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**Leadership Development
Initiative (LDI) Curriculum**

Setting up Your Leadership Stories

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Overview

Throughout history, leaders have written their story. Autobiographies or memoirs of the great leaders in politics, religion and science are common and highly valued by readers. Through their story, leaders display how they modeled the way, inspired a shared vision and challenged the status quo, and successful or not in their efforts, the stories inspire and educate.

Stories often teach leadership skills 'behind-the-scenes' that exemplify tools, strategies, and underlying values philosophies. Often, you may notice they are not speaking for themselves but rather they are speaking to (and for) a larger group. Reciprocity and relationships are crucial functions of leadership.

We have all written about ourselves in college admission essays, job application letters, bio sketches for various functions or organizations, and yet, the invitation to write your own leadership story (2500 words) can be daunting.

When one begins to write a personal leadership story, think about why you are writing it and who your audience might be. Sometimes events or achievements can trigger a story, other times it can be people one worked with (or supervised or led) or networks in one's life.

Writing for oral presentation is different than writing for the page. The reader's eye can skip back to refresh one's memory, but the listener only has one chance to hear.

A guideline approach to writing a leadership story is provided.

Objectives

After this presentation, participants will:

1. Identify examples of personal leadership stories.
2. Express the value and nuances of writing a personal narrative.
3. Begin to write a personal narrative.
4. Describe key differences between oral and written presentations.

Important Teaching Points

- Writing personal stories takes time and reflection.
- Aim for progress, not perfection (give yourself permission to write 'badly').
- Begin with a strong story about a major event (the "hook") and build an overall emotional arc.
- Describe 'negative' events positively (as examples of "diamond in the rough" and evolution).
- Emphasize the collaborative rather than individual achievements; use "we" instead of "I" by a ratio of roughly 5:3.

- Jot down the most vivid ideas first and then gradually answer the journalistic questions of "who, what, where, why, how, and when?"
- Be gentle with emotions and write descriptively with all six senses.
- When writing for the spoken word, write in shorter sentences.
- When delivering an oral excerpt of your leadership story, paint a picture with words and speak with a rate and range to allow images to sink into the audience's mind.
- When delivering an oral story, begin with a strong opening incident and finish with an equally strong personal story -- or lessons learned -- so that the audience is left with something to ponder.

Resources / References

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