



## COMMUNICATION BOOTCAMP SERIES

### *Talk It Out, Part 2: Making Truth Matter*

How do demagogues poison hearts and minds? How does indoctrination happen? How do we puncture it? Building on our values-based foundation, we offer strategies – and practice creating our personal stories that challenge dogma and make truth matter.

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Demagogues use scary stories to shut down critical thinking and indoctrinate their marks, but we too can use the power of story, only for good – to spark deep, visceral insights that expose manipulation and reveal truth, prompt self-questioning and reflection, and impart a moral lesson while reawakening values. Three story themes (which overlap) help us in our quest to make truth matter:

#### *Real Snake / Rubber Snake*

A story about how demagogues use fear to manipulate, manufacture false fears while obscuring genuine threats (ex: fear immigrants, ignore COVID).

#### *How Media Has Changed*

A story about how we got from journalism in the public interest (Walter Cronkite) to anything for profit (Alex Jones) and the consequences for democracy.

#### *Look for the Helpers*

A story about who has our best interest at heart vs. only their own interests (i.e.: Who is the firefighter and who is the arsonist?).

#### **What Makes a Good Story?**

- Heroes and Villains
- Suspense
- Make It Personal
- Keep It Simple
- Tap into Shared Experience or Memory
- Offer Moral Lesson, Choice, or Insight

## Making Truth Matter: Planning Your Approach

Have you had a friend, family member, co-worker, or neighbor (those you might have more than a passing conversation with) reveal their support for a conspiracy, spread disinformation, or express other harmful rhetoric (racist, anti-immigrant, etc.)?

Take a few minutes to reflect on and write down answers to these questions:

Why might this person be vulnerable to this conspiracy or demagogic appeal?

What's the insight you want them to have?

Therefore, what's the theme of the story you'll tell?

**For Example:** My friend's brother died when he couldn't get insurance after he lost his job. Nothing was there to help him, because the safety net had been destroyed. It was destroyed because enough people fell for the lie that the safety net was a "hammock" that only helped "welfare queens" and lazy deadbeats. That was a racist lie cooked up by talk radio shock jocks and anti-government politicians who only wanted the government to spend money on what helps the wealthy, like tax cuts. Now, my friend is angry about the idea that black Americans might get reparations - even that it's up for discussion - because no one did anything for her brother. Her anger that the system failed her is legitimate. She became an advocate and helped pass the Affordable Care Act, which expanded Medicaid, so no other families would suffer the pain and loss they did. She's not a hateful person, but she harbors resentment and anger, which a demagogue seizes on and directs at their scapegoat of choice. What my friend needs to realize is that the same people who have made her feel angry and bitter and fearful that someone might get something that she won't, or get help when her brother didn't, are the very same people whose mission to destroy social programs and the safety net are what killed her brother. Racial resentment killed the programs that would've saved her brother's life. He was white, but racism killed him because racism hurts everyone. The "real snake" is racism and the destruction of social solidarity that will ultimately tear us apart. The "rubber snake" is the idea that if one segment of society gets help or just compensation, that takes away from me. It's a classic demagogic appeal to scarcity and a zero-sum mentality. I'll use these thoughts to craft my story for when I talk to my friend about this.

**UP NEXT: Talk It Out, Part 3: Vaccinated, Unindoctrinated, and MOTIVATED - Thursday, May 13th, 7:30pm EST. RSVP at [hearyourselfthink.org/progresspa](http://hearyourselfthink.org/progresspa).**