



## **CAPE CHAMBER** OF COMMERCE & INDUSTRY

### **BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU TELL YOURSELF – IT COULD VERY WELL BE TRUE**

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Be careful what you tell yourself – it could very well be true

Like all humans, we eventually reduce every confusing element of our life down to two questions: Where did we come from and why are we here? According to David McRaney, the author of *You can beat your brain*, all groups and cultures ask these questions and existentially speaking, some find an answer while others are content to live their lives without an explanation.

The emerging field of narrative psychology adds a third fundamental question: Why do you want to know the answer to these questions in the first place? Dan MacAdams (as quoted by McRaney) asserts that, when your attempts to put together a narrative fail you, that's when you free-fall into malaise and stagnation. Without a narrative, our wants, needs and goals fall apart and that is why people often lose themselves after retirement. Storytelling appears in every human culture, and according to MacAdams 'to make meaning is to create dynamic narrative that render sensible and coherent the seeming chaos of human existence.' There has to be a reason for you to get up. This may be as base as slogging through another day, but meaning is crucial for survival. A person who sees no meaning in their suffering will wither away. But I leave that subject up to Victor Frankl in his work *Man's search for meaning*.

When psychologist Lysann Damisch handed half her subjects a golf ball she explained was lucky and handed the other half a ball as normal, the half with the 'luck ball' sank 35% more putts. That's the power of narrative for you.

So there has to be some narrative for us to be able to be effective. We need to buy into some story, even the one about ourselves. As primates, we are sensitive to social cues that could result in your ostracism from the group. In



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the wild, banishment meant death, so it follows that you want to be included, not being left out, never being the last one to know, and surely never being the only person not invited to the party.

Impression management theory says that you are always thinking about how you appear to others, even when they're not around. The question is what comes first: your display to be included, or your actual beliefs? As a professional do you feel compelled to wear a suit, or after donning a suit do you feel to conduct yourself in a professional manner?

The research says the latter, and as Kurt Vonnegut reminds us, "We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be."

### About the author

Sid Peimer is the Executive Director of the Cape Chamber of Commerce & Industry. His book 'The Clear Win: Pitching for new business – the strategies that work; the myths that don't' can be found on Amazon [here](#)

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