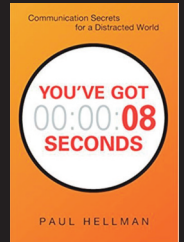


# You've Got 8 Seconds

## Communication Secrets for a Distracted World

Book by Paul Hellman

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### Synopsis

Want to captivate and engage an audience with charm and charisma? Whether it's trying to get your boss to notice your work, make your team listen to you, or impressing a group of clients with your presentation, you can certainly win their attention. By applying a few communication secrets, you can become a more effective communicator and build stronger relationships.

***You've Got 8 Seconds*** (AMACOM, © 2017) explains how to capture and hold the attention of others using simple, but valuable, communication strategies. Hellman explores the challenges of communicating in the Digital Age and provides a practical framework to improve and develop your communication skills. He presents three key strategies—focus, variety, and presence—together with real-life anecdotes to help you deal with everyday communication problems.



The key concepts of *You've Got 8 Seconds* can be distilled into the following steps:

#### Understand Your Audience

You can create focused messages that grab the listener's attention only if you understand what your audience is thinking. So make sure you're prepared!

#### Shape Your Message

Focus your message on answering the questions your audience may have. Develop your objective and key message so what you'll say is concise, yet detailed.

#### Learn to Be Unpredictable

Most audiences desire variety to capture their attention. Adding the unexpected such as telling interesting and relevant stories, asking intelligent and thought-provoking questions, providing humor, and even a bit of entertainment will keep your audience riveted.

#### Develop the WOW Factor

Your personal presence is a powerful tool when communicating with others. If you want to make an impact or influence your audience, you need to look and act the part. Be confident, positive, inspiring, and comfortable in your own skin, and you'll find people gravitating toward you and being more willing to engage with you.

**"Here's what is not a secret: First, you've got to capture attention. Then, you've got to keep it. The trick is how to do that. The trick is what this book's about."**

Based on *You've Got 8 Seconds* by Paul Hellman, we discuss how you can apply practical and powerful communication strategies to inspire and motivate your performance to greatness in your business and personal life. Hellman explores how to capture and hold your audience's attention, and ways to influence others and keep them engaged. We share our interpretations of *You've Got 8 Seconds* in the following pages.

## Practicing the Focus Methodology

Have you ever had a conversation with someone who seemed to not really be listening to you? Today we live in an age where people are easily distracted—checking messages on their phones, posting on Facebook, or looking at their Instagram feed often seems more interesting than listening to what you have to say. So what should you do to keep your listener's attention and get your message across? There are some effective ways to grab your audience's attention, to help them to stay focused and engaged. You can use Hellman's fast-focus methodology to make your message leave a lasting impression.

### Learn to Say Less

Suppose you had to give a presentation to your department—but instead of doing it in the usual 15 minutes, you've now been allocated only 5 minutes? Could you deliver a message that's concise yet still compelling? While you may struggle with these kinds of limitations, you need to learn to communicate an idea quickly and effectively. If your audience is bombarded with too much information, you immediately lose their attention. Keep it simple to remain memorable!

Sometimes, less really is more. Hellman encourages you to practice saying less. For example, learn to speak less than the other person you're having a conversation with, and, when in meetings, practice speaking in bursts of 30 to 60 seconds. Another tip that Hellman provides is to use ten presentation slides or fewer when presenting.

### When to Say More

Are you someone who doesn't speak up in meetings? Perhaps you feel you have nothing to add or your input isn't needed? Stop self-editing and share your perspective and point of view. It's important to be heard—in fact, you may surprise everyone with a few groundbreaking ideas!

### Effects of Self-Disclosure

Have you ever said too much in a meeting? Or perhaps you've revealed information to your boss that you shouldn't have? Self-disclosure can have a positive effect when it works out well. But if it doesn't, it can cause embarrassment, tension, or ill-feelings in the workplace. Hellman suggests you "stress-test" the riskiness of an announcement by asking two questions about your audience. The first question goes, "Will knowing this information benefit my audience?" and the second, "If they know all the information and it's negative, would they run a mile?"

