

Mentoring New Speakers

5 exercises to create meaningful talks that move people to action

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How to Use this book

This book is a collection of the most common exercises I use to help mentor new speakers.

Who am I? I'm Llewellyn Falco. I've been a technical speaker for two decades and have given 1,000's of presentations across the USA and Europe. I've also mentored a few new speakers and in that process, I've started to notice a few 'goto' activities I use with them to help them to help them find their voice and improve their presentation. The purpose of this book is to give you much of the same benefits of working with me on your own.

My co-author is Gillian M Lee. She is an author and speaker and one of the people I helped mentor in her speaking journey. Besides her obvious help in making this text readable, Gillian is here to be an advocate for the new speakers reading this. Not only to keep me honest but to ensure that these exercises are understandable and complete.

Together, we hope we can give you some practical tips to help make your talks more meaningful to your audience and more relaxing and fun for you to deliver.

We suggest you start by going through these sections in order the first time, and then pick and choose as you revisit the exercises later. Because the value you get from the book will be in the **doing of the exercises**, we also suggest that you do this book in small parts rather than one big long read. This will help you to have the energy needed to put into each exercise.

Llewellyn would never do all these exercises with someone he's mentoring in one session.

Who is this book for?

This book is for anyone who wants to speak with more confidence and change the way people act as a result of their presentation.

It is also for people who are mentoring new speakers themselves and would like some guidance on how what to do and what exercises might fix the problems that they are detecting. Many times the mentor knows what's wrong. It is obvious to them, however, getting the new person to walk a path to the solution may be difficult.

When Llewellyn started mentoring people, he would say,
"You need to tell a story " And they would reply, "I *am* telling a story."

These exercises helped him to get them to move.
This is why we have collected these exercises for you here.

The importance of practice

1. Give the talk

The very first thing that Llewellyn has people do when they ask him to help them with a talk is to ask them to give the talk to him. They are never ready to do this. I am never ready to do this. That's ok. Our goal is not to give a good talk. It is only to give a talk. Doing this will force something to come out of your mouth. And then we can start to work on that.

We are going to record this first attempt. It doesn't matter if it only lasts five minutes for an hour-long session; we need to capture something. And we are going to want to be able to review it. Usually, Llewellyn simply uses his phone for this, or if on 'Zoom' he will hit the record button. These recordings are not permanent and are deleted immediately after watching them.

note: If the person is extremely nervous about being recorded. I suggest using their phone so that they have complete control over the recording.

Watch the Talk

Immediately after giving the first version, watch it together and pay attention to these few things; The first is that some of it will be painful to watch.

That cringe is the badness leaving your talk. Nothing is more powerful for removing something you dislike than seeing yourself do it. It can take decades before you can watch yourself without cringing, so be patient.

Next, focus on the pieces that **you liked** from the session. Those are the pieces that you will want to grow. You will get more out of having wonderful pieces in your talk than removing all of the bad.

Finally, a nice advantage of having it recorded is that you can rewind sections. Sometimes you will say something you wish you had the exact words for and you can grab that from the recording. And other

times, you want to revisit a section that is important that wasn't quite expressed correctly. Re-watching sections of a talk is a great way of mining the talk for gems.

Tip: One advantage of recording your practice sessions is that once you get one you like, you can practice and review simply by watching your recording. This can be very helpful when given a talk again after a few weeks or month. Just put it on and load it into your working memory.

What is the take-a-way of your talk?

One of the first things that new speakers try to do in their talks is pack them full of lessons. Sometimes they do that right away with the title - Ten things I learned from our last project. Although this works great for articles and books, notice our own title, however this makes for a very bad spoken session.

The reason is memory. Someone who sees your talk is almost never going to act on it immediately. Usually, they won't act on it for even weeks or months later when the time is right for them to use what they learned from your talk.

I can't remember ten bullet points two months later. You can remember one important message. So the whole talk needs to be structured around this one thing that you want people to take away.

Distilling the most important thing is hard! It means getting rid of a lot of things that are genuinely important for the sole purpose of allowing one thing to shine through months later.

The importance of Stories

One of the best ways to get people to remember things months later is through the power of stories. This is the opposite of how most people structure their talks. They want to summarize what they've learned hoping that they can just share the end result. This would be wonderful if it worked, but it doesn't.

Everybody has something important to share. Jessica Kerr's advice is to "Give a talk to yourself last year" There are a thousand people who are where you were last year and would appreciate the help and advice. This means they need to hear **your** story. Many of the exercises that follow are about how to figure out and tell **your** story rather than just your bullet points.

