

# BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE IN THE WORKPLACE

WHAT'S YOUR  
STORY?

LEADERS GUIDE



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# NOTES FOR FACILITATORS

As part of the Return2Work Initiative, a number of resources were developed to facilitate a change in behaviour in workplaces around health and safety as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. (<https://www.return2work.co.za/behavioural-change-training/>).

In an interesting departure, the health and safety training materials introduced a concept called 'Whats Your Story' (WYS) as a mechanism to encourage workers and employers to start sharing their challenges and stories around the pandemic. This, with the intention of beginning to build some level of connectedness especially during these very challenging times where all South Africans have been affected one way or another by the pandemic.

This guide is intended to provide employers – big and small – as well as other organisations with the tools to create a safe space where key stakeholders in workplaces can begin to share their stories around COVID-19, the challenges they face in adhering to more stringent health and safety standards in the face of the pandemic, how they feel about having the vaccine and how their lives have changed as a result of the pandemic.

## Why is story sharing important during this time?

The pandemic has created huge stress and additional pressures for people. For example, trying to get to work safely can be a challenge for a lot of people. In trying to create a safe workplace for everyone, it is critical that we begin to build a deeper understanding of each other's challenges and each other's stories. The idea of incorporating storytelling into the behavioural change programme came about after hearing about the success of WYS, a national storytelling campaign developed by a South African NGO called Heartlines. What's your Story is about creating

connections between people, breaking down barriers, and helping South Africans to find our common humanity. Heartlines has found – through its work in workplaces and other spaces such as faith-based organisations – that personal storytelling builds greater understanding, trust and cohesion.

This guide is for “champions” appointed in companies (or any organisation such as community based to faith based organisations, government departments and even unions) who will drive the storytelling process.

This guide provides the tools and the processes around which groups of people can come together in workplaces and begin to build some level of trust around health and safety issues. This is critical to effect behaviour change and thereby contribute towards safer, more productive, working spaces with minimal risk.

The following include some guidelines of conducting the WYS processes:

**Length of processes:** The story sharing options range in length according to your needs and size of your organisation.

**Check in's:** 10-20min

**Story sharing small groups:** 20- 45min

**Virtual or onsite:** WYS can be held onsite which is preferable, however, in view of the pandemic, the process can be held through virtual mediums such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Google teams.

**Additional resources:** This guide provides reference to additional resources that the leader/facilitator can access such as:

Heartlines:

<https://heartlines.org.za/>

What's your story:

<https://projects.heartlines.org.za/wys/home>

Church in Action:

<https://churchinaction.org.za/>



# 2

## INTRODUCTION

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The pandemic has created huge stress and many additional pressures for people. What may seem to some like basic tasks, such as getting to work safely, sourcing an internet connection or finding a quiet place to work, can be a challenge for a lot of people. Safety in the time of COVID-19 is not just about our physical well-being, but also our emotional and mental well-being. **Being physically distant doesn't mean we can no longer have social cohesion and connection.**

In trying to create a safe workplace for everyone, we must begin to build a deeper understanding of each other's challenges and each other's stories.

The idea of incorporating storytelling into the behavioural change campaign came about after hearing of the success of the 'What's your Story?' initiative – a national story-sharing campaign developed by South African NGO Heartlines.

**'What's Your Story?' is about creating connections between people, breaking down barriers, and helping South Africans to find our common humanity. Personal storytelling builds greater understanding, trust, and cohesion. This is the basis for a productive and healthy workplace.**

The Return2Work Initiative, together with Heartlines, has developed an easy-to-use programme that will enable your company to make story-sharing part of its DNA – helping to build trust and social cohesion within the company.

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## WHY STORY-TELLING?

**“We’re all storytellers. We all live in a network of stories. There isn’t a stronger connection between people than storytelling.”**

– Jimmy Neil Smit

South Africa has such a rich tradition of storytelling.

Stories are all around us. They are what move, challenge and anger us; they make us feel alive and inspire us. We use stories to make sense of life and the world we live in. As individuals, we all relate to stories because our lives are stories.

The new world of work has been described as a connection economy. Today, value is created by the connections we make. The isolation and uncertainty arising from the pandemic have made this difficult – but stories will help us connect with ourselves and others, increasing trust and empathy between people.

