

CHAPTER 47

CHANGE YOUR STORY, CHANGE YOUR LIFE

BY DAWN ROMEO

Success is a result of more than just actions and endeavors. It originates with a mindset; a shift in consciousness where you see yourself as already in the beginning stages of what you will manifest. Your thoughts and attitudes work in your subconscious mind so you can identify opportunities where others may not see them. Success comes from allowing your strengths and gifts to unfold without self-imposed limitations.

You cannot escape your perceived limitations by denying your thoughts and fears about failure. Your mind is not easily fooled. If your personal narrative is embedded with thoughts that you are unworthy or undeserving, what you outwardly say, no matter how positive and inspiring, will not create success. If you want more success, more fulfilling relationships or to feel a deeper sense of satisfaction with your life, it is time to look at your personal story and see how it helps or hinders you.

The narrative we tell ourselves about who we are, where and who we come from and what we are capable of, shapes our lives. Our thoughts, feelings and behaviors create the story we tell about who we really are. Who we are, where we come from, the family we were born into and the events that surround our early experiences lay the foundation for the person we will become.

The way we portray ourselves to the outside world may or may not match the way we feel inside. Many people seem to have it all together, but somehow they can never catch a break. They may believe it is the community, family, spouse or employer that is holding them back.

Even when you are working diligently to put the life together you really want; what you are passionate about may be unwittingly standing in your way.

The external circumstances of your life right now are less relevant than your internal subjective view of yourself. The way we feel and the images we hold in the forefront of our mind manifests in the life we live.

If you define yourself as a struggling single mother who barely makes enough money to survive then this will continue to be your reality. How you define yourself will shift your circumstances and opportunities to that end. Let's say you have spent the last five year's New Year's resolutions focused on losing weight, getting out of debt or finding a romantic partner that isn't a jerk.

What we focus on expands, so negatively charged powerful thoughts becomes your reality, your truth. If you believe you are unable then you will be. If you think you can't, then you won't. Henry Ford said, *Whether you think you can or think you can't—you're right.*

Some people are bereft with negative intrusive thoughts:

- You'll never amount to anything.
- You are just like your father.
- You're not smart enough to go to college.
- You're not pretty enough to get married.
- You could never run your own business.

Your world expands or contracts to your beliefs about yourself and the environment around you. If you believe there is a brick wall behind every door why would you bother to try and open it?

Why do we fail? Fear.

When things don't go your way you say, "See, I told you it wouldn't work."

Success is not about everything working for you all of the time. It's about making peace with the obstacles that cross your path, knowing that obstacles will come up. Working through them gives the experience and time necessary to strengthen our character and resolve. Even with the obstacles concerns, and problems you learn to never, ever, ever give up.

When you believe there is a way for you to accomplish your goals, even if you don't know how that will happen, you work differently. Then it becomes a matter of determining what information you need, the contacts you need to make and what changes are necessary to get you to where you want to be.

When you think you aren't capable of getting to where you want to be, you won't put your heart and soul into a plan. A measure of emotional self-preservation comes in and you temper your response by not putting everything you have into it, to save yourself from complete despair if you don't achieve what you want.

Changing your story in a way that lends itself to your achieving what it is you really desire is an ongoing process. After you have established what your new story is, you need to check in on it on a regular basis to make sure it still holds true for you. If an aspect doesn't seem to be particularly helpful it may require more refinement. After working with many people in therapy and workshops, I have identified seven steps that are necessary to changing your story. This shift in awareness is not about becoming perfect. It is about becoming the best *you* that you can be.

SEVEN STEPS TO CHANGING YOUR STORY

1. Determine what you want your story to be.
2. Be mindful of how you speak and think about yourself.
3. Become grateful for people, experiences and the things you already have.
4. Limit your exposure to people who are critical, negative, self-sabotaging and draining.
5. Keep what you are trying to accomplish with you literally or figuratively.
6. Seek out like-minded people.

7. Don't give up!

It simply isn't possible to create lasting change unless you know where in your life you want change to occur. You need to have a goal. It isn't enough to know what you don't want, although that can be a good beginning. Define what you want in as much detail as possible. Imagine what it looks like, feels like and sounds like when you have gotten what you want.

Be kind to yourself. Don't spend precious time beating yourself up for all of the mistakes you make along the way or call yourself names like stupid, unlovable or unworthy. Mistakes happen. It is important to take personal responsibility in every area of your life, but be kind. Using negative self-talk is counterproductive.

By identifying all of the positive things you have in your life you will more clearly be able to identify what you want more of. I recommend that you write down five things each night you are grateful for, as well as meditate for ten minutes each morning on what you want to achieve.

Create a vision board, mind map or any other visual representation of what it is you want to create or bring more of into your life. Take a picture of what you created with your phone – so you can look at it every day to really keep your goals in front of you.

Expand your circle of friends, acquaintances and colleagues so as to include people who are also on a journey towards growth, success or fulfillment. Being around people like this creates enthusiasm and optimism, so watch out!

Remember that things don't always happen on the timetable we set. There are usually more variables than we first imagined. Change is a process not an event. You are your life's work, your magnum opus, so allow yourself to continue to grow.

JENNIFER'S CHANGING STORY

Jennifer is a 32-year-old woman who works as a freelance writer. Jennifer told me she had always struggled with self-esteem and a sense of worthiness. Despite what others would call enormous talent, she felt her writing was inadequate and was often overly critical and emotionally punishing. Jennifer struggled so much with doubt that she

began to feel depressed and anxious. When we met she told me she was writing a book, but was struggling to complete it. She found herself procrastinating and feeling depressed.

