

# discover!



### feeling known and understood

“When I prepare to write features for Business Legends, I tilt my interviews toward the personal side because I know our readers really relate to it. It’s the same principle that drives sports broadcasters to focus on personal profiles of players. It humanizes them and makes the game more interesting to a broader audience than just sports diehards.” David paused, looking carefully at MegaCorp’s CEO. “George, I hope you won’t think I’m prying too much when I ask some rather personal questions.”

“Of course not,” George answered. “I can always say ‘Pass,’ but I’m not likely to. I ask rather personal questions all the time, although for slightly different reasons.”

David’s shoulders relaxed visibly. “That’s great. I’d like to know as much of your story as we can fit into the time we have together. In fact, in my priorities it’s about a 50-50 split with whatever business wisdom you have to share.”

“Where should I start?” George asked.

“Anywhere you like,” David said. “Just jump in with whatever seems meaningful to you. There isn’t anything you think is worth telling that I won’t think is worth hearing.”

“I like that line,” George said. “Your approach to story sounds identical to what we preach around here.”

“Really? I’m surprised. A lot of corporate types seem to think peoples’ stories are a waste of time—kind of a courtesy they endure before getting down to the stuff that really matters.”

“That’s before they’ve tried it,” George answered. “A lot of corporate types have a lot to learn, don’t they?”

“Well, where to start...I’ve already told you a bit about my Grandpa Jack. He was really big in my life because I lost my dad when I was seven. For the next three and a half years, my mom did her best as a single parent, but Grandpa Jack filled a lot of holes for me.”

“And then when Mom remarried, I gained a stepdad, except it felt more like a loss than a gain. I was too young to understand all of the dynamics. I just knew that I was fighting for Mom’s attention and nothing I did was ever good enough for my stepdad.”

George filled the hour with high points and low points—school, athletics, dating relationships, marriage, birth of children, early career development, successes, failures—all of which contained emotional content and were defining moments in some way.

When George’s desk clock chimed, he and David were both reluctant to stop. David had gained a multi-level appreciation for the value of George’s complexity; he actually felt closer to him than to some of his own extended family. George, although not knowing David’s story yet, felt closer to him simply by virtue of feeling known and understood by him.

David scrawled an abbreviated note and looked back at George again. “I can see from what you’ve said so far that you’re really conscious of the need to listen carefully—especially to people’s stories—if you want to know them well and build emotional bonds. What else do you do that makes you so good at understanding people?”

“So good at it?” George asked, his eyes sparkling as he glanced at the portrait of a smiling woman. “You haven’t interviewed my wife yet. She wouldn’t concur with your assessment.”

David laughed. “That doesn’t count. I don’t think I’ve ever met a wife who felt understood.”

“You probably haven’t,” George answered. “All the more reason to keep trying. If we husbands weren’t so self-absorbed, maybe our wives would feel more understood.”

David scratched another line on his pad and thought out loud; “Why do I get the feeling that part of your answer is in that last line, that comment about being self-absorbed?”

George smiled. “You’re good, David. Anyone who processes that quickly should have no problem becoming an “expert” on people unless...”

“Unless what? Unless I don’t want to? Don’t care enough?” David interrupted, thinking back on their previous conversation.

“That’s the first obstacle,” George answered. “Once you decide it’s worth the effort, you focus more on others, learn to identify some of their markers, and have fun learning to read people. Not to judge them or put artificial limitations on them but to make deliberate adjustments that will make you more effective with them.”

“What do you mean by markers?” David asked. “Can you give me some examples?”

“Well, it’s not a technical term,” George said, pausing for a moment. “Let me ask you something before I answer. I’ll give you four words in alphabetical order. You rank them in the order that they appeal to you. Here they are: Peace, Popularity, Power, Precision.”

Without hesitation, David answered, “Power, Precision, Popularity, Peace.”

