

A person wearing glasses and a plaid shirt is looking down at a document. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

**Arena Academy**  
**Personal story**

**Elizabeth Erickson** / OFA Training Director / @LizzErickson

A close-up portrait of a woman with light brown hair pulled back, smiling warmly. She is wearing large, gold hoop earrings with colorful beads. The background is a blurred, textured wall.

**Liz Erickson**

OFA Training Director  
@LizzGErickson





## OPENING REFLECTION

**What was the last thing  
you remember that  
deeply moved you?  
Why did it move you?**



## GROUP SHARE

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# Goals for our time

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- 1 Identify the components of a compelling personal story
- 2 Craft your personal story and be adept in sharing it in a variety of scenarios
- 3 Believe in the power of shared connection through personal story

# Agenda

## Opening

Thinking about your values

Components of personal story

Adapting your personal story to your audience

Debrief and close

# Agenda

Opening

**Thinking about your values**

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**Compelling personal stories  
are built on values.**



## GROUP SHARE

**What values do you hear President Obama communicating?  
How do they land for you?**

# Agenda

Opening

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**Stories are powerful**

# Elements of a personal story

**Challenge**

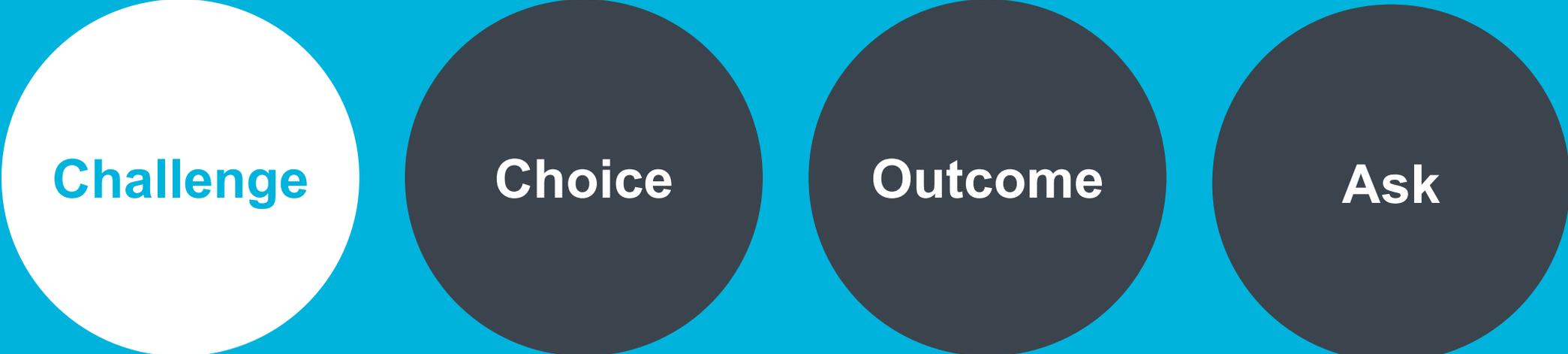
**Choice**

**Outcome**

**Ask**



# Elements of a personal story



**Challenge**

**Choice**

**Outcome**

**Ask**

**The challenge** is the central reason for taking action. Without challenges, there would be no need to organize. Everyone would just be happy with the status quo.

# Sample personal story

I grew up in the Central Valley of California -- next to peach orchards, cotton fields, and the vast Sierra Nevada mountains looming in the distance. I was raised on the beliefs of “You can do whatever you dream” and “If you work hard enough, you can achieve anything”.

I thought this applied to everyone. My unlearning of how the world worked hit me like a train when I taught 160 seventh grade boys in Charlotte, North Carolina. Faced with systemic injustices of poverty, failing education, and the color of their skin considered criminal, I knew dreams weren't enough for my students.

