

## Welcome to Quiet Courage – February 2005

The online newsletter for navigating life's changes and transitions from Bailey Coaching and Mary Ann Bailey, MC.

### Feature Article: The Stories We Live By

David came to coaching because he was no longer happy at work. He had been with the same company for 8 years and although he made a good living, he was miserable. He had always wanted to start an outdoor adventure camp for adults, but he felt he would be incredibly irresponsible if he were to leave his job and follow his dream.

David grew up in a family where hard work and company loyalty were the rule. His father had been an insurance broker with the same company for his entire life. David's older brother was an electrical engineer, and his sister was an accountant. None of his siblings had ever changed jobs.

David was the imaginative and adventuresome one in the family, but he received the message early on in life that creativity was looked upon as something frivolous. A person's worth was determined by working hard at a sensible job.

For most of David's life, he bought into that story. He was raised around people for whom that story seemed to work. His parent's friends and his brother and sister's colleagues all seem happy and successful. So every time David would think about leaving his job, it would just reinforce the fact that he was being irresponsible.

David worked hard and was very good at what he did, which according to the theme of his story should have brought him great joy and satisfaction. But it didn't. So, that left him with this question: Was he doing something wrong in his current job, or was he starting to see that his road to professional success and satisfaction may be different from his family's?

We all have our stories. Our stories are what help us make sense of who we are in this world. They are woven from a combination of the values, beliefs, and survival techniques that we learn from our families, friends, and culture. They are not bad; but they certainly can be limiting in their scope.

I think it is safe to say that the lesson of hard work that David learned from his family is a valuable one; but working hard does not mean that you need to do it in the context of a job that you don't like. And it is when our values begin to restrict our personal growth and development, that it is time to re-examine the story that holds those values.

But examining our stories can be tricky because over the years they have become integrated into who we are. We perceive the world through the lens of our story so the things we observe in the world reinforce our story.

In David's case, he could only see the people, who like his family, spent their lives working long-term at sensible jobs. The more entrepreneurial part of the world was almost invisible to him, or if he did know someone who had tried to start their own business, it would be someone who had failed. Through this unconscious filtering of reality, David kept himself stuck in the limitations of his story line.

What story are you living by, and how is it keeping you stuck in your life? Does your story revolve around the need to excel or achieve? Maybe you grew up believing that it was your responsibility to take care of all others before yourself. Or maybe your story tells you that you are not good at a certain thing and that you can never succeed at a particular profession even though you feel a strong desire to give it a shot.

We all have our stories, we just are not always aware of what they are. The following is an exercise that I have found very helpful in increasing people's awareness of their story, and how it may be holding them back from doing and being what they want.

1. For the next 2 weeks begin to observe the story you tell about yourself and about your life. The narrative that you say privately to yourself, as well as the public explanation you tell others, makes up this story.
2. Observe the story as the way you connect incidents in your life, include or exclude people, and give meaning to events.
3. At the end of each day write out some brief notes describing what you observed about your story that day.
4. What have you learned about yourself and your story? What actions will you take from what you have observed?

Remember that we begin creating our stories when we are very young and do not have the skills, mental capacities, or resources to make sense of the world in any other way. But as adults we do have the capabilities and resources to look more objectively at how we truly want to be in the world, and what we need to do to make that happen.

Until next time, all the best,  
Mary Ann Bailey, MC

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