“That’s what I thought,” George said. “Now let me add some educated guesses. You’re probably still in your late twenties, and you like what you do, but you have no intention of doing it for a long time. For you it’s a means to an end. Your payoff at Business Legends is not the salary; it’s the education—what you’re learning about successful entrepreneurs by rubbing shoulders with them. You’re eager to get on with your own business, but you’re too concerned about getting it right to jump too quickly. You don’t want to risk making the same mistakes many entrepreneurs make. And so while you’re putting the last few pieces in the puzzle, you’re building a network of contacts and potential counselors. You’re quite organized and eager to run the ship. Close?”

David’s pen wasn’t moving. That and the wide eyes told George he had nailed it.

“I try to be at least 80 percent right,” George added.

“Have you been talking to my wife?” David asked. “Nobody knows that.”



"They might," George said. "It all depends on whether they want to. We use a number of assessments like DISC and MBTI to help us understand each person's unique preferences and processing style. They help us know how to adapt our approach so we can draw the best out of everyone. After a while, patterns stand out."

"I'm sold," David said, scribbling. "Note to self: Research assessments."

## understanding the journey

As a leader, you set the tone for your corporate culture. If your organization is like most, many team members are operating on a purely transactional basis; relationships are professional and functional, making them as strong as yesterday's news.

Today's employees long for a work experience that is more significant and meaningful than a series of transactional relationships. They want to know that someone cares, that they can trust team members enough to share what really matters to them. How much do you know about them? How much do they know about you?

effective listening opens the door into a person's life, affording an almost effortless peek into a hidden maze, a maze you can gain skill in decoding.

### Unique but Similar

Every person is a unique combination of nature and nurture, genetics and environment. The complexity of personality and exactly how it relates to behavior has been an important part of wisdom literature since the invention of written language—and of oral tradition since the creation of humanity.

Reading or hearing the brief bits of Adam and Eve's story recorded in Genesis gives us an elementary understanding of them and even of ourselves. Some recurring patterns we see include the desire to have or experience something new, something we think might enhance our life even if it is forbidden. We see the desire to become gods. We see the gullibility to accept deception that plays into that desire, even when it means disregarding truth from a long-trusted source. We see the disappointment that always follows deception, and we see the first examples of guilt and remorse and loss.

Cain and Abel's story—scant as it is—introduces the patterns of a desire to please, a performance culture that becomes off-the-chart competitive, violent jealousy, denial of responsibility, and the curse of a nomadic life.

From earliest times we have known the power of story to teach values, to help us connect principles with life, and to understand individuals based on events and responses in their life. We naturally recognize certain patterns similar to our own or someone close to us.



These patterns are much like fingerprints: everyone's story contains many common elements, but the combined whole is unique to the individual.

these patterns are much like fingerprints: everyone's story contains many common elements, but the combined whole is unique to the individual.

#### Putting it to Work

We desire to understand why people do what they do. And we want to connect that knowledge with the ability to predict how they are likely to behave in the future. Although attempts to predict specific events in a

we want to connect that knowledge with the ability to predict how they are likely to behave in the future.

person's life are not reliable, it is possible to discern patterns that are likely to be repeated, because people do repeat patterns throughout their life.

Some of these patterns can be discovered through the use of personality assessments such as MBTI, DISC, and others. But at a deeper, more emotional level, you have the ability to exchange valuable insights with others in a very natural way. Many patterns emerge best through knowing and interpreting a person's story—the relationships, events, and activities in their life coupled with how the person interprets and responds to them.

You may become an expert at **discover!** and learn to navigate deeply into the maze of a person's life. Or you may be content with a surface exploration. Either way, your life is enriched by hearing and vicariously experiencing another person's story with its dilemmas, choices, consequences, and lessons learned.

#### Potential Barriers

One way to undermine trust and sabotage the very relationships you are trying to build is the desire to manipulate others. When good techniques are misused in this way, people are quick to sense it and resent it.

learn to relate—build relationships—because you value people for more than self-interest.



