



Pause - Reflect - Choose

Ways to Spot (and Rewrite) the Narrative

The Narrative shows up around the world on a daily basis, so it's important to be aware of *how* it shows up. In this chapter, you will find examples of how the Narrative can show up and ways it was (or could be) rewritten.

Remember our three-step process:

PAUSE

This step allows you to slow down long enough to recognize *how* the Narrative is showing up. Sometimes, it is hard to see at first glance. Trust your gut. Deep down, you know when something does not feel right. For too long we have been turning off our intuition, but now is the time to turn it **up**, not off. A key indicator is the word should. Sisters, the word *should* is our equivalent to the F-bomb. It is a red flag reminding us that buried deep inside, the Narrative is at play. ***Never bleach a red flag.***

REFLECT

After you pause, consciously choose to **reflect**. Ask yourself, what feels off about this statement or situation? Are you on autopilot, reading a page from history, or are you creating her-story from a blank page? Is this action rooted in power or powerlessness? Are you sending a message of victory or victimhood? Is it rooted in love or fear? Are you in a defensive or offensive position? Is there a shift needed that could change the momentum of this event or conversation?

Repeatedly asking why (up to seven times) will help you discover what is at the root of the problem. And then, the answers to your questions will clue you in to where you are and open up doors to a new reality – individually and collectively.

CHOOSE

The most powerful step is to **choose**. Shift out of autopilot and *choose* your direction. Consciously *choose* your new path at the intersection. Too many times in life we blow past the intersection without giving it a second thought. Use powerful language: *I can, I will, I am*.

Journalist Megyn Kelly, one of TIME's Silence Breakers, finds herself at the intersection. "I always thought things could maybe change for my daughter. I never thoughts things could change for me. Never. I believed the system was stacked against women, and the smart ones would understand how to navigate it," she says. "I'm starting to see it so differently now. What if we did complain? What if we didn't whine, but we spoke our truth in our strongest voices and insisted that those around us did better? What if that worked to change reality right now?"

See you at the intersections.

SCENARIO #1: TO UNAPOLOGETICALLY BE MYSELF: WISDOM FROM A LATINA SISTER

“I would definitely say that the intersection of race and gender have informed all of my professional life – I don’t shy away from it; I lead with it.”

[Susana](#) is a corporate communications and public relations professional with 30 years of diverse industry experience. At United Airlines, Susana served as lead external communicator for United’s Crisis Center team, implementing all global communications for a 14-day period following the 9/11 attacks. She also worked side-by-side with reporters from *The Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today* on a series of award-winning 9/11 features. With ComEd, she worked on issues of deregulation and reliability as well as several award-winning corporate citizenship programs— including the launch of a \$4M new STEM high school in Chicago’s West Lawndale community and a Stay-in-School program that earned a White House award for leading efforts in Corporate Citizenship.

Susana agreed to be interviewed because she 100% believes in the premise of this book. She knows first-hand what it was like to change her internal dialogue. She realized the glass ceiling *was* in fact a mirror too.

Here’s her story, in her words.

PAUSE – HOW THE NARRATIVE SHOWED UP

“I am a first-generation immigrant, a political refugee from Cuba. I arrived in the United States in the 1960s, when I was two years old. I grew up with three pillars - or challenges - to overcome: gender, ethnicity, and poverty. I was the first person in my family to go to college. Throughout life, I was taught to walk in two worlds: in my authentic, ethnic world and in the white, male world. It was very painful to constantly shut the valve on and off. I found I was never really flowing. I lived with that belief until my mid-30s when I read something that changed my perspective.”

REFLECT – A CONVERSATION WITH HERSELF

“I read an article about [Melody Hobson](#), a powerful leader in Chicago. I can still remember what she said about being unapologetically black and

unapologetically a woman. Those words changed my world. It was eye-opening to realize I *could* live my life differently. Honestly, that had never occurred to me before. I had listened to everyone else for so long. People of color, and even my bosses, would coach me to live in two worlds. I reached a crossroads – an intersection - and I had a decision to make.”

CHOOSE – WHAT SUSANA CHOSE TO DO AT THE INTERSECTION

“After reading those words, I made a conscious decision to see the world very differently. I chose to start standing in my world and draw others into it. I decided to no longer turn the valve on and off. I started to live authentically and began to gravitate towards jobs where I could live my values. When looking for a new position, I would interview the company as much as they interviewed me. The power shifted. It was an internal shift *first* that changed everything.

