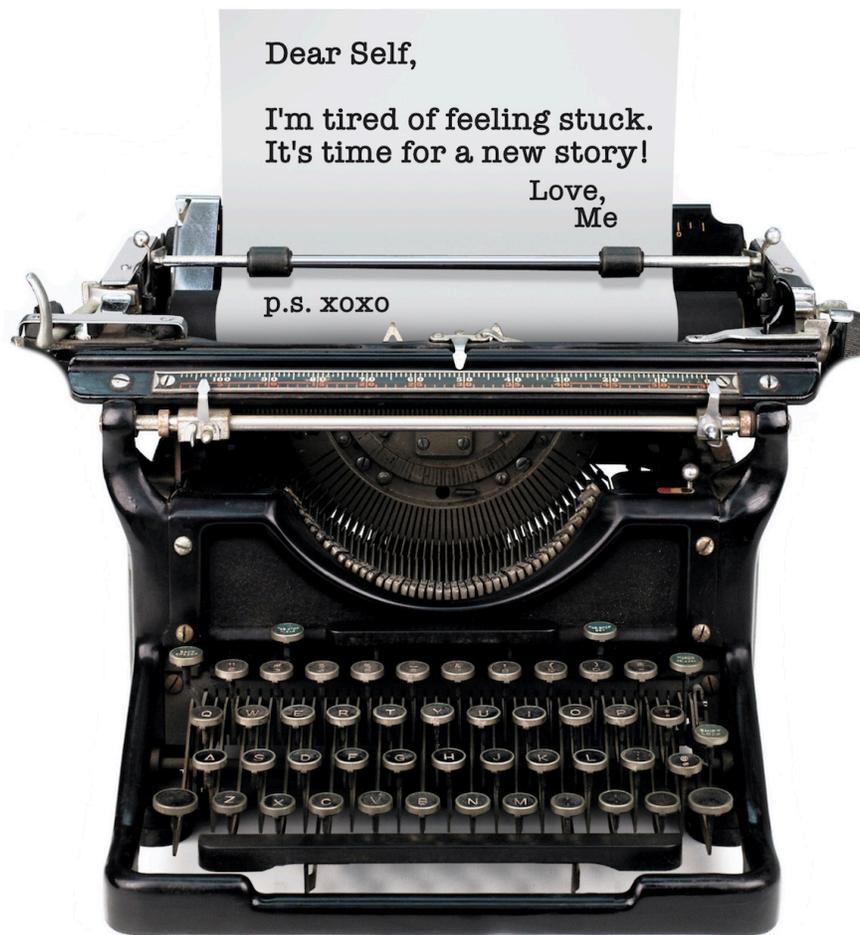


“Inspired pragmatism weaves throughout this delightful book of gems for anyone seeking to realize and maximize personal potential.” –Janet Harvey

StoryJacking

Change Your Inner Dialogue
Transform Your Life



Lyssa Danehy deHart
Transformational Coach & StoryJacker

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT STORYJACKING®:

“Inspired pragmatism weaves throughout this delightful book of gems for anyone seeking to realize and maximize personal potential. Lyssa’s easy vulnerability and naked revelations about how every person’s life unfolds is shared through her unique story that is at once our universal story of being human. It is a book to savor over time, to rest into on a rainy day by the fire while you allow your imagination to soar. It is also a book to turn to in a moment of anxiety or despair. *StoryJacking* is a spark to the banked fire in your heart that’s waiting to roar.”

— **Janet M. Harvey, MA, MCC, founder and CEO of inviteCHANGE**

“Lyssa Danehy deHart, a transformational coach and self-professed storyjacker, reveals in her new book, *StoryJacking*, how our lives are determined by the stories we tell ourselves. While the concept isn’t new, the term storyjacking is, and it’s about time we had a term for this concept. I’ve always found that when a problem exists and we find a way to label it, we become empowered to overcome it. If you’re ready to tell yourself a new story, I recommend learning the life-transforming art of storyjacking.”

— **Tyler R. Tichelaar, Ph.D. and Award-Winning Author of *Narrow Lives* and *The Best Place***

“Very simply, Lyssa Danehy deHart has written a helpful book that supports getting curious and changing your relationship to your stories. If you are ready to make important transformations in your personal narrative, then *StoryJacking* is a method through the madness!”

— **Jeff A. Barnes, Ph.D., Author of *The Wisdom of Walt: Leadership Lessons from the Happiest Place on Earth***

“*StoryJacking* is filled with wisdom, humor, and practical tips for creating the life you want. It goes far beyond the empty platitudes or simplistic ideals that many books offer, but instead offers a constructive approach to making change, through countless examples, stories, and exercises that will help you see how to get out of your own way and harness your inner spirit to take you where you want to go. This book is one gift I’m giving everyone this year—the secret to success.”

— **Wendy Hinman, Adventurer, Speaker, and Author of *Tightwads on the Loose* and *Sea Trials***

“Do you ever feel stuck, your mind swirling with negative stories? Then *StoryJacking* is the book for you. This book gave me several new tools to change my own internal narratives and supported the belief that I can create new stories that take me where I want to go, while rewriting the stories that limit me.”

— **Patrick Snow, Publishing Coach and International Best-Selling Author of *Creating Your Own Destiny***

“*StoryJacking* by Lyssa Danehy deHart is that best friend we all wish we had, the one who calls us on our crap and shows us the way to a better life. Using the magic of story, this book demonstrates how to recapture the creativity and joy that is every person’s birthright. Lyssa includes accessible exercises that build self-awareness and self-compassion, and she provides the tools we need to change our stories and create our best future.”

— **Jessica Lourey, MA, MS, Speaker and Author of *Rewrite Your Life: Discover Your Truth Through the Healing Power of Fiction***

“Who doesn’t have parts of their life story they’d like to change? Lyssa Danehy deHart’s book *StoryJacking* makes it easy and do-able to tap into the power of the reader, who Lyssa emphasizes is whole, capable, resourceful, creative, and the owner of his or her own story. I found a wealth of tools and exercises to play with as I focused on generating that new, updated version of my life story. Reading the book is like having a personal coach and a friend in my corner.”

