and that is quite OK. The differences in personal style are indeed one of the more helpful pieces of information that can be gained for mutual understanding. For example, some people have few inner images or ideas during the construction work, then get into the story-telling part and are often surprised at the wealth and unexpected relevance of the images.

Schmid, B. (2006) Tuning into background levels of communication – Communication models at ISB

Paper referring to the contribution of Bernd Schmid at the 13th annual European Mentoring and Coaching Conference; 01.-03.11.2006, Cologne

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Schmid, B. (2007) Dreams in organizational Coaching

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