“When I lived from that space, my salary ended up matching my value – the value I placed on myself first. This world is in desperate need of people willing to *be themselves* in the corporate world. I now teach young women that you will never find your power as long as you are play-acting. You will never live an authentic life if you are only doing what everyone else has told you to do. If young women can grow up understanding this drumbeat in their heads – that they *can* be themselves – then they can create an entirely different future.”

Key Message: Don't shy away from your differences; lead with them.

SCENARIO #2 – THE MYTH OF AGE-ISM

PAUSE – HOW THE NARRATIVE SHOWED UP

Vivian is a vibrant, energetic and talented 52-year-old woman facing a new chapter in life. Her divorce is imminent and she is pursuing new professional opportunities. As she searched for options, she met with several power players in the community - men who have been very successful. She asked for their insight into new opportunities for her. After a few meetings, she called me to share the conversation below.

“He told me I am obviously great at what I do, so I should stick with that instead of trying to reinvent myself for a different career at my age. (I didn’t realize hitting 50 was the end of my professional life!) He then told me I should hurry up because no one would hire a 60-year-old speaker, or better yet a 55-year-old speaker! He said right now, I have the advantage of people wanting to stare at me because of my natural beauty.”

I could hear the defeat in her voice as she expressed her shock at the conversation. She did not realize she was at an intersection where she could make a choice: buy into his-story OR write her-story instead.

REFLECT – A CONVERSATION BETWEEN SISTERS

“Vivian, I hear the defeat in your voice,” I said. “I know you are trying to hide it. Do you realize that what he said is a myth – a big lie?”

“I am trying to Kim, but this is a theme in many of my recent meetings,” Vivian said. “Am I really too old now? Am I just fooling myself, thinking I can create a new life at my age?”

Shift #1 – *“NO, you are not fooling yourself!” I said. “Vivian, you have come face to face with the Narrative. This is a tired old storyline that men believe for us, not themselves. Perhaps many grow tired of women as we grow older because we finally wise up and stop tolerating disrespect. This is their story, not your story.”*

Shift #2 – *“Why do you keep looking outside yourself – to these men - for **your** answers?”* I continued. *“They are not going to give you the answers you need to create this new chapter of your life. Can you consider the possibility that you are searching for an answer – a hero – outside yourself?”* Vivian listened intently and recognized it for what it is. *“What do I do with the fear? I am scared about this next phase in my life?”*

Shift #3 – *“Vivian, you have the ability to grow your speaking and consulting business or start a new venture. All the answers you need are inside,”* I said. Vivian replied, *“I guess this is why so many women just go away at this stage of life. . .”* I reminded her that she had the power to change that storyline, starting now.

CHOOSE – WHAT VIVIAN CHOSE TO DO AT THE INTERSECTION

Vivian made a decision to stop looking outside of herself for the answers. And when the time came to tap into her network of female friends, she remembered that not all women are ready to help other women - yet. Instead of being discouraged by this, she chose to listen to her gut and pay attention. “The women who do want to help show their hearts and intent by actions, not words,” Vivian said. Right now, she is happily writing a new business plan – and rewriting the Narrative in the process.

Key Message: Slay the dragon of disrespect every time it rears its head.

SCENARIO #3: OPENING COMMENTS FOR A CONFERENCE

PAUSE – HOW THE NARRATIVE SHOWED UP

Sara, a high-potential leader in the healthcare field, reached out to me as I was working on this book. She was planning to kick off a women's conference in New York City the following week and wanted my input on her remarks. In light of the Narrative, three opportunities showed up.

REFLECT – A CONVERSATION BETWEEN SISTERS

Shift #1 – For her introductory speech, Sara said she wanted to be brief, to be bright and to be gone. After all, the audience was coming to hear the keynote speakers, not her. “Whoa,” I said. I pointed out how this was Nikki’s red zone showing up, which says, “I’m okay in the background.” *“It is perfectly okay for you to take three minutes to build your leadership brand. No one else is going to do that except you.”* Then I learned Sara was the one who helped mobilize the entire event! And she wanted to take a back seat? No way, not happening on my watch.

