

**Ep #81: Rewrite Your Leadership Journey:
Deconstructing Old Narratives (Part 2)**



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With Your Host

Sandy Linda

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Have you ever wondered how the stories you tell yourself about your past failures might undermine your leadership potential? Many of these stories limit us rather than liberate us. Stay tuned.

Welcome to *The Reinvention Lab: Where Ambitious Women Transform Loss into Legacy*. Hosted by Master Certified Life Coach and fellow trailblazer, Sandy Linda, this is your space to discover how life's biggest challenges can ignite profound transformation—where grief becomes growth, setbacks become stepping stones, and your unique story lights the way for others. If you're ready to turn life's challenges into opportunities for leadership, legacy, and forward momentum, you're in the right place. Let's dive in.

Hello creative humans and fellow trailblazers. I am glad you're joining me today. Do you ever have those moments when spring cleaning turns into an unexpected journey down memory lane? That happened to me last weekend. As I was sorting through boxes in my home office, I found a stack of old journals. The journals had embarrassing, inspirational quotes on the covers that seemed profound at the time.

As I flipped through the pages, something stopped me. In my handwriting from five years ago were the words, "Maybe I'm not cut out for leadership roles." I had to sit down when I read that. Can you believe it? The woman that doubted myself had no idea I host a podcast on transformation and overcoming devastating losses. I couldn't see that the struggles were shaping my leadership abilities.

When we experience significant loss, whether it's the end of a relationship, a career setback, or a missed opportunity, we don't just experience the event itself, we create a story around it. These stories become the lens through which we view ourselves and our potential.

Today's episode feels personal to me. We are continuing our journey into the stories we tell ourselves and how they shape our feelings and belief about our future. I have to tell you, This work changed everything for me. And based on

[The Reinvention Lab: Where Ambitious Women Transform Loss into Legacy](#)
with Sandy Linda

Ep #81: Rewrite Your Leadership Journey: Deconstructing Old Narratives (Part 2)

the messages many of you sent after last week's episode, I know these stories are alive and working in your lives too. Some of you took action on the grow through loss exercise, which can rewire your brain.

Last time, we talked about how powerful personal stories are. When we learn to question these old narratives with compassion instead of judgment, we don't just understand our past differently, we expand what's possible for our leadership future.

Today, let's explore part two of our series, Deconstructing Old Narratives. I will unpack how these stories form, why they are sticky and how to separate what happened from the meaning we have assigned to it. I am continuing your journey into how the stories you tell yourselves show up as leaders every single day.

In the next few minutes, you'll discover how to distinguish between objective events and the subjective interpretations you have wrapped around them? Why do certain themes keep appearing in your professional life?

And how might these recurring stories block your next level of impact? And how to question these long held beliefs with compassion instead of judgment. Beating yourself up for having these stories is another limiting narrative. One of my favorite quotes from Dr. Brené Brown is the most dangerous stories we make up are the narratives that diminish our internal worthiness. Today, we are challenging those stories.

I invite you to be present with this episode, whether you're driving to work, going for a walk, or taking a few minutes of reflecting. The stories about your past losses and setbacks aren't fixed. They are waiting to be rewritten. When you rewrite them, you change your understanding of the past and transform your future possibilities.

The problem is many of these stories limit us instead of liberating us. They keep us stuck in patterns that no longer serve our growth and transformations. So let's separate fact from fiction.

[The Reinvention Lab: Where Ambitious Women Transform Loss into Legacy](#)
with Sandy Linda

Ep #81: Rewrite Your Leadership Journey: Deconstructing Old Narratives (Part 2)

Let's start with Maria, who's one of my community members, a brilliant marketing associate who redefined her leadership approach after one rejection email. Imagine a conference room with slick glass walls where important decisions are made. Maria had spent weeks preparing for her promotion interview, refining her presentation, practicing her responses, gathering data on the department's challenges. Then the email came, "We appreciate your interests, but we have selected another candidate."

Yikes. I recall those rejection letters and never took a sensible time to acknowledge and review it. But now her story gets interesting. What happened next wasn't just about the email. Maria's story centered on her interpretation of the email.

Let's break down what happened objectively. Maria applied for a leadership position. The company evaluated multiple candidates. They selected someone else. Maria received a standard rejection notification. That's it. Those are the facts. Just like if a camera had been recording, that's all it would have captured.

Maria, however, immediately began constructing a much larger story than facts allowed. She kept constructing in her head, "They'll never see me as leadership material. I've been here five years and this is the second time I've been passed over. It's clear this company doesn't value women leaders like me. I should stop trying to advance my career here. Maybe I'm just not capable as I thought I was. What was I thinking aiming so high?"

Notice what happened. And some of us do this. Maria took a single event and extended into the future where she said, they'll never see me as leadership material. Then there was a sense of failure color her entire career path where she said, I should stop trying to advance. And then she took it personally, seeing her own self-worth reflected in the decision by saying, I am not as capable.

When faced with setbacks or disappointments in our professional lives, we create interpretations to make sense of what happened. These interpretations follow patterns that reflect our beliefs about ourselves, leadership, and our

Ep #81: Rewrite Your Leadership Journey: Deconstructing Old Narratives (Part 2)

potential. These patterns can cripple our leadership possibility. These recurring themes act like automatic scripts for certain situations. They are so familiar that you don't notice them running in the background of your decision-making.

