

*Change the stories people tell about themselves...  
... you change in an instant who they are and can become.*

*Change the stories people tell about their universe and about others...  
... And you change the world.*

*Patrick A. Horton, PhD*

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# MASTERING THE POWER OF STORY

## The Story Coach – Practical Magic

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*The Story of Transformation &  
The Transformation of Story*

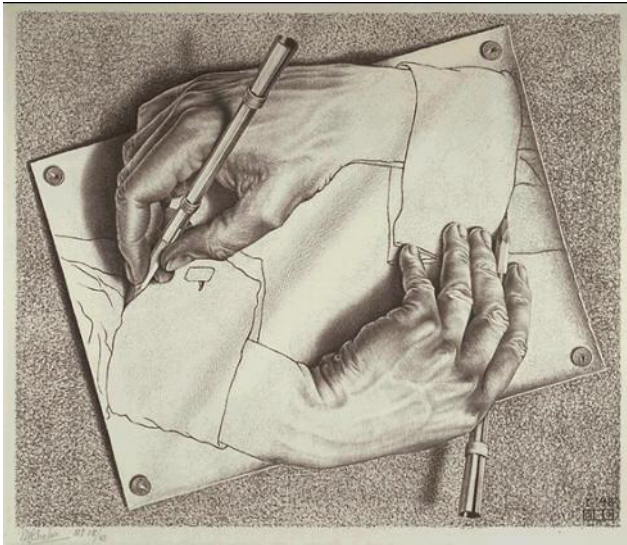


Illustration by M.C. Escher

**Patrick A. Horton, Ph.D.**



"In the instant we open our eyes  
and become aware of the world...  
There is Story.

In the moment we endeavor to express ourselves,  
or attempt to entertain, inform, or transform others...  
There is Storytelling.

It is not just something we do...  
It is who we are."

Patrick A. Horton, PhD  
The Story Coach

[www.thestorycoach.com](http://www.thestorycoach.com)



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## Preface

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In a world increasingly defined by unprecedented change, people, organizations, and entire industries and nations require equally new and in some ways equally unprecedented perspectives, strategies, and skills. Not just to navigate this changing world, but to take charge and shape it. To a great extent, this book will provide a step or two in that direction and, at the very least, even point to and begin to provide a framework for seeing the pieces of the changing puzzle as a more *comprehensive* and surprisingly *comprehensible* whole. While most would prefer not to be bothered, it is delusional to imagine we can just ignore or escape these accelerating changes that daily redefine our lives. It is foolish and wasteful to miss capitalizing on their infinite possibilities. It is no longer viable to overlook clearly understanding and intentionally shaping them.

This applies most of all with those we normally associate with story, although it ultimately also does not matter who you are or what you do. It does not even really matter what it is you want or need to be and do. Ours is a time of change of a kind and scope that has no exact precedent in the past or roadmaps for the future. Every day and in every way, the challenges to our stories about who we are and how we fit in are changing in ways that make it difficult to keep oriented, let alone keep up. This book and actions you take with it will allow you to do both and much more. The material and concrete steps in this book are essential for all creative professionals, professional creators, and everyday heroes coming to recognize their lives as stories in the making in which they wish to play a greater role as effective author and well informed guide. It is, after all, about divining the life in story and defining the story in life – which is to say it is about many things at once and one *unifying* whole.

As for your part at this particular moment, there really are only a few basic questions you need to consider to determine whether you want or need to read this book and begin to master its empowering steps...

1. Do you have or even just *feel* you have a story to tell?
2. Do you have or even just *feel* you have vision or mission to sell?
3. Do you have a life or career worth creating by intentional design?

Chances are that you answered most if not all in the affirmative. However, if you answered even one with a 'yes', you seriously need to read this book, several times actually. If you are still on the fence, however, perhaps you should also ask yourself the following...

4. Do you want to find and define your place in a changing world?
5. Do you want to actively shape and integrate the worlds you live in?
6. When you reach the end of your life, do you want to be able to look back and know you lived it deeply, richly, and fully?
7. Would you like to be able to do any or all of the above so well you can inspire and actually help show others the way to do the same?

You do not need to know just yet what it is that you have an urge-up-to-a-driving-need to create, communicate, and/or accomplish. You do not need to know what the full realization of any or all of the above would or could even look like. In point of fact, the odds are you do not know, at least not fully, which is a fundamental part of the draw *to* explore them. It is this very fundamental fact of life and universal call to story that is a cornerstone to this book and to all creativity, discovery, and growth. All you do need in your head, heart, and hand at the moment is the awareness that the cost of *not* exploring these questions is just too high. What you need to learn is how everything you ever think, feel, say or do is living story and how you can make powerful use of that knowledge. This book and the wide range of interconnected issues it will cover will give you the skills, perspective, and means to address all the above and effectively pull it all together in a optimal unified whole that specifically and uniquely works for you regardless of your role, goals, or arena.

