



Using

the power

of stories

to train new hires

Measures for Justice  
Case Story by

**narativ**

**“If you really want to move someone, you have to tell a story.”**

-- Amy Bach, author and founder of the non-profit, Measures for Justice.

“I still don’t really understand what your organization does,” one funder said to Amy Bach after her pitch. She felt dejected. She was already a successful author, but Amy had a new mission. Accessible county-level criminal justice data could transform the criminal justice system. She just needed to communicate the value and mission of her new nonprofit, Measures for Justice, to funders.

This is when she hired Narativ, a storytelling and communication consultancy, to help her craft a compelling origin story that demonstrated the importance of Measures for Justice. A year later, Amy returned to the same major funder and gave her new pitch. The funders told her it was the best pitch they’d ever heard and awarded Measures for Justice \$3.1 million in funding.

With this added investment, Measures for Justice expanded their reach and impact. Their original team of 4 quickly grew to over 30. But, with growth came new challenges—how do you maintain standards and train a remote workforce?

Up until this point, Caroline Sarnoff, the Director of Data Collection at MFJ, personally reached out to the sheriffs, attorney generals and other potential stakeholders in the field and travelled county to county to collect this

sensitive and important information from them. Now with a growing team, she was responsible for training others to do this critical work and one of the most difficult jobs within the organization. To work in the field, data collectors needed excellent communication skills to be able to improvise on the fly and remain cool under pressure.

Caroline thought that by taking new-hires with her to stakeholder meetings, they would learn how to do the job through observation. However, in this fluid and unstructured approach to employee onboarding it could take months to train just a single employee. This was limiting MFJ’s growth and eating up resources. Measures for Justice reached out to Narativ again; maybe they could develop a creative training solution to MFJ’s growing pains. Amy states,

**“Narativ’s helped me learn early on about the power of stories for connecting. I knew they could come up with an innovative onboarding program.”**

## **THE CHALLENGE OF KEEPING ONBOARDING RELEVANT AND ENGAGING**

The problem of training new employees in a rapidly growing organization is not unique to Measures for Justice. When any company or organization grows beyond 20 employees, they often face an internal cultural crisis that costs them productivity, and sometimes, employees.<sup>1</sup>

A successful onboarding program would impart MFJ's mission and values, inspire new hires, and boost productivity and growth. Unfortunately, studies show that only 12% of employees find their onboarding helpful.<sup>2</sup>

Narativ needed to develop a remote onboarding program that facilitates a team-oriented culture while also providing the tools and information needed for success. To deliver for MFJ, Narativ had to break the mold: rather than hiring actors or hosts to talk in abstraction about company values and policies, information needed to be first-hand and direct-from-the-field. The content needed to prepare new employees for specific challenges of the job and also be engaging. In addition, because MFJ employees are scattered throughout the country, the program needed to be on-demand and accessible for a remote workforce. Stories and storytelling is the perfect vehicle to achieve these ends.

### EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE IS A GOLD MINE — STORIES SHARE THE WEALTH

Narativ worked closely with Caroline to identify what new hires needed to know, then excavated the details from her personal stories that would communicate the lesson. Each story became a module in the training program. They were recorded and presented like a podcast. No longer than fifteen minutes, the 8-module program could be listened to anywhere and took just under an hour.

In each module, listeners heard a story about Caroline's most difficult meetings with

antagonistic stakeholders, from sheriffs and judges, to prison wardens. Narativ provided commentary at crucial points in each story to illustrate important aspects of the job. This context really helped new hires. As one employee noted,

**“The commentary about each story helped me focus on the skills I needed to be successful in the field. The lessons felt more applicable to real life than other trainings I had received in the past, which felt stuffy and corny.”**

The stories deeply resonated with the new hires and allowed them to visualize how to respond and act during tense interactions.

In a fascinating twist, while listening to Caroline's stories to prepare the modules, new information surfaced about best practices in the field that even Caroline hadn't realized were of great value. The Narativ method was able to excavate, and most importantly, leverage crucial and tacit employee knowledge that MFJ didn't even know they had.

