

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/tell-the-story-differently/>

Jessica Jackley, founder of Kiva and founder and general partner of Untapped Capital, shares a story about her daughter to inspire future entrepreneurs to ask, "What if?" She encourages listeners to become aware of the stories they tell on repeat and the assumptions that build those stories — then ask what could be different.



Transcript

- I'm gonna start with a story to set this up 00:00:06,600 and this story is about Soraya.. So she's in a mode right now, and all of my kids went through this, where out of the blue.. she'll become obsessed with the repetition of a thing.. Like, sometimes for days, sometimes weeks.. It could be a song or a dance or a series of actions like running some path in the house and, you know, in a loop or a kind of scene she wants to replay again and again.. But she gets obsessed with repetition and she lately has been obsessed with the repetition of certain bedtime stories.. Hang with me.. So the story lately that she's super into is this one.. I don't know if it's familiar to anybody.. It's pretty much a classic..

It's about this family that goes on a bear hunt, you know, typical Saturday, and they make their way through a bunch of minor obstacles with lovely sound effects, like through some wavy grass, swish, swash, right? Mucking through the mud, squelch, squirt, whatever.. Wading through a river, splash, splosh.. You get it.. And then they all run, they finally make it to see the bear and, like, shockingly, they're terrified, so they run back and it all goes in reverse and then they climb into bed and head under the covers and, like, vow to never go on the bear hunt again.. She loves this.. It's her thing.. She wants me to read it all the time.. She wants me to talk about it.. And even when we turn off the light, she's like, "Tell me the bear hunt story." So, and, of course, I'm gonna go back to a baby pic because why wouldn't I do that? So I'm a pretty patient person if I may say so, but there's only so many times I can tell the same story on repeat without descending into total madness.. So for fun slash survival, I started to change some details at some point..

And at first, I would just adjust one detail, like the sound effects.. Instead of splash, splosh, I would mix it up, right? Drips of rain, whatever.. The weather elements, the obstacle, the way they got through it, order of events.. Now, when I first started doing this, because we'd already gone through it the normal way a million and a half times, when I first started to change the details, Soraya, my little lady here, would freeze and she would pay extra attention.. And at first I was like, "Oh my gosh, she's gonna have a tantrum.. She's gonna not like this." But she actually really loved this and listened even more intently.. And so I got bolder.. I would change bigger things.. I would let all these weird natural consequences follow, like we'd find a boat to get across the river.. We wouldn't even push through the snowstorm..

We'd stop and build a snowman.. We wouldn't just discover the bear.. We'd discover like a mirror family of bears that's the

same as our family and then we'd just hang out there and all stay and have a party and eat pizza or something.. I would change one thing and let the rest follow.. And all this is fine, but this is where it gets kind of next level for me, and I hope for you too.. So picture me, I've said these stories a million times, I'm changing details.. One night recently, we're lying there in the dark and Soraya's on my chest and I'm starting to tell the story, figuring out, like, what am I gonna do this time? And all of a sudden, she pushes herself up and looks right at me, it's dark, but I can still see her, and she interrupts me.. And for the first time ever, she says, "Mom, what if the bear had a baby kitty?" So the details aren't important, but she figured out that she could change the story.. (mimics explosion booming) Big unlock.. She started to ask, "What if we did this different thing? What if the bear had a kitty? What if?" And it went from there..

And she interrupts, like, as soon as I launch into it these days, and with other stories as well.. So what is the big deal with that? I believe that our ability to pick our heads up and to look at each other and to voice confidently, "Hey, what if this thing was different? What if this detail, big or small, what if it was different? What if we turned left instead of right? What if we flip the script and gave this character a voice? What if we try another way to solve the same old problem? What if somebody unexpected becomes the hero?" I think doing this can change everything.. And doing this in my own journey, asking this question at the right moments in time, it's changed my life again and again.. Being motivated to imagine a different possible future, a different possible way the story could go, it's the foundation, essential and unmissable, like, prerequisite to creating exponential change.. Because whether we're aware of it or not, we walk around every day with stories on repeat, these stories about how things are or how things are done, who we are, who we can become, who someone else is and what the potential for their life and their path is.. And if we can become more aware of these stories that we have on repeat and the assumptions that build them and if we can change and update the right pieces along the way, then amazing new stories can branch off and start to unfold...