

How to Tell a Life Story: Overcoming Life's Turning Points Through Five-minute Life-story Speeches

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Abstract: The paper discusses life-story speeches, where individuals share personal narratives in a five-minute format. These speeches may empower both speakers and audiences. Research in Japan highlights key impactful elements: reflection, the life theme of the speaker, and transformation from victim to victor. The Career Construction Interview (CCI) method, introduced in Japan by Dr. Shujiro Mizuno, aids speakers in structuring these narratives. A recent Tokyo event, where speakers underwent CCI sessions, highlighted positive impacts on both speakers and audiences, inspiring future surveys and events.

WHAT IS A LIFE-STORY SPEECH?

A life-story speech is a five-minute personal narrative about one's life. When I lived in San Francisco in 2018, storytelling events were all the rage. In these events, audience members were invited on stage to share a five-minute story about their own lives. I was often fascinated by these life stories, and this experience inspired me to start my research with the idea of holding similar events in my own country, Japan.



EFFECT OF LIFE-STORY SPEECHES

Before holding a life-story speech event in Japan, we examined the effects of life-story speeches to understand what kind of speeches would be accepted by the audience. Sugiura (2004, chap. 2) suggests that listening to other people's stories of overcoming turning points may empower listeners to overcome their own challenges.

WHAT KIND OF SPEECHES EMPOWER THE AUDIENCE?

The next question is as follows: What kind of speeches may empower the audience? To analyze this, I would like to compare two example life stories of the same person.

Example Life Story A

“I was born in the countryside. After graduating from a local university, I joined a large manufacturing company. After several years, I moved to a non-profit organization (NPO) and worked there for 16 years. Currently, I am working in the business sector again and leading a project that solves environmental problems by connecting the business and NPO sectors.”

Example Life Story B

“I was born in the countryside. Hence, I love nature and wish to protect the global environment. In my 20s, I had an argument with my manager, who held a different opinion about this issue. After this argument, I left the company and started working for an NPO and continued to work there for 16 years.



Currently, I am back in the business sector because my dream is to solve environmental problems by connecting the business and NPO sectors, leveraging my work experiences.”

WHAT MAKES A LIFE STORY EMPOWERING?

Upon comparing the two example life stories, three differences can be identified:

1. Reflection

In Example B, the speaker finds meaning in each life event. For instance, events such as being born in the



countryside, having an argument with their manager, and working in an NPO have shaped the speaker’s life. On the other hand, Example A is just a list of facts without any indication of how these facts relate to the speaker.

2. Life theme of the speaker

A life theme is crucial for any speaker. In Example B, the speaker’s life theme is to engage in discussions with those holding different opinions and work with them to protect what is important to the speaker. This theme appears repeatedly in the speaker’s life, for example, when arguing with their manager about environmental issues and working with two different sectors to save nature.

3. From victim to victor

The speaker leveraged their life theme, which transformed them from a victim to a victor. The speaker had an argument with their manager in their youth because their life theme compelled them to engage in a discussion with those holding different opinions. After their transformation, the speaker now uses this ability to engage in discussions and works with two different sectors to save nature.

HOW CAN WE CREATE SUCH LIFE-STORY SPEECHES?

I would like to introduce the Career Construction Interview (CCI). The CCI is a career-counseling method that helps clients identify their life themes and assists them in overcoming life’s turning points, thus transforming them from victims to victors.

The CCI is being introduced in Japan by Dr. Shujiro Mizuno.

LIFE-STORY SPEECH EVENT IN JAPAN

Following this research, a life-story speech event was held in Tokyo, Japan, on July 15, 2023. This event had three speakers,

and all of them underwent a CCI before preparing their speeches.



EVALUATION

We asked the speakers and audience to respond to a questionnaire. Below are some main comments from the questionnaire.

Questionnaire Response (Speaker)

Q. As writing life-story speech, you looked back on your life. What did it mean to you in overcoming life's turning points?

A. By linking the period from childhood to the present in a single causal line, I was able to reconfirm the significance of past memories and episodes, and I feel that I was able to strengthen my own current identity.

Questionnaire Response (Audience)

Q. Do you think listening to the life-story speeches will help you overcome a turning point in your life?

A. YES. I felt the turning point was an opportunity.

A. I was moved by how much it touches people to know who you are and to speak so powerfully about yourself.

A. I was often struck by the real life of real people and by listening to their stories.

DISCUSSION AND NEXT CHALLENGES

At first, we had little clue on how to localize such events held in the U.S. for the Japanese market. Fortunately, the CCI method helped us organize the first life-story speech event in Japan. At this stage, our research still remains very simple, and we would like to conduct a more detailed survey in the future.

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