Jennifer described herself as a fair writer who made enough money to live on, but she did not see herself ever becoming successful. When asked to describe her story of who she was and where she came from, she described a story of fear and lack. Jennifer grew up poor. She lived with her mother and two siblings. They always struggled financially. Her mother worked two jobs just to make ends meet. She explained that her mother never really approved of her decision to become a writer. Many of her friends encouraged her to “get a real job” with a predictable income and pension.

Even though she was able to make a living from her writing, Jennifer spent a great deal of time second-guessing her decision to stick it out. Her limiting beliefs surrounded her in everything she did. She had no idea how these beliefs kept doors around her closed, but she was willing to do whatever it took to overcome her limitations. The willingness to do the work opened up her possibilities by opening her eyes to the choices surrounding her.

Begin on your new path now. Write out your new personal narrative in as much detail as possible. How different is it than the one you have been using up until now? Pick one area at a time to work on to shift into your new story. Start with whichever aspect you want. The key is to be striving every day. Create a list of action steps for the area you are choosing to work on to keep the momentum going.

In Jennifer’s case she began by identifying what she needed to do to get her book finished. She recognized several key things that she needed to implement. First was to reread everything she wrote and make notes on what she thought she needed to add and any areas she wanted to change or get rid of. Then she looked at the negative self-talk she had about her writing and capabilities. Jennifer was able to really see how this mindset did not support what she really wanted to do. She was able to pinpoint exactly how her personal story sabotaged her dreams.

Next we worked on challenging each limiting belief she had and construct ones that supported her dreams and goals. She created a gratitude list every night and began meditating on her capabilities for ten minutes every morning. She visualized her finished book and how she would

feel when it was published. She practiced mindfulness throughout her day and challenged any negative thought that came up instead of accepting them. Slowly the negativity began to recede and she felt free and inspired.

Jennifer set up a schedule where she worked on her book for a minimum of one hour each day. She minimized her mindless activities like watching television and surfing the internet aimlessly. Her confidence grew and she planned her daily activities and list of what she wanted to accomplish the night before.

She saw the amount of negativity she surrounded herself with and knew this had to change. Jennifer let go of some relationships she recognized were not good for her, and she set limits with others. She explained how negativity had a bad effect on her life, and that she would no longer be able to be around people who were critical, gossiping, or put her down. To her amazement, setting limits was helpful. Some were fascinated by her direct approach to changing what she exposed herself to and shared what their own negativity had caused them. Jennifer was able to act as a mentor and share what she had learned.

In many ways it is easier to declare you can't change because you are too old, lack the resources to create what you really want, are unlucky or never get any good breaks. But this is an excuse. Your excuses keep you stuck because that is what they are designed to do. If you want to make changes you need to shift your thinking. When you accept who you are in the present moment, then you can begin to change. You cannot change what you do not acknowledge.

Come into being the person you want to become in every given moment. Talk about your unfolding life in terms of *when* instead of *if*. In Jennifer's case, it was "*when* I finish the novel" not "*if* I finish it." Use your identifying phrase "I am" wisely. Whatever comes after "I am" needs to be positive. To get to where you want to be, your inward feelings and outward statements need to match.

Ask for help when it is needed. This can be difficult for some in the beginning especially if you have little experience asking for help. You will most likely find the people who love you are more than willing to help when you ask. Talk about what you want to do. Sometimes just talking about it can spark ideas. Others may also have knowledge you

are not aware of and point you in the right direction. Therapy, workshops and coaching are also powerful tools in working through a negative mindset so you can focus on creating a life you enjoy.

You are a fully-functioning human being, who like everyone else, is a work in progress. Each day is a new opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of your capacity and capabilities. You can choose to live your life on, and with, purpose. Follow your own path by changing your story and live your life to the fullest in the most meaningful way for you.



About Dawn

A nineteen-year, multi-faceted career qualifies Dawn Romeo, LCSW, LCADC as an impressive and highly effective psychotherapist who understands the core concepts of success and the roadblocks we manufacture to avoid it. Her expertise and education has benefited a diverse client population as she draws upon an impressive background that includes a Master's degree from Columbia University and a post graduate certificate from New York University in Forensic Mental Health. Always looking to help others and give back to the profession, she mentors a variety of clinical staff including LCADC and LCSW candidates.

Concurrently, Dawn offers family and individual therapy from her private practice in Montclair, New Jersey, where she utilizes a holistic approach to treating anxiety and depression and also provides in-depth education supportive of twelve-step self-help groups and relapse prevention.

Truly immersed in all aspects of her profession, Dawn also acts as facilitator and workshop instructor, presenting regularly on topics such as: "What's On Your Bucket List," "Getting Unstuck," "Increasing Intuition Through Balance," "Finding Your Life Purpose" and "Radical Acceptance."

Dawn also coaches select individuals on how to create more success in their lives. Her philosophy of working with an individual's strengths and guiding them on their path towards the life they are looking for in smaller measurable steps, brings lasting success and fulfillment. She works with clients on creating goals from their dreams, and the action steps to get them to the finish line. Dawn is able to assist people in increasing their motivation and consider possibilities they were otherwise unable to see. Her background in psychotherapy gives her a unique take on perceived limitations and ways to break down barriers.

An accomplished writer, Dawn's philosophy holds that success is more than a result of actions and endeavors. She is an inspiring authority on attaining success, and this, coupled with her broad background with so many groups in clinical settings, makes her an authority on the subject. In addition to her many published articles, she will be releasing a new nonfiction book in late 2015.

Dawn holds multiple accreditations and certificates including School Social Worker, Licensed Clinical Alcohol and Drug Counselor, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, SIFI/ LCSW Supervision Certificate and is a Certified Clinical Supervisor. She is affiliated with the NASW, Hudson County Chapter.

Dawn currently operates her private practice in Montclair, NJ, and may be contacted by email at: dawnvbr@gmail.com.

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