— **Maureen Purcell, MS, PCC, Career/Life Coach at SoLwork.com**

“For many of us, our most often-told and most deeply held, intimate, internal stories are keeping us from being the people we aspire to be. They keep us from living the life we desire. Too often our oldest, most familiar internal stories keep us stuck, feeling sad, mad, and downtrodden. Enough! If you’re ready to dive deep into why you keep telling yourself these stories and what you can do about it, then look no further. Lyssa shares such a wealth of knowledge, research, intriguing stories, tools, and inspiring support throughout her book. You will uncover the stories that have been holding you back and learn how to rewrite them in ways that allow you to flourish. Here’s to *StoryJacking!*”

— **Margie Beiswanger, Business Coach at TransformYourBrilliance.com**

“*StoryJacking* provides a clear road map to help you master your best self. Through the skilled use of storytelling, the author takes you on a journey into self, weaving ways to explore your heart and soul to improve your life.”

— **Susan Friedmann, CSP, International Best-Selling Author of *Riches in Niches: How to Make it BIG in a small Market***

“Reading *StoryJacking* is like sitting in Lyssa’s office engaging in the most profound and enlightening conversations where the subject matter is my inner world. “Get curious” now means the opportunity for exploration into stories I have told myself for years, but that do not serve me well in the present. *StoryJacking* and the therapist/coach that bore its creation, have invited me to confront those stories that I unknowingly absorbed and lived with as if they were truth. By “getting curious” about our emotions, thoughts, and reactions, we put a spotlight on stories that need “jacking” so we have a choice in the next chapter of our life, and the next, and the next.”

— Pamela Moore, MA, LMHC

“I thoroughly enjoyed *StoryJacking*. With humor, insight, and a remarkably understandable synthesis of our psychological processes, Lyssa provides her knowledge and experience as a therapist, coach, and human to inspire readers to look at their own stories through a new lens so they can rewrite or tweak their stories to write the life story *they choose*.”

— BJ Levy, JD, MA, PCC, Coach and Author of *Roadmap to Success*

“In *StoryJacking*, Lyssa has done a beautiful job of organizing and articulating wisdom, common sense, and insight—not an easy task. Furthermore, she explains how the fields that were once unnecessarily disparate—therapy and coaching—have distinct value in our lives. This book is both an interesting read and a practical tool for unraveling your story, while enjoying the route taken of another journey.”

— Jan L. Bowen, Author of *It's Not That Complicated: How to Create a Personalized Template of Alignment*

“*StoryJacking* is inspiring, energizing, and insightful! This book helped me be more aware of how I create my life story moment by moment. It helped me think consciously about: What is my life story? What am I telling myself? How do I want my story to go? I can change it! I can affect it! Lyssa's book *StoryJacking* will help you write your story about who you are and who you want to be in the world. She will shift your thinking so you can have the life you want!”

— Penny Rempfer, Ed.D., ACC, Coach at PennyRempfer.com

“On occasion, a new book comes out that explores old wisdom with new insights and even illuminate's things you've never thought about. *StoryJacking* is just that kind of book. If you want to explore your stories and transform your life, Lyssa Danehy deHart has given you a road map with yourself as the key.”

— Nicole Gabriel, Author of *Finding Your Inner Truth*

“Lyssa creates a great depiction of how our mind works and how we can change our own lives if we are willing to improve. Pick up *StoryJacking* if you want to be encouraged and inspired to recognize you are the captain of your own ship.”

— Michael O'Brien, author of *Fearing Nothing: Overcoming Anxiety, Panic, OCD, PTSD, Phobias, Shyness, and Depression*

“Life is hard enough, but it doesn't have to be. Don't you want to be the hero of your story? Lyssa's vast knowledge, woven through her storytelling, exercises, and diagrams, turns your previously tightly-held convictions on their heads and deftly empowers you to rewrite your story with greater ease. It's time to start *StoryJacking*!”

— Meredith Herrenbruck, Author of *Becoming Ridiculously Awesome*

StoryJacking

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Transform Your Life

Lyssa Danehy deHart
MSW, LICSW, PCC



StoryJacking®

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You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes.

You can steer yourself
Any direction you choose.

And will you succeed?
Yes! You will, indeed!

(98 and _ percent guaranteed.)

— Dr. Seuss, excerpted from *Oh, the Places You'll Go*

To L181

In the vastness of the universe, playing upon this human stage,
I am glad I met you. xoxo

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I don't care who you are, no one writes a book alone. There are so many contributions from so many places, and it is through the generous sharing of conversation and time that any author completes a book. I am honored and blessed for the richness of experiences that each person has brought into the sandbox for me to explore.

I am deeply grateful to my mother, Elsa LaFlamme, Ph.D. Mom, you set the stage for my creativity, curiosity, and questioning. Your willingness to talk things through, explore self-reflection was pivotal. While at times it was difficult to muddle through for both of us, you demonstrated what it looked like to follow your dreams, leap into the unexplored life, and explore it.

I am also deeply grateful to my father, Edward Danehy. Dad, you pushed me to do more when I would have wanted to have it a bit easier; by doing so, you helped instill in me a mindset that I could push through difficulties, and by not giving up, I could figure things out. One of the most important gifts you gave me was that you helped me develop grit.

Into each of our lives, if we are lucky, comes the family that we choose fully, with eyes and heart wide open. For me, that family is my soul sister, Michele Logan. I love you for every deep conversation, each kerfuffle we have had to work through, and for every night of laughter that hurt my face and sides. You have been the bestest friend I could ever have. You are a John Wayne friend.

Jody McCrain, you were instrumental in my sorting through ideas and concepts as I muddled through the idea of StoryJacking. I love our talks and I appreciate all your support. Thank you for being such a good friend.

I also owe a debt of gratitude to the many people who have helped and influenced me, including Dale Albers, Kayla Black, John Bradshaw, Joseph Campbell, Carii Clawson, Stephen Covey, Maureen Cooke, Norman Doidge, Albert Einstein, David Emerald, Lamia Faruki, Joseph and Annette Fourbears, B.J. Fogg, John Gottman, Jonathan Haidt, Janet Harvey and everyone at inviteCHANGE, Wendy Hinman, Mindy Jones, Carl Jung, Jack Kornfield, Jane Lancaster, Brad Lohrding, Anna Masterson, Pamela Moore, Daniel Peebles, George and Alice Pryor, Nanny Rawlings, Michelle Rios, Don Miguel Ruiz, Rumi, Nina Serpiello, Michael Singer, Dr. Seuss, Jocelyn Tate, The Buy Nothing Project, and Marianne Williamson.

Thank you to my publishing coach, Patrick Snow, for supporting me and helping me get past the first few paragraphs. You have been immeasurably important to my completing this book.

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Thank you to Susan Friedmann, Aviva Publishing. Your enthusiasm for my book gave me a lift at just the right time—at that final push, when I needed a bit of breeze to get across the finish line.

