DAVID BAYER'S

Mindset

MONTH

THE STORY VS. WHAT HAPPENED

Learn to Separate the Facts From the Meaning You Give Them

UNDERSTANDING THE STORY YOU'RE TELLING YOURSELF

Think about the last time something happened that upset you.

Maybe someone said something that hurt your feelings. Maybe you didn't get the response you were hoping for. Or maybe something didn't go the way you expected.

In moments like these, your mind immediately begins trying to make sense of what happened.

And before you know it, you've created a story about what the experience means.

Here's a simple example.

Imagine you send someone a message and they don't respond.

WHAT HAPPENED	THE STORY
You sent a message. You haven't received a response.	*They're ignoring me. I must have done something wrong. They don't respect me.*

Notice the difference?

The fact that someone hasn't responded is real. But everything you've decided it means is an interpretation.

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And depending on the story you're telling yourself, you might begin feeling anxious, rejected, frustrated, or angry.

You might send another message. Withdraw from the relationship. Or spend the next several hours thinking about something that may not even be true.

You're no longer responding to what happened. You're responding to the meaning you've given it.

And here's what's interesting.

Two people can experience the exact same situation and have completely different emotional reactions because they're telling themselves different stories about what happened.

This is why becoming aware of your interpretations is such an important part of changing your experience of life.

You may not always have control over what happens around you. But you can begin recognizing the meaning you're assigning to those experiences—and questioning whether that meaning is actually true.

The next time you find yourself feeling upset, frustrated, worried, or discouraged, there's a simple question you can ask:

What actually happened, and what am I telling myself it means?

The exercise on the following page will help you explore that distinction using a real situation from your own life.

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YOUR STORY VS. WHAT HAPPENED WORKSHEET

01

STEP 1

Choose a recent experience.

What happened?

Think of a recent situation that left you feeling upset, frustrated, worried, disappointed, or discouraged.

Describe the situation using only the observable facts. Imagine you were watching a recording of the event. What would you actually see or hear?

02

STEP 2

Identify the story.

What did you make it mean?

Think about the assumptions, judgments, or conclusions you made about yourself, another person, or the situation.

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03

STEP 3

Notice the impact.

How did that story affect you?

Think about how you felt, what you started thinking about, and how you reacted or behaved.

04

STEP 4

Question the story.

What else could be true?

Is there another possible explanation or way of looking at the situation? What might you be assuming without knowing for certain?

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TAKE THIS INTO YOUR DAY

As you go about your day, begin paying attention to the stories you're telling yourself about the things that happen in your life.

When something triggers an emotional reaction, pause and ask yourself: *What actually happened, and what am I making it mean?*

Remember, the story you're telling yourself is only one possible interpretation. You can question it, consider a different perspective, and choose how you want to respond rather than automatically reacting to the meaning you've assigned it.

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