

# Ep #6: How to Share Your Personal Story in a Way that Serves



## Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Michelle Barry Franco**

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You are listening to the *Beyond Applause* podcast, episode number six.

Welcome to *Beyond Applause*, a podcast for mission-driven leaders, coaches, and creatives who are ready to share their expertise and stories through public speaking. Here's your host, Michelle Barry Franco.

Hello my speaker friends. We need to talk about one of my very favorite topics today. I'm probably going to say that a lot of times here on the podcast, but this really is one of my very favorite because we're going to talk about your personal stories. And I want to talk about this because it comes up so often. I hear from clients, people in my audiences. It's actually one of the first things that people want to ask me when we get on the phone to talk about speaking coaching. They're asking. My story is what drives me to want to get out there and share my expertise. To share how I got past this very difficult circumstance.

You know, often they've been through some kind of transformation, and their story is ... Their own story and experience is what makes them want to go out and share it with so many other people. And yet, our stories can be very scary to share. We're afraid of the relationships we have with people who are also players in that story. We're afraid of our credibility. Tell this story will actually put a crack in this sort of shiny exterior. All of those things. So we're going to dive into all of that. Basically, we're going to talk about how to tell our stories in a way that takes care of us, and powerfully serves our audience because that is what our stories can do.

So before we dive into that content, I of course am going to tell you a story of inspiration about our middle school TED event recently. But even before I tell you that little story of inspiration, I want to thank you so much for your feedback about the podcast so far. It is so thrilling to me. So exciting to me, to hear how much this podcast is serving you. I've heard positive things about each episode really. But especially episode number two where I got to talk with Moe Carrick about TEDx talks, and all things TEDx. How to prep for one. How to get a TEDx talk since Moe Carrick is a lead organizer

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of TEDx Bend. A very large TEDx even that I get to be a part of as well. Anyway, if you haven't listened to that podcast episode, listen to number two. We'll put of course a link in the show notes. But really, I've gotten wonderful feedback about all of them. Thank you, thank you so much for sharing that with me.

Okay. Let's talk about the story of inspiration. Oh my gosh, this is so exciting to me. So I think I mentioned on a previous episode, but just in case I haven't or you didn't hear that one, I got to coach our eighth graders at our local middle school. My daughter, Serena, happens to be in that eighth-grade class. In one of the eight grade classes. So that was extra fun for me. But it was so fun working with all of the eighth graders, and their teacher, Catherine Sanford, amazing, extraordinary teacher, really created this whole change project for them where they were supposed to come up with an idea for a way that they would create positive change in the community. And then from that experience of creating some kind of positive change, social change, in the community, either the school community or beyond, they were then to create a sort of TED style talk that they would deliver at the end of this whole multiple month project for all of the parents.

And I mean it was just so cool. So I got to be a part of helping the kids structure their talks. I got to go into the classroom and talk them through to TOPOYEN, the only presentation outline you'll ever need. If you don't have that, let me know, get in touch, I'll make sure you can get access to that. Actually, I'm sure we'll put it in the show notes. But I got to talk them through that. I got to come back in and talk with them about delivery. We talked of course about what to do with all that extra energy in your body that can often be experienced as anxiety. And these kids delivered. Just extraordinary. It was like tears running down my face watching them deliver this amazing talk. And I got, again speaking of tears running down my face again, I got a text the morning.

I was in the airport flying off to a workshop, and I got a text from one of the moms who also happens to be my sister-in-law. Yes, my daughter gets to be in class with her cousin which is amazing. But what she said to me ...

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Jennifer said, "You know, I was telling Aaron," my brother, "That these skills that they learned through this process, really are going to serve them for the rest of their lives." And that just oh. Tears. Lit up my heart. It is so true. That's why I do this. That's why I'm so passionate about sharing this podcast with you. About the work that I do. About getting to be in there with those eighth graders. These skills. These learning how to share our ideas and our stories in a way that changes other people's lives and lights them up. That puts them into action. That allows us to create incredible positive influence and change out in the world across our lifetimes. So it was so inspiring to see these kids take these tools and run with them in a really powerful way.

All right. So let's dive in. Speaking of using these tools in a powerful way, let's dive in to how to tell our most vulnerable stories in a way that really serves. So back in 2010 I took a writing class called, The Story You Came to Tell. And honestly mostly, I took that class because of the title. I mean you see that. The Story You Came to Tell. I wanted to know, what is the story I came to tell? And it was just a little sort of side note about the power of the way we title things, right? But underneath that of course is that we all do have this story, or usually these stories that are really such an important part of our own life journey and path. And for those of us who are called to use our stories to serve others, that is what these are. These are the stories we came to tell. That we're on this Earth to share with others to serve.