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This will *not* be the last book you will ever need to read on any of the wide ranging topics it covers, either separately or as they are interrelated. It is, however, powerfully and uniquely useful as the first. Most of it you will take in and learn by doing – more often than not discovering you already had many to most of the most crucial pieces to the puzzle – but now with a rapidly growing new ability to bring them into relief in a vastly larger context, and put them into a practical unfolding order and equally practical steps and plans to not only divine and fulfill your dreams but to exceed them. Your life, stories, work, and career will never be the same. They will be greater than you imagined. This book is, after all, also about mastering the life in story and the story in life in a rapidly changing world – step by unexpected but increasingly effective step – to discover what it is to live fully and be fully alive. This book is not so much about redefining any existing unified language of how we discuss, teach, or create story so much as about creating one. It is about creatively navigating and effectively taking charge of change.

And take note, for all the reasons and in all the ways this book is *not* just for writers or even for media professionals *only*, it may be the most important single volume they will encounter for some time to come. It will provide an unprecedented common language and integrated steps to address their respective needs and contributions to story and project development even as it transforms their ability to deal with a changing industry and changing world. On the flip side in a world or combination of converging worlds in which story, media, and potentially intentional social change are themselves ubiquitous and converging in new forms that no longer emanate from the media industry only, this book will explore the many ways that most story is implicitly strategic scenario and how all strategic scenarios at their best are projected living story. It helps shift paradigms where needed. It creates some where there are none. It shows the way to help sound the depths of creativity and imagination. When used well, it will make your personal, professional, and spiritual journeys not only the best they can be but woven together as one.



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## Introduction: **A Brave New World**

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At any given moment in life, you can accomplish *extraordinary* to seemingly *impossible* things if you can fulfill a few deceptively simple conditions for action and success. You need to know what you are after. You need to know what it takes to do that. You need to know what it takes to do what it takes. You need to step up to the plate and commit. Most of all, it has to matter. Then and only then can you rally the support and resources to realize in the world what you have realized or are coming to realize in your imagination. Then and only then can you create and sustain the necessary personal levels of persistence, focus, and thresholds of action for it all to come together and succeed. Then and only then can you create in the external world the needed sense of need. Then and truly only then can you fully recognize, shed, and leave behind those things in your world that needlessly impede, limit, or stop you.

That's it. Pick up a pencil. Write it down. Put it up on your wall. Then go out and transform your life, your story, your work and career. What does meeting or not meeting these conditions have to do with a book on life, story, and success in the Brave New World<sup>1</sup>? Everything.

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<sup>1</sup> While this phrase is clearly a reference to the famous or infamous book by Aldous Huxley, it does not take that grim and seemingly emerging version of the future as inevitable, only as likely if we allow it to unfold on its own and do not actively, intentionally, and effectively choose to create our present and future otherwise.

These are the implicit challenges you present to yourself, your characters, and your colleagues in all the myriad collaborative processes that must emerge and *converge* to bring any story, intention, project, or endeavor from initial concept to realized fruition. They are the implicit challenges you present to your audience in any setting or medium when you ask them to get on board for the ride. They are the driving force and critical path to real and lasting success at anything. They are always about story and what story is always about, *and*, they almost never occur. Not separately, not together, not in your life or your stories, your work or your career. It is why things fail, from projects and programs to entire industries and nations. It is all about *need, intention, action, and choice – character, context, challenge, and change*. Everything else is just noise and stuff happening – unless, of course, it is *fate, destiny, or divine plan*. But we'll come back to that later.

Do I have your attention? Good.

As it turns out, your attention, along with where you put it and how, are key to all that follows in these pages and what becomes both possible and impossible in your awareness, imagination, and visions of the world. Where and how you pair all of that up with and through action are key to everything else that is to be realized or not in all life, commerce, and art. And much of what you have been told or sold, thought or taught about almost everything in and about life and the world – most especially about story – ranges from piecemeal and inadequate to outdated, irrelevant, or flat out wrong, while much of what you just know to be true gets lost or dismissed in the shuffle. We are about to readjust all that so you can better understand the real creative and commercial processes as they are understood in the media industry, how they are actually played there, and as you can make them work better to assure your success (and keep your head when all others, including the ‘experts’, literally are losing theirs). Better, *we are going to show you how to take charge and open the floodgates to your own creativity and that of others as we explore how life and story both work and are inextricably interconnected*.

