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The following text on the power of storytelling comes from the Generation Change program Wajahat Ali initiated on behalf of the State Department in eight countries helping to empower young change agents and social entrepreneurs. For his efforts, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton recognized Wajahat as a "Generation Change Leader." Wajahat Ali read from this at the 2015 AIEA Annual Conference in Washington, DC during the luncheon plenary, and has granted permission to post this excerpt on the AIEA website.

Each leader – each great leader of a country, of a sports team, of a company, of a non-profit organization—each great leader has a great story.

You are currently living a story, right?

All humans have a story. Stories give us an identity; stories give us purpose; stories help us communicate our ideas, our values, and our beliefs.

Stories are how we meet people. For example, when you meet someone for the first time, you ask, “Hey man, what’s your story?”

Stories are how we pass down our values, ideals, religions, histories and cultures to our kids.

We share the stories of our prophets. The parables of Jesus, the life of Prophet Muhammad, for example.

How do we teach kids lessons? Through stories – “The Boy Who Cried Wolf” for example. Every country I’ve visited has some version of this story encouraging children not to lie and warning them of the consequences.

Stories are also how we brand and present ourselves to the world. Every company has an “About Us” section, right? They tell you their story – Steve Jobs and Bill Gates started off



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as college dropouts with big ideas about creating an intelligent machine – the computer – that would transform the world from their garages.

However, stories, like individuals, are nothing without people investing in them and believing in them – both emotionally and financially.

In the professional world, you will learn about the “the elevator pitch” – how to convince someone in two minutes to financially invest in your ideas. You have to “hook them” with a great story. Details aren’t enough, you have to inspire them and convince them through a story.

Believe it or not, you are all heroes of your story. Your story is still being written. But you are in control of your own destiny. You are a change agent. You have the ability to change your story, your community’s story, and your country’s story and steer it towards a “happy” ending – or at least a “happier” ending.

Every hero is on a journey. But a hero must ask him/herself the following questions:

Who am I?

What do I want in life?

Why am I on this journey?

What’s my destination?

How do I reach my destination?

How do I overcome any obstacles that will come before me on my path?

Whose help do I need in overcoming these obstacles?



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What are my personal strengths and what are my weaknesses?

WHAT'S MY PURPOSE?

Remember– everything is tied to the story.

HISTORY is called “the story of change.” Again, YOU are the change agents. You are the heroes of “this” story.

How you write that story, and eventually help write the story of your community, depends on your intentions, your passions, your dedication, your vision and your hard work.