

# Coaching Tools: Story Circles

## Transcript

## Appearing

In order of appearance:

1. MAJ David Stephens
2. MAJ Ali Coulton nee Heenan

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## Transcript details

**MAJ David Stephens** As we think about coaching and leadership coaching, there's a number of specific tools that we can use in order to be able to encourage those conversations with some of our counterparts. One of those tools, is story circles. And so, we're going to talk to Ali. Ali, tell us, what are story circles and how, as a coach, can we use these?

**MAJ Ali Coulton nee Heenan** So, I found that this tool is very applicable. Everyone can relate to it. It's very easy to use to help bring perspective to any situation. So, the tool itself - and you can do this either getting the counterpart to imagine two circles or you can physically draw two circles - and the idea is that you've got two circles when you are looking at something that has happened. In one circle, you're looking at what happened, and the second circle is what is the story you're telling yourself about what happened.

So, as human beings, we are natural meaning making machines, we like to come up with meaning and tell us our stories about everything that happens. So, it's a really good way to help separate the two. Because what happened is very factual, and then the story we tell ourselves will be unique to us as an individual based on our past experiences, in life, in similar situations. An example that is very easy for many people these days to grasp is using, text messages or any sort of messaging service and the typing dots that appear when the person at the other end is typing something that hasn't sent the message. So, it's something that everyone, especially the TOs, can relate to.

So, I like to explain it by think of a time where you have sent a text message to someone else, where you've perhaps been a little bit vulnerable. You might have asked them out on a date, or asked for some help, or something where it's been uncomfortable for you to put yourself out there and you see the typing dots. So, you're sitting there waiting for someone to respond, and you know that they're typing, and then the dots disappear, and no message comes back.



And it is a really good example where people can think of what actually happened is you sent a message, you saw the dots implying that someone was typing your response, and no message came through. That's what happened. And then you can explore all the meaning; the story that we make up about what happened: their phone died; they are too busy sharing my message with their friends; they're laughing at me. All different things. So, it's quite a simple example you can use to introduce the concept, where this tool can then be useful or in two different ways.

So, if your counterpart might come to you with a situation that happened in their in their life and was challenging for them, you can use this to look at what happened and then what's the story that they're telling themselves about what happened. So, they can identify all their own assumptions, some of which they might want to go and confirm, or whether they are spinning this story and it's getting really out of control, when the reality is very different. So, that's one way where it can just be used to expand someone's perspective on a situation. It can then also be used as a way to handle difficult conversations.

So, if someone has looked at a situation where they might have felt hurt, or attacked in some way, say with a peer, they felt like they were being made fun of. They can sit there and if they're going to have that conversation, they can come at it in a very open way of: The story I'm telling myself is you are making fun of me, or the story I'm telling myself is that I am not valued in my opinion, isn't valued, and it's a way of removing defensiveness and attack and having difficult conversations. That's something that's quite easy to play around with.

MAJ David  
Stephens

Thanks, Ali. And do people engage with this? You know, how is it worked practically for you? Is it easy when it rises in a conversation with someone? Do they sort of jump up? How does that work, practically?

MAJ Ali Coulton  
nee Heenan

I find that, for me, using that example of the typing dots is a fairly sort of light-hearted, very relatable situation that introduces the concept. And I found that people can sort of find some humour in that and then explore, with a sense of humour, sort of the extremes that we can go to in creating these stories. And I find introducing it in a light-hearted way and not necessarily applying it to something really, really challenging upfront and immediately it then just offers a tool that they can come and revisit. And then they're far more receptive to using it when it might be a bit more of a challenging topic.

MAJ David  
Stephens

Thanks, Ali