We all have story about virtually everything, even when it is only vague but emotionally charged shadows and fears about the unknown. Everything we ever think, say, feel, or do individually or collectively is a taking in, a playing out, and/or a revisiting, revising, or creating of story. Story is our lens, filter, and organizing principles to experiencing and shaping the world around us. It is what joins us together, separates us by degrees, or tears us apart as individuals, families, groups, and as nations. It is our story about ourselves and about the world that defines and limits us, or opens up universes of infinite possibility. It is story that determines how we remember and understand our past, how we experience and engage our present, and whether or not we have a future, a let alone how we shape it. It is through story that we create, sustain, nurture, or destroy – whether by enlightened intention or by accidental design.

The problem is few of us fully understand or even remotely begin to tap this power in any setting – personal or professional, fact or fiction. We often fail to recognize how and when it is being used for or against us. Ironically, the very media and institutions whose historic mission is the development and circulation of story and our vision of the world now dominate all venues even as they undermine the viability of their own missions, products, and profits. Story and media gurus often have it wrong, not always because they do not understand, but because they must try to sell what you want to hear in order to survive and succeed. We greet *waves* of new storytellers and media executives with the unfortunate but reassuring lie that all they need is a hot idea and a pitch, even as *that* idea fails us all. We daily lose our way as a people and nation, all too often distracted by new noise, new toys, and reassuring but empty rhetoric. We relentlessly exploit our young in the goal of creating mindless market-bots when we should be nurturing and guiding them. We tend to look behind in time if we bother to look at all as we fail ever more frequently to see what is before us, let alone grasp what could be. And, as grim as this seems to be, there has never been more *promise* or *possibility* at every turn for those who can see and convey them to others.

If you are a writer, you must powerfully capture and express your vision in a way that speaks to and moves publishers and/or actors, directors, producers and, ultimately, an audience. If you are a publisher, actor, director, producer, you must clearly convey your needs and vision to guide the best from writers AND know how to listen to get theirs. If you are a development or marketing executive *really* worth your salt, you must have the goods for more than a campaign for a successful *opening* weekend and short run of DVD sales or downloads. If you are a change agent of any kind, you need to know how to draw out and handle all the ‘story’ held by those you wish to impact, and offer up alternative visions they can try on for size and actually *experience* as viable scenarios worth embracing and in fact helping to flesh out and bring to full realization. At every step of the way, regardless of your role or arena, you have to deliver the goods and be able to sell it all. And, if you are among those who must manage and/or influence all of this, you especially must understand the changing pieces of the puzzle and how they all connect. ***You all must understand what generates, drives, and shapes change.***

It is here that this book differs most substantially from others on story, including some that seem akin to it as *it is equally a book about story and transformation – how transformation shows up or fails to in real life and how that shows up or fails to show up in and through story.* It is about bringing into relief the shared critical paths of both, beginning at their *real* beginnings, and how our own story about the world impacts our needs, willingness, and ability to explore and tell stories that speak to our times. It is about discovering how to divine and resonantly capture those stories and visions that want us to tell them and irresistibly attract and hold an audience. As it turns out, *all stories worth telling (and well told) are ultimately about transformation, and transformation always has its own need, structure, drive, and point.* It is where myth comes from. It is how we are wired. It means you always will have something to say, something worth saying, and the best means to say, package and sell it. Not just what we usually think of as ‘story,’ *but the real and living thing.*

Put most simply, this is a book about the life and power of *Story*. How it works – where it comes from – how to divine and wield it to understand and shape your life and the lives of others. It is derived from long-running Story Coach – Practical Magic presentations, workshops, and seminars with a similar primary focus on achieving and even redefining success in the changing worlds of media, in part by helping to create a more successful media. The book also retains the material’s versatile applications to life, creativity, and to work in other arenas as well, and will give new depth and power to virtually everything you do. It not only will help you to step up to divine and claim your rightful place in the world, it will help you step up to fulfill your calling to inspire and to lead. None of it is secret. It is simpler than you imagine. You are needed as never before in ways both immeasurably ancient and breathtakingly new. Most importantly, there has *never* been a better time or a greater need for Story in all its forms, or for those who understand and effectively wield its power. Not because in any given situation they have any or all the answers, but because in almost any situation, they are uniquely able to bring into relief and effectively ask the right questions. More specifically, the right questions at the right time.

