

SwingLeft

COLLEGE

PROGRAMS

"The power in your story of self is to reveal something of yourself and your values—not your deepest secrets, but the key shaping moments in your life. We all have stories of pain, or we wouldn't think the world needs changing. We all have stories of hope or we wouldn't think we could change it."

MARSHALL GANZ

Story of Self & One-on-Ones

As you begin organizing your school, state, or region you might be wondering why a busy college student would stop what they're doing and volunteer with you or your group? Why would they join your team?

The answer is because you've inspired them to and because they have shared values and interests. The best way to inspire people to join you is to connect to their emotions, bring them into the strategy, and give them a clear on-ramp to getting involved.

One of the ways to do that is through telling your story of self. Your story of self both establishes a connection with the person or people you're speaking to and establishes credibility that you have a stake in the outcome of this work.

Your story of self can be used if you're speaking to a class, recruiting at a club, meeting with a potential partner organization and most effectively, if you're having a one-on-one with a potential volunteer -- all of which can happen virtually.

We want to touch people's emotions in a way that motivates them to take action, not feel despondent. Your story should invoke emotions that leave people feeling hopeful, feeling a sense of solidarity, feeling a sense of urgency, and feeling angry enough about the situation to want to get involved.

Easily the most famous example of a story of self is then-Senator Obama speaking at the Democratic National Convention in 2004. [Watch here](#) and try to see if you can spot his story of self.

Finding Your Story

We all have a reason for being here. Something bigger than ourselves that motivated us to get involved in organizing at this moment in history. For many, the motivation is the person in the White House. But beyond the headlines there are personal motivators that got us off the sidelines and into action.

Your story of self should include a time you faced a challenge, a choice you had to make to do something about that challenge, and the outcome from the action you took.



What's Your Story?

Think back on a time when you got really angry with something you saw on the news or heard about politics. Or think of a time that you heard a story that broke your heart and you wished you could do something about it. An easy way to identify our core values is to think about what brings up emotions in us.

Another way to connect with your values is to ask yourself: If you had a magic wand that could only solve one issue, what would that issue be? Why that one? And what first made you care about it? **List at least 3 moments that have shaped your values.**

Choose one of those moments to keep working with as your story of self. Pick one that you think will relate best to your audience right now: other college students that you're organizing to volunteer with you. Don't worry, you can have more than one story that you use at different times and in different ways. But every organizer should have their go-to story nailed down.

Over time you'll want to have different versions of the story that can be used in different settings. Use a longer version of the story for speaking engagements and have a shorter version of the story to use in everyday situations.

Exercise:

Pull out a sheet of paper or open a google doc and write out your story. Try to get to the core of why this particular challenge impacted you. What led you to make the choice to take action?

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graph LR; Character[Character] --- Choice((Choice)); Challenge[Challenge] --- Choice; Choice --- Plot[Plot]; Choice --- Outcome[Outcome]; Choice --- Moral[Moral]
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The Story of Us

The story of us tells the story of why we (collectively) are the ones who need to take action. A few great examples of this are the movements around the March For Our Lives and The Sunrise Movement. School gun violence impacts young people, so young people should be a part of the solution. Climate change will have the largest impact on the lives of Gen Z so they are the ones with the most at stake in fighting to stop it.

What shared challenges and shared values do you and your prospective volunteer have? Why does the election in 2020 matter so much to young people? And how can bringing young people into the solution make a meaningful difference?

Story of Now

The story of now is where you communicate the urgency of taking action right now. The closer we are to Election Day, the easier this will be, but we believe that building early infrastructure for candidates is one of the most impactful things our volunteers can do with their time.

In your story of now you'll want to let the person you're speaking to know what's at stake right now, what we're doing about it, and then make the ask for them to get involved.

Think of this as a time to give them some insider information on how elections are won and lost. You can share [Swing Left's Super State Strategy](#) and how the work you're doing will help us take back all the Houses this November. Your job is to create urgency around taking action right away.

One-on-One Conversations with Volunteers

Having one-on-one conversations with people is the best way to recruit volunteers. There are different types of one-on-ones to keep in mind, but let's talk about introductory one-on-ones with potential volunteers.

One-on-ones are a very different way to think about recruiting than just utilizing social media or an email blast. Think about it like this:

An acquaintance posts on Instagram that they're having a Netflix Watch Party and anyone who wants to join can just use the link and show up. How likely are you to go?

How much more likely would you be if that acquaintance sent you a direct message, told you about the watch party, told you they're playing your favorite movie, and gave you the exact details for when and where to join?

What's the difference between these two ways of inviting someone to participate in something?

The second example probably makes you feel more special, more valued, and like you joining actually makes a difference to the other person.

But your one-on-one shouldn't be the time to just make your elevator pitch. It's a time to hear what matters to the other person, identify your shared interests or values, make an ask of them, and agree on next steps.

How to Have A One-on-One

A successful one-on-one is all about building connections. Ideally it should be structured as about 20% talking and 80% actively listening. Share your story, ask open-ended questions to encourage the other person to share their story as well, establish a shared vision, explain the strategy behind the vision, and invite them to take action. Always make sure you get a commitment to taking action and then follow up!

If the other person isn't talking much, channel your inner news reporter and just ask a question and shut up. Give them the space to keep talking and really pay attention to what they say.

There should be a clear goal for your conversation. Have a goal or ask in mind going into the conversation. When you invite someone to have a one-on-one with you, make sure they know where the conversation is heading. Don't trick them. Say something like "I'm starting a virtual group for our school to take action around the most important elections in November. I'd love to chat with you this afternoon so we can get to know each other better and see if it's something you want to be a part of."

An ideal flow of a one-on-one conversation should look like this:

Introduction

Introduce yourself and remind them of the purpose of the meeting and about your role with Swing Left.

Connection

This is the time to share stories and ask open-ended questions. Talk about what you both value and about what resources you each have to share (the other person may have a project they want your support on too -- what resources can you contribute to them?). Find out what they think about the issues and tie the work you're doing into the solution.

Listen & Agitate

Get the other person fired up, but hopeful. Now isn't the time to rant about Trump, it's a chance to connect what you've heard them say matters to them to their emotions and values. Help them see that they can make a difference in the things they care about.

Solution

After you've both shared stories, resources and ideas (remember this is a two way relationship) help steer them towards the solution. The solution you'll want them to see right now is the importance of winning in the Super States, registering voters and building early infrastructure for campaigns.

Make an ask

Never leave a one-on-one without making an ask of the person. Get them to commit to taking an action. This could be something as simple as introducing you to someone else who might want to get involved or as big as hosting their own virtual letter writing party. Always make a clear ask, get a commitment, and then follow up with them later.

Resources

[Story of Self example](#) (listen for the challenge, choice and outcome)

[Story of Us example video](#)

[Story of Now example video](#)

Improve your listening skills through [active listening](#)