More than ever, people are looking for a sense of **community**. People want to belong to something. They want to know that their contribution is appreciated; they want a sense of purpose. With the pandemic having affected the emotional and mental well-being of so many people, the need for people to talk about their experiences and challenges has become even greater.

**The effectiveness of ‘What’s Your Story?’ rests on four pillars of value:**

### GREATER WORKPLACE EFFECTIVENESS

Storytelling in the workplace leads to a better understanding between individuals, improved communication, greater trust, and higher levels of collaboration. Teamwork will be enhanced, leading to improved business outputs.

### INCREASED EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING OF STAFF

Research has shown that story-sharing can play a positive role in people’s emotional health. Talking about your experiences, and listening to others share what they have been through, can be very cathartic.

### A MORE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Greater social cohesion directly reduces prejudice and the potential for conflict. When everyone in the workplace feels accepted and valued, the creative power of diversity can be harnessed.

### DEVELOPING BETTER SOUTH AFRICAN CITIZENS

The insights gained from hearing people’s stories equip employees to be more engaged and effective citizens in the communities in which they live, play and work.

# HOW DO WE DO STORY-TELLING?

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## ASK. LISTEN. TELL

Storytelling happens through an amazingly simple three-step framework: **ASK. LISTEN. TELL**. This is how it works:

**ASK:** Asking is about seeking first to understand. We get to understand each other better by first asking.

**LISTEN:** Active listening is at the heart of good communication and forming positive relationships. It acknowledges that everyone has a story worth sharing.



ASK  
LISTEN  
TELL

**TELL:** Telling is our way of letting others into our lives to help them understand us a bit better.

By using this approach, you can create space in your business for staff to share their stories.

Story-sharing can, and should, be naturally integrated into your work environment using a range of different activities. It can be used in your existing staff or team meetings, or you can set up regular meetings that are specifically focused on story-sharing.

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# HOW TO GET STARTED

## 1

### Recruit

Start the process by finding champions in your organisation to help you implement and drive 'What's Your Story?'. The champions will explain the process to their colleagues and encourage maximum participation. These will be people in your organisation who are passionate about and believe in the story-sharing process. Create a group of leaders from different areas in the company and go through the process together before you roll it out in your organisation. It helps to get in touch with your own story before encouraging others to share theirs, and this will create the space for the leaders to do that.

## 2

### Organise

Decide whether to integrate story-sharing into team meetings, or whether to share stories in separate, dedicated story-sharing sessions. Draw up a plan with your 'What's Your Story?' champions about rolling it out. Identify where, when, how and who:

**When:** When is the best time in the workday or week to integrate story-sharing?

**Where:** Where is the best place to implement this process in my organisation?

**How:** What story-sharing methods best suit the when and where?

**Who:** Who will take responsibility for organising and facilitating these sessions? What skills can you draw on from different members of your team to roll out the process effectively?

## 3

### Method

There are two styles of story-sharing: Check-ins and story sharing in groups.

**Check-ins** are used in your normal staff meetings before you start a meeting.

Check-ins are not about getting people to share about their work progress, but rather about how they are doing as individuals. The prompts that are used aim to help people open up.

#### Story-sharing in groups

Small group story-sharing is where people come together in groups to share about their personal journey and experiences. This would need separate meetings or a significant amount of time allocated at the start of a meeting.

In this guide, we provide methods for doing both **check-ins** and **story-sharing in small groups**.

# METHODS FOR STORY- TELLING

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### CHECK-IN

Checking in is a deliberate way for a team to open a meeting or session. Each participant takes a turn to share something related to their emotional well-being before the work conversation starts. When everyone can remove their personal distractions, it's easier to focus on getting the job done. A check-in is about the emotional status of your employees, and not about a work project. The purpose of enabling participants to share what is on their minds is to help them connect to the here and now.

Knowing where everyone's minds are at drives clarity. You can adjust how you facilitate the meeting or be more tolerant of someone who is acting defensively or being more silent than usual. When you understand someone else's mindset, you become less judgmental about how they behave.

*When: At the beginning of the meeting. Put it on the agenda. It doesn't need to be longer than 10 minutes, just make sure everyone has a turn.*

*Roles: Designate one person in each meeting to facilitate the check-in. They should prepare and decide on the form the check-in will take.*

### TYPES OF CHECK-INS

#### QUESTIONS

Depending on the time you have available, select four or five of the most

relevant questions. Get each person to answer the selected questions and allow them to finish their turn before moving on to the next person.