In the pages that follow, we will explore a comprehensive yet elegant blend of paradigms and practices for the creation, development, and promotion of story, even as we explore applications of story in shaping and guiding everything else in life. It looks like magic. It redefines practical. It raises the bar on success. The point, of course, is not to learn the paradigms themselves, but to execute their stunningly effective steps. We will show how the most pervasive models for creating, developing, and delivering story often doom stories, projects, and careers from the outset, as do the corporate cultures and structures built around them. We will balance the very private aspects of creativity and the equally crucial collaborative steps and stages needed to assure congruence between the creative and commercial sides of things and to help you tell stories you did not know you had in you with an ease you will not believe.

In the still grander scheme of things for those specifically interested in the media industry, we will illustrate some of the ways the media industry itself gets in its own way and limits its success with the very models, organizations, and corporate cultures purported to assure success. We will have a little to say for industry organizations and guilds that sit idly by and accept these trends when they could lead the way in impacting them. Perhaps most importantly for many new to the doors of Hollywood, it will shatter the appalling message of the cottage industries that have emerged to sell you on the idea of selling your idea. It is almost an outright lie. Almost. This book and its applications in the media world and everywhere else are for those who, as we will say over and over again, are ready and willing to do and to become able to do the real work. As we will also say over and over again, success in Hollywood these days must occur as much in spite of Hollywood as because of it, and in spite of many gurus who profess to hold the keys to the kingdom.

Many of the elements covered will be as ancient as story and storytelling themselves. The context and conceptualization of them will be as current as the times we live in. As a result of mastering them, you will be better able to succeed at and redefine your given craft or career. You will be more able to impact the media industry and others personally as you go. You will better understand how to collectively and/or institutionally impact the industry as a whole. You will show up for success with what everyone ultimately is looking for whether they explicitly know it or not; confidence, conviction, commitment, and craft. You will learn to trust and tap your own voice to tell stories you did not know you had in you and successfully promote them in ways you did not know were possible. Moreover, you will increasingly have the sensitivity and tools to help others do the same. Just as importantly, you will be able to convey your visions even to those who resist them in order to hold on to inadequate to blatantly false visions of their own as you create unprecedented control over your own life, story, work, and career. This is not just about success *in* the media world. It is about success *for* it.

Professionals throughout the entertainment & media industries can capture and move audiences more successfully while drastically enhancing the collaborative process from concept to successful release. Studios, networks, and production companies can capture, develop, and successfully market the best material possible while drastically cutting investments on ineffective to outright misguided story and project development – with more consistent results. Everyone will have a shared and integrated creative and commercial language, matched by equally comprehensive and complimentary collaborative practical steps. You can create and/or contribute to the creation of product that will sell (and know how to sell and/or help to sell it). Not only will you be infinitely better at doing whatever it is you do in your life, work, and career, you will be infinitely better at helping others transform what it is they do. Best of all, we do all this with a simple exploration of the conditions for success outlined above, a few powerful and empowering principles for life and story, a handful of questions, and one short mantra.

Since this material is based on the simple understanding and potent use of the fact that there is nothing that any of us ever do for any purpose or in any setting that is not an expression or manifestation of story, this book also has a great deal to say for those other arenas as well. Professional speakers, corporate executives, and corporate planners can discover means to develop missions with vision and visions with mission that hit the ground running and draw in the most resistant players as active participants. Advertisers, PR, and marketing - communications professionals can better integrate corporate/product missions, branding, and product promotion/delivery for themselves and their clients. Teachers, clinicians, and change agents can discover a new language, tools, and possibilities for healing, creativity, and taking charge of change. Individuals from all walks of life can shed ways of engaging the world that create limitations or even prisons for them, and take charge of their lives as stories in process in which they are key author and guide – not only in the world as it is, but as it can be and is becoming.

It should be noted before moving on to the chapters to come that there is always a temptation in writing a book like this to yield to the impulse to say whatever it is you believe your audience wants to hear, rather than take responsibility for addressing what you manifestly *know* they need to learn, integrate, master, and *do*. The readiness to give in to this impulse, of course, arises in proportion to the extent to which your drive for selling lots of books is matched by a willingness to mislead and misdirect your audience in the bargain. The same basic truth applies to courses, conferences, and consultations. Whether this willingness is based on ambition, greed, or even reluctant compromises to your material so you can manage to reach anyone at all, it has the same ironic and varyingly tragic results; *the better you manage to stand out in the fray and succeed at creating and selling a book on how to succeed in and 'sell' to Hollywood, the less able your readers may be in doing either.*

The resulting gibberish to outright lies can be seen in endless lists of books and in courses on the 'secrets' of selling to and finding 'success' in Hollywood (and everywhere else), often written or offered with great aplomb by people who have done and achieved neither. On the other hand, there is a wealth of great training and material at hand everywhere. The truth is, the more widely available 'experts' and events on story and breaking into Hollywood have become the more confusion they have created, even as story has become the most important but often ignored, misrepresented, and misunderstood phenomenon in the media industry.