I have extrapolated from many people and many stories that have passed through my life along the way; all

the client stories are fictionalized versions coming from multiple sources and experiences and filtered through my lens. That said, I want to thank, with a deep bow, *every* client I have had the privilege to work with through the past twenty-five years. I cannot express the depth of my gratitude for the trust you have given me, your willingness to explore, get curious, challenge me, challenge yourselves, and teach me to be a better therapist, coach, and human being. Thank you.

INTRODUCTION

“Anyone who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.” — Albert Einstein

In the words of Stephen Covey, I want to start this book with the end in mind. StoryJacking® is a play on words, exploring a central theme of StoryJacking, which is about changing our relationship to our stories. This might mean to “jack” and elevate a story; for example, moving from seeing yourself as a waitress who wants to ask more interesting questions, who becomes a counselor and then a coach, as in my case. Another StoryJacking experience could be about challenging and shifting your internal dialogue, thus “hijacking” your own thinking. And lastly “jacking into” an existing story that aligns with your purpose.

In these pages, you will explore:

- the manner you consciously determine what self-mastery will look like
- what impact you would like to have on your life and the lives around you
- the pathway that will help you as you move through the world toward your goal

As human beings, we often live our lives focused on the things we want. Not thinking as often or as deeply about what we need, or even more importantly, how we want to be with ourselves in the world. An anger management technique I use and recommend to my clients is to distract yourself when you are intensely angry or upset. When you are angry about something, it hijacks your brain, releasing a chemical cocktail of upset, increasing your reactivity and decreasing your ability to process information in a useful way. One distraction you might try is thinking about winning the Lotto; I am sure you can distract yourself for a few hours with what you would do with your bounty of money, the car you would buy, the house you would build, the gifts you would give, and the donations and causes you would support. To be sure, this distraction can help your brain to calm down so you can get it back online.

Distraction is a great technique for the short term from your original annoyance, giving you the space to relax, breathe, and get your brain calmed down, but constant distraction is no way to live your life. In a state of permanent distraction, you are living asleep, missing the moments of brilliance, of learning, of actualizing as a human being. When your primary focus is on superficial stuff, on numbing your pain, or avoiding reality, you can't focus on what is truly important: learning to spend your time and attention on who you are at your core; deciding which parts of yourself you would like to encourage; developing insights into what your purpose and your passions are; discovering what you want to bring into the world; and determining how you want to manifest your life in a way that is in alignment with your core essence, purpose, and values.

Throughout this book, I have sprinkled concepts that I call the super-secrets of the universe; they give weight to concepts that I think are important. Here is the first super-secret that you need to know: *You are not living your life for today. Your yesterday self already made all the decisions that got you where you find yourself now, and your today self will be making all the decisions for your tomorrow self.* If you're happy and content with your life, then yay you! If you are a bit less than content, then your today self has the opportunity to make some small or big changes, and your tomorrow self might be extremely grateful for the work.

There are many aspects of your life to consider as you muddle through where you want your life story to go and how you might rewrite certain chapters. You may not always think through the consequences of your “in the moment” actions, but that doesn’t mean your future self isn’t going to be dealing with those consequences down the road. Hopefully, your life is a long game. No matter what your life is like in this moment, you can impact the last chapter significantly, as you discover what you want the rest of your story to be like, look at all the tools you can develop, shift your mindset and attitudes, and then commit yourself to your own personal evolution. For me, there is empowerment in the idea that, while you may fail at times, when you have a deep connection to knowing yourself, trusting yourself, and having a vision for yourself, and when you align those aspects with your end goal, you can steer your course toward your own goal line. You have heard many metaphors for this: “They lost the battle, but won the war,” or Scarlett O’Hara’s “Tomorrow is another day.” I expect you can reflect on times when you made a fast and unconscious decision, only to have to live with a longer-term consequence shortly after. For example, the kid who breaks curfew coming in an hour later, only to lose his privileges for a month; or the one nanosecond misstep on an adventure that leads to six months of rehab after you break your leg. And while having a big audacious goal to work toward is important, it’s just as important that your goal resonates and aligns with your core essence. It’s a balancing act, to be mindful in the moment, as you learn to appreciate and be grateful for the life you are in the middle of living. This process can be difficult, so I honor you for taking the steps to explore yourself.

My purpose for StoryJacking is that I want my today self to develop self-awareness and self-mastery so my tomorrow self can live as open to the opportunities that present themselves to me as I possibly can. I would like to share with you the ideas and tools that will allow you to develop your self-awareness and self-mastery. You don’t have control over the world, bad things will happen, but you have power over how you will interpret those bad things. Even when times are hard or painful, you will be able to watch your life’s experiences with curiosity and an open-minded perspective. You will find the pathways to joy, gratitude for the life you are living, and hopefully, a way of making changes that improve not only your life but the lives of those around you.

I imagine there are some people who feel they have never suffered, but I have not met any of them. Most people on this planet have experienced trials and tribulations. Bad things have happened, beyond personal control, that have created drama or chaos for them. Life is not a competition to the bottom based on who’s suffered the most; rather, it’s about the stories you choose to align yourself with despite the suffering. When the Dalai Lama was forced to flee his country, lose his home, and be set adrift on the seas of change, he had all the same choices as any human being—to be bitter and angry, or to choose another path. He has chosen the path of compassion, gratitude, and generosity. Ask yourself, “Which paths are set before me? How will I embrace my opportunities to be a hero and leader in my own life? What is the impact I would like to have on others, my family, my community, and the world? And, of the paths before me, which will bring me more joy and less suffering?” It’s your choice; choose wisely.

In this book, I am going to share ideas about how to StoryJack your life, by doing what I have done with my clients for years. I am going to share my understanding of how we, you and me, create stories. I am going to use examples and share with you the tools I have used with myself and my clients over the past twenty-five

years. I will do my utmost to illustrate the concepts we will explore. Along the way, I will also use myself as an example of how stories show up for people, not always in pretty ways. My stories may not be your stories, but I think we have enough commonality that you may recognize yourself in some of my experiences. I am not sharing my stories because they are so unique or fascinating; instead, I am intimately familiar with my stories and the inner workings of my mind. I don't have to assume anything or guess how someone else might think, feel, or react because I'm drawing upon my personal experiences and perspectives. My stories will allow me to share with you what I have learned, what I have had to explore in my inner world, and how I muddled through, or at the very least, got clarity about just what stories I was telling myself. Then I could consciously choose which stories I wanted to encourage and which I needed to let go of so I could move forward in the direction of my dreams.