2. Story or Summary

Very often, people find it hard to actually tell a story. This exercise (from Kevin Allison's Intro to storytelling course on Udemy) is helpful to move into storytelling.

Steps

1. Record the story.
2. Replay one sentence of the story.
 1. Identify if that sentence was a **story** or **summary**
3. Repeat for each sentence. The power of this exercise is in seeing how much story you have vs summary. For many new speakers, they end up with 100% summary. To be clear, the goal is not to have 100% story. The goal is not 100% but you need it to be more balanced.

Story vs. Summary

We were unprepared for the outage.

The above is an example of **summary**. It tells us what happened but doesn't allow us to relive it. If we were to convert it to a **story**, it might sound something like,

*I woke up to the phone ringing at 7am and my boss screaming,
No one has been able to place an order since 2am this morning. We've lost over \$2.5 million of revenue.*

Notice **story** allows you to relive the experience whereas **summary** allows someone who has lived it to remember it.

Being true to the story - not the facts

There is an essence of your story which you are trying to convey to your audience. There are also historical facts of your story. Sometimes these can confuse or muddy your story. Sometime these can be in direct conflict. My advice is to prioritize your story and its message. As such, use facts when they are convenient. And disregard them or even make them up when they are not.

"Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please."

— Mark Twain

Your Specifics

Pay attention the next time you are reading a book from your favorite author. Notice how many words are involved in the details of the scene. This isn't by accident. The story teller is trying to get you to suspend your disbelief and re-live the story they are telling.

Almost every business book tells the story of someone at a failing company who tries a new process and ends up turning around the company to outstanding success. It's the specifics of that story that make the book interesting.

It's the specifics of **your story** that allows others to learn from it as if they have gone through it themselves. If you just say what you learned, you remove the chance for them to have those learning be impactful

What will make your story, **your story** is the specifics. What are people's names? What were the details of that argument? Details make the story real, more so than the lesson.

*Twilight and Fifty Shades of Gray are the same story. *Cinderella and Pretty Woman

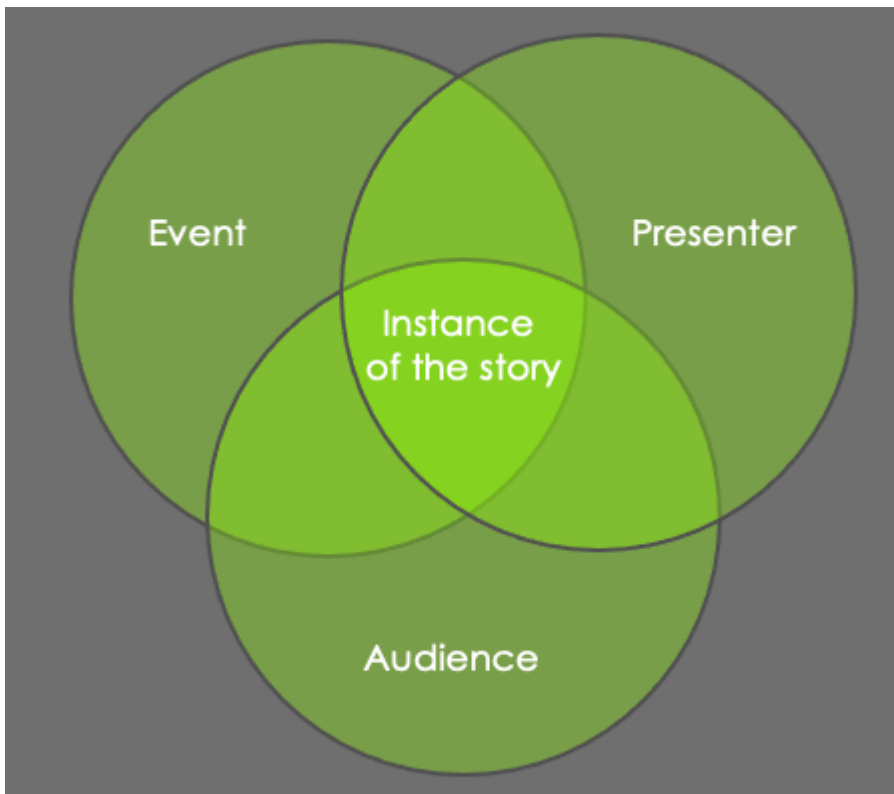
What are the details that let you live the story as if you were there? Does it feel real to the person listening?

Very often when speakers are trying to tell their story, they make it very generic so that it will fit any listener. Unfortunately, abstract lessons are the opposite of how people learn and not what a speaker should do.

