

'This book is down-to-earth, gritty and oozes experience. I've been speaking for over twenty years... trust me, I've learnt from this book. Paul McGee is clearly a skilled helper.'

— Kriss Akabusi MBE

How To Speak So People *Really* Listen

**The straight-talking guide to
communicating with influence and impact**

Paul McGee

Author of the International bestsellers
Self-Confidence and *S.U.M.O.*



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'This book is disturbingly good. It simplifies the complex challenge of the Spoken Word into an entertainingly compelling sequence of easy-to-use golden nuggets. McGee is yet again doing his very best to put me out of business.'

Graham Davies – Bestselling Author of *The Presentation Coach*

'Paul McGee has the ability to present practical and effective advice in a very accessible and humorous way. Research shows that speaking in public is one of the biggest fears for so many people, yet it is a skill we need to call upon in both our professional and personal lives. Paul's tips will help you not only overcome those nerves, but present your ideas and yourself in the most powerful way possible. Whether you are standing on stage giving a keynote presentation in front of hundreds of people, or aiming to make the best impression one-to-one, this book is an essential read.'

Andy Lopata – International Speaker and Author of three books on Networking and Referrals, including ... and Death Came Third!

'A wonderful book that is both practical and fun to read. The style of writing, use of stories and the fact that it is bursting with tools, tips and techniques will take your ability to communicate and engage with others to a new level.'

Sue Atkins – Speaker, Author and ITV *This Morning* Parenting Expert

'Paul writes in a wonderful down-to-earth style, which is punchy, poignant, and packed with brilliance. Delivered in a fun, practical way this book will be invaluable to anyone wanting to speak with greater impact – whatever their experience.'

Geoff Ramm – International Speaker and Author on Celebrity Service and OMG Marketing

'Paul McGee provides an insightful and practical guide to the world of speaking and communicating with maximum impact. What makes the book unique is the wisdom of over twenty-years' public speaking that Paul brings to life with personal stories and experience. If you are ever required to present, sell, or pitch a deal, or are about to be interviewed for your next big role in life, then you must read this book. Why? Because...'

You will learn simple and practical tips that will increase your confidence, your impact, and will motivate your audience to take positive action.'

Steve Head FPAS PSAE FISMM – Professional Speaker, Performance Coach, and Author

'This book is down-to-earth, gritty and oozes experience. I've been speaking for over twenty years... trust me, I've learnt from this book. Paul McGee is clearly a skilled helper.'

Kriss Akabusi MBE

‘Communication within your organization is critical to your image and success. This book is full of wisdom and sharp one liners that will help you do your job better.’

Molly Harvey – Speaker, Executive Coach, Author

‘Talk is cheap. Being listened to is priceless. And this book tells you how. Brilliantly.’

Andy Cope – Conference Speaker and Bestselling Author of *The Art of Being Brilliant*

‘This book is riveting – revealing so many home truths. If you are serious about wanting to communicate more effectively, make sure you read it.’

Julie Fadden – Chief Executive South Liverpool Homes, *Sunday Times* ‘Number One Best Not-for-Profit Company to Work For’ for three consecutive years

‘Paul McGee speaks around the world – not because he is famous – but because he is one of the best. I know, I’ve seen him at work. This book reveals nuggets of wisdom that will help you to communicate in a way that engages your audiences and moves them to action. And he does it in a fun and practical way. I’m proud to recommend this book.’

Lee Jackson – President of the Professional Speaking Association in the UK and Ireland, and Author of *PowerPoint Surgery*

‘Learning a critical skill – like how to speak – from a bad source not only stops you achieving the success you deserve, but sets in bad habits that are then difficult to change. Reading this book will do two things. One, you will be learning from a world class source: a guy who has travelled the globe as an international speaker for decades. Two, you will be taught by a masterful bestselling author who knows how to bring across powerful ideas in an inspirational, motivational, and, most importantly, fun way. This book will change your life.’

David Thomas GMM – International Speaker, *Sunday Times* #1 Bestselling Author

‘Here’s the deal: this book will definitely help you to be a more effective communicator. Warm, waffle-free, practical, and insightful, it’s brilliant stuff, an investment that will pay massive dividends. So just buy it.’

Jeff Lucas – International Speaker, Bestselling Author and Broadcaster

‘I have nearly a hundred books on public speaking and this is a refreshingly different take on all of them. You’ll read it in hours but the messages will stay with you for years. It’s clever, insightful and packed with takeaway tips.’