I hope this helps you to see that:

- You are not alone.
- This journey into self-awareness is the path to self-mastery.
- Grappling with yourself, your perceptions, attitude, and mindset will free you in ways you have yet to imagine.
- Self-mastery leads to becoming a better leader, parent, partner, friend, and human being.

Throughout my life, I have kept journals, recordings, poems, and notes. These became tools to help me remember more clearly how I felt at different times. I recommend looking at the tools you already have and then building a bigger toolbox. If you have kept journals, pull them out and see where you have been and where you are so you can chart a course toward where you want to go. When you keep a journal, you can step back from the inside perspective of the events and then look at your life from an outside perspective; you may have heard this called the bird's eye or 30,000-foot view. Realize that you are the expert in your own life. You will have your longest and most intimate relationship with yourself; you have been with yourself since the moment of your creation, and you will be with yourself until your last breath. Spending time getting to know yourself, understanding your motivations, questioning your beliefs, and exploring what has meaning and why is always a worthy endeavor. So, again, a powerful tool is to journal; seeing your stories in the safety of your own notebook can lead you to some illuminating insights. And that is, of course, what I hope for you—that through the process of getting curious and thinking about how to do your own StoryJacking, you will develop insights into the stories you can challenge and change.

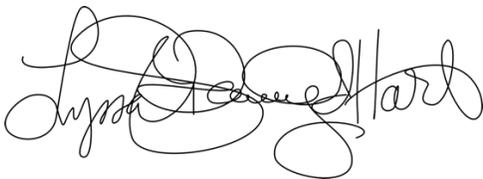
In reflecting upon one's life or any event, each of us is always coming from our own voice and looking through our own lens. The lenses and filters that we see the world through are so firmly attached to our faces that it requires great awareness and then courage to pull the lenses off and look at ourselves and the world around us from any other viewpoint. You may find that you don't always like what you have been telling yourself, or that you have been your own worst problem so placing blame on others is wasting time and stopping you from moving forward. Blame and anger are backward-looking emotions; they can be useful only when you decide to look at why you're feeling them. In this book, you will explore who you are, what gets in your way, your filters, and your emotions. You will have many tools to choose from to support you in changing habits of behavior and thinking. I will give you some new ways to explore the inner landscape of

your mind and look at the stories you are telling yourself. I have used stories from my work with clients, just like you, but I have changed names and mixed up the situations a bit, so in reading this, if you recognize yourself, it's confirmation that you are not the only wanderer on the road; the path is filled with people muddling through, just like you.

I often talk to my clients about calming themselves down. I have said, "Rub your tummy and repeat, 'I'm okay, I'm okay, I'm okay.'" I still say this and it still is helpful. But these days, I am much more likely to say, "Plot twist! How do you want to change your relationship to the story?"

A plot twist is a set of circumstances; it could be a big and life-changing event, such as losing your vision, your home, a job, or getting divorced. Your plot twist could be any of the small daily interruptions that toss you off your game, like getting stuck in traffic, stuck in line at the post office when you are running late, or being pulled into unexpected meetings. These are the events you weren't expecting, but they showed up. Now you need to recognize them, pivot, and adjust the plan forward. Plot twists can also be lovely things like an unexpected introduction that leads to a great friendship or a business opportunity. In each plot twist, you have a choice, and your choice hinges on how you decide to shift your relationship to the situation and the story. Now it's time to StoryJack.

This book is my way to help you understand your internal processes, the ways you interact in the world, and how you make stories and meaning. I invite you to become more curious, deepen your self-awareness, learn from your insights, and become your best version of you. This book won't change the world outside of you into the perfect place for you to live happily ever after. However, it will open your eyes to look at the ways you have created the box you now live in and then determine whether that box is the one you wish to stick with. If it isn't, then let's StoryJack the heck out of it. By the end of this book, I hope you can create new narratives and write a new ending to the story you call your life.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Lyssa M. Danehy deHart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with large loops and flourishes.

Lyssa M. Danehy deHart, MSW, LICSW, PCC
Bainbridge Island, WA * Spring 2017

SECTION I

YOU ARE WHOLE



COACHING TO THE STORY

“The only thing standing between you and your goal is the bullshit story you keep telling yourself as to why you can’t achieve it.” — Jordan Belfort

Let’s begin by looking at StoryJacking from a coaching perspective. This process asks you to consider the core competencies and best practices of coaching. While there are many similarities, real differences exist between coaching and counseling. StoryJacking is used in both counseling and coaching to build insights and skills to help you shift. In this book, I am writing from a coaching perspective, and I think that is important for you to understand, so let me explain.

Most therapists are comfortable listening to the stories their clients bring, while coaches often want to “bottom line” or “nutshell” the story. “Let’s get to the point and not lost in the weeds.” What I find interesting about this perspective is that all your beliefs, identified limitations, possibilities, and ideas of meaning are wrapped up in the stories you share with others. I think it is vital that coaches challenge their own mindsets and recognize the opportunity that exists to explore their clients’ meaning through the stories they create and share about themselves. There is a big difference between listening to an interesting story and recognizing an important one. For example, I once watched a coach working with a client around the idea of buying a home; the conversation got mired in the interesting but unimportant details around the cost of housing, real estate markets, and neighborhoods. The coaching never delved into what was important about the idea of “home.” By not inviting the client to explore the meaning below the story’s surface, “What does home look and feel like?” the client missed the opportunity to explore at a deeper level what was important to him about owning a home. For instance, when the client stated, “My home is my safe place,” the coach might have asked, “Would it be of use to explore what you mean by safe place?” “What is the difference between the safe places inside and outside of you?” Given that home ownership is not the only way to address the need for safety, getting curious about what is even meant by safety or where that need comes from could open a conversation that helps someone learn more about himself. And that’s what it’s all about—self-awareness—to be able to choose consciously what you need.

So, let’s agree that listening and coaching to the story doesn’t mean that either you, the individual receiving coaching, or I, the coach, are listening to the surface, superficial, or repetitive story until both of us are tired of telling and hearing it. Instead, let’s get curious about the underlying meaning the story’s narrative illuminates. Let’s use the story as the platform to jump into deeper waters, where you can know yourself

better.

Since much of my career has been as a therapist, let me share some differences between counseling and credentialed coaching that I have noticed:

Counseling	Coaching
A long history, beginning as a science in the 1800s.	Thomas Leonard started the International Coaching Federation (ICF) in 1995
Historical use of labels like crazy, insane, lunatic, or mentally ill.	Sees clients as whole, resourceful, capable, and creative.
Stigma of patient as broken and needs to be fixed.	Client is leader in co-creative process.
Medical Model – insurance and diagnosis.	Non-medical Model – Client in full ownership.
Many different therapeutic theories.	Eleven Core Competencies that support client growth.
Masters level degree or higher and State Licensure.	Training through an ICF Credentialed program and ICF Certification
Therapist as expert.	Client as expert.

