

Empowering People To Be in Charge of Their Own Story | eLearning (Transcript)

Good day, everyone! My name is Branden DeFoort and if you're tuning into today's e-learning we will be covering the topic of empowering people to be in charge of their own story.

At the core of all our work, regardless of our role in the agency, our aim is to support people to live self-directed lives. A function of this goal is supporting people to be in charge of their own story. And truly, this boils down to choices and how people should be in choice about **what, when, and how** information is share or not shared. As staff, we sometimes fall into loops efficiency that we may forget the impact of our actions. For instance, if you provide direct support, it might be easier to quickly read the person's mail while they're at work so no appointments or important information is missed. It might be easy to put away the person's laundry in their room when they're out with friends. Or we might not knock when going to people's homes because it's also our workplace. And if you don't provide direct support, we might be accidentally sharing information that the person wanted to keep confidential. For instance, maybe the person you support just entered a new relationship. The team is ecstatic about this because this was a long-standing goal for the person and the supports were really active

and robust to help achieve this outcome. At the next leadership meeting, you want to share this as a success story to inspire others. However, upon further reflection perhaps the person wanted to keep the relationship a little more private because the relationship is in its infancy. Or maybe the person wanted to share the news themselves.

Although these examples seem harmless at face value, a series of these well-intended actions can result in us robbing people of control in their own narrative. Perhaps the person is waiting for a letter from a loved one and they don't want anybody to read it. Or maybe they are behind in their bills and don't want people to read that in the mail. Maybe the person doesn't want anybody entering their room, even if it's to help with laundry. And perhaps the person wanted to share the news of their new relationship directly with people instead of hearing it through the grapevine.

In order to hone in on this concept of being in charge of your own story, I want to share a personal experience with all of you.

In my early 20's, I was fortunate to buy my first home. This was a 120-year-old home in rural Manitoba and it had hardly seen any renovations or upgrades. My family and I invested two years of blood, sweat, and tears into this home. We

reinsulated the home, we did this beautiful sage green siding with wood shakes in the gable. The roof was completely redone. We had just drywalled the entire second floor. I had sanded the original hard wood floors to bring them back to life. I created this really unique wood panel wall in the living room. And so on. This house was transformed in those years.

I also consider this time in life my grind years, because I was a single man with a lot of expenses. I was essentially working two full time jobs from 7 in the morning to 11 in the evening every night. Plus a 2-hour commute since I lived in a small rural town called St. Jean Baptiste. I loved my house. I loved seeing the improvements that was a result of my hard work. That is until my grind years started to catch up to me.

There was one night that was particularly challenging. I arrived home from a late shift, and wanted to make a quick dinner and unwind for the night. I lit a candle, listened to some chill music, and made the easiest and quickest meal I had which was Kraft Dinner.

I must have been so tired because I don't even remember going up to my room and eating the macaroni. What I do remember is being woken up to the horrifying smell of smoke. To make a long story short, my house was on fire. Luckily, I

managed to jump out of the second-floor window and get to safety. I remember the volunteer fire fighters arriving so fast, and they looked at the house and said they will be able to save it. That is until the smoke reached the attic, and I still had the old school wood chip insulation in the attic and the entire home caught on fire. Nothing could be salvaged. Absolutely everything was lost.

You might be wondering why I am sharing this really intimate story with you.

Well, that's because I am in charge of my story. So there are two potential causes of the fire, I had this really old fridge and the compressor could have exploded OR the other reason is that when I went up to eat my dinner, I forgot to blow out the candle.

Now, I share this with you because for the longest time, I told people that it was the fridge compressor. I was so ashamed that I wasted my family's time in renovating this home. That I put so many volunteer fire fighters at risk. The guilt consumed me and so I took charge of my own story and just told me it was the fridge compressor. Now that I've processed this trauma in my life, I see it as a learning opportunity and I CHOOSE to share the different side of this story with all of you now.

People with disabilities are not granted the same choice. If someone with a disability potentially caused a house fire, I could only imagine the right restrictions that the person would experience. That Incident Report would haunt the person for the rest of their lives. People would likely not have choice in telling their story and others would just be made aware.

The insurance company knew it was either the candle or the fridge compressor, and frankly they didn't care because it did not change my coverage. On the flip side, if someone with a disability were in my shoes, they would probably see restrictions for the rest of their life, and would likely never be able to live in a supported independent living model. In fact, I know of one person with a disability who accidentally left the stove on and left their home. In response, the person had to move into a 24/7 shift staffed home all in the name of safety. There was no fire, no damage, and no harm. Yet the person's life changed forever. And in my situation, I was able to rebuild a beautiful home. The insurance never flinched. Nobody came to me and said that I had proven to be too irresponsible enough to own a home. My bank was not threatening to take my mortgage away. And yet, the biggest difference between my story and the person who left the stove on is that I did not have a disability so I was given much more grace. EVEN though my circumstance had true- and real-life consequences.

Now, there is a lot we can do to support people to be in control of their story. I would like to introduce to you all the concept of the sealed envelope. Let's say there is specific information that the person does not wish to share with everyone, and in particular with the revolving door of new staff. This could be an incident, an event, a medical history or truly anything that the person would like to keep private, however big or small. However, what if we need to keep this information accessible because we may require it at any given time. We can still find a balance with keeping people in the driver seat of their narrative and storing information. You can put this information in a sealed envelope and written on the envelope it can say that this information can only be accessed with the expressed consent, and in the presence of, the person. This allows the staff to get to know the person before learning some of the most intimate details about them. If one of the first things that people learned about me was that I caused a house fire, this would impact the perception that people have of me. That I might not be responsible or that I shouldn't be trusted to cook or to be alone. People grow. People learn. And people should be in charge of their story so their past selves, doesn't become the prevailing reputation. The sealed envelope is just one tool that helps us protect people's confidential information, but also keeping people in

driver seat of their lives. When people are in charge of their own story, this will assist your mission of supporting people to live lives of their own design.

And just like that folks, that concludes today's e-learning on being in charge of your own story. I want to thank you for tuning in, we'll see you next time.