

AN ACTION GUIDE



TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

SIX STEPS FOR ACCURATE
AND ARTFUL SELF-DEFINITION

HOLLEY M. MURCHISON

If you enjoy this excerpt...

consider becoming a member of the reader
community on our website!

[Click here for sign-up form](#). Members automatically get 10% off
print, 30% off digital books.

Praise for *Tell Me About Yourself*

“Holley’s book is a sage mentor between easy-to-access pages. The book contains fun and practical exercises, clever challenges, and attainable and aspirational case studies to help you build confidence and find your personal style and best self. What a joyful way to find your authentic and most confident voice!”

—**Anne Marie Burgoyne, Managing Director, Social Innovation, Emerson Collective**

“The essential field guide to owning your story. Holley does a masterful job in leading readers down a systematic path of crafting their story while keeping it real. This book is not for the faint of heart. This is about the journey of unlocking the power and potential of ourselves through our own words.”

—**Vinitha Watson, founder and Executive Director, Zoo Labs**

“Holley Murchison has shown me the way to communicate who I am in a hyperconnected and extremely isolated time. In an age of polymaths and disdain for braggadocio, this book is the key.”

—**Mark Brand, CEO, MB Inc./A Better Life Foundation**

“Tell me about yourself. A seemingly innocent yet challenging invitation that can send the unprepared into a fidget-ridden verbal spew of consciousness. First impressions matter, and in *Tell Me About Yourself*, Holley Murchison lays the framework for articulating the most important story you will ever tell—the story of you. This isn’t your ordinary public speaking book; it’s derived from thoughtful lessons Holley has learned from successfully drawing even the most apprehensive visionaries from their shell.”

—**Tonya Rapley, CEO, My Fab Finance**

“In *Tell Me About Yourself*, Holley shares insights on how to step up and into one’s own voice with clarity and strength. This book gracefully guides the reader through a journey of discovery while providing the space and pace needed to gather and coordinate the power that drives each individual’s story.”

—**Elyzabeth Holford, Founding Senior Executive, Digital Living Research Commons, Aarhus University, Denmark**

“No one has to suffer through the awkward tongue-tying and often-times confronting ‘first impression.’ If you are looking for a tool that gets right to the heart of the matter, *Tell Me About Yourself* is your Swiss Army knife. It is the most powerful contribution to public speaking in this era of avatars and profiles, providing readers with an analysis of self that can be shaped into a colloquial masterpiece.”

—**Sallomé Hralima, Executive Dream Director, The Future Project**

“I have long believed that great teachers are performance coaches, and there is no better example of this than Holley Murchison. In *Tell Me About Yourself*, Holley not only helps the reader unearth his or her voice but recognizes that the leaders of the 21st century will be storytellers.”

—**Dave Lynn Gould, Administrator, Belin-Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development, and honors faculty, The University of Iowa**

“A practical crash course in finding your inner voice and successfully communicating it. *Tell Me About Yourself* is the perfect blueprint for reinventing how you share your story and make sure the world understands who you are.”

—**Melissa Patenaude, Chief Experience Officer, FEWOFMANY**

**TELL ME
ABOUT
YOURSELF**

This page intentionally left blank

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

**Six Steps for Accurate and
Artful Self-Definition**

**An Action Guide
by Holley M. Murchison**



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.
a BK Life book

Tell Me About Yourself

Copyright © 2017 by Holley M. Murchison

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.



Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

1333 Broadway, Suite 1000

Oakland, CA 94612-1921

Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278

BK

www.bkconnection.com

Ordering information for print editions

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the "Special Sales Department" at the Berrett-Koehler address above.

Individual sales. Berrett-Koehler publications are available through most bookstores. They can also be ordered directly from Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626; www.bkconnection.com

Orders for college textbook/course adoption use. Please contact Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626.

Orders by U.S. trade bookstores and wholesalers. Please contact Ingram Publisher Services, Tel: (800) 509-4887; Fax: (800) 838-1149; E-mail: customer.service@ingrampublisherservices.com; or visit www.ingrampublisherservices.com/Ordering for details about electronic ordering.

