Eight Components of a Role Model Story

Component 1: Characterization is a short description about the role model and the circumstances of their life. It ranges from one or two sentences to not more than a short paragraph. The characterization makes the role model real, adds credibility to their experience, and brings the story to life.

Component 2: Membership in intervention population. Often, the characterization of the role model's life situation will identify clearly their membership in the intervention population. If it does not, then that membership should be made explicit early in the story since it helps the reader identify with the role model.

Component 3: Risk behavior. Many individuals have more than one risk behavior. It is important that the risk behavior central to the story is clear to the reader. The context in which the behavior occurs also should be included. If the target behavior is condom use, then an important factor in identifying the context is recognizing the type of sexual partner. An example of this would be: "I sell my body to guys on their way to work each morning, and I hardly ever asked them to use a rubber until…"

Component 4: Goal. Each story should contain only one goal. Since a single risk behavior could have a number of different goals, it is important that only one goal be selected and included in the story. That goal also must be precise. For example, while "reducing HIV risk" is not a precise goal, "not sharing injection equipment" and "using a condom during anal sex with a main partner" are more precise goals.

Component 5: Stage of change. The story also should illustrate movement from one stage of behavior change to another. There only should be movement from one stage to the next stage. The story should not illustrate movement of more than one stage. For example, the story should not show someone moving from Precontemplation (thinking about whether the behavior should be changed) to Action (practicing the new behavior). There are only three shifts (from one stage to the next) that you can show in a role model story:

- Precontemplation to Contemplation
- Contemplation to Preparation
- Preparation to Action

Component 6: Determinants. Each story should describe only one or two behavioral or social determinants that influenced the role model to change their behavior. Determinants have an impact on the way a person thinks or feels about HIV risk or performing a target behavior. The determinant is what motivates the role model to develop an intention to modify their risk behavior, adopt a new behavior, or continue with a practice that has already been adopted.

Component 7: Barriers to change and methods of overcoming them. Each story should describe a specific barrier that the role model encountered when adopting the target behavior. For example, not having a condom available at the time of sex is clearly a barrier to condom use. The story should address this issue and describe the method used to overcome the barrier, such as carrying condoms or asking a date to stop at a store to buy them. Negative reactions or problems should be included, such as a partner becoming angry when asked to use a condom, but the resolution to this obstacle also must be presented.

Component 8: Positive outcome. Finally, the role model story should include the positive outcome that reinforces the adoption or the intention to adopt the desired behavior. For example, using a condom during sex may reduce the worry of contracting HIV, or it may give the role model a better self-image. Even in situations where the goal was not achieved (such as the role model asking a partner to use a condom but the partner refusing), a positive outcome must be included (such as the role model feeling good about trying and having developed a new strategy for overcoming the barrier in the future).