

'Tell the Title of your Tale' Technique: Its Relevance to Third Generation Coaching

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Abstract

'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique is proposed as a tool that can be used to expand coaches' capacity for reflection, opportunity for meaning-making, and enable narrative-collaborative dialogue between coaching psychologist, and coachees, all of which characterizes third generation coaching. 'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique is based on the premise that if content of autobiographies, and biographies sum up the life tales of an individual, ideally the 'title' of these life tales capture the essence of what is shared in the detailed account. Five different variations of this reflection-based, dialogue-driven, collaborative technique is described in this paper, along with examples of follow-up questions, expected outcome, and general precautions in using the same. Further research using this technique is recommended in various arenas of coaching such as education, sports, relationship, health care, business etc.

Key words: tell the title of your tale, coaching psychology, narrative coaching, third generation coaching, creative activity, autobiography, biography

Autobiography refers to the tale of an individual's life that is self-written, while biography refers to accounts of an individual's life written by another person. They are 'life stories', if not 'life histories' as sometimes the veracity of the narratives cannot be determined (Peacock & Holland, 1993). However, these life tales are significant in terms of understanding what the author chooses to tell about one's own life, as in the case of autobiography, or that of other's life, as in the case of biography, to the readers at a given point in time. If the content of autobiographies, and biographies sum up the life tales of an individual, ideally the 'title' of these life tales capture the essence

of what is shared in the detailed account.

Consider the examples of the following life tales: *The Story Of My Experiments with Truth* by the Indian freedom fighter Mahatma Gandhi; *Man's Search for Meaning* by holocaust survivor, and psychiatrist Viktor E Frankl; *A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer, an author who was also a survivor of child abuse; *The Short And Tragic Life Of Robert Peace* by Jeff Hobbs; *Open* by Andre Agassi, the former World No.1 tennis player. Each of these titles reflect and emphasize either incidents that have had a profound impact on the person's life; or one's outlook on the past, present, and the future; or in some cases, sums up one's motives, and overall

life's philosophy. Based on this premise, a technique called 'Tell the Title of your Tale', which encourages individuals to reflect on the potential titles of their autobiography, and biography is presented in this paper. Though the application of this technique is wide-ranging, its application in the realm of third generation coaching, which emphasizes on narrative-collaborative dialogue between the coach, and coachee is focused here.

Coaching aims to enhance the wellness, performance, and achievement of individuals in various contexts, and Coaching Psychology is the field which applies concepts, and theories from Psychological Science to achieve the same (Allen, 2016). Thus, a coaching psychologist facilitates the process of enabling coachees to script a better tale for their life by increasing wellbeing, performance, and achievement in the domains of relationship, business, health care, education, or sports etc. and in this process they are likely to become a dream keeper, supporter, and a friend of coachees as Herll (2004) points out. The field of coaching has witnessed significant changes with the shift from goal-focused first generation coaching to an emphasis on the coachee's implicit knowledge of solutions to one's concerns and challenges in the second generation of coaching. Currently, third generation coaching focuses on the narrative-collaborative partnership between coach and coachee with chief emphasis on values, meaning-making endeavors, and identity work (Stelter, 2014). 'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique proposed in this paper lends itself to third generation coaching that emphasizes on a perspective that local culture influences one's perception and communication; views coaching as a dialogue-driven, and transformative process where opportunities are created for the coachee to self-reflect, refine, and revise stances on self, others, and world; considers values to serve as an anchor, and steer actions in the context of personal, and organizational leadership (Stelter, 2014). 'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique can be used as a tool to increase coachees' capacity for reflection and meaning-making, and provide a conducive platform for narrative-collaborative practice of coaching, as described below.

The word 'Tale' is used in the title of the technique- 'Tell the Title of your Tale' instead of 'Story' for its alliterative quality, and not with any particular intent to differentiate between story and tale, even though a tale is a story that is lengthier ("How to Write a Short Story," 2016) and rich in description, while stories could be of any length. Five variations of 'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique is presented below, along

with follow-up questions, expected outcomes, and general precautions in using the same. The coaching psychologist can use all the five methods or choose that which is most relevant to coachees. Given the goal of the technique is to create a narrative-collaborative practice for facilitating reflection, exploration, discovery and/or reinvention of coachees' self-concept, values, and meaning, the follow-up questions and dialoguing on the same is as important, perhaps even more than each of the activity itself.

METHOD 1

The coaching psychologist asks coachees to reflect on what would be the title of their autobiography if they decide to write one at present. For example, a coachee tells his autobiography would be titled *Shattered*, or *To Forgive is to Live*, or *On Cloud Nine*, or *Giving Change a Chance* or anything for that matter, a coaching psychologist must further process the response of the coachee using any or all of the following questions.