Berrett-Koehler and the BK logo are registered trademarks of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

First Edition

Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-5230-9466-0

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-9467-7

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-5230-9468-4

2017-1

Interior design and production: Dovetail Publishing Services

Cover design: Felicia Reyes, www.feliciareyesdesign.com

and Leslie Waltzer, Crowfoot Design

Author photo: Adrian Octavius Walker

Dedication

To you. For choosing yourself and honoring your story.

The world needs your voice now more than ever.

Thank you for taking this leap.

And to khoLi., Monica, Regina, Craig, and Mel—

thank you for being so down for the vision.

I couldn't have asked for a better team.

This page intentionally left blank

Contents

Preface	vii
Chapter 1: Why Stories Matter	1
Chapter 2: Honing Your Voice	13
Chapter 3: Six-Step Process	23
Chapter 4: Essential Tips & Preparation	33
Chapter 5: Show & Prove	55
Chapter 6: We Can All Win	75
Index	97
About the Author	101
About Oratory Glory	103

This page intentionally left blank

Preface

*Today you are you, that is truer than true.
There is no one alive who is youer than you.*

—Dr. Seuss

Tell me about yourself

An overwhelming command, posing as a casual question—one we hear almost every day, though varying in its phrasing.

“What do you do?” asks a newcomer to your social circle.

“I’d love to hear more about your work,” says a networking stranger.

“So, what can *you* do for *us*?” queries your next potential client.

“Tell me about yourself,” insists your next new boss.

In any number of settings, we’re frequently required to discuss ourselves, to share who we are and what we contribute to the world. Unfortunately, in most circumstances—especially, when we have just a moment’s notice to respond—it can be challenging to pull all the pieces of ourselves together, conveying the perfect response, while forging a bond, sparking

an idea, or advancing into deeper, more meaningful conversation.

This book is an action guide for success in all of those curious conversational moments. In it, you'll find the skills needed to accurately and artfully define yourself, as well as merge and amplify the arcs of your personal and professional journeys.

Tell Me About Yourself will challenge you to rethink the story you have been telling yourself about yourself *and* provide you with a process for not only crafting new narratives, but sharing them with authenticity, compassion, and finesse.

Enjoy the TMAY process. Share it with friends.

Here's to owning your voice.

—Holley
Founder and CEO
Oratory Glory

PS: We'd love to hear how the action guide is working for you. Share your progress and video intros on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter (@OratoryGlory). And don't hesitate to reach out to us with your questions, breakthroughs, and feedback (hello@oratoryglory.com).

**TELL ME
ABOUT
YOURSELF**

This page intentionally left blank

Chapter 1

Why Stories Matter

Meet Holley

Twenty-seven years ago, I was just an introverted kid being tossed around the heart of New York City. As the middle child of five, in the custody of two drug-addicted-soon-to-be-separated parents, I was no stranger to the muffling of my own voice amongst my family, or in a crowd.

Actions, conversations, decisions—all of these things were happening around me, and as a six-year-old with very little agency, when it came to grown-up life topics, I was fairly practiced in opting out of all of the above.

While it's true that, early on, I often played the role of fly on the wall in most conversations, over time, I developed a knack for building genuine and meaningful connections with people through empathy and active listening in private connections. As I grew older, I began using my quiet skills to stand out in what seemed like a perpetually noisy world. Luckily, the opportunities provided to me by my stealthy behaviors also helped develop my confidence so that

I—not necessarily just my anxieties—began to challenge myself in academic and extracurricular settings. I intended to grow through my public discomfort by intentionally taking on public-facing roles, roles that demanded I be outspoken in order to succeed.

After years of playing it quiet, in third grade I picked up a basketball. I was naturally athletic and in love with the sport. It helped me have conversations and form friendships with kids in the neighborhood that I would have never approached off the court. In fourth grade, I entered my first storytelling contest (and won first place). In fifth grade, I auditioned for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and earned the role of Reverend Sprague. In seventh and eighth grade, I joined the mock trial team and competed against middle school students throughout the city, learning the art of formulating and sharing a grounded, persuasive argument. In tenth grade, I became captain of both the debate and girls' basketball teams, honing my leadership, argumentation, and critical-thinking skills, while polishing a style of my own.

