

Who we are will determine what we do and how we do it. “Who” is an important determinant of our belief structure and how we convert that into work. The “who” is description of why we exist and why we want to engage others in our journey.

It is interesting to me to understand the story behind the story. Olympians are a favorite target of connecting the dots between where they’ve been and where they are trying to go. Many of the most successful Olympians have overcome tremendous personal trials on their way to competing as one of the world’s best athletes. Some have encountered potentially devastating health problems and others have overcome severe circumstances in life. In the end, their story is a tale of accomplishment and personal success. Buried deep in that story is the “who” of the outward personality we see splashed across TV screen and print.

The “who” is rarely known, but the what and how is easily seen. It is important as a leader that you understand the stories that brought you to the activities and cause you currently pursue. Our story reminds us of why we have passions and why we seek a goal. The inner drive to do something is always tied to a deeper drive to fulfill the story that has been written for our life. When we understand the “who” of our character we can more easily convert that story into the energy of acting out that story.

Those stories of where started it all and why we are on this journey are not only important conversations to have internally, but we should share them with those we lead as a source of definition and inspiration. When we understand that she is a cancer survivor we recognize the source of that passion to fully live. When we know that he overcame an abusive childhood marked with poverty, we understand his love of making things right in his small corner of the world. When we know the story behind the person we are able to join with them in creating the coming chapters of life. We become part of their story and they enter our own. The stories and conversations of today will shape the stories and conversations of tomorrow.

The challenge for a leader becomes understanding our story and then living it out as a means to impacting someone else’s story. We must focus more attention on those we lead than on ourselves. Their interests and goals must be known to us so we can incorporate their talents and aspirations into the story we are creating for our organization. An introspective leader with an outward view of the team and enterprise is far more successful in making a lasting impact than a leader with a self-centered paradigm of work and life. We, as leaders, are not the reason for our existence. We are to serve others on a journey of self-discovery that always ends in a better story to tell to those who will listen. Share your story.