Since that course, The Story You Came to Tell with the most amazing Ellen Waterston in Bend, Oregon, I've come to see that some of us have this powerful drive, this call, to use that story we came to tell, or the stories we came to tell, in service of other people's greater life. And in service of other people's transformation. Really, we are driven by our own experiences of transformation, and we want to make it easier for other people. Right? So when you're telling that kind of a vulnerable transformation story, whether it's a small one ... Sometimes we have these small but meaningful transformations in our life. And sometimes it is like the big story that kind of

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epitomizes a huge change in our life. It doesn't matter. These still can be scary stories, and so we want to tell them carefully and thoughtfully.

So that's really what we're talking about here today. So we're going to talk about why your story matters. And we're going to talk about how to tell your story in a way that serves. And then how to deal with some of the most common fears of telling our most powerful, vulnerable stories because that is what I hear about a lot, and I know that's often what's getting in the way is we're afraid of these things. So we'll dive deeper on those in just a few minutes.

But first let's talk about why your story matters so much. Why does it matter that we tell our stories? We can feel it within us, the strive. Like this ... For some of us, I know this is true for me and this is true for many of my clients, we feel like we don't have a choice and yet, and yet it's so hard to tell it. So why does it matter so much? To us we can feel that it's just this drive, but why does it matter to others too? So in 2011, I heard Wayne Dyer tell a story about making his whole family leave a restaurant when he learned he couldn't order a beer there. And I don't remember the detail of it, because of course the details aren't what matter to me at the time. This wasn't my story in the details. I didn't have eight kids like he did. I had three.

But what resonated so powerfully for me, was that I knew that drinking, that my drinking, was getting in the way of me being the kind of parent, the kind of momma that I wanted to be. I was struggling with how drinking was impacting the way that I was caring for my kids, or my presence in their lives. I didn't have the sort of extreme case where it was so obvious to me that I had to quit drinking otherwise I was going to end up in jail. I'm not saying that wouldn't have eventually happened. I have no idea. But I knew that I wasn't being the person, the wife, and especially the mother that I wanted to be.

And when I heard Wayne Dyer tell that story, and how that was a moment for him of realizing ... Actually, I think he even had a few more moments before he fully realized it. But that it was that drinking was getting in the

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way of him living into his fullest life, that I could see that. I could see that window into my own life. And that that could be enough of a reason to maybe not want to continue drinking. Or to change my relationship with drinking.

So it really helped me filter his ideas through a practical step that I could make. And for me, that equated to an alcohol sabbatical. So when I decided to take an alcohol sabbatical, which by the way lives on today. Almost six years later I still don't drink, and I'm very happy and feel like a different woman in many ways because of it. But after I made that decision that I was going to take this sabbatical around drinking, I started to see out other stories that just helped me make this, what felt like a pretty dramatic change in my life. I drank wine every night. It wasn't super ... I didn't have a big dramatic story about drinking. But I did have this pattern every night of a glass of wine, and then another, and then another throughout the evening. This sort of slow anesthesia I call it now.

And I wanted to find other people who had stories more similar to mine because I didn't have the dramatic, "I was arrested, put in jail," or some other major thing had happened in my life. And I came upon Aiden Donnelly Rowley of Ivy League Insecurities. And she had this year without wine. And throughout ... You know she took a year off from drinking. And I just really relished those stories to help me keep moving forward in this new way of living, and it was really powerful for me. And then I sought out all kinds books where women were telling their stories. You know often moms who were living the kind of, "Can't wait for my five o'clock glass of wine," which is very much the way I was living, and how they lived their lives and what it felt like to be on the other side of a year or two years, or however they had changed their relationships with drinking.

The point is that when I decided to make what felt like a really big change that I thought about for a long time because I didn't think that I could go without that nightly glass or glasses of wine. I sought out other people's stories to help me stay on track. And I still love to read stories about

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women who are living without wine or have changed their relationship with drinking in such a dramatic way.

So when we see ourselves in the essential sense through the stories of others, we can see to the other side of things that otherwise can feel vague, and maybe even impossible, which is true about me before as I was trying to think like, "How can I actually get rid of my nightly glasses of wine?" It seemed impossible. So stories are a powerful medium for transformational human connection. So when I help a client craft their story of transformation in service of others, it is always with this in mind. And I invite you to think about it that. How can you think of your story as not so much your story, and all of the details of your story, and we'll dive deeper into that in a minute. But how can you think of it through the lens of their eyes. The person you know you're meant to serve with this story?

So let's actually dive deeper into that. How do you tell your story in a way that serves? Here's the main thing I want to anchor in for you. While it is your story, and so therefore it's a story about you, ultimately, it's not about you. Not really. When you want to tell your story in a way that serves, in service of others, your story is actually about them. You want to tell it for them. And this often means we leave out the many details that will create separation. But it's sort of this dance that we do around telling enough detail so that there's resonance. Right? This is why a powerful audience analysis is so important. You really want to ask yourself questions like, "Who is this person I'm meant to serve? What is their life like? What are they struggling with," and really at the deepest level, "What are the thoughts in their own words that are running through their heads?" Because when you make that deep connection with your ideal audience member, then you can tell your story in a way that will resonate for him or her more powerfully.