Don't give people a reason to question the motive for the interest you show. Be careful not to:

- Pry or interrogate
- Divulge a confidence without prior permission
- Expect openness without first modeling it
- Trust (or communicate) your diagnostic/predictive skill beyond its limits of accuracy

### getting started

Building this culture doesn't begin with a directive and a sudden plunge. Begin by modeling. Take time for non-work-related conversations. Ask about interests and family. In time, stories will follow when you ask the right questions.

When appropriate, you can start with an open-ended request such as "Tell me your story." The other person may respond with a list of questions to clarify what you have in mind. Be as nondirective as possible, while making the person comfortable to proceed. If you have a half-hour during which you need to discuss some other things, you could say, "Well, we only have a half-hour right now, so why don't you shoot for a ten-minute version that hits some of the highs and lows, beginning at any age you like."

Being nondirective affords the storyteller a sense of comfort in determining the pace and depth of revelation. It also allows him to self-select what is meaningful. This in itself is part of the story.

Your story will naturally answer—or hint at the answers to—important questions like:

1. Who are you? (What is your story? Why are you here?)
2. Where are you going?
3. Where are you now? (How did you get here? Overlaps with #1)
4. How will you get to your destination?
5. What do you do best?
6. What are you passionate about?
7. What do you value?
8. What are your strengths?

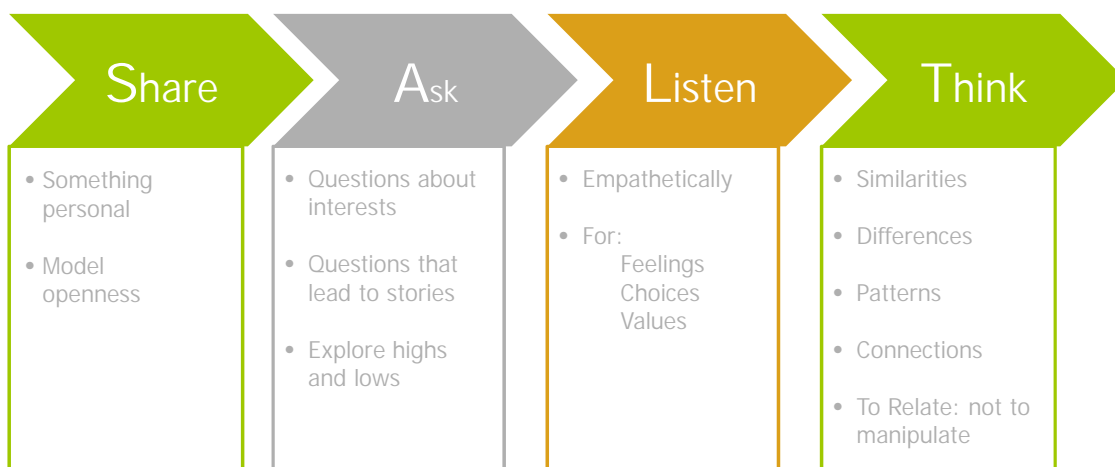
9. What are your weaknesses?

10. What are your priorities?

When you start with a non-engineered story, you are likely to discover different answers than the ones you would have given in direct response to the ten listed questions. Where there is a discrepancy, your story version is likely to be closer to the truth. Answers to the specific questions tend to be more idealized; under pressure they are likely to break down, revealing the same answers your story would have implied.

The following model is a quick reference guide for helping you **discover!** the stories of others.

## discover!



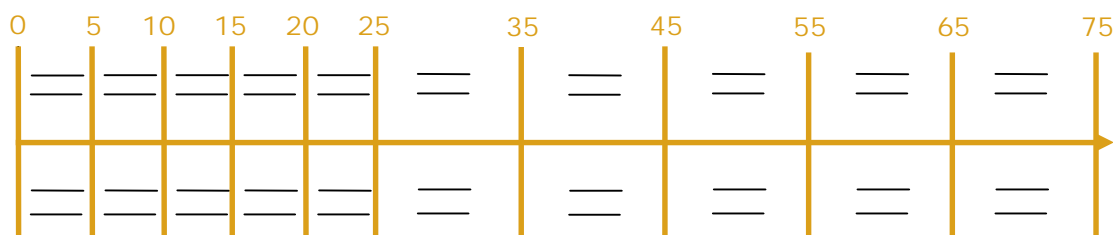
### Story Patterning

Every person's story contains some patterns similar to yours. Some people's stories contain many patterns similar to yours—they are more like you—but no one's life story is identical to yours.