# Challenge

**Now it's your turn!**

# Elements of a personal story

**Challenge**

**Choice**

**Outcome**

**Ask**

**This is the **choice** you made  
to confront your challenge. What  
is the choice you made in that  
moment of adversity?**

**For most organizers, your choice was action. Your choice was change—to stand up and do something, no matter how big or small.**

# Sample personal story

## Choice

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**Now it's your turn!**

# Elements of a personal story

**Challenge**

**Choice**

**Outcome**

**Ask**

# What were the results of your decision?

**The outcome** shows how taking action can lead to something good. If you're telling the story in an effort to move someone to take action, they need to know that taking action can have positive results.

# Sample personal story

## Outcome

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Since that year, I have committed to understanding what a powerful education looks like for students in our country, supporting local schools in their efforts for success, and constantly re-evaluating who I am as a white woman in this world.

**Now it's your turn!**

# Elements of a personal story

**Challenge**

**Choice**

**Outcome**

**Ask**

**The ask** is when you give your audience a chance to join you and become part of the story.

# Sample personal story

## Ask

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Since that year, I have committed to understanding what a powerful education looks like for students in our country, supporting local schools in their efforts for success, and constantly re-evaluating who I am as a white woman in this world.

This weekend, there will be a community panel at our local school, discussing different alderperson approaches to education -- would you join me in attending?

**Now it's your turn!**

# Elements of a personal story

Begin writing your personal story. Think of a key life moment—it doesn't need to be dramatic—in which you began to care about the issue you wrote about in the previous exercise. Consider the following:

- C** What was the specific challenge you faced?
- C** What was the specific choice you made?
- O** What happened as a result of your choice?
- A** How can your listener join you in taking action?

# Agenda

Opening

Thinking about your values

Components of personal story

**Adapting your personal story to your audience**

Debrief and close

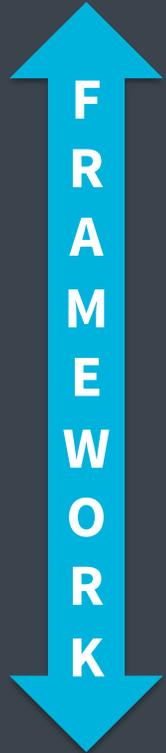
# Adapting your personal story to different audiences



## GROUP SHARE

**Who are the likely audiences you interact with as an organizer?**

# Scenario 1: During a 1:1

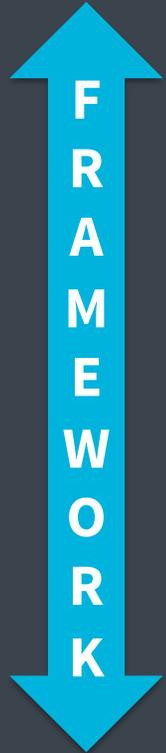


- **Challenge**
- **Choice**
- **Outcome**
- **Ask**

You are an organizer who needs to find a team leader for a neighborhood team that you are building in your turf. You have identified a volunteer who you think would be a really committed person to lead this team, but before you ask them to do that, you need to make sure they have the skill and desire to do that. The ask of this 1:1 is to organize, host, and recruit for a house party. This will be their first test.

Values of the person you are speaking to: fairness, equity, hard work

# Scenario 2: Canvassing



- **Challenge**
- **Choice**
- **Outcome**
- **Ask**

You are an organizer knocking doors. The voter that you are speaking to is undecided about your candidate, but did indicate they voted for Trump in 2016 because they thought there would be better business opportunity with Trump being in office. Your ask is to get their email address, so the voter can receive more information about the candidate you are canvassing for.

Values of the person you are speaking to: safety, loyalty, respect

# Group share

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**Debrief and close**

# Debrief

What are your next steps for your personal story?

How can you continue to re-center on the values that drive your work?

What do you predict will be difficult?

# Key shifts in thinking:

- 1 Personal stories transform issues and candidates from complicated, abstract policy to real life experiences
- 2 Personal stories are a way to share our motivations and values in an authentic way that allows us to bring people into our work for the long-term
- 3 We need to be able to adapt our personal stories to a variety of audiences at any given time (in 1:1s, with our members of congress, when we are recruiting, when we are canvassing)

# Next steps:

- 1 Continue to practice and refine your personal story
- 2 Share your personal story your coach and ask for feedback

**Thank you!**