## Employ the Fast-Focus Method

In *You've Got 8 Seconds*, Hellman emphasizes the importance of understanding your audience—and it helps to become the audience to do so. Step into the audience's shoes, so to speak. Imagine you're the listener and ask yourself what would capture *your* attention. What the audience hears, remembers, and may want to act on is an important part of any form of communication.

The author suggests you answer three questions to help you “fast-focus” your message:

- 1 Why should they listen to you? Know your **purpose statement**. You need an introduction where you immediately grab your audience's attention.
- 2 What precisely are you saying? Decide on a **main statement**. This is the body of your message where you'll deliver your key points.
- 3 What are they supposed to do with this information? End with a **call to action**. This is the conclusion where you end on a high note.

Use these questions as a guide when drafting the content of your communications—whether it's for one-on-one conversations or during a presentation. Ensure that when you focus a message, you are prepared with the answers to any of your questions.

## Other Focus Techniques

Depending on the circumstances, you can design a message using several other effective focus techniques. Hellman encourages you to first *begin with your conclusion* the next time you have a meeting with senior executives. Don't bore them with unnecessary details; jump directly to the conclusion and then disclose the process while getting there.

The second focus technique is *accomplishment*. At some stage, you'll be asked what you've accomplished. The author points out that accomplishment needs three things: obstacles, action, and results. However, for accomplishments to work, you have to use stories to inspire and influence others. Using the acronym SOAR provides a better understanding of how accomplishments impact your story. The S in Soar refers to Situation and outlines the context while O-A-R refers to obstacles, action, and results.

Hellman provides an apt example of a young account executive newly out of college working at a PR firm to demonstrate this S-O-A-R process.

- **Situation:** An important client needs PR, but has been unsuccessful even though they have been persistent in their endeavors.
- **Obstacle:** Media coverage for the client was sparse as reporters were reassigned to other duties.

- **Action:** Through sheer perseverance, new media targets were highlighted and relationships forged.
- **Results:** The executive managed to land two major media meetings for their client. The CEO was impressed and consequently increased the budget.

Providing *feedback* is the third focus technique and follows an “XYZ” format. Basically, it means that X is the problem, Y is how you react to it, and Z is the effect on the business. Hellman provides an example of a manager who had issues influencing his staff. It involved a project team that didn't report to him, but he was responsible for the outcomes. “When a project doesn't work out” should be more detailed to mean “When we don't meet a deadline.” And “I feel distressed” is too emotional for the world of business and can rather be replaced with “I'm concerned.” And lastly, “Because I took a risk” can be changed to “because it will impact our customers.” When you put XYZ together, you get “When we don't meet a deadline, I'm concerned how it will impact our customers.”

## Gaining Attention with a Difference

Ever had to sit through a meeting, speech, or presentation in which you were bored? Was it too long? Was there too much information? Many of us have been victims of painful and long-winded meetings and presentations, because audiences' needs aren't always taken into account. But just because the content may be dull doesn't mean your presentation has to be. In *You've Got 8 Seconds*, Hellman presents variety as a successful communication strategy you can use to liven up information, in addition to storytelling, and engaging with clever questions.

### Excite the Audience with Variety

People enjoy variety and a bit of the unexpected—and audiences are no exception. Hellman encourages you to give the listener exactly that. Steer away from boring, mundane, and lengthy presentations and instead offer the audience a memorable experience. Make them the star of the presentation by keeping them captivated with something different.

But how do you accomplish that? Hellman suggests you move out of your comfort zone and try new things, such as being more interactive with the audience or incorporating technology to keep them engaged. Learning to project more emotion and energy into your level of communication can also help to show your enthusiasm.

Looking to persuade? Use your head, heart, and hands to communicate your message to your audience. If you want your audience to think, for example, appeal to their sense of logic by asking questions that get them thinking. Tug at their heart strings by telling an inspiring story; and if you want them to do something, show them.