Shift #2 – As we continued the conversation, Sara commented that the conference was not about her but about the women in attendance. (This is Nikki’s red zone sneaking in again.) She wanted to serve them. While her intention was well meaning, it was misdirected. *“One of the best ways you can serve them is to be the best version of yourself, Sara,”* I said. *“There is not a limit to how much shine each of us can have. When you shine, you give others permission to shine.”*

Shift #3 – In her opening remarks, Sara planned to share a story, one she had been telling for years, about a struggling artist and how it related to female CEOs and how few there are. *“Sara, you don’t seem convinced about this story. Why are you sharing it?”* I asked. She shrugged, *“I don’t know. It seems to be the right thing to say. I have never really liked it, but I don’t know what else to say.”* This was a glaring example of how the Narrative shows up. Sara was inclined to share it because it was the same story *she* had been told over and over again. She was swimming in the fish bowl with the Narrative, and she didn’t even know it. Once I pointed it out, she immediately

understood. But then the challenge became, what now? Without the old narrative to tell her what to say, she was momentarily speechless.

The conference theme was “Send the Elevator Back Down.” I asked what that meant to her. Her immediate response: *be brave*. (She even had the saying written on a Post-it note by her desk.) Still, she was baffled about how to tie it in. She casually mentioned a story about teaching her young daughter to be brave. *Ah-ha!* There was the gold we were seeking -an authentic way to share what deeply mattered to Sara.

CHOOSE – WHAT SARA CHOSE TO DO AT THE INTERSECTION

She wove together a NEW narrative for her opening remarks, one that was much more empowering. Take a look . . .

I have a note posted in front of my desk to remind me of an important decision I made as I have evolved on my journey as a leader. It says, “Be brave.” Two words = BIG impact. Let me explain.

I have a three-year-old daughter named Brooklyn. A few months ago, Brooklyn started gymnastics. I went to drop her off, and I watched kid after kid run in, excited. Brooklyn stood next to me, pulling on my dress, refusing to take one more step. I leaned over and whispered, “Be brave. Being brave means that even though you are scared, you push through and then good things happen.” Brooklyn smiled, took a breath and ran off to class. But she left me thinking: Was I being brave in my classroom of life?

I thought about the times in my career when I wasn't brave. When I didn't volunteer for an assignment because I didn't have all the qualifications or when I had a creative idea but just didn't share it. I decided that if I wanted to inspire my daughter to continue being brave, I would have to keep being brave too. Maybe you can relate?

Living up to this idea of “being brave” has encouraged me to say yes when I wanted to say no. To raise my hand to take on one more assignment. I treat each day as an opportunity to be brave. And guess what? Good things happen.

Our event today is due to women making a conscious decision to be brave. A passionate group of women came together to create a commercial women's organization. It meant going to our CEO for support and prioritizing leadership development for women - among so many competing priorities. It meant securing funding and being brave enough to admit that we all needed the inspiration an event like this provides, no matter where we are on our leadership journey.

Our theme today is "Send the Elevator Back Down." And for this to work, we each need to embrace the idea of being brave - brave enough to step on when the elevator comes down. In preparing for this event, I was reminded by another brave woman that the glass ceiling is often a mirror. And it begs the question, do we ever hold ourselves back by not choosing to be brave?

Ten-minute conversation. Eye-opening shift in perspective. A world of difference.

Key Message: Be brave and good things will happen.

SCENARIO #4 – WISDOM FROM A SISTER IN THE LARGEST FRATERNITY IN THE WORLD

Kathy is a retired U.S. Army Colonel and has served in a variety of complex roles, including FEMA disaster response, National Defense University Strategic Leadership Program Director, the U.S. Embassy Pakistan, the Pentagon and the White House.

Here, she shares a pivotal moment from a career spent in the largest fraternity in the world: the U.S. military.

PAUSE – HOW THE NARRATIVE SHOWED UP

“I entered the military shortly after Congress mandated that women were allowed in my field. In essence, I was forced upon them. I quickly shifted to survival mode by turning into an android. I stripped away every piece of my femininity so I would not look like a girl. It is amazing how nondescript someone can become when focused on their product, not their person. I became the perfect soldier. That worked until my thirteenth year when a conversation with a mentor changed my perspective.”

