

Story 37

Reality Is Different

A mutual conversation between principle and reality

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The Story: Reality Is Different

I sometimes — or rather, often — come up with unconventional ideas and put them forward. The response that usually comes back is this:

“Your idea is correct in principle, but not suited to reality.”

True. I am no longer someone working on the front lines.

The Paradox

And yet — perhaps paradoxically — is it not precisely because I don't know the constraints of the front lines that I can think about goals and direction based on principle? And taking the long view: shouldn't we be finding ways to overcome the constraints of reality and move in the right direction?

I am not saying I am always right. I am saying that a mutual conversation between principle and reality is necessary.

Both Must Go Together

To identify and address the factors that obstruct or neutralize the effort to move toward a goal, I believe two things must go together: a clear-eyed grasp of reality, and a commitment to drawing the picture according to principle.

Selfish interest *The motivation to protect one's own interests, constrained by the limits of what is currently possible.*

Self-interest *The motivation to make the achievement of a principled and right goal one's own — to own it genuinely.*

If we set aside selfish interest — the motivation constrained by current reality — and take the achievement of what is genuinely right as our own self-interest, I believe it becomes possible to resolve or reduce the problems of reality, one by one.

What is clear is this: we must not give up on that effort too easily.

Small Group Discussion Guide

This is an essay. The author makes his own way of thinking the subject. The core tension is single: does principle ignore reality, or does reality become the excuse for abandoning principle? Both are dangerous. The story proposes a mutual conversation between them.

— Church Community —

Young Adults (20s–35)

Opening (5 min)

- Have you ever been told “You’re right in principle, but it’s not realistic”? What did that feel like?

Discussion (20 min)

- When principle and reality conflict, which do you tend to give up first? Why?
- The paradox: “Because I don’t know the field’s constraints, I can think according to principle.” What do you make of that?
- Selfish interest and self-interest — how do these two motivations show up in your life?
- Is it possible to stay in conversation with reality without giving up principle? How?

Scripture (10 min)

Romans 12:2 — *“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

- If ‘do not conform to this world’ is not a call to escape reality — what balance between principle and reality does it point to?

Application (5 min)

- Is there a principle in your life that you have given up because of the constraints of reality? Could you take it up again as your own self-interest?

Adults (36–60)

Opening (5 min)

- In an organization or community: is there something you have given up because it was ‘not realistic’?

Discussion (20 min)

- The role of the person who articulates principle, and the role of the person who knows the ground — how should these two interact in an organization?
- The author says: “I am not saying I am always right — I am saying mutual conversation is needed.” What does it take for that conversation to actually happen?
- The danger of accepting constraints too quickly, and the danger of ignoring reality and insisting on principle — which do you see more often?

- Selfish interest vs self-interest in leadership, parenting, organizational decision-making — how do these show up?

Scripture (10 min)

| **Micah 6:8** — *“To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

- Pursuing justice (principle) and mercy (the person in reality) together — how does that connect to the mutual conversation this story proposes?

Application (5 min)

- In your community right now: where is a more honest conversation between principle and reality most needed?

Seniors (60+)

Opening (5 min)

- Over a long life: have you ever given something up as ‘not realistic’ — and later felt it was actually right?

Discussion (20 min)

- The voice of someone who has stepped back from the front lines — why might that voice still be valuable?
- Have you seen someone who refused to give up on a principle? What did that life produce?
- How can you pass on “Don’t give up too easily” to a younger generation?

Scripture (10 min)

| **Galatians 6:9** — *“Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”*

- How does ‘we will reap if we do not give up’ connect to the final line of this story?

Application (5 min)

- What is the one thing from today’s story that stays with you most?

— General Community —

Young Adults (20s–35)

Getting In (5 min)

- When you hear “That’s not realistic,” how do you respond — do you accept it, or push back?

Discussion (20 min)

- Thinking according to principle versus knowing the ground — which matters more? Why?
- The paradox — ‘not knowing the field’s constraints lets you think from principle’ — do you agree?

- Selfish interest and self-interest in daily life — where do you see these two motivations in yourself?
- Staying in conversation with reality without abandoning principle — is there a concrete example from your life?

Going Further (10 min)

- Does social change begin from principle or from fixing what exists? Or do both need to go together?

One Step (5 min)

- Is there a principle or goal you have quietly told yourself is ‘not realistic’? Could you pick it up again?

Adults (36–60)

Getting In (5 min)

- When principle and reality conflict in organizations or society — which side do you tend to land on?