3. Timing exercises - (1, 5, 50)

Any given instance of a presentation is going to combine three factors:

- The presentation and events that are being told
- The presenter and what they are trying to emphasize in that moment
- The audience and what they are receptive to



As such, presentations are different from the script at play. And they are more reactive and involve some improvisation. This means that it is very hard to get your timings to work as planned.

Instead, it is better to be able to adjust how you present each section. And be aware of the time. A great exercise to help speakers become comfortable with adjusting their time is to give your presentation at wildly different time scales. Here's how:

Assumptions and adjustments

Many of the first-time speakers that I'm working with are giving ten to twenty minute talks with ten to twenty slides. The following times are based on that structure. If you are giving a much longer or much shorter talk, adjust accordingly. Likewise, if your slide to talk ratio is much different, you will often need to adjust.

#1 The one-minute talk

This sounds ridiculous but set a one-minute time and try to speed run through your talk. In doing this you will find that you not only shorten explanations but skip entire slides and sections. You also figure out what is the essential core of your presentation.

#2 The five-minute talk

Like above this is going to be a much quicker than normal telling. It will build on the essential core and give you enough time so that you don't need to cut out sections or slides. This is really helpful when you realize that you are running behind while onstage.

#3 The fifty-minute talk, one slide of

Here we want to work on really delving into each slide. But we don't want to take fifty minutes to do the whole talk. So pick a slide randomly from the deck and set a five-minute timer for just that slide.

It's best if the slide is smaller. So that you really have to pull out details and depth. This is great for when you have more time or you realize that you need more focus in this area for this audience.

The importance of clocks

Now that you have stretched your talk to its limits and compressed it to its essence, you can safely adjust the length on the fly during the presentation.

To do this, you will need some sort of clock plus an idea of where you would like to be in your presentation at key intervals. This way, you can tell if you are running fast or slow, and adjust accordingly. This means you want to know 13 minutes in that you need to speed up, not find out 5 minutes before the end that you need to cut off the end of the story.

If you are presenting remotely, you will need a clock or count-down timer in your office, visible while you are looking at your camera. If you are presenting in person, you should assume that this will not be provided. Instead set up a count down timer on your phone or tablet. And bring a stand or a holder so you can make it visible to you from the stage.

For example, I go on stage at 10:18 for my 10:30 talk which is set to last 30 minutes. I immediately pull out my iPad and set the count down timer for 42 minutes and start it. I place it on the side of the stage, visible to me. I know that when it gets down to thirty minutes, I need to start my presentation. When it hits zero, I need to be done.

Setting/Character/Plot/Conflict/Resolution

Role Playing - Using emotion in your story

If you are telling a sad story, but you yourself are not sad, your audience won't be either. They are going to look to your emotions for cues on how they should feel. This means that if your boss is angry, you need to be using an angry voice. If your team is celebrating, you need to be using a happy, excited voice.

This does not come naturally to new speakers. It means that when you are telling stories in the voices of the characters in your stories, those characters need to have their own voice. This can mean creating accents for them, but more importantly, it means emoting when speaking in their voice.

Because this feels more appropriate in theatre than a boardroom, it's going to take some practice.

Developing your character's characteristics

For example, one of our characters was Bob the salesman.

"What's Bob like?" I asked.

"Oh, he's big and boisterous. Whenever he talks, he waves his hands around a lot. And he likes to make statements like 'This is going to be the best ever!' He's very different than Suzie.

"Oh, What's Suzie like?"

"Suzie is shy and demure. She is small and she makes herself even smaller by hunching her shoulders. When she talks, you can barely hear her voice. And it feels like she's always apologizing."

You need your characters to come to life. This means that they need to have a personality. This doesn't have to mirror their actual personality. It can be a heightened or exaggerated version or you can make it up completely for dramatic effect. But they have to have a personality.

Once you've fleshed out their personalities, you're going to need to practice role playing them. This is really simple.

Take a single character and start by just having them say the parts of their story in their voices. It will feel silly at first, but with practice, it will feel more natural to say their parts of the story in their voice than not to.

Two Person Talks

Tips for Podcasts / Interviews

Event Driven Practice

- User groups
- No new talks at conferences

Appendix A: Short Reference

Short Reference

todo: capture all the callouts here....

Special Thanks

Many people helped proofread and offered advice in the creation of this book. Thank you to each and everyone one:

- Nazee Hajebi

Maybe not:

Slides

- Props
- Contrast - data & diffence