So I had a client years ago who had some pretty crappy things happen in her relationships. And she wanted to, on behalf of other people who had also had a lot of struggle around relationships, she wanted to go out there and tell them, "This can get better." She'd gone through this experience,

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come out the other side, and is in a happy, healthy relationship now. So she wants to go share her story and is out there sharing her story very powerfully now. But when we first started working together, she was really living in the details of this story. And this story, because it was so rich and detailed, and unexpected in many ways, multiple partners had left her totally unexpectedly.

Once when she was actually completely at the moment of expecting a proposal, instead he said he didn't want to be with her anymore. And she learned her partner had been living a complete double life for almost a year, and this was a complete surprise to her. Then, just when she thought she was healed, went through some self-healing and personal growth, and found another partner, and felt really ready for a new healthy relationship, almost the exact same thing happened to her. Some difference in details. But it was one of those like, "No way," stories. Like, "I can't believe it." And she was still living in it in that, "Can you believe this happened," way. She was devastated of course by what happened, and because of the repeating of almost the exact same circumstances, and even with her eyes what she felt like were wide open, the same happening to her again. She still had that kind of, "And you're not going to believe what happened next."

But that's not what matters when we share our story to serve. What matters to our audience is that we let them know, yes, we know about the pain of it, and yes, we had our struggles too. But what really matters is that we rise. Because they want to see themselves rise too. That's where you want to focus your detail. So here's what I like to tell my clients, and what I again, another thing I want to anchor in for you. Don't fall in love with your own story. Fall in love with your audience member. Your ideal client. Whoever it is you know you're meant to serve, fall in love with her rising. Let her see that that is what's possible, and let her story show her that journey with just enough detail so that you show that yes you know what it's like to struggle. But that also rising is possible for her as well.

So you don't have to be on the cold bathroom floor. You can, if that's really what happened for you and if that little detail quickly can give a sense of

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how hard it had gotten for you. You know I just hear so many of these stories where they were, you know, were devastated, and I'm on the floor, and then this happened, and then this happened. And we get lost in all those details and we start to actually lose resonance. Just don't overdramatize because you'll lose our focus. Take us into your world enough so we can see and feel it, but not so much that we see how different we are than you. And then focus on the rising. So that's how you tell your story in a way that serves.

Now of course, as we dig into these details, and we think about telling these stories, these fears come up. So let's talk about how to deal with some of the common fears of telling our most powerful, vulnerable stories. This is the scary part of telling our stories. So I'm just going to cover a couple of the things that come up the most often. One is, what if someone in your life who you still have a meaningful relationship with, gets mad at you? Is upset because you're telling the story, because while it is your story, it's their story too. Maybe you had a tough childhood and you're telling stories about your parents, or other adults in your life. Maybe you're still with your partner, but you and your partner went through some really tough times. Maybe your story's about a sibling or a best friend.

So one of the most common questions I get is how can I tell the story without hurting them? Here's the key. Tell your part, focus on what you did, focus on how it felt for you, and leave out as many of the identifying details as possible. And I've told ... You know I have some childhood stories that I tell in various books that I've written or chapters I've written in books, or when I'm on stages. You know there's some stories about my childhood that some of the adults in my family, parental ... I have a number parents and some sort of fascinating childhood history. And so while yes, people might be able to figure out some of those elements, the focus is really on how it impacted you. How it affected you. And then what happened and how you transformed from there. If people decide to go sleuthing into your past and try to find out about it, you can't control that anyway. Focus on your part and leave out the identifying details as much as you can.

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And if you can't leave out some of those details, and you know that people are going to be able to tell who it is, you may want to have a conversation with some of the people in your life. Here's the thing. Know when you're asking permission, or when you're just giving a heads up. Because if you're asking permission and they say no, what are you going to do about that? What do you want to do about that? So just spend some time with yourself exploring, am I asking their permission, or do I just want to lovingly let them know that I'm going to share this story, and I'm going to leave out as many identifying details as possible. Some of it is really our own self-care around allowing a person in our life to process what pain they may go through by having to hear publicly that you've been hurt. They may know it, but everybody has avoided having the conversation.

Maybe they have some personal work they have to do around it that's not yours to control. Again, this is all going to be within your own domain, and your own relationships, the decisions that you make. But just know that it is possible to actually have pretty powerful transformation within your relationship by having those conversations. I've seen some pretty incredible partnerships arise with clients and other people in their lives as they've had that conversation and decided, "Yes, we want to use this story to help others transform." So there's a lot that might be possible there that you don't even realize.

