

# HR LEADER

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## A Story for You and Your Children

How telling a value story can alleviate unnecessary stress

By Esther K. Choy, President & Chief Story Facilitator, Leadership Story Lab

I am lucky. I have the option to work from home or from a traditional office. Working from home when my youngest daughter was barely two years old, however, presented a big drawback. Whenever she discovered I was there, she glued herself to me like a moth to a lamp. One afternoon, I found myself running late for a clients' meeting and my toddler unwilling to let me go.

Running out of time and ideas, I asked my nanny to take her for a walk as I left the house. Usually if my daughter got to go somewhere too, she was not as bothered by my leaving her. But that afternoon, she felt differently. Refusing to take another step, she stood outside of our house wailing and calling for me. As I hurried down the three blocks to catch the bus, her crackled voice rang in my head and wrenched my gut.

I went to see clients that day with a disproportionate amount of guilt.

I knew my youngest was in good hands, and yet I carried this overwhelming sense that I was abandoning her. *Why am I doing this to my baby?* I asked myself. And when my older daughter asks, "Mommy, why do you have to work?" I don't seem to be able to come up with a satisfactory answer. Money? Not entirely. Purpose? How do I explain purpose to a six-year-old? Fulfillment? Again, what does that mean to young children? And why are these big words more important than being with them?

Many working parents struggle to bridge their working and personal lives. When they feel like one part of their lives is taking away from the other, stress increases. But it doesn't have to!

A participant in one of my storytelling workshops wrestled with a similar question from her ten-year-old son every day. "What did you do today, Mommy?" No matter how many times she has answered the same thing, she is not satisfied. Here are a few examples of what she typically says:

"Um... I wrote a lot of emails."

"I went to a lot of meetings."

"I read a lot of reports."

Although factual, these responses are just not meaningful to the ten-year-old or his working mom. So she decided to tell her son a story using a classical storytelling tool: metaphor.

"What did I do today? Well... You know how when we go to the grocery store, sometimes we see shopping cart covers parents use for their young kids to sit on? Did you know it used to be impossible to hold all the pieces together? But then someone figured out that the missing piece was Velcro. With Velcro, all the pieces can work together. That's what Mommy did at work. I was trying to figure out that one missing piece that could hold everything together."



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Telling this story took less than a minute, and it packs a punch. The story is relatable to her son (and much older audiences). It sparks his imagination and curiosity. Most importantly, both the child and parent understand the importance this mom brings to her workplace as an inventor, a problem solver, and someone who ushers in simple, unexpected solutions.

So try it yourself! If you struggle to explain the significance of your work to your children (or anyone in your organization), use a metaphor. Compare the essence of your work with a tangible object, like Velcro. Then, explain how the value you create

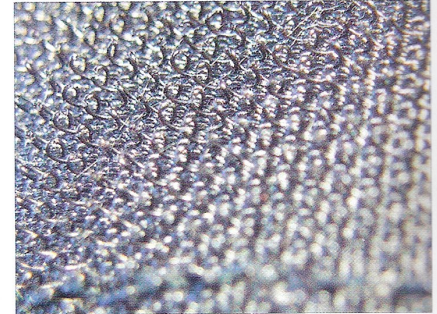


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If you struggle to explain the significance of your work to your children (or anyone in your organization), use a metaphor. Compare the essence of your work with a tangible object, like Velcro.

is just like the value of that object you and your children (or other audiences) are more familiar with. Everyone will feel much more engaged and satisfied.

It may not take away the guilt completely. I suspect guilt is hardwired into us as parents. But your children will have a new understanding of the impact you bring outside of your home. If you can do this, then you are not a parent who leaves his or her children only to type a bunch of emails and attend endless meetings. You bring value to your community, and in turn the world your children are inheriting is better because of it. •

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