

Client Exercise Sheet 9

A Different Story

John's story about why he doubts his door is locked

Well, I always worry about the door being properly locked. I close it very carefully, paying attention to every action. The click of the latch, the resistance of the door when I push it shut. But I still doubt if it's really closed. I think of a door I once saw swing open after the person thought they'd locked it, and well I'm not an expert on locks and some can spring open automatically. My friend had a garage door once which just opened in the middle of the night. Mind you that was an electric lock. When I test the door, it seems shut but I don't know how shut is shut. I mean how much movement is allowed. Of course, if I was robbed because I left it open, I'd feel terrible.

John's story is a good example of an OCD story justifying the doubt. Now the first point to note is that all of the reasons given by John relate to other times and other places. None relates to what he is observing in the here and now. Obviously the story can't be relating to the here and now because his senses say all is OK in the 'here and now'. But he feels justified in drawing on events he has heard about second-hand, connecting up completely different events and imagining sequences. However, these all make him 'doubt' what he is actually seeing in the here and now.

Do you think John is justified in doubting because of these reasons? You might say yes because sometimes we need to rely on our 'intelligence', 'know how', or 'memory' despite the fact that these came from us, not from the outside. For example, if I've read somewhere that one area of a town I'm visiting is dangerous, I might be wise to avoid it even though I have no evidence in the 'here and now' that it is dangerous. If I know from experience that every time I leave the house with more than three accessories, I'm likely to lose one of them, it may be a good idea to take precautions even though there is nothing lost in the here and now. If I know I'm prone to slip on ice, then it might be sensible to watch out when I walk on ice even if I've not already fallen. All these 'reasons' for caution are valid this is because they either they are based on real information from outside sources applicable to the here and now, or I have had direct *experience* of them in *identical* situations. The reasons do not come from second-hand information, hearsay and invented stories.

Now let's return to John and then to the justification for your own OCD doubt. Is John's story based on facts *related* to the here and now or on justifications *remote* from the here and now? Don't forget, *relevant* means that your intelligence about what could be there is drawn from evidence, authority or

Try this exercise. Say which of the following statements is based on the *direct evidence* that ‘maybe the door is locked because . . .’

1. ‘This lock is old and sometimes jams and fails (in reality) to lock the door’.
2. ‘I read about someone who left the door open’.
3. ‘It could be a statistical probability that I leave the door open’.

Which one justifies the doubt in the here and now?

‘Maybe the door knob is contaminated because . . .’

4. ‘Microbes exist, so my hands could be contaminated’.
5. ‘I touched a knob which I saw had mud on it’.
6. ‘It’s common knowledge you can catch germs from other people’.

Again, which one justifies the doubt in the here and now?

The correct answers are 1 and 5 only. Were your answers correct?

So let’s try building up your alternative story along the bridging game lines. First we start with your sense observation. I see the car door locked. I know it’s locked because my senses say so, and whenever I lock it I always do so correctly. It’s a good door lock, it’s never been faulty and there’s no reason to think it’s faulty now. So I’m going to shop, and when I come back it will be locked. How do you feel now about your doubt?

OK. Now return to the story and fill in even more detail, for example: I remember how the door stayed locked even in cold weather, and when I had a bump I can’t remember the lock ever jumping open. For it to not to be locked after I locked it, there would need to be some major unheard-of problem. How do you feel now about the initial doubt?

Just to be sure, go back one more time and try to add in any other details you may remember which could enrich and add density to the story. Remember that the elements can be from experience, common sense or realistic conclusions.

So now note down your own final detailed alternative story:

It's the Way You Tell 'Em

Other devices which can help you tell a good story include:

- Richness in detail: Part of the immersion comes from absorption in details of the story. The richer and more nuanced the details, the more credible.
- Smooth transport: The second is the transporting nature of stories which seem to take you along with them on a journey. All stories travel from A to B on a seemingly credible route.
- You are along for the ride: The third element is that you are in the stories. It's not just a third person narration like listening to a audio-book read by a famous actor.
- It's personal: A fourth element is the personalization of the happenings around you and that the key transition points are dramatic and meaningful and touch you emotionally.
- Imagination: A fifth point is the use of the imagination where, of course, anything can happen and very powerfully.
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Client Training Card 9

A Different Story

Learning Points

- We all create stories about our lives and ourselves.
- These stories are convincing and rich in detail, the more they are lived in.
- Stories can transport our feelings and beliefs.
- Stories define who we are and where we are going.
- Changing our stories changes how we live in our world.

Practice Card

- Be aware more and more during the day when you are telling and relying on stories.
- In particular, it's important to be aware of stories about the self some of which they not be factual and therefore not true.
- If the OCD story comes along, catch it as it leaves reality, wind it back to the start and change its detail point by point by replacing the OCD argument with an opposite counter-point. Reinforce your alternative arguments with a fact or observation derived from reality. If necessary expand on the alternative story by adding bits which lead to an alternative conclusion. Finally, rehearse the alternative story . . . as a story. Measure the effect the story has on the credibility of the OCD story and how much you believe it is a story, not a fact.

An example follows.

Monitoring story credibility

After you've rehearsed your alternative story, please note the following scores.

I believe my OCD story is a fact.

Not at all
0

Definitely
10

I believe in spite of all these exercises that my OCD story is the most credible story.

Not at all Definitely
0 _____ 10

I realize my OCD story is just a story like any other.

Not at all Definitely
0 _____ 10