REFLECT – A CONVERSATION WITH A MENTOR

“*Everything you do is perfect,*” he said. “*You are a perfectionist. You are everything to everyone, but I still don’t know who you are. You are a machine. You don’t smile. You don’t laugh.*” After some thought, I responded. “*I have a wall around that piece of myself, sir, and I would rather not share it.*” Fortunately, he would not let it go. Over time, he showed me that I could shift to be *who I chose to be instead of who I was molded to be*. He taught me how to put in a sliding glass door to myself so that when I chose to open it, I could. He led me on a journey of self-awareness and self-examination. Until that point, I lived the military expectations demanded of me - no questions asked.”

CHOOSE – WHAT KATHY CHOSE TO DO AT THE INTERSECTION

“That intersection in life taught me to believe in myself instead of believing in the work I did. My mentor taught me to trust others and to trust myself. I learned

power comes with letting go of control; it was an eye-opening lesson. I went on to serve another sixteen years for a total of twenty-nine years and six months. We have to stop saying it's *them*. It has to be *me* owning how I am heard."

AFTER THE INTERSECTION: INSIGHTS
AND ADVICE FROM KATHY

- Truly own your accomplishments and what only you can bring to the situation. Understand and believe that it's not just hard work in the system that brings success rather it's you that brings the magic that makes it all work so well. Contribute from a place of grounded awareness.
- Approach every situation with curiosity and a need to understand the perspectives of others. This will broaden your awareness on issues you think you already understand and open creative new ways to solve problems. Asking instead of telling provides opportunities to synthesize information, changes the breadth and depth of conversations you have with others, and build relationships.
- Relationships don't automatically happen at the group level; they start one on one. Take time to understand what motivates the people around you, and you can begin to develop trusting relationships, one person at a time. These relationships will provide new spaces for people to see and hear you, where actions and words are in alignment with your authentic self.

Key Message: Own how I am heard.

SCENARIO #5 –FOR OUR SISTERS IN HOLLYWOOD AND ENTERTAINMENT

Story based on a viral video of Reese Witherspoon

PAUSE – HOW THE NARRATIVE SHOWS UP

A video of Reese Witherspoon’s spirited speech at the 2015 Glamour Women of the Year awards resurfaced in the fall of 2017. For days, my inbox was flooded with emails from those who had seen both the video and read the early versions of this book. “*Look, she saw the Narrative too!*” they told me.

Here’s the video; note the phrase that was a glaring example of the Narrative at work. <https://www.facebook.com/glamour/videos/10155637551490479/>

REFLECT – A CONVERSATION WITH HERSELF

Shift #1 – The first thing Reese did was recognize the Narrative at work. The phrase she was asked to say - *what do we do now?* - did not reflect what she knew deep down. Awareness was the first step, and then she started to have conversations with others.

Shift #2 – Taking the advice of her strong mother - *if you want something done honey, do it yourself* - Reese turned to herself and asked, “So, what do we do now?”

Shift #3 – When launching a studio focused on the stories of women, she was repeatedly told, “There is not a market for movies about female-driven stories” – another example of the Narrative at work. Reese chose not to believe that and did a rewrite of her own.

CHOOSE – WHAT REESE CHOSE TO DO AT THE INTERSECTION

Reese Witherspoon launched a film production [studio](#) in 2012. The studio is dedicated to female-driven material; it’s all about sharing the stories of strong, powerful women. As you heard in the video, that decision resulted in half a billion dollars in sales worldwide and Academy Award nominations. Reese continues her quest, along with [others in entertainment](#), to support women and dismantle the Narrative through the [Time’s Up](#) initiative launched January 1, 2018. Another group, [50/50by2020](#), is pushing entertainment organizations

and companies to agree to reach gender parity in their leadership tiers within two years. Be inspired – times are changing.

Key Message: Lead the change you want to see.

Many of the true story video links included in this book follow the same thought process outlined above. A sister paused long enough to recognize the Narrative for what it was. They spent time reflecting on how they could change it. Most importantly, they made a powerful choice to take action. [Change our words, change our world.](#)

[#SpottheNarrative](#) [#RewritetheNarrative](#)

A Message From Kim

I would love to hear your story too - Kim@KimberlyFaith.com