Discussion (20 min)

- The ‘principle articulator’ and the ‘reality executor’ in an organization — when these two roles interact well, what does that look like?
- The risk of accepting constraints too quickly — what examples have you seen?
- The author says “Don’t give up too easily.” Is that stubbornness, or conviction? How do you tell the difference?
- Selfish interest vs self-interest in an organizational context — how would you explain the difference?

Going Further (10 min)

- Have you seen an organization or leader where the conversation between principle and reality actually worked well over the long term? What made it possible?

One Step (5 min)

- What from today’s story is most striking? Say it in one sentence.

Seniors (60+)

Getting In (5 min)

- Over a long life: have you seen someone hold to a principle all the way through? What did that produce?

Discussion (20 min)

- The voice of someone who has stepped back from the front lines — why might it still be worth hearing?
- How would you pass on “Don’t give up too easily” to a younger generation?

One Step (5 min)

- What from today’s story stays with you most?

Facilitator's Guide

The Heart of This Story

This is an essay. The author makes his own way of thinking the subject — openly, without self-defense. He admits he is often told he is unrealistic. He agrees. And then he argues that the conversation between principle and reality is more valuable than winning the argument in either direction. The story's strength is in the absence of defensiveness: he acknowledges he may be wrong, and still insists the conversation must not stop.

What This Story Is Really About

- ① Principle vs reality — not the victory of either, but mutual conversation
- ② The paradox of not knowing the field — ignorance of constraints enables vision
- ③ Selfish interest vs self-interest — same root word, completely different direction
- ④ Not giving up — not stubbornness, but conviction

Connections Within the Series

Story 32 (React and Respond): Story 32 asks 'how to act'. This story asks 'in what direction to act'.

Story 5 (The Gift of Dakoro): An outsider's single question — 'How did you handle this before?' — allowed the community to find its own answer. The paradoxical value of the outside perspective connects directly to this story.

How to Begin

- ✓ "Have you ever been told 'You're right in principle, but not realistic'? What happened?" — start here. The experience is universal across all ages and backgrounds.
- ✓ Or: "Have you ever paid a cost for holding to a principle? And have you ever regretted giving one up?" — both directions open the conversation.

Four Risks to Watch For

- ⚠ **Risk 1: Principle vs reality becomes a binary debate — which is more important?**
Why it matters: The story's answer is neither. It's the conversation between them.
Redirect: "The author doesn't say which one wins. He says 'mutual conversation' is needed. What would it take for that conversation to actually happen in your context?"
- ⚠ **Risk 2: The selfish interest / self-interest distinction becomes too abstract**
Why it matters: The distinction is powerful precisely when it becomes personal.
Redirect: "Is there a specific principle in your life right now that you are not holding to because of the constraints of reality? That's selfish interest at work. What would self-interest look like there?"
- ⚠ **Risk 3: The group quickly agrees that 'reality comes first' and closes the discussion**

Why it matters: The author's core argument disappears.

Redirect: "The author is not saying to ignore reality. He's saying that reality's constraints must not become the reason to abandon the principle itself. Why does that distinction matter?"

⚠ **Risk 4: The group demands a method — 'so what exactly should we do?'**

Why it matters: The story doesn't give a method. That is intentional.

Redirect: "The author's last line is: don't give up too easily. What 'not giving up' looks like will be different for each person's situation. What does it look like in yours?"

Notes for Specific Groups

Young adults: This is when the pressure to 'be realistic' is most intense — career choices, social idealism, faith commitments. Create space to name honestly what has been given up and what hasn't.

Leadership and organizational groups: The tension between the principle articulator and the reality executor is a daily organizational experience. The selfish interest / self-interest distinction applied to decision-making is particularly direct for this group.

Retired and senior groups: The author himself is someone who has stepped back from the front lines. The question of whether that voice still has value — and what kind of value — is the most direct question for this group.

Church leadership groups: The tension between theological principle and community reality is constant in church governance and ministry decisions. Inviting concrete examples from the group's own context can open the most honest conversations.

Closing the Session

- ✓ "Is there a principle or goal that you have told yourself is 'not realistic' — and given up? Could you take it up again as your own self-interest?" — close with this.
- ✓ Or: each person restates the selfish interest / self-interest distinction in their own words — applied to their specific situation.

In the Author's Words: "I am not saying I am always right. I am saying that a mutual conversation between principle and reality is necessary. And we must not give up on that effort too easily."