My college years weren't that different. I still loved basketball. I still loved finding my way to the spotlight. Fascinated and inspired by the ways words ignite things, I went on to study communications and media, specifically television and radio. I was immersed in the field, and thriving using a skill that once terrified me. And this is a version of my story—a fairly linear

approximation of about 22 years of my life. But if this book serves to develop any common understanding, let it be that almost nothing about life is linear, and what little there is, is often terribly boring. And with that common understanding, let's agree that this version of my story—no matter how many times portions of it have been repeated in interviews, podcasts, or speeches—is not only a bit lulling, but also fairly inadequate. And yet, it still matters.

Meaningful moments

Take a moment to consider the greatest stories you've ever heard. Whether they're tall tales passed down at family gatherings, representations of significant figures taught in textbooks, or modes of perception created by the media, narratives agitate, educate, inspire, and motivate us by reframing some of life's most memorable and meaningful moments. Narratives help us uncover and create new truths.

That said, it's helpful to think about storytelling as a part of our social and cultural currency. Relying heavily on its market and traders, or context and audience, storytelling serves as a central barter point for entertainment and education, the preservation of culture, and the illustration and instillation of values from one party to the next. In this way, storytelling helps build and maintain community. In fact, the

work of sociologist Peter L. Berger reminds us that all of what we know as human life is rooted in this cultural currency.

Stories illustrate who we are, remind us what we're capable of, highlight our uniqueness.

According to Berger, every story we share is a testament to the freedom we have to affirm. Stories illustrate who we are, remind us what we're capable of, highlight our uniqueness, and as a result, unite us or divide us in ways that shape our world. They are our declaration and purchase of our seat at the table, our place in the moment, and ultimately, in history.

So, what if we were forced to live without them?

How might our lives be different in the absence of the accounts that have defined us? How would this absence change the ways we conceptualize and understand ourselves? Without stories, how would we make sense of the layers of our experiences, beliefs, desires, dreams, values, and bodies of work? What if we weren't forced to live in the absence of accounts, but rather, the absence of accurate, artful, soul-stirring accounts? These questions bring me back to my own story.

After college, my personal journey became even more eventful, often unpredictably. In terms of my career, I went from bagging groceries at the local

supermarket to preparing taxes at an accounting firm; from hosting a radio show to managing high-end construction projects at a private contracting firm; from leading volunteer projects across New York City to directing educational programming at camps and organizations around the country. Over the last 20 years, I worked over 23 jobs across the arts, education, entertainment, finance, and technology sectors—all this, before then starting two businesses of my own.

Wearing so many hats (and, honestly, doing more networking than I'd wish on anyone), I eventually grew anxious and overwhelmed whenever prompted with the infamous “So, tell me about yourself.” On the one hand, I *knew* I couldn't respond with an almost two-page account of my life from elementary school to the present—no matter how transparent and linear it seemed. On the other, I was concerned that because I'd tried my hand at so many things, I would never be able to concisely express who I was professionally in conversation. This, I felt, would leave people to assume I lacked direction or focus. I worried I would be judged or misunderstood.

At times, I felt like my work history was a bit of a curse, when, in fact, there is absolutely nothing wrong or bad about exploring your curiosity and skills through different opportunities. Exploration is one of

the best ways to become more aligned with our passions, path, and purpose. Accepting this as truth, I became much less focused on recounting what I or anyone else believed to be my story or life history and much more intent on accurately defining my skills, goals, and personal beliefs. I focused on articulating my path in and through the world, with my work paving the way—however winding that way might have been.

Owning our selves

Sparing us a full-blown discussion of the Jungian Self and psychology, I do want to acknowledge that the most powerful thing I've ever done has been merging my conscious desires with the professional image I had begun to create for myself in order to engage authentically as my whole self.

