

Change your story.

Seth Godin. 3/23/12 blog

Did you wake up fresh today, a new start, a blank slate with resources and opportunities... or is today yet another day of living out the narrative you've been engaged in for years?

For all of us, it's the latter. We maintain our worldview, our biases, our grudges and our affections. We nurse our grudges and see the very same person (and situation) in the mirror today that we did yesterday. We may have a tiny break, a bit of freshness, but no, there's no complete fresh start available to us.

Marketers have been using this persistence to their advantage forever. They sell us a car or a trip or a service that fits the story we tell ourselves. I don't buy it because it's the right thing for everyone, I buy it because it's right for me, the us I invented, the I that's part of the story I've been telling myself for a long time.

The socialite walks into the ski shop and buys a \$3000 ski jacket she'll wear once. Why? Not because she'll stay warmer in it more than a different jacket, but because that's what someone like her does. It's part of her story. In fact, it's easier for her to buy the jacket than it is to change her story.

If you went to bed as a loyal company man or an impatient entrepreneur or as the put-upon retiree or the lady who lunches, chances are you woke up that way as well. Which is certainly safe and easy and consistent and non-confusing. But is it helping?

We dismiss the mid-life crisis as an aberration to be avoided or ridiculed, as a dangerous blip in a consistent narrative. But what if we had them all the time? What if we took the resources and trust and momentum that helps us but decided to let the other stuff go?

It's painful to even consider giving up the narrative we use to navigate our life. We vividly remember the last time we made an investment that didn't match our self-story, or the last time we went to the 'wrong' restaurant or acted the 'wrong' way in a sales call. No, that's too risky, especially now, in this economy.

So we play it safe and go back to our story.

The truth though, is that doing what you've been doing is going to get you what you've been getting. If the narrative is getting in the way, if the archetypes you've been modeling and the worldview you've been nursing no longer match the culture, the economy or your goals, something's got to give.

When decisions roll around--from what to have for breakfast, to whether or not to make that investment to what TV show (or none) to watch on TV tonight, the question to ask is: Is this a reflex that's part of my long-told story, or is this actually a good decision? When patterns in engagements with the people around you become well-worn and ineffective, are they persistent because they have to be, or because the story demands it?