Russell Andlauer

Interpersonal Communications

Professor Fetzer

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Storytelling Paper

Storytelling communicates much more than just the events described within the story. If the listener pays careful attention to how the speaker tells a story, much can be learned about the speaker themselves. For this assignment my friend Matt told me about an annual tradition his family would do together out of necessity that proved to be valuable bonding time together. This story provides an example of the effects *family rituals* can have on an individual’s character and *identity*. The story also demonstrates the positive role *humor* has on developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. Matt’s story shows that even small seemingly insignificant events can create a large impact on a person’s character and identity.

When Matt was growing up his whole immediate family would drive up to his grandma’s house to put plastic reinforcements in the hill above her house to prevent landslides when it rained. His family would do this every year because the plastic would deteriorate from exposure to the sun. Everyone in his family would help including his grandmother. Sometimes his uncle would come up to help as well. Matt remembers joking around with his family while they were working and that even though it was a lot of work, it was a lot of fun too.

The story Matt described told me a lot about his family culture. This yearly family ritual provides an example of one of the values that Matt holds that can be traced back to his family’s beliefs. For as long as I have known Matt it is apparent that he places a high value on being a hard worker. Matt takes pride in giving his best effort in his school and work responsibilities. This story of how his whole family would contribute to the task of reinforcing the hill above his grandma’s house demonstrates where Matt’s strong work ethic comes from. It is clear that family rituals such as this one have shaped Matt’s character into the man he is today.

Building off of the idea that family rituals help craft one’s character, this concept can easily be expanded to include affecting the development on one’s self-concept. My friend Matt not only could be described as having a strong work ethic, but he identifies himself as a hard worker. This story shows that this has been part of his core values since he was a child. He described that he wasn’t strong enough to carry the box of stakes used to secure the plastic to the ground, but he would still carry other items to help out. Even at a young age Matt had the attitude of striving to do his part in accomplishing a task. That attitude has carried into adulthood and he considers it a core part of his self-concept.

Something Matt implicitly communicated to me through his story was the importance of humor to his family. He mentioned a few times that several funny stories came out of working on the hill above his grandma’s house. Humor enhances interpersonal communication in several ways. Humor brings people closer to each other, reduces stress, and makes experiences more enjoyable. One of the reasons that this yearly chore became a set of fond memories is that it involved humor. Matt’s face seemed to light up when he mentioned that his uncle would sometimes help too. I know from other conversations that Matt believes his uncle is hilarious. In this way, humor played a large role in making an otherwise unenjoyable task pleasurable for his whole family and brought them closer together.

This story provides an excellent example of the effect of family rituals on an individual’s character traits. These character traits can lead to an individual creating a self-concept that matches. The role humor plays in developing strong bonds in a family or other relationships is shown through Matt’s description of his experience. Even though this experience can be seen as minor experience relative to other events in Matt’s life, it has clearly helped shape his character and identity.

Transcript

Matt: “So about a family story… when I was younger, around the age of six or seven, I remember that my Grandma owned property up in Ukiah, California, where she raised my mom and my uncle. There was a problem with the piping and the irrigation and actually it had to do with the sewage coming down and also the water. We were up on a hill and there was another hill above that and another property above that. They had a problem where the hill slid. It slid up to the house. Growing up, every year we would have to go up there to put plastic on the hill to keep it from sliding when the rainwater would soak into the soil, causing a mud slide. We would have to build a wood wall or something to keep the dirt away from the walls. The mud would seep through the wall or put too much weight on the wall, causing it to collapse.

So every year we would have to go up and change the plastic because it would deteriorate from the sun. I just remember being a little kid and going up and it was a lot of work, but also it was a lot of fun, there were a lot of funny stories from that. I remember climbing up the hill, which was always interesting. There were sometimes that my uncle would come up and help and those were always funny times. There were some times that I would try and help carry stuff up, I was a little kid and the stakes that we would use were pretty damn big. They were pretty thick stakes, so I wasn’t able to help bring up a box like this (gestures size with hands), but I could help bring up the plastic, and try to help there. It was kind of fun. My whole family would help, even my grandma. She was in top shape and she was about 65. She would be up on the hill helping us hammer in stakes. It was definitely a whole family effort.”