Jeremy Nicholas – Writer and Broadcaster

How to Speak so People Really Listen

**The straight-talking guide to
communicating with influence
and impact**

Paul McGee



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In memory of Vicky Taylor.
Well lovely lady,
you certainly left a legacy.

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Foreword by Andy Bounds, communication expert

You communicate all the time.

So you might as well be brilliant at it.

But it sure is hard to do well, isn't it? After all, people have different priorities and personalities to you. They might not like what you like. So, for you to be a good communicator, it's important to adapt your mindset and messages so they resonate.

Paul's book will help you do this. He'll challenge your thinking about how you communicate. He'll then explore loads of strategies to improve how you do it.

In fact, you're only a few hours away from communicating better than you ever thought possible ...

What part of your body will this book impact?

I have a thought for you ...

Imagine that, every time someone communicated with you, it turned part of your body bright green – the body part they'd had the biggest impact on.

So, if someone taught you something new, you'd be *cleverer* than before. So you'd have a bright *green head*.

Or if someone told you an emotional story that made you *feel* differently, it'd be a *green heart* communication.

I find most business books are one of these two – green heads or hearts. You know the sort of thing – you read them, learn stuff, enjoy them ...

But this isn't enough.

After all, what's the point of us becoming cleverer/happier if we don't *do* anything differently as a result?

No – instead, the best books give you *green hands*. They cause us to *do* things differently.

Which brings me to this book ...

Why this book will help you communicate better

Paul has used all his experience – and that's a *lot* – to give you *green hands*. To improve how you communicate. You won't just learn stuff. You'll read one of his tips, then be able to *use it immediately*.

The whole thing's written so you can adopt his techniques easily. Even better, each chapter ends with Paul challenging you to focus on the one key action you'll take after reading it – what he calls 'My One Thing'. And with twenty chapters, by my maths, you're about to have twenty new things. How many business books can you say that about?

My advice – as you read it, have three things with you:

1. A pen to write your actions down
2. Some paper to write them on
3. A drink. You'll lose yourself in this book. So have a drink handy. That way, you won't need to break off from reading!

I've read countless books on communication. I've written a few myself. But this one stands out as something that will make you communicate better.

Its sole purpose is to give you *green hands*.

And it will.

Andy Bounds
Communication expert, author and
award-winning consultant
www.andyboundsonline.com

Introduction: Why this stuff really matters

“

***We can all talk. The
challenge? Getting
people to listen.***

”

Imagine the scene. You’re desperate to win a new job. You’ve completed a lengthy application process. You were thrilled to have an initial telephone interview. That went well. You progressed to the next stage. Your excitement increased. You prepared extensively for your face-to-face interview.

And then the letter came.

You've made it to the final stage of the process. A second interview at head office which will also include you giving a ten-minute presentation.

You plan for this final interview as if your life depended on it. In some ways, you feel it does. Your years of study and sacrifice look like they will finally pay off.

You're tantalizingly close.

You've never had any training or coaching on giving a presentation before, but you've sat through countless presentations.

You know the score.

Polite and formal opening.

A slide showing a list of bullet points outlining your objectives.

Then an overview of your background.

A section that includes an overview of the company and what you've learnt about them.

The next section is on the role and what specific skills you can bring to it, followed by a summary and conclusion.

Oh and one more thing. Your final slide.

'Thank you. Any questions?'

You like making slides. And if the interviewer missed anything, you've written down all the details on them, which they can always refer back to.

You're ready. This is it. The chance of a lifetime.

Fast forward two weeks.

The job went to someone. But it wasn't you.

The recruitment agency informs you that you were the strongest candidate on paper. You'd made it down to the last three. Your background and experience were just what they were looking for.

You're gutted.

So what went wrong?

In a nutshell: your presentation.

You bombed. The content on your slides overwhelmed them.

There wasn't enough engagement with your interviewers.

The panel felt they didn't get to know the real you. Just a corporate clone that failed to connect with them.

They sensed within 90 seconds of your start that you weren't the right person. The rest of your presentation did nothing to challenge their initial impression.

You were smart in appearance. Professional, if a little wooden. Polite. Knowledgeable about the company and what the role required. But no thanks. They see dozens of people who are like that.

You didn't stand out from the crowd. You were, I'm afraid, forgettable.

You needed to stand out.

You needed to grab their attention immediately.

You needed to deliver with energy and authenticity.

You didn't.

Bye-bye dream job. Maybe it just wasn't meant to be.