I would hazard to guess that most therapists don't see themselves as the expert in their clients' lives, but there is a larger perception that the therapist is an expert. And, there is a large group of people who call themselves coaches, but have minimal to no training as a coach, they may act more as consultants. Both therapists and coaches use many similar tools to help support insight awareness and personal growth. Coaching owes much of its foundation to the work of many different psychological theories. Yet the idea of you, the client, as expert and these eleven core competencies that a practicing International Coach Federation (ICF) coach uses, set the foundation that you are the person in the driver's seat.

You can read more about these core competencies at the ICF website, coachfederation.org. Here are the Core Competencies in a nutshell:

1. Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards
2. Establishing a Coaching Agreement
3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client
4. Coaching Presence
5. Active Listening
6. Powerful Questioning
7. Direct Communication
8. Creating Awareness
9. Designing Actions
10. Planning and Goal Setting
11. Managing Progress and Accountability

What is so special and pivotal about these competencies is that all coaches who are following the ICF coaching model and not consulting or doing counseling, are working to integrate these competencies into their work with their clients. There is a mental shift, where both you and your coach see you as the expert; you are a powerful human being, capable of your own insights, competent to determine what tools work best for you, able to be self-knowing, and able to rewrite your stories. I ask you now, which would you prefer to be—the expert or the patient?

I bring this up because I believe that if you start with the idea that you are whole, capable, resourceful, and creative, then you are empowered to shift any ideas, beliefs, or behaviors that keep you stuck or feeling powerless. You can change your world. If I believe you are broken and that I, or any outside person, has either the responsibility or the power to “fix” you in some way, you are already working at a deficit. To be clear, good therapists do not try to fix their clients. But insurance requires diagnoses, so to get paid, therapists must give you a diagnosis. The medical model requires this, and frankly, the medical model implies implicitly and explicitly that you are ill. Some people are mentally or emotionally ill to a degree that the medical model does apply and can be quite useful. Yet, when I think back over the twenty-plus years I have been working with people, maybe 10 percent of my clients were seriously mentally ill. Most of my clients were stuck—they came to therapy because they were struggling with relationship issues or situational anxiety and depression that was directly linked to things in their lives, like their finances, their relationships, their kids, their careers, or a crisis. Most wanted to figure out their place in the world and discover how to create a life they resonated with. I would hazard a guess that most of my therapy clients would have been just as well served by coaching as by counseling. I believe that the world is filled with people who could benefit from the growth opportunities that psychological insights and tools offer without needing the medical model.

It’s important to acknowledge that a power differential shows up when one person is in a higher position, like a doctor, counselor, or expert, and you are a patient coming to him or her with a problem. You might consider abdicating your power to these professional people, because, well, they’re supposed to know everything, and wouldn’t it be nice if there was a pill, fairy dust, or a magic wand they could just wave around your head to “fix” you and your situation?

In coaching, the responsibility and work are focused on you, the client, and it comes from you, your situation, your insights, your desires, and your expert knowledge of yourself. It’s an internal generative process where you own your sovereignty. As the expert in knowing yourself, you get to decide what you want to explore in your internal landscape. Coaching trusts that you are able to determine your life and that you are capable of uncovering your deeper needs. The coach holds the space for you to be heard, facilitates the agreement and clarity around what you want to explore, asks powerful questions to help you get curious, and helps you develop insights and deepen your current insights and awareness. The coach also supports you in creating the map and steps that will keep you moving in the direction of your stated goals, helping you to hold yourself accountable to the actions that you decide you need to take.

Coaching is a co-creative process where you are encouraged to design your life, set powerful goals and visions about your future, take the actions that will support your growth toward your goals, and ultimately learn to

manage your own progress. The coach provides some accountability in this process, but as you grow, you are supported in taking more ownership for yourself. In a nutshell, coaching gives you, the client, permission to be a full grownup, with all the choices, responsibilities, and consequences of overseeing yourself, that being grown up entails. StoryJacking fits with coaching seamlessly because StoryJacking is all about you evolving into the person you want to become and having the support that challenges you to live for more.

Each of us accomplishes more with support. What matters is having a supportive environment so you can do more than you might do alone. Let's look at an example: You have a beautiful draft horse, and this horse can pull 1,500 pounds, but you need to pull more weight than that, so you gather up a second draft horse that can also pull 1,500 pounds. You might assume that between the two horses, they could now pull 3,000 pounds, right? Well, yes, they can, but here psychology steps in, so, in fact, the two horses can pull something closer to 4,500 pounds. Because something fascinating happens when the horses work together, they are empowered and benefit from the teamwork. And, even more interestingly, if the horses have trained together and developed their relationship, they can pull more and faster than they could have pulled alone. In my own life, I have multiple examples of this relational empowerment. When I clean my house alone, it takes longer than if my husband helps; add music and dancing and we have more fun and get more done. Or think about the growth of "coworking" spaces—because humans enjoy being around other humans, when we have company, we are more productive, we generate ideas, and we are emboldened to stretch ourselves. Imagine working alone all day at home with no interactions with others; after the novelty wears off, it's a lonely slough. This is what you do for yourself when you get a coach or a counselor; you give yourself the support to go farther than you believe you could go if you were alone. If you are in a co-creative process, developing your personal team, I am guessing you can move four times as much of your baggage as you could if you tried to muscle through it alone. Similarly, having support from someone else is a great way to change your stories faster and with more fun than if you did it all alone.

I love the co-creative process. I have my own coach, and I continue to have a support network of my own. I will staunchly say that I owe all my own StoryJacking to the people in this circle. The ability to gain perspective from the observations and questions that my circle brings to me has supported me in my personal life and in my career. I also like the shift from medical model to coaching model, but it hasn't been easy; it's taken concentrated effort. The transformation from counselor to coach has asked me to stretch and let go of some ideas about my insights for others and be open to their insights for themselves; it is one way I have been StoryJacking my own paradigm, changing how I see myself in relation to the work I do, and challenging my ideas about how I want to be with people, as a human being and as a coach. I am sharing many of the tools I use, and I hope these tools will support you in your own move forward on a clear and direct path. I love starting with the perspective that you are whole, capable, resourceful, and creative. I have worked in the helping field for a long time, and I absolutely believe that each one of us can change. I believe wholeheartedly in your ability to heal your wounds, determine your dreams, and then work like the dickens to make those dreams a reality.