Similar patterns in life stories are dramatized by unlimited variations in detail. That’s part of what makes them so fascinating. The fascination deepens as the stories reveal to you some of your hidden complexity. But it’s at the next level when stories become most valuable: when you begin to understand others—their dreams, their fears, their motivations.

Here is a simple process for identifying life-story patterns. Begin with your own story to gain insight into yourself as well as to learn how to use the process with others.

Divide your life into multiple time periods. The length of each period can be flexible; the shorter the time periods, the more information you will record. You might start with five-year increments for your early life—up until age 20 or 25—and then move to ten-year increments as shown in this chart.



Notice the four horizontal lines in each time period, two above the midline and two below. These are placeholders for experiences you recall—two highs and two lows—from each time period. What events come to mind? What people come to mind? Give each experience a brief nickname that you can write on the line to represent the experience.

As you think of the highs and lows to include in your chart, focus on experiences that created a vivid memory for you. These are likely to have had a significant impact on your thinking process and worldview even if they don’t seem like life-changing events.

Try to avoid defaulting to normal major life experiences like graduation, marriage or the birth of a child unless there is an unusual experience or response related to them.



The chart may reveal some timing patterns—rhythms that mark your experience. These could offer insight into periodic vulnerabilities that influence career or relocation decisions at a level below your conscious awareness.

You may also notice similarities among the highs and similarities among the lows. These offer clues to what is important to you: what motivates you and the nature of your vulnerabilities.

After completing the chart, use at least a paragraph to describe each experience and its impact on you. When you have completed the descriptions, you are likely to see other patterns begin to emerge.

Looking back at the highs and lows, can you identify any factors—including assumptions, beliefs, attitudes—that appear frequently? What contributed to the highs? What contributed to the lows? Is there a factor present in the highs that is absent in the lows? Vice versa?

For example, suppose you suffered from an unrecognized fear of failure. Your lows might reveal a pattern of failures that resulted from a lack of bold action. Your highs might reveal a different pattern, the presence of factors—including outside counsel or encouragement—that prompted bold action. The obvious question, then, is how can I proactively seek the outside help I need in times of fearful indecision?

This approach to patterning your life story results in gaining insight into your perspective. It often reveals assumptions, beliefs and attitudes that were previously hidden to your conscious analysis. Examining them for suitability in light of current values is always constructive.

The facts of your life up to this point are merely the facts of your life; they are not your story. Your story transcends the mere facts; your story encompasses meaning, choosing, incorporating, overcoming. It includes the most basic growth process employed naturally by every toddler: risking, failing, learning, adjusting, risking.

When the people you lead are willing to share their life story with you—especially at the pattern level—you can experience bonding and insights that have a significant beneficial impact on your team's performance.



### going further

1. Think about a time someone showed interest in your life. How did that impact your relationship?

---

---

---

2. With which individual on your team do you struggle the most?

---

---

---

3. What impact do you think this struggle might have on the rest of your team?

---

---

---

4. What steps could you take to better **discover!** who they are?

---

---

---

5. Identify the unique DISC and MBTI profiles for yourself and this other team member. In what ways might your struggles be related to profile differences? What might you do to work through these differences?

---

---

---



6. What do you think your team would look like if everyone made this a regular practice?

---

---

---

7. Discuss these questions with your coach.

8. Additional Resources:

- Bo's Café (Lynch, Thrall and McNicol)
- Personality Plus (Littauer)
- Who Do You Think You Are Anyway? (Rohm and Carey)
- Type Talk at Work (Kroeger, Thuesen and Rutledge)