There always have been courses, conferences, consultants, and publications on story and the 'secrets' of breaking into Hollywood. They converged and virtually exploded as an entire cottage industry over the last decade, offering up many variations on the 'secrets' to selling to Hollywood and success in the media industry at a time in which the industry itself was being taken over by corporate convergences and professional amateurs. They all bought and sold the idea you could succeed just by having an idea, and that breaking into Hollywood was just the luck of the draw in which you could cheat and win the lottery.

For many potential readers, little to any of the above will matter. They are not so much looking for how to tell stories as to create product. They are not so much looking for how to define, pursue, and achieve a dream as they are looking for a means to have one and/or keep it alive. Lies and misinformation are actually useful (as long as they are shared) as the real intention or commitment is just going through the motions anyway, pretending they are part of the entertainment industry or could be if only that missing ‘secret’ or big break shows up. For many readers, it is actually comforting knowing they have not made the real effort yet. It means or could be taken to mean that it is still possible to succeed if only they try harder or do something better. The unspoken reality for even those who actually do aspire to try and make it in Hollywood (or anywhere else) is that it is emotionally safer to stay shy of the needed thresholds and types of action for success in order to keep the dream safely untested and thus both its hope and its imagined possibility alive. It is the challenge of having to risk your dreams to actually live them.

The initial problem for those of you who are ready and willing to take risk and become fully able is you will have to find your way through oceans of distorted and fragmented information to get your hands on what you really need to know and *do* to succeed before you have the information in hand to be able to know what it is you really need know. The second and inescapably related problem is you will then have to swim through equally vast oceans of people in positions of power who bought or pretend they bought the fragmented and erroneous goods. The third, and as it turns out most pivotal problem or challenge, is whether or not you can step outside of the box of what you know or think you know to explore those worlds that call to you on the horizon or are trying to emerge and speak through you and your creative impulses. This holds true whether you are among those striving to fulfill your creative drive on the creative side of things or executives who want to work with them. The fourth problem is how to address all this at once without getting lost in a world and industry undergoing rapid and unprecedented change.

The great news is sevenfold. There are more opportunities and great work being done with story than ever. There really is a way to not only proceed, but to lead. You hold many of the most crucial keys yourself. The keys you do not have are quite concrete and attainable if you are willing to take a few unfamiliar steps that will seem strangely familiar when you allow them to work and try them on for size. The still better news is that the pages that follow will walk you through discovering and expressing your own voice in a ways that fulfill your creative needs and commercial potential in ways you cannot believe and that you will be doing as you learn because you will be leaning by doing. The inescapable news is that it all comes back to and begins with you, as the crucial source, conduit, and vehicle for this journey of discovery and the necessary agent of action at every step. The biggest news of all is that it is in finding your own true voice that you can do all this by speaking to what everyone wants or thinks they *want* while offering up what it is you and they *actually need* – distinctions that cut throughout these pages – all of which begins and ends with divining and fulfilling your calls to story.

The call to story for most is almost always based on, driven by, and given form from some conflict, unmet need, and/or unanswered question. This is true whether we consciously know what they are at the outset or not. In point of fact, the real call to most story or stories is fueled by the extent that we have not clearly defined and do not clearly know what it is we really want, actually need, and/or are really after. At its most base levels, it emanates from the need to fulfill some promise or to survive and overcome some wound, loss, or sense of being incomplete.. It is guided by and shows up in the universal and very human needs for a belief in possibility and a sense of meaning, direction, purpose, and place. At its greatest depths and highest levels, it is about healing, completion, and becoming whole. What lies beyond all these when they are complete and fulfilled in both life and story is the discovery and manifestation of whatever we throughout history have called the divine, the space of pure creation and expression beyond limitations or history.

Not everyone, of course, is ever going to break into let alone make it in Hollywood or the media industry writ large or is seriously interested in doing so, just as not everyone is going to be a world-changing artist, entrepreneur, or captain of industry. Everyone, can, however, live their respective life artfully and fully – with clarity of intention, passionate yet practical commitment, and a profound grasp and conviction of purpose. It really is possible to understand and *proactively* engage yourself and the world around you. It really is possible to seek and find a balance between the opportunities and demands of the external world around or available to you and what it is you bring to it in terms of contribution and need. Most importantly of all, it is possible to do all this with the greatest possible success and satisfaction in each and every area of your life, as individual parts and as an integrated whole, by fully engaging in and savoring the journey *as* an adventure and journey – with full appreciation of all its dynamic depth and dimensions and precious life force.