BECOMING WIRED FOR STORIES

“The world isn’t just the way it is. It is how we understand it, no? And in understanding something, we bring something to it, no? Doesn’t that make life a story?”— Yann Martel

Let’s go back in time, about 5,000 years. You are a traveler, crossing a vast and dark forest as you explore an unknown world and look to find your place in it. You are on a quest to find a vision for your future; it will take courage to show the world that you are here and to make your shout out into the darkness. You are not alone. You are following the footsteps of those before you, and you are laying the groundwork for those who follow you. You’ve come to a good spot to stop for the night, so you start to prepare for the long night ahead. The night slowly creeps over the sky and the last pale strands of light are slowly being eaten by the dark. You are sitting alone in this dark and alive forest. You hear night creatures as they hunt, the long wing beats of an owl, and then a short time later, a screech and then the short, quick cry of a rabbit meeting its end. As you sit in the dark forest, your sight is limited, but your body is alive with intense awareness. Your ears prick up at every small sound—each slight rustling of leaves or branches in the spaces around you. Your world and vision have gone black and gray in the night. When you look up through the dark outlines of trees and see a sky filled with the bright pinpoints of 100 billion stars, you are struck by the enormity of the universe around you, and you feel small. As you place yourself in this scene, allow your mind and body to feel what that smallness in the bigness of the universe feels like, what do you notice in your body right now? Are you feeling comfortable, or feeling dread? Excited or anxious? Name the feeling(s) you notice.

As you sit in this darkness, you decide that enough is enough and pull your belongings close. You feel around in your camp bundle and find your flints. You have gathered some wood together and set some dried moss in the middle of the pile. You strike your flints together, creating small sparks of light, and as you strike, a small ember hits your dry kindling and you softly blow. In a few moments, you see the hot red outline of the moss catching fire. You gently breathe life into this new fire until the flames start dancing. The darkness around you begins receding. Soft yellows, oranges, and blues light up your surroundings, and warmth begins to fill the air. How do you feel now? What are you noticing in your body? Are you feeling safer? Are you relaxing?

Fire and our ability to harness it changed the course of human history. Fire offered us warmth in the cold and light in the dark. Fire protected us from the dangers of predators who wished to snatch us up as dinner. Fire allowed us to cook food, expand our diet, and smoke meat. It gave our bodies the opportunity to suck more nutrients from our food and to keep our food lasting longer so we didn't have to forage the whole day. That gave us the most precious commodity in life: time. I would argue that fire created stronger communities and that all art, music, and innovations are directly linked to our harnessing of this powerful tool. The emergence of stone tool designs and manufacturing and the control of fire are the first two significant technological advancements in the human experience.

Not needing to forage constantly gave us time to become creative and innovative. You, yes you, come from the most creative and innovative species on this planet. You are the dream of those early people—that they would still exist in you in some faraway future. And along with creativity and innovation, this spaciousness of time gave us the opportunity to share our stories around a fire. We shared stories to share the adventure of the hunt; we shared stories to build bonds between us; we shared family stories that strengthened our familial and tribal bonds, and ultimately, as we sat around the fire looking up into those 100 billion pinpoints of light, we shared stories to create meaning and develop understanding about a world that was mostly unknown and wildly beyond our control. The fire danced and cavorted in our rings of stone; it helped us to feel safe, warm, and full. The stories helped us make sense of the world around us and feel a little bit more in control. They allowed us to learn from others and think new thoughts of our own. As we decided what things meant, we labeled, named, and defined each thing we saw. By doing this, we felt powerful and set about deciding that we were the masters of all we saw.

As we moved forward in time, through thousands of years, our minds developed networks for transporting understanding about what we saw, what we dreamed, our emotions, and how we felt both physically and psychologically. All these senses then connected to stories we used to explain what our senses were telling us. Stories became how we communicated, traded information, explored ideas, and shared our explanations and understanding of the world.

Paul Zak, author of *The Moral Molecule: The Source of Love and Prosperity*, describes his research about how we connect to the emotion in stories. The brain releases chemicals in response to stories. Chemicals like cortisol, adrenaline, or oxytocin. These chemicals help your neurons to express responses, such as sadness, excitement, or love. Let's say you are watching a sad movie like *The Notebook*. You find yourself sad, possibly even crying, maybe to the point that your husband shakes his head at you and your sobbing best friend, and asks, "Why do you two watch that stuff?" Your sobbing brain is being triggered to release cortisol for your distress and oxytocin for your connection to and empathy for the characters in the story. The more powerfully this reaction is triggered, the more connected you feel to the characters, and in the case of *The Notebook*, the more tightness you might feel in your throat, the redder your nose would become, and the more you might cry. Zak's research explores the connection between the evolution of oxytocin and our ability to create attachment. When these two chemicals are released together, it makes it more likely that we

will have empathy and caring for another person in the story. Over hundreds of thousands of years, our storytelling brain developed these chemical connections in our storytelling networks; as neurons fired and chemicals released and responded, we became hardwired for stories.

Our brain lights up with stories. When we listen to a slow and lackluster lecture, our brain processes the words into meaning, but little else happens. Only when the information is shared in a compelling way that gets us to think and feel simultaneously do we experience the story from an inside perspective. Then we begin to feel what the meaning is and not only know it. Stories have the power to help our brains sync up with others—be they humans or animals—so we can share their feelings and perspectives. If you have ever been moved by the story of an animal who is suffering, you are not just suffering with the animal because what you have heard goes against your moral code; you suffer because you have felt the power of empathy, and on some deep level, you have internalized that suffering. The funny thing is that our brains don't know the difference between being immersed in a powerful story and physically being in the situation. When we internalize the story, it becomes a part of our experience and shapes how we see the world.

In his book *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human*, Jonathan Gottschall writes that “most of the stories told the world over are almost always about people with problems. The people want something badly—to survive, to win the girl or boy, to find a lost child. But big obstacles loom between the protagonists and what they want. Just about any story is about the protagonist's efforts to secure, usually at some cost, what he or she desires. “Story = Character + Predicament + Attempted Extrication.” This pattern is great so long as we don't stop at Character + Predicament.... When we apply this storytelling pattern to our personal lives, we will realize that most of the stories we tell ourselves inside our heads are also about problems—our problems. They include what's wrong with our lives, what's wrong with other people, and ultimately, what is wrong with us. What our stories don't often include is how we will succeed at getting out of our particular predicament.



