



# Are the Stories Your Company Tells Supporting Your Success? Or Getting in the Way?

By Sharon Rich

**Y**ou've probably heard about the time JFK visited the NASA Space Center in 1962. While touring the facility, he stopped to greet a man who was sweeping the floors. Kennedy asked the man what he did there. The man replied, "Well, Mr. President, I'm helping put a man on the moon." At NASA in the sixties, literally every member of the team embodied the organization's story. As a result, they accomplished what had, prior to that, been unthinkable.

You definitely have not heard of the marketing firm that told fear-based stories about their competitors, believed they had to steal a competitor's clients in order to succeed, and got passed over by that very same competitor on a huge, business-transforming project. The company went quietly out of business a few years later.

This is the power of story to impact an organization's future.

## **Every business is the manifestation of many stories.**

The first story of every business is the idea that brought it into being. As the business grows, its stories determine what team members see and what they miss, how they evaluate, decide, choose and follow through. What gets rewarded and punished. Stories impact who is hired and how they are onboarded — as well as whether they encourage high performance — or underperformance.

We can transform our organizations' performance by becoming intentional and aligned in the stories we tell. In my upcoming book ***Your Hidden Game: 10 Invisible Agreements that Can Make or Break Your Business***, "The Stories Our Team Will Tell" is the First Agreement, because it impacts everything else we do.

## **Think You've Got a Grip on Reality? Think Again.**

Author Byron Katie, wrote, "The world is nothing but my perception of it. I see only through myself. I hear only through the filter of my story."

Most people are unaware that we humans interpret everything that happens through stories. Reality doesn't create our experience. Reality *plus our story about what's happened* creates our experience. So, when we call something or someone a success or failure, when we find a situation frustrating or exciting, when we decide on a strategy — all of that is story. All too often, it's the negative, destructive stories that compel alignment. The only way to ensure that team members have their stories in sync with business success, is conscious agreement about the stories needed to produce the company's desired outcomes.

## **Story change, means behavior change, means culture change.**

The culture of a business is inextricably connected with its stories. In fact, the stories both reflect the current cultural behaviors in the company — and create the future cultural behaviors. When we don't like what is happening in the business culture — or in the results that culture produces — we need to change the stories. To change the stories, we must change the behaviors.

One company I worked with wanted to improve their culture and their results. They agreed to stop telling disempowering victim stories and start telling growth-inducing accountable ones. They agreed to three main shifts to make this happen:

**Shift 1: From Fear to Possibility** — They replaced talking about what couldn't be done and why with stories about what the team *could* do and what that might create.

**Shift 2: From Judgment to Acceptance** — They eliminated the labels "good" and "bad" and instead accepted the truth of the situation without judgment so they could simply figure out what to do next.

**Shift 3: From Blame to Ownership** — They dropped finger-pointing in all directions and instead focused on what each person or team needed to do to produce results.

## **Stories determine what's possible in your company.**

Stories create brand perception. Brand perception creates reality. Negative and limiting stories get in the way of a company's ability to execute. Even when stories are based on conditions beyond the organization's control, how they manage these stories can be the difference between success and failure.

This is why any organization that wants to perform at a higher level had best take a good hard look at the stories being told — and not being told — about their business.

What stories is your business telling?

***Sharon Rich is the CEO of ThinkBusinessGrowth, Inc. and author of the upcoming book: Your Hidden Game: Ten Invisible Agreements That Can Make or Break Your Business. Sharon facilitates creative organizations in aligning on the foundational agreements they need to for a high performing culture and produce measurable business results. She can be reached at [sharon@thinkbusinessgrowth.com](mailto:sharon@thinkbusinessgrowth.com).***