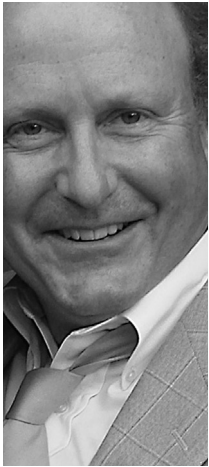


# Narrative Design



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Clients never sit in my chair. I am not possessive about my chair and I always stand in a neutral location while my clients choose their seat in my office for the first time. There are 4 other places to sit around my coffee table, which vary in distance and intimacy relative to my chair. At one end of the couch there is nothing between us and we sit very close together. The middle and the other end of the couch put the coffee table between us and are farther away from me. The big comfy chair is a fortress at the far end of the therapeutic rectangle, and I try to be particularly gentle with anyone who sits there. In subsequent sessions most big comfy chair clients work their way down the couch in my direction unless they have arthritis. Friends who are not clients are likely to sit in my chair when they visit my office, or even at my desk. For them it is just a room with lots of chairs.

Nelson Coates gave me the term *narrative design*, which I immediately recruited to the purposes of personal counseling and psychotherapy. Nelson creates movie settings that embody important elements of the storyline, and even segments of the narrative arc. Setting implies history and establishes expectations. Consider a classroom, an emergency room, and a card room. Consider a prison cell and a monastic cell. Consider the waiting rooms of your dentist and of your masseuse. Consider the arrangement of furniture in my office and the diplomas hanging on the wall by the Consumer Protection Notice, which informs my clients how to file their complaints with the state board of psychology. All of this speaks of your history and mine and it establishes the expectation that we will speak confidentially and openly with one another in this room, that we will influence each other's view of things, that I will have your best interest in mind, that some persistent dilemma or unhappiness will be resolved or illuminated, and that our lives will both be enhanced by this. Call me.

## ***Relief, Recovery, Resolution***

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