Let me walk you through the most common themes I see among women leaders and how they impact leadership capabilities. The first recurring theme is the permanent rejection. This is when you take a single instance of not being chosen, like Maria, and convert it into a permanent state. They didn't select me this time becomes they will never select someone like me. This theme affects our feelings and alters our behavior. You stop raising your hands, stop volunteering ideas, and stop pursuing opportunities that could showcase your strengths.

Another reoccurring theme is the proof of inadequacy. We describe setbacks not as events, but as evidence of who we are. A project that didn't meet expectations becomes proof that we aren't skilled enough, rather than an experience that provide valued feedback.

I worked with a brilliant CFO who operated under this theme. After a financial forecast missed the mark during a volatile quarter, she began second guessing every analyst. This proves what I have suspected, she told me during our coaching call. I don't have the strategic vision for this role. Leaders under this theme tend to play it safe, avoids innovation and bold decision because any failure would confirm their inadequacy.

A third theme affecting women leaders is the villain script. This narrative takes any questioning or challenge as proof that they don't belong in leadership position. The most captivating aspect of this theme is the selective nature. You might have abundant evidence of your competence, but you filter it out, focusing on the moments that support the villain narrative. Leaders with this theme often over-prepare, over-explain, and exhaust themselves trying to prove their worthiness.

Ep #81: Rewrite Your Leadership Journey: Deconstructing Old Narratives (Part 2)

What makes these recurring themes so powerful is that they operate outside our awareness. We don't wake up thinking, today I'll limit my leadership potential by believing I am an imposter. Instead, these themes become the water we swim in, so common that we don't even notice them.

Let's consider how Maria's experience shows this process. Her interpretation that they'll never see me as leadership material wasn't a passing thought. This interpretation didn't just make Maria feel bad for a few days, it altered her leadership direction and engagement with her potential.

In meetings, she held back innovative ideas, thinking, why bother, they don't see me that way. Now, every meeting, interaction with leadership and opportunity was now seen through this distorting lens. When a colleague suggested she lead an important client presentation, she deflected the opportunity. When her manager asked for volunteers for a high-visibility project, Maria hand stayed down. Though she had unique expertise to offer, she was holding back and not sharing her innovative thinking.

Maria was limiting her visibility and influence by deflecting presentation opportunities. By not volunteering for high-visibility projects, she was preventing herself from demonstrating her strategic capabilities. And the most painful part, her leadership perceived her as someone who wasn't ready for advancement. One rejection had created an invisible ceiling that Maria was now maintaining. Maria wasn't consciously deciding to limit herself. The reoccurring theme had become automatic.

Telling ourselves to be more confident rarely works. These themes operated at a deeper level than conscious self-talk. As we wrap up today's exploration of deconstructing old narratives, I want to leave you with some powerful questions to consider this week. These are not quick exercises. They are invitations to shift how you view your past experiences and their impact on your leadership.

First, take that limiting interpretation we discussed, the story you've been telling yourself about a significant step back or loss, and ask yourself, what evidence

Ep #81: Rewrite Your Leadership Journey: Deconstructing Old Narratives (Part 2)

contradicts this story? Look for moments, feedback, or achievements that don't fit your narrative. It's common to filter out information that conflicts with what we already believe.

For example, if your story is, I am not strategic enough for executive leadership, You might recall the time your CEO praised you for your long-term vision on that market expansion project or how you expected an industry shift before your competitors. List at least three pieces of evidence that suggests your limiting interpretation isn't the complete truth. This isn't about positive thinking, It's about complete thinking.

Second, create some distance by asking, how would I interpret this event if it happened to someone I deeply respect? We judge others' experiences with more compassion and complexity than our own. Would you tell your respected colleague that one rejection means they're not leadership material? Or would you see the situation with more nuance?

Finally, shift your viewpoint with this question. What leadership qualities did I develop because of this experience? Transformation begins when we recognize that our challenging experiences aren't just obstacles, but creative moments that develop essential leadership capacities. Perhaps that business failure cultivated resilience. Maybe that difficult transition honed your ability to navigate uncertainty. What you once saw as weaknesses might make you an outstanding leader.

When we question these stories that have felt so real for so long, we often discover that we're never the full truth. They were the most painful interpretation available, and our minds latch onto them as protection. But true protection comes from seeing the complete picture, both what happened and the strength you developed from it.

These questions are groundwork for next week's episode, where I'll move from deconstructing old stories to reconstructing empowered narratives. I will guide you in creating new meaning from past losses that expand your leadership

Ep #81: Rewrite Your Leadership Journey: Deconstructing Old Narratives (Part 2)

potential. Today, we separated facts from opinions, and found the main themes. Next week, I'll build something new and powerful on that foundation.

Until then, I encourage you to spend time with those reflection questions. Notice what shifts when you approach your past with curiosity instead of judgment. Pay attention to how your leadership presence might change as you loosen the grip of old narratives. The stories you tell yourself aren't just about understanding your past. They are creating your future.

I love to hear how these questions land with you. Share your insights with me, send me an email, or message me on our Substack community platform. I can't wait to continue this journey with you next week as we transform loss into a legacy, one narrative at a time.

Until then, you are the author of your leadership story and you hold that pen. Have a great week everyone. Bye.

Thanks for joining us on *The Reinvention Lab*. If today's episode inspired you, don't forget to follow and share it with someone who's ready to turn their challenges into opportunities. Want to take your journey to the next level? Visit sandy linda.com/program and apply for coaching today. Together, we'll turn your story into a legacy. Until next time, keep moving forward with purpose, passion, and power.