Examples of Follow-up Questions

1. Would you like to reflect and share regarding the circumstances, and life-experiences that made you choose this title?
2. How did you go about making the decision of having this as the title of your autobiography?
3. What are your feelings, and thoughts as you reflect on this being the title of your autobiography?
4. Can you describe the title of your autobiography using three adjectives?
5. Would you like to reflect, and share what values underlie your choice of this title for your autobiography?
6. What does the title of your autobiography mean to you?
7. If an opportunity is given for you to change the title, would you like to change it or would you prefer to keep it the same? What are your reasons for keeping it the same/changing it?
8. Is there any one event that you could change, which in turn would change the title of your autobiography? If so, would you like to elaborate on the same?
9. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'Easiest', 10 is 'Most Difficult', how would you rate your experience of finalizing the title for your autobiography? Would you like to share what made it easy/difficult?
10. What are your reflections on this activity itself? Or the process that it took you through?

Expected Outcome

The major outcome of this method of 'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique is to gain an understanding of how coachees perceive their life at present. Further outcomes would vary depending on the chosen area of focus, and are as follows - 1) Insights on the antecedents, and motives of coachees for choosing that title, subsequently an understanding of significant experiences in coachees' life; 2) Deeper understanding of the values that underlie the choice of the title, and broadly a glimpse of significant values in coachees' life; 3) Create a reflective space for discovering the meaning the title of the autobiography holds for coachees.

METHOD 2

The coaching psychologist asks the coachees to imagine a particular person as their biographer. After this, coachees are suggested to reflect on what would the title of their biography be from the other person's perspective. Example, a husband is asked - *What would your wife title your biography as?* and he says *A Joyous Juggler*. Another coachee is asked - *What would your childhood best friend title your biography as?* and she says *A Wasted Life*. A coaching psychologist must further explore the coachees' responses using a combination of the following questions.

Examples of Follow-up Questions

1. Would you like to share your reasons why you believe your friend would title your biography as _____?
2. What are your feelings and thoughts as you reflect on this being the title of your biography according to your spouse?
3. You said your wife would title your biography as _____? What do you think your father/ daughter (Replace it by any other significant person) would title your biography as? Is it similar or different? What according to you are the reasons for this similarity or difference?
4. What according to you were some of the defining moments in your relationship that would make your business partner choose this title for your biography?
5. What are some of the values that your relationship with your manager is based on? Are those values in any way being reflected in the title of your biography that you think your manager may choose?
6. What does this title mean to you if this is exactly what your team leader would choose as the title of your biography?

7. Ideally, what would you have wanted your mother to title your biography as? What changes should occur in the relationship in order for her to think of this ideal title for your biography?
8. If the same question were to be asked to your spouse 10 years ago, do you think she would have chosen the same title for your biography or would it have changed? What are your reasons to believe it would have remained the same or it would have changed?
9. Ideally, who would you have liked to write your biography? What would they title your biography as? What are your reasons for choosing that person to be your biographer? Also, share your reasons why you believe that person would choose this particular title for your biography?
10. Are there any circumstances, and life-events if changed in the relationship between you, and your brother, you believe his reasons for choosing this title for your biography would have changed?

Expected Outcome

The major outcome of this method of 'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique is to explore empathetic perception of coachees regarding others' perspective regarding them. Further outcomes would vary depending on the chosen area of focus, and are as follows - 1) Insights on the relationship dynamics between coachees, and the chosen person to be coachees' biographer; 2) Deeper understanding of the values that underlie the choice of the title, which in some cases may reflect values upon which the relationship is based; 3) Create a reflective space for discovering the meaning of the relationship between coachees, and the chosen person to be their biographer at present, and how it has varied overtime; 4) Provide a space that encourages coachees to visualize an ideal relationship between them and the chosen biographer, which could eventually lead coachees wanting to work towards the same.

METHOD 3

The coaching psychologist gives a list of over thirty titles of autobiographies, and biographies already published, and asks coachees to choose the title that best captures the gist of their life, and that which least captures the essence of their life. For example, a school teacher chooses the title *I Too Had A Dream*, which is about Verghese Kurien, Indian Social Entrepreneur, and says this title least captures her life, or if a motor vehicle

accident survivor chooses *I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings*, an autobiographical memoir of Maya Angelou, American poet, and civil rights activist, and says this title best captures his life at present. A coaching psychologist must further explore coachees' responses using the following questions.

Examples of Follow-Up Questions

1. Would you like to reflect, and share the circumstances, and your life-experiences that made you consider this title to best capture the essence of your life?
2. Would you like to share your reasons which made you decide that this title least captures the gist of your life?
3. Is there any other title that you would like to choose as your second option that best describes/least describes your life?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is 'Easiest', 10 is 'Most Difficult', how would you rate your experience of choosing one title from the list of thirty titles of autobiographies, and biographies? Would you like to share what made it easy/difficult?
5. Would you have preferred to come up with a new title for your autobiography or would you have preferred choosing from the existing titles as we did in this activity? What are your reasons for your choice?
6. Would you like to reflect on the values that underlie your choice of this title?
7. Imagine the title that you chose wasn't part of your options, what would have been your alternative choice, and what are your thoughts and feelings regarding the same?
8. Did the person whose story was told in these autobiographies/biographies have any influence on your choice of the title? If so, what about that person made you chose the title of their autobiography/biography?
9. If your spouse/team leader/best friend/any significant person was the one to choose the title for your biography from this list, what are they likely to choose? And your reasons for the same?
10. What meaning does this title hold in your life?