## Use Stories to Influence Others

If your information tends to be overwhelming or is difficult to understand, use analogies and interesting stories to grab your audience's attention and keep them engaged. Learn how to develop compelling stories to replace lists, especially bulleted lists in slideshow presentation. Hellman advises that when telling a story to your audience, you open with a problem to hook their attention. Play around with various openings for your story, but always make sure you close a business-related story with a relevant point. He explains that a story is similar to a mini-presentation; it should consist of an opening, a middle, and an ending. And, use humor when telling your story but remember to always keep it relevant to the topic!

## Differentiate between Announcements or Discussions

Do you know the difference between an announcement and discussion? People are often confused about whether to make an announcement or have a discussion. Hellman explains how an announcement differs from a discussion—an announcement is a decision that's non-negotiable, while a discussion is a decision that can be talked about or amended pending feedback. It's necessary to understand the distinction between the two and to be clear about which one you're using. When you make an announcement, it's imperative that you also explain your reasons for doing it. Discussions, on the other hand, take place when the matter affects the other person more than you. A discussion is also useful when you need team buy-in, if someone lacks experience, or are as knowledgeable or experienced as you are.

## Ask and Answer Good and Bad Questions

Are you being judged by the questions you ask or the answers you give? Asking the right questions is not always easy! However, it's important that your questions are effective if you want to learn, research, solve a problem, make a decision, or influence the listener. Hellman contends you should be able to ask smart questions to make a favorable impression (and be able to answer bad ones).

The author recommends a number of strategies to improve asking questions:

- Use open questions as much as possible, as opposed to closed questions where you'll most likely just get a one-word "yes" or "no" response.
- When asking multiple questions, start with easy questions before moving to more difficult questions. Remember to disclose why you're asking a high-risk question so that you can put the person at ease.
- Refrain from asking loaded questions most of the time, but don't be afraid to occasionally ask questions that may make people uncomfortable.
- Be specific about the questions you ask to ensure you obtain the necessary information.

You won't always have all the answers to questions people ask; particularly in presentations—in this case, counter the question or defer it. And, when questions are too personal, it is perfectly acceptable to decline.

## Presentation Tips and Tricks

There are some valuable skills you can implement to ensure your presentation doesn't bore anyone to tears. Add a bit of sparkle at the start using a question, quiz, analogy, story, or demo, or asking the audience to imagine something. Try using an element of surprise to liven things up—and be different. Hellman advises instead of talking, show off your skills to your audience by incorporating slide shows, props, or a whiteboard to capture their attention and make your message stick. Or talk about food to captivate your audience—whatever you do, be sure to create an impressive presentation.

## Projecting Your Presence

Have you ever experienced someone walking into a room and immediately you're drawn to him or her? Some people exude a certain magnetism and light up a room. This typically has little or nothing to do with looks or the clothes they're wearing. Rather, it's a question of their presence being very powerful. Hellman shows you how to project your presence, demonstrates how to recognize the leadership message you're trying to convey, and assists you in increasing your awareness by switching up your style and learning how to look and feel more confident.

## Fake It 'til You Make It

You've probably heard the expression "fake it 'til you make it"—sometimes you have to act the part to look the part. When communicating with people, it can sometimes help to pretend you're confident and doing a great job, even if you're not sure. Do that enough times, and you'll eventually start to internalize that positive attitude.

## How You Look and Act

As you know, first impressions count and people are quick to make judgments about your competence and skillset based on your appearance. This includes how you speak, conduct yourself, your body language, gestures, and even the way you move. The author suggests you make eye contact but remember not to stare. Watch how you sound when you speak—a monotone voice can be off-putting! Hellman also cautions against sending mixed messages—for example, if you're delivering bad news such as "we're downsizing and you're being let go," it would be inappropriate to look or sound happy about it. Your words and body language should match.

## Requirements for the Right Disposition

Your temperament, also known as your disposition, plays a vital role in how people perceive you; it's about the overall impression you make.