The journey or larger story of our life and all we create and leave behind in it is ever so much more than the sum of its parts, which is true as well for what we normally think of as story because, once again, everything is living story. It falls to you to divine and determine what the story of your life and the unfolding life in your stories will be. Unlike the majority of your kindred spirits on the planet, you now have much of what you will need to get started and proceed literally in your hands at this very moment. It will require of you several things: an open mind; trying it on for size; executing it in action; and, a willingness to get out of your own way and let your shifts in being and tactile commitment grow. It will require a bit of a leap of faith as well that what lies ahead for you in terms of life and possibility not only lie outside of what you know or imagine at the moment, but vastly exceed them and can come to you only in exercising that powerful combination of full attention and *informed* not knowing. It is here that all things profound and powerful make themselves manifest and known. It is here you will find your own voice. It is from this space you will take your place in and help shape the world.

This journey together will not be without its real world challenges. For those who would seek to succeed anywhere in this whirlwind world of change, let alone dare to lead, success more and more must occur as much in spite of people and cultures of your arenas as because of them. Success in the allied worlds of media in particular increasingly requires collaborations with growing ranks of professional amateurs whose job it is to command crafts, product, and commerce they do not understand. The dynamics of the deal increasingly fly in the face of successful product and production within an industry as much at war with as it is successful at seeking the holy grails of profit, synergy, and economies of scale. Success both in and for Hollywood especially increasingly must occur as much or more in spite of it as because of it.

Contrary to claims by industry professionals and pundits alike, it is not true that no one sets out to make a bad movie or storytelling product. It happens all the time, with stories and projects partially to completely doomed before they even reach the written page, let alone thereafter. All that said, it also is not true, as many would like to believe, that all these professionals, organizations, nor the industry itself are completely heartless, stupid, or ill-informed – including many who appear to be. Many of their objectives are quite sound and even essential, just as many of their areas of competence crucial in a changing world and industry. The challenge is in making all the pieces fit at all levels and in all arenas of endeavor with an ongoing eye to the fundamental role of story and the essential combinations of skills and crafts the industry generally under appreciates, fails to integrate, and oftentimes actually ignores. The challenge is in looking beyond how things are practiced and/or perceived to be practiced in the present in order to see how things can be done and what is possible both immediately and in successively unfolding steps. All of which is to say, once again, that you quite often are going to have to know and understand a great deal more than you may initially imagine (or want to imagine) you must master, regardless of your respective role. You must often know more than many who falsely claim to guide you.

Again, there are entire armies of self-proclaimed gurus to misplaced media execs who out there who, whatever their real or feigned intentions, are committed to helping you to fail, at least in part – again, if not by intention then by accidental design – often with a personal need to maintain beliefs that may never have had relevance in a changing game. There is, again, an entire cottage industry of courses, conferences, consultants, based on selling you whatever it is you want to hear or they have to offer rather than what you actually need to know. And if you do have the good fortune of realizing how to divine, develop, and step up to sell whatever it is you need to do in life, you still have to do it in industries and systems that are living and breathing contradictions in design, goals, and objectives, whether their inhabitants know it or not.

We are about to change all that and turn the entire personal, creative, and commercial continuum on its ear to make it all not only immediately viable but clearly understandable and subject to rational influence for those willing to show up and do the real work. All those others who are happy spinning their wheels or going through the motions pretending they have a career now or *could* have one if only that one big break came along, I wish you good fortune and a winning lottery ticket – with a real lottery. As for all that alternate army of gifted and generous executives, colleagues, and consultants who aim to make a difference and truly can when given the chance, listen up. We are about to reclaim the game.

There are no shortcuts. There are no enduring cheats. No magic log lines, contacts, or pitches. You have to do the real work to step into, let alone succeed at the game, and the game itself is changing. But as recent success and failures in corporate halls and on screens both large and small constantly remind us, story and effective storytelling remain key to success by any definition and you are and ever will be the key to story. You now hold in your hands the distilled means to fulfilling your call, potential, and quite possibly your destiny. Better still, you are about to discover the degree to which you already know more than you think you know, and have an *inherent* ability to recognize what you need to learn.