After listening to the modules, new hires participated in an in-person workshop where they learned how to craft a personal narrative of why they had come to Measures for Justice, and how this intersected with the aims of the organization. This helped new hires own the mission of MFJ and successfully do their job.

One employee described that,

“Crafting my own personal story made me realize how to tell the story of Measures for Justice in my own words. This made my pitches much more personable and natural.”

## THE RESULTS

Through a hybrid approach consisting of on-demand podcast-modules and a team workshop, Narativ was able to prepare Measures for Justice’s employees for their job in less than a week. What once took months, now took days.

The program also had another added benefit. In these personal stories of Caroline’s experiences, she talked openly about mistakes she had made. This fostered an environment where mistakes were not covered up, but rather utilized as valuable lessons for the whole team. This is also how Narativ’s onboarding stories introduced new hires to the most important values of the non-profit: teamwork, open communication, and transparency.

The program instilled a sense of mutual trust between employees and management. Caroline describes that

“As much as I needed my team to be well-trained, I also needed to be able to trust them completely. Narativ gave me that confidence—my employees are capable of going out on their own.”

This hits on one of the most important outcomes from the Narativ process: building that crucial level of trust between team members and leaders. Trust is only possible when everyone feels comfortable sharing their vulnerabilities and personal stories. Through the Narativ onboarding process, employees learned they could be honest about their hesitations and mistakes because this led to productive solutions. Similarly, Narativ’s onboarding process allowed Caroline to trust her employees and trust that they would do an amazing job when they were on their own.

The impact of this at Measures for Justice has been so powerful that Narativ has been re-hired to expand the podcast structure into videos with a new training goal that builds upon the original modules. All employees will gain the tools to write their own personal stories of why Measures for Justice matters, why it was created, and what the future holds for the organization. They will tell these stories in the field and also use them to explore more deeply their own personal connection to MFJ’s mission.

## THE NARATIV ADVANTAGE

With Measures for Justice, we built an on-boarding program that prepared new hires for a job that previously didn't exist. We used workshops and audio-recorded modules to build a bespoke and on-demand solution for a remote and growing workforce. We specialize in building custom training and on-boarding programs that work for your specific needs, industry, and company size.

**Are you ready to use storytelling to train, on-board, and connect?**

Contact Jerome Deroy, Chief Executive Officer and Head Trainer to learn more.

[CONTACT NOW](#)

### About Narativ and Measures for Justice:

**Narativ:** Narativ is a storytelling company and consultancy that uses the power of story to address business and communication challenges. We use our method to help businesses and organizations develop stories that connect with their audience and change human behavior. For 25 years, the Narativ method of storytelling in business has delivered measurable impact and value—we have transformed teams, cultures, and individuals.

**Measures for Justice:** Measures for Justice (MFJ) was founded in 2011 to develop a data-driven set of performance measures to assess and compare the criminal justice process from arrest to post-conviction on a county-by-county basis. The data set comprises measures that address three broad categories: Fiscal Responsibility, Fair Process, and Public Safety. Measures for Justice is supported by the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, Google.org, MacArthur's Safety and Justice Challenge, the Laura and John Arnold, Pershing Square, Draper Richards Kaplan, and Open Society Foundations, in addition to the Bureau for Justice Assistance in the Department of Justice.

### Author Bio:

Allison Harbin, PhD is a writing consultant and researcher who approaches her career as a business writer and thought leader with the same critical thinking and nuance that allowed her to succeed as a scholar and art historian. She specializes in bringing a humanistic perspective to business communication to help clients communicate effectively and persuasively. Allison earned her PhD in Art History from Rutgers University and her BA from the University of Virginia in Studio Art and Art History.

1. "5 Ways to Maintain Your Company Culture During Growth," by Rhet Power. Inc. June, 13, 2017.
2. "State of the American Workplace," Gallup. 2018.