Key elements for the best disposition include practicing humility, commanding authority, and being optimistic and composed. Hellman explains that you need to stay humble and always make others feel important. Practice the law of agreement by embracing an idea or criticism, and if you can't agree, ask a question in a positive manner. Lively and animated debates can help to promote a commanding presence.

## Be a Leader

Hellman discusses how you should demonstrate leadership—in other words, be the conductor and take the lead. Learn to be an effective leader by holding meetings that are efficient and where people can participate. Be assertive without being pushy, and keep in mind that you don't need everyone's approval when getting the job done. Hellman also encourages you to stay focused and remain present; being distracted and multitasking are common errors people make when trying to be focused. Use your physical, emotional, and mental energy to achieve better results. When you combine focus and energy, you're bound to accomplish your goals. Don't be afraid to use initiative by providing new ideas and concepts and take risks to inspire and motivate. Stay committed and take responsibility. Initiative and commitment go hand in hand and are important elements to accomplish success.

Be optimistic and aware of your expectations. To avoid confusion, provide clear and concise expectations when you communicate with others. If you find yourself in a situation where you feel you're being attacked verbally, take a deep breath and remain calm and composed. Don't react to emotional triggers when criticized but instead accept the feedback and learn from it.

## Moving Forward

Hellman concludes that you are bound to make mistakes but with continual practice, you'll improve and become better. Lastly, don't hold onto mistakes you've made—let them go and practice until you become the best at what you do!



## Insights—Sharpening Your Leadership Message

### Recognize the Importance of Focus

Learn to focus your message and become the audience. What the audience hears, remembers, and acts on is important when delivering your message. A focused message sticks with your audience and helps them process the information succinctly.

### Learn To Be Different

Add variety and make your messages come alive. Keep the momentum going by engaging your audience with smart questions, stories, videos, slideshows, and props as well as humor and entertainment. A bit of flair and pizzazz will make your presentation memorable!

### Increase Your Presence

Stand out from the crowd by developing a presence that commands attention. Keep in mind that your body language, voice, and temperament affect your attitude. If you're not in a positive frame of mind, it will most likely impact how you come across. So learn to look and act the part, exude confidence, communicate effectively, and remain calm under pressure.

### Use Stories to Capture Your Listeners' Attention

One way to grab your listeners' attention is engaging them in the fine art of storytelling. Remember your story has to connect with the audience on some personal or emotional level! It has to be entertaining but short and concise too.

### Create Dialogue with Others

Engage your audience by asking compelling questions. Asking smart and open questions not only helps your audience to think, it also helps keep them captivated. Avoid closed questions, as they limit the way people engage with each other and prevent us from learning from each other past a quick "yes" or "no."



## Conclusion

How can managers and business leaders communicate effectively today? Sadly, our ability to communicate with each other has been impaired by digital distractions, which has diminished our attention span and concentration levels to that of the average goldfish—eight seconds! Hellman provides powerful communication techniques and strategies to help you avoid interruptions and capture the attention of your audience. In *You've Got 8 Seconds*, Hellman provides entertaining and humorous real-life anecdotes to deliver a clear and concise message: you can improve your communication skills to achieve lasting business success.

“Forget perfect, just pick one or two things to practice. Consider your next meeting, or your next conversation, or your next email. There are a lot of 8-second moments; you present yourself every day. And whatever you practice, act as if your message matters. Because it does.”

If you've enjoyed our insights on Paul Hellman's *You've Got 8 Seconds: Communication Secrets for a Distracted World*, we encourage you to access the other *You've Got 8 Seconds* assets in the Skillssoft library, or purchase the hardcopy.

## About the Author



**PAUL HELLMAN** consults and speaks internationally about effective behavior at work and has worked with thousands of executives, managers and employees in leading companies. He has a master's degree in management and several degrees in psychology, and has taught graduate courses in organizational psychology.

### Also by Paul Hellman

- 1 *Naked at Work (and Other Fears): How to Stay Sane When Your Job Drives You Crazy*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, © 2016, ISBN 978-1540445599.