STORY-MAKING MACHINES

“Who are we but the stories we tell ourselves, about ourselves, and believe?” — Scott Turow

If you are human, then you are story-making machine. You know stories. You invent and create them about everything that you see, think, and do. You create them about each thing that you see others say, think, or do. You know a good story when you hear one. You most likely love to tell stories, and you will stop and listen with great intensity to someone else’s story if it captures your head and your heart. I am sure that you have heard, and maybe even told, a wild fish story—you know, about the one that got away. Your brain is designed to recognize that you are hearing stories or telling stories when you share something that happened to you like “I’ve met ‘the one,’” and you need to shout it out to the world, or at least tell it to your best friends, needing to talk all about it. Maybe you are sharing an adventure that you had, where you were chased into a bathroom with an English couple by a slowly ambling bear (true story). There is an agreement and understanding that when you talk about something that just happened, you are sharing a story. You probably also have strong ideas about the truthfulness of stories. In the wise words of Marcus Aurelius, “Everything we hear is an opinion, not a fact. Everything we see is a perspective, not the truth.” When the pieces of the story don’t fit, you might quickly realize that you are being told a tall tale; perhaps you would call these lies.

You may love funny stories; these stories tend to help you find your tribe of fellow funny folk. You can be mesmerized by a good dramatic story or a passionate one, especially if the passion and excitement are yours. You may even enjoy the occasional scary story, especially if you aren’t in the middle of living it yourself and no chainsaw-wielding psycho killers are at the door. And I hope you recognize that all these stories are the way we communicate with others.

Where we can get shagged up is the stories we tell ourselves that we rarely share. The stories about how we can’t do something because we aren’t good enough, or smart enough, or capable enough. These stories cause us problems because we often keep them secret, hidden away in some dark closet in our mind, sometimes even from ourselves. And this, my friend, is a problem.

These negative and often unconscious narratives are so powerful that they can derail you from completing goals, changing jobs, creating boundaries, or showing up authentically in your life. I am fascinated by how

our stories affect us, so I have been working to develop my own curiosity, gain clarity, and begin to challenge the stories that have been limiting me. I hope to share what I am learning so that if it resonates with you, you might have some tools to challenge and change the stories you are telling yourself and that are keeping you stuck and playing small in your life.

We can get tangled in our stories. It's the "I can't see the forest for the trees" metaphor; we are so "up close and personal" in our lives and our relationships that we can't see our lives from any other angle. My clients often come to me wanting forward motion in their lives around issues they have been wrangling with, often for a long time. Depending on what the client and I decide to get curious about, we may find ourselves trundling down any number of rabbit holes of stories. I continually notice how many different stories we tell: stories that focus on what isn't working, on how we are stuck or trapped, that tangle us up in details, or that are so wrapped up in a lot of emotions that they don't lead anywhere useful. Yet if everything is a story, as I believe, which are the stories to explore? Are there stories that are helpful to you, or would the story about the story be an interesting place to look? Where are you ready to get curious? What do you focus on so the stories will be useful and help you shift your life in meaningful ways? And what do you need to support yourself to gain perspective, expanding the willingness to show up differently, and generally get out of your habits of thinking, reacting, and avoiding so you can show up differently in the world? If you want a different life experience, you must be different yourself; otherwise, it's an easy slip right back to your old habits and old stories.

I ask that you have compassion and empathy for yourself on this journey. That you are even reading this book shows that you are courageous and ready to take a good look at what you are saying to yourself. To StoryJack your life means you are willing to get out of your stories and get curious about what they are about—to discover what is going on below the surface. Are you willing to practice getting into your own shoes and then out of them again—to try on some new shoes and even play with all the shoes in the store, trying on different ones so you can tromp through your stories and see and understand them in some new ways? Being willing to gain perspective is an act of courage; it is also one of the super-secrets of the universe. *As your perspective shifts, so does your world.*

There is the empathy you will develop for yourself and others as you explore all the possible stories; that empathy gives you a window into the struggles other people are wrestling with. To see the world from another person's viewpoint opens your mind, especially if you don't agree with that perspective, allowing room for forgiveness and understanding. You didn't live the life that got another person to the place he is, yet you can develop appreciation for that person and make an effort to hear his unique perspective.

What I hope you gain is the willingness to look at all of us from a position of compassion, empathy, and kindness—to look at what you think might be going on in someone else's story.

Ultimately, I hope to share the thoughts, ideas, understandings, new thinking, and tools I have used in changing some painful and problematic stories that I have held onto myself and which are not serving me in my present life situation. This is not about navel gazing or "The Great American experiment of me," as in the words of Walt Whitman. StoryJacking is about learning to grow yourself as a person of self-mastery by exploring your relationship to the stories that you tell yourself. It's about developing insights, courageously

holding yourself accountable for your life, and basically owning your baggage so you can change your story. It is about getting out of your own way so you can be successful. If this process is helpful to you, I will be glad. If it doesn't work for you, I encourage you to take care of yourself in ways that do resonate for you. But either way, stay curious and find the pathway you need to change your stories and create a successful life in whatever way you determine success.



MEET YOUR PSYCHE

“Stories are psycho-diagnostic—they diagnose the condition of our psyches. When we watch, read or hear a story, whatever detail jumps out reflects an issue in our psyche that requires our attention.” — Thea Euryphaessa

You have most likely heard of Sigmund Freud, the Austrian neurologist at the turn of the twentieth century who founded a psychological process called psychoanalysis, which he used to treat psychopathology. Psychology attached itself to the medical model of seeing any mental disorder as psychopathology so it would be considered a “real” science and not a bunch of hocus pocus. And, in all fairness, it is a real science, in part thanks to people like Freud. Through his work with his patients in Vienna, Freud developed many psychological theories. I am not going into all of them, but the one I want to explain quickly is that of the id, ego, and superego.

The id, ego, and superego are the three parts that make up your psyche. And your psyche is defined as your soul, mind, and spirit. Understanding these three parts will give us a common language when we talk about ideas throughout the rest of this book.

Your id is your instinctual self. You have some simple impulses to eat, breathe, procreate, and survive. Basically, if you’re alive and you want to stay that way, your id is the part of your psyche that drives these aspects of your life. It is also the aspect of your psyche that operates most obviously on the “pleasure principle,” which, in a nutshell, means that you seek to move away from pain toward pleasure. Would you prefer to be burned or have a cupcake? Well, regardless of what your mouth is saying, trust me, your id wants the cupcake. And your id will take the cupcake by force if it must because it wants what it wants. Most likely, you are in alignment with your id on this cupcake dilemma. Your id wants your satisfaction with no insight or thought to consequences. So let’s make the choice a little harder; would you prefer an apple to a cupcake? You know what your head is telling you right now: “Apples are good for you, and cupcakes are filled with sugar and butter.” But your id is that impulsive part of you that doesn’t give a flip and would gobble down that cupcake in the blink of an eye, lick its lips, and smile.

