



Oh, the Tales We Tell:
**Getting Beyond Our
Stories at Work**

Every day, Jerome begins his work by telling himself his favorite story: *I'm not valued around here. They're heaping on the work just to see when I'll break, so that I'll quit. I'm sure to be passed over for promotion.* You can just see his shoulders sag when he walks into the office.

His co-worker has her own favorite story: *This company's president is a critical and demanding control freak, who shuts me out of every decision but expects me to know everything.*

Every day, we tell ourselves enough of these kinds of stories to fill a library: Why my supervisor closed her door today. Why the client rejected my proposal. What my co-worker meant when he laughed at my question. Why my subordinates are being so difficult. How I'm such a failure.

And on, and on, and on. And that's just at work. What about the stories we tell ourselves at home?

We live our lives as if the stories are true. We act and react, often in pain, from our often mistaken understanding of another's words or actions, our assumptions about why they are saying or doing what they are, and our thoughts about how those people—and we, ourselves—*should be* different.

Stories Damage Relationships—at Work and at Home

Yet, it is these stories, and the emotions that come from the stories, that are usually the source of the pain and/or discomfort we feel in our relationships, whether at work or at home. We want to blame another, but in reality, it's usually our thinking that is causing the discomfort, says Byron Katie, author of the best-selling book *Loving What Is*.

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For example, Katie says, when you think the thought, “My father shouldn’t be so judgmental,” you might get angry, resent his advice, his belief that he knows best. You might avoid him or not listen to what he has to say about anything. You might be silent or rude when you’re with him.

But while you believe your father to be judgmental, another might hear his judgments as good advice, or as one man’s opinion, while someone else might find his words amusing. Your belief that your father shouldn’t act the way he does or say the words he says are what cause you the anger, resentment and possibly even separation.

Getting Beyond Our Stories

What we need to do to ease the pain and experience more freedom in our lives is learn to get beyond our stories, to get under our beliefs to what’s really living there.

“The result of investigation is often a deeper appreciation of the people in our lives, and a realization that it was not their words or actions that really harmed us, but our uninvestigated thoughts about their words or actions,” Katie says.

In her book, Katie outlines a simple path of inquiry into these horror stories we tell ourselves that revolves around four questions:

- 1. Is it true?**
- 2. Can you absolutely know that it’s true?**
- 3. How do you react when you think that thought?**
- 4. Who would you be without the thought?**

Doing the Investigative Work

First, state your belief about someone and ask yourself if it is true and whether you can know absolutely, without a doubt, that it is true. For example, let’s take the belief that your boss is a critical and demanding control freak, who shuts you out of every decision but expects you to know everything.

Is it true your boss is critical? Demanding? Do others in the office hear constructive, well-intentioned suggestions where you hear

criticism? Have you never had the freedom to implement work as you see fit? Do you know without a shadow of doubt that your boss’s actions are about wanting to control your every sorry action?

The next question to ask yourself is: How do you act and react when you think these thoughts? Do you find yourself angry and resentful? Do you go out of your way to avoid encounters with your boss? Do you respond defensively to any sort of comment? Does your work suffer? Does your body tense up or your stomach ache when you interact with your boss? Do you enjoy any of your time at work?

Talk about lack of peace and harmony!

Now, imagine that you don’t have this story any more. Who would you be?

Perhaps you would be more content at work and enthusiastic about the new learning you’re receiving. Perhaps you would be less concerned about what others thought of you and more intent on contributing in unique ways to the work at hand. Perhaps you would be next in line for a promotion. Or perhaps you’ll be working for another company. You may be calmer and more peaceful.

The Turnaround

The final step in this investigation is to turn around the statements you’ve been making. Try them on. See if they fit. Do you express criticism in other areas of your life in ways that are harsh and hard to hear? Do you try to control your spouse, your children, your co-workers? Are you critical and demanding to yourself? Our “stories” often point to traits that we have but that we project onto others so as not to acknowledge them as our own.

With inquiries like this, there is no right answer. The goal is not perfection, but truth.

“Who would you be without your story?” Katie says. “You never know until you inquire. There is no story that is you or that leads to you. Every story leads away from you.”