- How are you and your family coping with the pandemic?
- What are some of the challenges you are facing personally?
- Share a change you have had to make at work either during the pandemic?
- What personal lessons are you learning during the pandemic?
- What discourages you the most?
- What encourages you the most?
- What is one hope you are holding onto right now?
- What is a plan for 2021 that you had to let go of because of the pandemic?
- In which ways would you describe the 'new normal' as being better than the 'old normal'?
- What is one thing you have learned about yourself during lockdown/the pandemic?
- What are some of the big events or turning points in your life that have helped define who you are?
- What are some significant achievements, events or experiences that shaped your life?
- Who are some of the people that have played the biggest roles in your life?
- What are some of your future goals?

## COVID-19 and Vaccines

You may also want to focus on vaccines and the myths surrounding COVID-19.

*Note: It is important to allow people to express how they feel about these issues. But to combat misinformation, you will need to respond in an empathetic way with up-to-date facts about the vaccine. Refer to this guide, developed by Heartlines, for accessible and current information about vaccines and COVID-19: <https://churchinaction.org.za/index.php/resources-tools/about-corona/covid-19-vaccine>*

## COVID-19 Vaccine Questions

- What are your fears when it comes to taking the COVID-19 vaccine?
- What have you heard about the COVID-19 vaccine on social media, and how does that make you feel?
- What do people in your family say about COVID-19 and how do you manage disagreements when it comes to beliefs?

## FINISH THE SENTENCE

If you have limited time available, this device is a helpful way to get your team to check-in in a focused and succinct way. The facilitator of the check-in presents the group with an unfinished sentence and asks each person to complete it.

Some examples include:

- When I woke up this morning, I felt... because...
- I am distracted by... because...
- I hope for...
- My goal in 2021 is...
- Lockdown and the pandemic have been a challenge because...
- I am nervous about the vaccine because.....
- What scares me about COVID-19 is....

You can also turn the examples listed in the 'QUESTIONS' section above into "finish the sentence", e.g. One thing my family is doing to cope with lockdown is...

## SMALL GROUPS

If your organisation has more time available, story-sharing in small groups is a great way to integrate storytelling into the culture of your organisation and go beyond just checking in.

We suggest flexibility when it comes to how and where people share their stories.

The following options might work, depending on the nature of your organisation.

### OPTION 1: TEAM MEETINGS

When you have team meetings, take half an hour each time for one person to tell their story to the rest of the team or group.

If you don't have teams you could divide staff into groups of 7 to 10 people.

### OPTION 2: CREATE A ROSTER

This works best with groups of 8 to 10 people. Make a list of staff members and draw up a roster for dedicated time together regularly to allow each person an opportunity to share their story with their group.

## GUIDELINES FOR TELLING YOUR STORY

Sharing your story with someone can be scary – but it can also be a very liberating and empowering process for you and others. Being willing to tell someone our story opens the door to the following:

- It helps them understand who we are.
- It broadens their perspective of people who are different from them.
- It builds understanding and a base for greater trust.

Here are some values and guiding principles for telling your story:

- Be truthful.
- Maintain privacy.

- Only share as much as you feel comfortable.
- Be willing to be vulnerable.
- Be true to your emotions but be respectful.

Share your story in any way you feel comfortable, using visual aids where needed. In the next section, we have outlined three possible methods you can use to structure how you share your story.

## STORY-SHARING TOOLS

There are several different tools you can use when sharing stories with your team. For more information about story-sharing methods, visit [whatsyourstory.org.za](http://whatsyourstory.org.za). In this guide we have included outlines for the following approaches:

- My life through questions
- Yesterday, today and tomorrow
- The River of Life

## MY LIFE THROUGH QUESTIONS

Spend some time answering the questions below. (Choose all of them or only those you feel comfortable with sharing – you can also add some of your own.)

Write down notes or highlights that you feel comfortable sharing with others.

You may choose to represent your life story visually or audibly – through images, symbols, sounds or songs that capture aspects of your story.