We live in an extraordinary time on the planet. Subtle to not-so-subtle changes of all kinds materialize, take shape, careen, and collide at such a breakneck pace that our personal and collective stories about them seem unable even to begin to keep up. New communications technologies and entertainment media spring up in an instant and kaleidoscopically change and vaporize all over again just as quickly. Global economies and political boundaries shift like dunes in the wind. The media industry in particular and all the increasingly allied worlds of art and commerce spin and turn in a dance with emerging markets that make it difficult to determine who if anyone is in the lead. And, for better or worse, as the world grows smaller and playing fields level and converge, many forces of changes are in motion that are more real than apparent while others holding our attentions are more apparent than real. But take heart when I say our stories about the world and about change itself ‘seem’ unable to keep up. They can keep up and do much better. In point of fact, we are not only quite able to rise up and ride the many waves of possibility and largely unprecedented change emerging in this very moment that then take us to the next, we can command and shape them as never before, and, once again, not just in the horrifyingly grim vision of Aldus Huxley’s famous or infamous “Brave New World.”

What appears to be conflict and chaos from one perspective is often nothing more than new openings and opportunities from another for those who can see. It is those who understand and effectively wield the power of story in any arena that not only will lead the way and succeed at each new game, it is they will shape and define the game itself. It is they who will show the way to success as it has always occurred; in seeing what others do not, in taking viable risks, and in stepping outside of the box. And because in all arenas, most especially media, success is about collaboration between a wide variety of players and skills – the greatest success will fall to those who understand their respective needs, limitations, and contributions to story and mission development who can thus best understand, guide, and uniquely support the needs of others.

You now stand at a crossroads in your life and career much like those you create for the characters in your stories or players in your mission statements in which the challenges and the tipping point of change – the differences that makes the difference – are not only at hand but quite literally in your hands. What happens now and in all those moments to come in your life, work, and career are up to you in ways they were not even minutes ago before discovering and beginning to read these pages, and, as my friend W Mitchell<sup>2</sup> says, the only real failure in life is in not trying. Desire, vision, and even faith are great in their place. It is what you concretely put into action or fail to put into action that matters and determines the mark and legacy of your journey through life.

Come and discover the simple steps and language that assure you can create and communicate the story and career of your dreams while effectively addressing and even guiding the artistic and commercial needs of others. Discover how creative and commercial processes themselves converge at their best and actually become one and the same. Discover why it called Practical Magic. Again, as the seminar tag line goes, it won't just change the way you work, it will change the way you live. With that, you may do more than a little to change the world and achieve some personal, creative, and commercial success along the way. All you have to do is try some unfamiliar but immediately effective steps on for size with a real intention of seeing what they can do.<sup>3</sup> This book is, after all, about divining the life in story and defining the story in life.

Welcome to the journey and your own Brave New World.

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<sup>2</sup> W Mitchell is a good friend and internationally renowned speaker, author, and change agent who literally wrote the book on overcoming adversity, facing the unknown, and taking charge of change, "It's Not What Happens to You, It's What You Do About It."

<sup>3</sup> It is highly suggested that you explore the content and steps in these pages in tandem with a partner and/or work group for reasons that will become obvious in short order.



## Chapter One

# Before We Begin: The Medium Is The Messenger

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Principle One: There is almost nothing more powerful than the right question at the right time

To say we hit the ground running in the presentations, workshops, and seminars that gave birth to this book is to *redefine* understatement. This is true whether we are working with actors, writers, filmmakers, corporate planners, social change agents, or every-day heroes coming to understand their own unfolding lives as dynamic stories in the making. This is true whether we are working with them separately as specialized groups, or working with many of them all together in innovative *reel* world, *real* world, and/or possible *future* world cross-combinations. This is true whether or not those in attendance are as yet remotely aware of (let alone fully clear on) what they are really after before the presentation begins. And, this is particularly true for all those attendees who come in with lives, projects, or careers already in progress that have bogged down or hit the wall in some way, and seem before the presentation begins to be impossibly, incredibly, and immutably stuck. They soon discover, as you will see, few creative professionals ever suffer from writer's block. *What they really suffer from and can easily overcome is writer's blank.*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Briefly, they skip essential steps, ignore crucial contexts, and miss the key roles of creators themselves and the real nature of the creative process. They look for answers before they formulate the questions. They spring into action before they know what they are really after or what it will take to do that, then come up grabbing at air only to discover there is no 'there' there, at least not yet – whether in narrative story or real life missions.

From the very first moments of arrival, before we even officially commence, attendees begin taking some subtly new and different steps with *instant* results, and are trying on new tools and perspectives without their even knowing it. *Paradoxically*, it seems to those in attendance that we are doing very little *if anything* beyond settling in and getting to know each other a little, getting comfortable in the setting, and maybe getting a little footing. We are doing this, of course, as it meets the eye. However, as with all moments of the event (and by implication all the pages of this book), we are doing a great deal more, doing many things at once, and effectively placing attendees at the transformationally powerful creative *center* of it all. They begin exploring ways of ‘learning by doing’ that leave behind all kinds of limitations and obstacles that can doom stories, projects, and careers to partial or complete failure before they even start. For some, we are secretly stepping off of one path or journey and discretely beginning another. For still others, we are subtly but ultimately radically redefining the journey they are already on.