When I began to accept and prioritize what was unique and individual to me as a human being, I shifted. I moved from simply rehashing the events of my life to practicing the art of self-definition, which isn't so much about your life resume as opposed to *who* you are beneath the surface, as well as *how* that *who* informs *what* you choose to do with your time, and *where* you show up in the world. Self-definition is, simply, the articulation of how your motivations and values shape the choices and moves you make in life.

Focusing on self-definition, I even started paying closer attention to the ways people would introduce me when I shied away from doing it myself. They would never get it quite right. There was always something a little inaccurate in their telling, often an important detail that never made it into the conversation, or a summary of skills that wasn't quite inclusive or exhaustive of the work I'd done. Eventually, I vowed to take control of my story. I knew that if I wanted to make deeper connections with the people I was interacting with, I would first have to be able to clearly communicate who I was. This required a system.

First, I spent time thinking about the different conversations I might find myself having—dinner parties with investors and board members, presentations with potential clients, networking events at conferences, and other social gatherings. Then, I put together a series of questions and prompts to help me feel more prepared. Then I created a clear outline for the most critical things I wanted to share about me when describing myself, or making my own introductions. Once I had that down, I constantly practiced, preparing for any number of scenarios. And, I constantly studied, paying attention to some of my favorite communicators and storytellers, taking notes on how they defined and presented themselves. And of course, I iterated, revising my own story, and coaching others so that they could do the same.

It worked.

Today, when people ask me questions like “What do you do?” or unexpectedly invite me to introduce myself to a group of strangers, I’m no longer reluctant to say:

I’m an entrepreneur and strategist working at the intersections of communication, education, and culture. I’m motivated by and dedicated to service. I divide my time between collaborating with colleges and high schools to help them more intentionally connect students to learning pathways aligned with their passions, and developing learning experiences, special events, and coaching programs to help artists, creatives, and entrepreneurs better communicate their visions for shifting and impacting culture.

—or—

I believe in the power of marginalized voices to change the world, and believe a large part of that change lies in improving the way we learn. I’m also driven by the possibility of how much brighter our world can become if we ignite students, artists, creatives, and entrepreneurs to continue uncovering and pursuing work they love, with love. So, as an entrepreneur and communication strategist, I’m excited about finding new ways to blend my passions for education reform, culture, and the arts into projects that instigate change.

—and—

In my day-to-day work, I'm the CEO of a storytelling agency and speaker collective where I lead the development of learning experiences and curriculum and communication strategy for a number of clients. And you?

If you don't have an answer for that yet, don't worry. You will by the time you finish this book. Not only have I transcribed my proven six-step process for accurate and artful self-definition, but I've compiled profiles and case studies of some of my favorite communicators and most successful clients. As you progress through the TMAY process, remain encouraged by their examples. They all started from exactly where you are now: with themselves.

Moving forward

Introductions jump-start all of our conversations. When done well, we effectively express our core values and life's work and, in doing so, open ourselves to a variety of new connections and professional possibilities. When delivered poorly, conversations can fizzle just as quickly as they begin. Whether you're a college student, artist, entrepreneur, corporate employee, or creative professional looking to make an even deeper impact through your work, or trying to move through

the ranks at your company and make meaningful contributions along the way, this book is for you.

Introductions jump-start all of our conversations.

What to expect:

Key questions, tips, and strategies for getting to the core of who you are

- An actionable six-step process to structure your responses across a range of conversations
- Case studies, interviews with, and profiles of artists, entrepreneurs, and creatives
- Practice scenarios to help you apply what you've learned throughout the book

What you'll need:

- Assorted color sticky notes (for working through activities and prompts)
- Oratory Glory storyboard (to map out your introductions)
- Your favorite pen(s) or pencil(s)—feel free to pull out all the colors!
- A journal to keep track of notes and reflections
- A smartphone or photo/video recording device (for activities and practice)

If you enjoy this excerpt...

consider becoming a member of the reader
community on our website!

[Click here for sign-up form.](#) Members automatically get 10% off
print, 30% off digital books.