Expected Outcome

This variation of 'Tell me the Title of your Tale' technique gives leads to understand not just how coachees perceive their life, also how they do not perceive their life. The outcome is similar to what can be expected in method 1, along with an opportunity to explore how coachees don't view their life.

METHOD 4

The coaching psychologist asks coachees to imagine and share what would have been the title of their autobiography if they had written it five years ago, and what would be the title if they write it five years from now. This question could be asked along with Method 1 activity. In that case, three titles will be shared. For example, an entrepreneur is asked this question, and he says *Merry before Marrying Mary* would have been the title of his autobiography five years ago, *Finding Solace in Chaos* right now, and *Congruence* would be the title five years later. A coaching psychologist must further explore coachees' responses using the following questions.

Examples of Follow-Up Questions

1. Which of the three titles best reflects your 'real self'?
2. Knowing which of these titles, would your friends be happy for you?
3. Which of these titles was the easiest/most difficult to decide? Would you like to share your reasons for the same?
4. What values do you associate with each one of these titles?
5. What are some of your thoughts, and feelings associated with each of these titles?
6. Would you like to reflect and share regarding any insights that you derived doing this activity?
7. Which of the titles give most meaning to your life? Would you like to share your reasons for the same?
8. Describe using three adjectives the title you have chosen for the autobiography you shall write five years from now?
9. You mentioned the word 'aspirational' in describing the title of your autobiography that you shall write five years from now, what skills should you possess to make that title truly reflective of who you shall be five years from today?
10. Would you like to reflect and share, how would you best summarize your life looking at these three titles?

Expected Outcome

The major outcome of this variation of 'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique is to explore how coachees perceive their life at varying points in time - past, present, and future. The outcome is similar to what can be expected in method 1, with two major additions being that it also provides insight into past, and future, along with opportunities to reflect on transitions with respect to past to present, and present to future.

METHOD 5

The coaching psychologist asks coachees to imagine that they are the biographer of a significant person in their life, and tell what would they choose the title of the other person's biography to be. For example, a team member from a football team is asked the question - *What would the title of the biography of your team captain be if you were the author?* and he says *Narcissist Like No Other*, or an employee is asked- *What would you title the biography of your supervisor?* and she says *An Ace Catalyst*. The coaching psychologist can use these responses as cues, and converse further.

Examples of Follow-Up Questions

1. Would you like to share examples of instances which made you choose this title for the biography of your colleague/captain/wife?
2. If you were the one to have been asked this question five years ago, would your response be the same?
3. What are some of the values that your relationship with your spouse is based on? Are those values in any way reflected in the title you have chosen for his/her biography?
4. If your relationship with your team leader was as ideal as you wanted it to be, then what would you have titled his biography as?
5. As you reflect on the title you have chosen for your dad's biography, what does it tell you about your relationship with him? Secondly, what does it tell you about both of you as individuals?
6. Is there any person in your life that you desperately want to be their biographer? If so, who would that person be? What would you title their biography as? And your reasons for the same?
7. As you reflect on the other person's life, and the title you have chosen for their biography, what is your key learning from their life?
8. To what extent do you feel you knew the other person well enough to be their biographer? Would knowing the other person in an even more in-depth manner have altered your choice of title for their biography?
9. What skills do you think you should have possessed to have known the person well enough to be their ideal biographer?

10. Keeping in mind the relationship you share with your daughter, and the title you have chosen for her biography, would you like to reflect on the values that have been the basis of your relationship with her?

Expected Outcome

The major outcome of this method of 'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique is to explore the perception of coachees regarding significant others in their life. The other outcomes are similar to that of Method 2, even though in this method the coachee is the biographer of the significant person.

GENERAL PRECAUTIONS FOR ALL THE VARIATIONS

Coaching Psychologists must give adequate time for coachees to reflect on the questions. The relationship between the coaching psychologist, and coachees must be non-judgmental. The four dimensions of applied practice of third generation coaching characterized by narrative-collaborative dialogue must form the bed-rock while using this tool, and they are strength-based approach to bring about change and development in coachees; an emphasis on 'what could be', not just 'what was', or 'what is'; an assumption that problem is external to the coachee, person is never the problem; impact of coachees' life tales on the witnesses should be explored (Stelter, 2014). All the responses from coachees must be processed using empathetic listening, paraphrasing, reflection of feeling, reflection of meaning, questions that lead to thick descriptions - all of these skills to ensure coachees are understood as accurately as possible. Coachees must never be left without a closure with abrupt termination of dialogue. If the activity rakes up feelings of distress for reasons the coaching psychologist couldn't expect beforehand, coachees must be encouraged to seek further support.

Overall, 'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique could prove a useful third generation coaching tool which focuses on expanding capacity for reflection through narrative-collaborative dialogue between coaching psychologist, and coachees. The potential applications of 'Tell the Title of your Tale' technique is immense in the domains of sports, education, relationship, health care, business etc. and further research regarding the same is recommended. ■

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Biography

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