What most in attendance do not realize until a short time later is that we instantly started taking in new information and ways of doing that shed or altered old ways of thinking and doing to produce instant and unexpected results, even as we initiated subtle but radical shifts in perceptions and paradigms to contain it all and serve to produce more. Most attendees only discover after the fact that we not only were leaning to navigate the world as they knew or thought they knew it with greater ease, we were navigating profound new worlds with equal ease before they even suspected they were leaving anything of the old ones behind. We not only change their view of the world and doing *by* doing, we shift their understanding and the power of their place and potential place in it. The results are intuitive, immediate, and almost without precedent.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> When John Lee, (the author of the highly successful volume, *The Producer's Handbook*) skeptically agreed to give a brief evening presentation following a full day of the story seminar described above, he was stunned on arrival to find the audience excitedly animated rather than on overload and exhausted as expected. When told with a shrug that this always happens. John's response was, "Patrick, you don't understand, these guys aren't just fired up, they are finishing each other's sentences."

The universe most attendees step out into at the end of the day is not remotely the one they left at the door when they first arrived, just as it is not remotely one most anticipated they would need to explore, even for the visions and desires they arrived with and will still seek to achieve. The personal and professional universes they now occupy are light-years beyond what most thought possible, let alone anticipated. The worlds of what is now possible or becoming possible are transformed, as is the clarity and crucial importance of what uniquely drives each attendee to show up to begin with to fulfill their need to manifest and create. All of this is possible because the workshop or seminar did not begin and *end* with what participants thought they wanted, but opened them up and equipped them to navigate and address what it is they need. They know and *do* things differently at day's end because, in addition to hearing descriptions and principles of story and storytelling as expected, they were guided experientially through the real unfolding story of giving birth to story. Unlike other books and courses that cover principles of *analyzing* story, this material takes you through the process of creating it.

It sounds esoteric when you talk about it in this way whereas it is simply very practical hands-on training when you see and do it, most especially in the actual coaching that occurs throughout the day that draws out from participants all those creative steps they are trying to give birth to but do not know how to access or express. What only becomes apparent later in the day as we are working in ways most did not initially imagine, is we also began with steps and elements of creation that may have seemed incidental or even silly at first, but prove to be much of what is missing in other books, courses, models and careers. This includes, among other things as mentioned above, putting you squarely in the center of the entire continuum of the real creative process – from generally neglected real starting points to rarely attained complete finish – and showing ways to exercise or take back your own creative, personal, and *commercial* power by shifting from an *external* or *field dependent* orientation to a more personal and *internal* '*locus*' (*location*) of control.

What is this shift to a more personal and internal ‘locus’ (location) of control in your perceiving, engaging, and shaping the world around you? The answer to that has two parts, both of which have to do with your hitting the ground running from literally page one of this book. First of all, it is the shift in orientation that inevitably has to happen for the characters in your narrative stories to move from being acted upon to taking action; i.e. where they see the ability to control, act, or make a difference to be located, ‘out there’ or at least partly within themselves. Second of all, it is the same shift that must occur for you in your own life, work, and career for you to literally take your own power back and take focused and effective action – including taking ownership of your own intentions, stories and voice. It is an example of the kinds of principles we will cover that can make all the difference in your setting out to create and realize great visions in your mind and then in the world. It is also a reminder that story and storytelling, whether on the page, the stage, or on the screen (let alone in the home or boardroom) are not a matter of static rules or lifeless mechanics, but a vibrant and living thing.

In many ways, these shifts in focus and focus on ‘shift’ are merely parts of radically more effective means to equally more effective ends. However, as you will soon see (and be reminded you already knew), they are very much ends in themselves as well, tied to the inescapable fact that the path to satisfaction and success is often very much a path or combined paths to healing, completion, and becoming whole – release, revelation, and inevitably some kind of rebirth. What separates you from the crowd is that you are ready and willing to face things as they really are, along with the unknown that comes of that process, and do the real work to take it all in, digest it, and re-present it in some way that allows others to see as well to find their own shift in seeing, being, and doing. This is and always has been the call and role of artists, leaders, teachers and guides in the world, and those who live most artfully and in charge of their own lives. You are, by the call of your own journey and courage to answer it a unique creative force and a living force of creation.