### QUESTION FRAMEWORK FOR TELLING MY STORY:

1. Where was I born and raised? What kind of family did I grow up in – big or small, rich or poor, urban or rural?
2. Which were my most important relationships growing up? Who are some of the people that played the biggest roles in my life?

3. What are some of the big events or turning points in my life that have helped define who I am?
4. What were some of my challenges growing up? What were some of the choices I made to overcome those challenges?
5. What are the anchoring beliefs or values by which I live my life?
6. What do you feel has changed most in your life since the pandemic? How does this make you feel?
7. What have been the greatest challenges you have faced personally since the pandemic? How did you overcome these?
8. Can I think of an encounter(s) with a person who is different to me (culture, race, religion, class, etc.) – both negative and positive? How have those events shaped my story?
9. What are some significant achievements, events or experiences that shaped my life?
10. What are some of my future goals, as well as my hopes for my family's well-being, and the well-being of my community and country?

## YESTERDAY, TODAY AND TOMORROW

Using the framework of yesterday, today and tomorrow, you share three personal stories based around the following themes:

- Before the pandemic
- Your hero's journey and lockdown
- Success in the future

### STEP 1: YESTERDAY

*Before the pandemic*

Think back to before lockdown and the start of the pandemic.

- What did you love?
- What were your goals for the year?
- What made you happy?

## STEP 2: TODAY

### *Your hero's journey*

Think about a challenge in your life that came about because of lockdown and the pandemic and how you overcame it. It may have been a small moment or incident where you had to draw on all your skills and experiences to overcome a difficult challenge.

- Why was it so tough? Did it challenge your skills, values or identity?
- What did you do and how did that challenge shape you?
- How did it change how you see yourself? How did it redefine you?

## STEP 3: TOMORROW

### *Success in the future*

Imagine its 20 years into the future and you have achieved everything you'd ever hoped to.

- What are your accomplishments?
- Who are you?
- What have you done?

## RIVER OF LIFE

Imagine your life as a river that roughly corresponds to the chronological order of events in your real life. For example, the river can be calm and straight, perhaps bubbling, during the good/happy times. The river might then wind itself around large, imposing rocks that could represent obstacles you've faced. Think of relationships or key moments with your family and friends, or encounters with people who are different from you. A big bend in the river could represent a major life change, such as moving away from home. A waterfall could represent times when you feel like you lost control and were caught in a downward spiral.

Spend time drawing your river.

Once you've done this, choose four key moments – good and bad – that have shaped who you are today. These are what you'll share when telling your story.





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# GUIDELINES FOR LISTENING TO SOMEONE'S STORY

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Listening to someone's story is an act of love and respect. It acknowledges the fact that everyone has a story worth sharing. As we listen, we communicate many things, including:

- "I respect you."
- "I acknowledge your human dignity."
- "What you are telling me is important."

Here are some values and guiding principles for listening to someone's story.

- Listen with your heart.
- Slow down.
- Don't judge.
- Don't interrupt.
- Don't give advice.

## ACKNOWLEDGING SOMEONE'S STORY

Sharing stories in a small group or during a check-in may result in people feeling vulnerable. It's important to thank each person for sharing their story. If there was something about someone's story that moved or challenged you in some way, consider telling the person that in private and thanking them for the specific way their story meant something to you.

Nobody must abuse this time by using it to judge or correct the storyteller or interrogate them about their choices or actions.

The role of the team leader is not to dig deeper during the check-in or story session - but rather to approach the person offline and enquire further, seeing whether they would like to talk more, or if they need help. Participants should also be encouraged to engage offline with the story-sharer if they think they can help or have had similar experiences.





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# GOING BEYOND

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Many companies and other organisations, once they have started a journey of storytelling, have integrated it permanently into the cultures of their organisations.

Story-sharing can help create social cohesion and emotional health in the workplace and can also be used to address issues such as diversity and cross-cultural understanding.

Heartlines' award-winning film *Beyond the River* is also available for viewing and can be followed by relevant discussions about the different aspects of the film's story.

To keep the storytelling revolution going, we've created an online platform where you can read, watch, or listen to the inspiring stories of others.

You can also share your own story with others.

The site also offers various resources and ideas to continue storytelling in your workplace, home, or community.

For more information, visit [www.heartlines.org.za](http://www.heartlines.org.za) or contact Heartlines directly at [info@heartlines.org.za](mailto:info@heartlines.org.za)