The deal is:

*When you're bland,
you blend.*

Trust me, the above scenario happens every single day around the globe. The context may be different. So too might the process. But the outcome remains the same. The person with the strengths and experience lost out due to their ineffective communication skills.

The question is: how can you make sure that person isn't you?

Now I recognize you might not have an important presentation to make for a job interview. Maybe you're a charity worker hoping to influence people to support your cause. Perhaps you're a manager seeking ways to engage and motivate your staff, or a teacher or trainer wanting to make a difference to people, whatever their age. Alternatively, you might want to convince your boss to take a new direction in relation to a particular project. Or maybe you've been asked to deliver a presentation to your peers at a conference, or your passion for politics means you want to persuade others that your perspective is the best way to make a difference to society.

Whatever the scenario or situation, here's the sad reality:

You may have the expertise and experience.

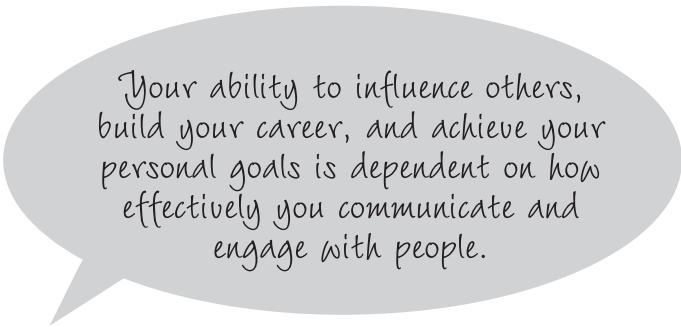
The passion and professionalism.

The competence and the contacts.

But you could lack one crucial thing.

The ability to communicate your message in a compelling way that causes your audience to sit up, take notice and listen.

Here's the deal:



Your ability to influence others, build your career, and achieve your personal goals is dependent on how effectively you communicate and engage with people.

Recently a colleague of mine was asked to sit on a panel that was responsible for awarding a £90,000 research grant spread over three years. All applicants were asked to present their case for why they should be awarded the grant. Ultimately, the £90,000 was given not to the best applicant on paper, but to the person who made the most persuasive presentation. Think about that for a moment.

Ninety thousand pounds.

That's a lot of money to lose out on because you weren't effective at communicating your message.

Trust me, this stuff really does matter. And it matters to you and your future success.

So make sure you never forget the following:

“

***Knowing the words to
a song doesn't make
you a great singer.
Neither does having
expertise in a subject
make you a great
speaker.***

”

And here's both a harsh and sad fact. Some people have values and views many would find offensive. But they get heard. They get noticed. Not simply because of what they believe, but because of how well they communicate their message. Criminals and politicians can manipulate minds because they've developed the skills of knowing how to persuade others. Yes, other factors and skills do come into play, but if they're unable to communicate effectively their influence is weakened. Their voice is less likely to be heard.

So how does this specifically affect you?

Well, potentially you miss out on promotion, or the new job, or fail to secure some new business, and you do so not because the other person is better or more knowledgeable than you.

You lose out because they've mastered the ability to communicate more effectively and persuasively than you. They've learnt to sell themselves or their services in a better way than you have.

That's the reality folks.

That's why I believe developing your skill as a communicator is crucial. Master this skill and it will help get you noticed, get along better with others and get ahead in life. Fact.

You see, the harsh reality is that life isn't fair. We don't all start on a level playing field. But there is some good news. Where we finish can be influenced by a range of factors. And one of those factors is simply this:

Here's the deal:

“

*Good people
with a great
message are
not guaranteed
a captive
audience.*

”

Your ability to communicate effectively with others.

Thousands of people know this. That's why so many politicians and leaders from all sectors want to develop their skills in this area, and are prepared to invest a considerable amount of time and effort to do so. I guess you've decided to do the same.

Getting the best from this book

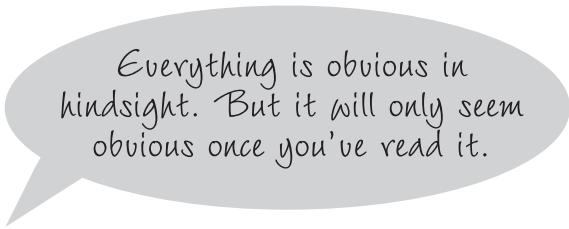
You've been prompted, for whatever reason, to read this book. Great. But make sure this is not a passive perusal through the following pages.