So another question that comes up often is what if me telling this story actually mess with my own credibility? Right? So you know maybe you have this perception, or there's an actual truth, that your exterior, it's look a lot shinier than these stories are going to reveal. Maybe you're going to talk about some failures that other people would be really shocked by, and that in fact you are afraid that they will mess with your credibility. The first thing I want to point out to you is, will it really? Just ask yourself that question. Oftentimes we have the perception that what people are appreciating is that shiny exterior when in fact they're learning, and growth, and really service through your stories and expertise will be even more powerful when you share that you have fallen too. Because here's the thing. They're over there probably thinking, "Did they ever struggle? Have they ever made this

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kind of mistake?" And that may very well be getting in the way of them learning the most from you.

So that's the first thing, is asking yourself the question, is it true that your credibility depends on that shiny exterior? And there's a really really good chance that that's not the case. But I will say, you don't necessarily want to tell every deep dark story. An audience analysis here is key. Who is it you're trying to serve. Who is it you want to serve, that you're meant to serve? And what stories will most powerfully serve them? It comes back to that. And you know it's possible that some of your messiest, ugliest stories, really aren't going to serve them anyway. Well then there's no reason to tell those stories. They'll just confuse things.

Now again, this can be a dance, right? Because sometimes vulnerability and fear around telling those stories will keep up from sharing ones that will help our ideal audience member transform the most. But it is a legitimate place to ask your own question. What story will serve them the best, and is this particular story going to do that? You're not here to serve everyone. And that is key to remember. You're here to serve a particular person. That's why you do that deep connecting audience analysis. So the shame your audience may be feeling is powerfully met when you show them they're not alone through a story. A messy story that you choose to share.

I remember hearing Brené Brown. I think I heard her say this at a conference I was attending, but I believe she also talks about this in her book, *Rising Strong*. But she talked about ... She was swimming with her husband. And she talks about these ... She had sort of put something out there to him, kind of a connection. She'd made a connection play like, "Oh this is so wonderful to be with you," or something like that. And he had responded kind of lightly and not in kind. Not with the same kind of intimacy and connection. And she started to make up all these stories about how he probably wasn't as attracted to her anymore, or thought she wasn't as athletic as she used to be, or ... You know was just making up all of these stories. And while I think she was making the point when she was telling that story about how she had made up all these stories when in fact later

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when she checked in with her husband and said, "Hey I'm making this up that you're feeling all these things," that was not at all what he was thinking.

What I took away from that, and one of the reasons that story is so powerful to me is I thought, "Wow. Even Brené Brown, who is so cool and amazing, has these moments of insecurity with her husband." And that was a powerful connection moment for me. So vulnerability through story telling is a practice. And it does deserve care. So you can choose a couple of stories. Practice telling them in a way that shares maybe a little more than you ever have before. Make sure you've got, again as Brené Brown talks about, you know the people close to you. Who you know will care for you as you work through a vulnerability hangover potentially, as she describes after her TED talk. And just have those people that help you care for yourself after you practice this. But you will.

It has been my experience, my experience with many many clients, that as we practice telling these vulnerable stories, and seeing that we're okay afterward, and actually hearing how powerfully they serve our audience, that we get better and better at sharing them and it feels better and better that we can create that kind of connection when we do them well, when we do them in a way that is meant to serve as we've talked about here. As I shared earlier. It also helps us live into the full vision of who we are meant to be as speakers. Because if you're called the way that I know you are, if you're a mission driven speaker, then there's this real drive to share ourselves through our speaking.

So your story is one of your most powerful vehicles of human connection and resonance. Just don't fall in love with your story. Fall in love with the person you serve, and what you see as her already heroic rise. And remember that being afraid is human. It's beautifully and richly human. So ride the waves, and care for yourself. Make it a practice. Stay in connection with your own values. What matters to you, your own boundaries. Have that close circle next to you. And again, to quote Brené or bring in Brené Brown one more time, close your eyes. Turn away to those who judge but aren't in the arena with you. I hope these ideas I share here help you feel

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excited about just reaching towards the edges of your courage and telling your stories. If you'd like even more guidance on how to tell your own story, I share one of my own scary stories plus specific guidance on telling your own scary stories at [MichelleBarryFranco.com/TellYourScaryStory](https://MichelleBarryFranco.com/TellYourScaryStory), so you'll get even more resources there.

As always, it's an honor to share this time with you, and I already can't wait for next week. Meantime just know that I'm cheering you on all the way.

Thanks for listening to this episode of *Beyond Applause*. If you like what was offered in today's show and want more, head on over to [michellebarryfranc.com/start](https://michellebarryfranc.com/start) to get your free complete guide to stepping into leadership speaking right away.