Now, if you ran around acting only on your impulses, you wouldn’t get much done past eating, breathing, shitting, and screwing. Which might sound fun for an evening, but it limits a lot of possibilities for your life. So as our minds developed, we also developed the ego. Your ego is the moderator between your superego

and your id. It works hard to please your id in ways that will get you what you want within the limits of the reality you are living in, and within the reflections of the superego, which is the internalization of your societal, cultural, and familial rules.

Let's say you are living in a sugar-free household; your family thinks sugar is bad for you. That is your reality, and on some level, to avoid grief at home, you have to operate under the principle that sugar is bad for you. When you bring a snack to school on share day, your mom sends you with beautiful apple slices; they are delicious, and your mom has gone to great effort to slice them and arrange them like swans—seriously, the presentation is amazing. When you get to school, everyone exclaims that your apples are the most beautiful they have ever seen; I mean, they're swans! Right next to your swan apples, on the snack table, is an old blue Tupperware box filled with cupcakes—just normal everyday cupcakes, some chocolate, some vanilla, simple. Which snack do you think is going to be gone first? The swan apples? No? That's right, those sweet, fat-filled cups of sugar with sugar frosting; blink, blink, gone. Your ego will make this id desire okay. It will tell a story to make you entirely happy. "Well, you don't eat cupcakes every day, do you? In fact, you have been so good at eating fruits and veggies that you deserve a cupcake. And after the morning you had running around making sure those swan apples didn't fall apart on the ride to school, you've done your part to offer a beautiful healthy option, plus, you don't get cupcakes at home, soooo..." You get the point. Your id wants the cupcakes, your ego is going to make it happen, and your superego in this case is just fine this once with a little sugar snack.

Now, let's look at a situation that's more concerning than a cupcake. Let's say someone is hindering your ability to be successful or feel okay about your life. Maybe he is messing with your opinions, your beliefs, or questioning your values. All these things feel like threats to your brain. They make your id want to scream, call names, poke the person in the eye, and basically destroy him. But your superego believes that, in your world, screaming at someone because he disagrees is rude and you are not allowed to do that. Therefore, your ego must find a way to navigate between your id and your superego.

Your ego, needing to find a way to navigate between your id, which wants what it wants, and your superego, which judges and punishes with guilt, shame, worry, and inferiority, creates a story to survive in the middle between these two powerful systems. The ego tries to balance what your id is demanding with a) the reality you are in the middle of experiencing, and b) the cultural and social rules that have been indoctrinated into your values and ideas of appropriate ways to think and act. To that end, your ego employs a vast array of tools, safety strategies, or defense mechanisms to make the story work or to justify poking the person in the eye; it is always working to please these two demanding tyrants, the id and the superego.

Your ego is the part of your psyche that most people see when they interact with you. It's also, from a conceptual angle, the part that makes up stories to survive the other parts. Obviously, there are brain regions and structures that are incorporated into the process, but it's still important to understand that your ego gets hooked by events, creates stories, tries to make sense of the information, and then navigates between your survival instincts and your social norms. This process can be exhausting for your ego, and you're probably exhausted just reading about it. You deserve a cupcake. It's okay; I'll wait.

YOUR EGO IN YOUR EVERY DAY LIFE

It's good to understand how your ego runs interference between your id and your superego. But your ego also has another hat to wear; its job isn't only to run interference in your psyche between your wants, needs, and rules. It has also taken on the task of protecting your psyche from the big bad world.

Let's say you're an art student as I was; you've put your soul into your object d'art, and you have brought your prized baby into your class for the weekly critique. Now, you are in love with what you created, passionately in love, so you walk in with pride. Your psyche is ready to receive all measure of adulation from your professor and your class. Only, wait—what's that? Someone says, "This art object seems immature; it lacks depth, needs more color, or less; it's missing something, or is sloppy, or generally doesn't communicate anything important..." "What?" As the critique continues, your heart shuts down and your ego steps in. Then your internal "What the hell?" might become the external version. Your ego is not going to take this sitting down, oh no. You might swing fiercely between denial, "I'm not here; this isn't happening," to projection, "You idiots don't know what you're talking about!" to exaggeration, "This is the worst thing that has ever happened to me! I am giving up art," and even to fantasies of revenge, "I'll make you all sorry when I am super-famous!"

Your ego developed these strategies to protect you in childhood and has continued to evolve them through the years. Let's say when you were five, you wanted to do something, but your parents said, "No!" Then your sister started calling you names, chanting how weird you were. Well, your ego didn't want your psyche to be "weird," so it had to defend you, right? So you responded with something truly awesome, "You're a doo-doo head! I'm gonna tell Mom that you're being mean!" Under just the right circumstances, your sister backed off. And you learned something important—you could protect yourself from two things in this situation:

1. From feeling weird for wanting to do something you got judged about.
2. From your sister's big mouth.

Fast forward twenty years. You may still be using these strategies, albeit more adult versions. You used a strategy and it worked, and then you decided that it was a powerful tool that you could use to stay safe from situations worse than your sister, in a world wildly beyond your control. So, to be clear, there is nothing wrong with defense mechanisms or safety strategies; you do them, and I do them. I do, however, see them all on a spectrum, and if we are using one or two for every situation, what is the outcome of that? If all you have is a hammer, then everything might look like a nail—capisce?

If I were to leave you with one key point, a super-secret of the universe, about your ego and defense mechanisms, it would be this: *Everything that we human beings do is on a spectrum*, and the same is true for these defenses. There is withdrawal where we ask for a time out all the way to the other end of the spectrum where we just refuse to speak to the other person. Or in the case of anger, the spectrum might slide from self-harm all the way to rage and throwing things.

If it's any comfort, we all fall on the spectrum with most psychological things. Not to digress too much, but

in my work, I have found that we like to define what is wrong with other people. We label people with all kinds of things: “That person is a narcissist,” or “That person is passive-aggressive.” We tell people our labels for them when we say things like, “You’re withdrawing from the conversation or the relationship,” “You’re in denial,” “You’re crazy,” or...insert label here. This is all just projection. What matters is what is going on with us, what we say, think, and do. If I am finding myself at the unhealthy end of the spectrum, if I’m exaggerating how terrible, awful, or horrible something or someone is, I can challenge myself and get curious about my own extremes. Then I can engage in some mental jujitsu and look at ways to get back into emotional and psychological balance in my story.