I want you to involve yourself as we explore a whole host of ideas and insights. How? Well, think of specific situations where you want to raise your game as a communicator. Perhaps it's with a customer, a colleague or even one of your kids. It could be speaking to a large audience, leading a meeting or simply a conversation with one other person. Whatever the context, whatever the size of the audience, look for ideas and insights that will take your communication to a new level, and in doing so increase your influence and impact.

Oh, and here's something to be aware of. The issue is not whether you've come across some of these ideas before. Neither is it a case of labelling what you read as 'just common sense'. The question is: 'so what are you doing with it?' If you're reading this book simply to acquire more knowledge, fine. I wish you well. People who accumulate lots of knowledge might do well in pub quizzes. They can sound impressive among their friends. But I hope you

want to gain so much more. I hope you want to improve as a person, fulfil your potential and look back on your life with a sense of satisfaction and not regret. Trust me, the ideas in this book will help you – yes, even the simple ‘common sense’ ones.

However, here’s a point that’s worth remembering:



Everything is obvious in hindsight. But it will only seem obvious once you’ve read it.

And here’s another thing. Please don’t see this book as aimed purely at stimulating your intellect and helping you stock up on a range of academic theories. If that’s your only aim with reading this book, then trust me, you’ll be disappointed. You see, that’s not my style. Check out the subtitle on the cover.

The straight-talking guide

That’s what this will be. A guide to help you get better as a communicator, however experienced or inexperienced you currently are.

How I know this stuff works

Here’s why I know this stuff works and am confident it will make a difference to you. If you use it, that is.

Let me take you back to April 1989. Yes, I know it’s possible you might not even have been born then.

Me? I was on invalidity benefit (now known as incapacity benefit).

When I could walk I had to use a walking stick. But the majority of the time I was housebound. I'd lost a high-flying graduate job with a large multinational organization. The cause of all this? An illness commonly known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, or ME (Myalgic Encephalomyelitis).

At the time, eight out of ten doctors didn't believe it was a genuine illness. Some still don't. My own doctor was one of them. His response to my so-called illness? He sent me to see a psychiatrist in Liverpool. If I'm honest, I found it a challenging and humbling experience.

I was ill for nearly three years, but I got to a position where I felt well enough to work part time. However, my next big challenge was this.

No one would hire me.

Why?

I couldn't pass a medical.

So here's what I did. I hired myself.

I was awesome at the interview. Stand out candidate, in fact.

I think the technical term to describe my employment status was self-employed. My international headquarters doubled as a bedroom in a small house on the outskirts of Warrington. In my first year of business I earned the princely sum of £2,300. That's over a whole year. My tax bill was fairly small that year. In fact, it was non-existent.

My accountant dumped me as I was wasting his time.

But despite that rather less than auspicious start, things did gradually improve. My training and development business grew. Over time, my business evolved into speaking at conferences and team events. People started calling me a motivational speaker. (Some also said I had a passing resemblance to Dustin Hoffman – in his younger days, I hope.)

But there was a challenge. I'm not a celebrity (except in my mum's eyes). I've never climbed Everest, sailed round the world singlehandedly, walked to the North Pole, overcome cancer, lost a limb or won a gold medal.

I'm just Mr Ordinary – yet I had to compete as a speaker, not only with celebrities from all fields, but with doctors and professors and multimillionaire business people. Whereas I'm just that slightly below average height guy from Manchester who bizarrely supports Bradford City and Wigan Athletic (it's a long story) and wrote a book called *SUMO (Shut Up, Move On)*.

But despite that I've done OK. I've spoken around the world. From Bolton to Bali, Rochdale to Reykjavik, and Todmorden to Tehran, I've spoken to over a quarter of a million people in forty countries to date. Some have willingly paid to hear me speak. Others were sent by their boss and clearly wanted to be somewhere else.

So how have I managed to develop a successful speaking career with such a rather ordinary, unspectacular background

Clearly, the support of others is crucial. And I'm not denying that luck will have played a part. My books have clearly raised my profile, but not to the extent that I can

be described as being particularly well known. I'm not. But here's something I have done. I've worked incredibly hard on two things.

First, my message – *what* I'm actually going to say. For me, content is crucial. Second, I worked hard at *how* I'm going to deliver that message. It's been an obsession at times. But it's reaped some rewards, and in this book I'm going to draw less upon academic theories and more upon practical experience and real-life examples that have worked for me and countless others in my profession. I'm going to share insights, ideas and practical tools you can use to help you. And the good news is you can use them immediately.

I appreciate you may have no intention of developing a career as a motivational speaker. That's fine, although there's always room for more people who want to inspire others. But you are going to learn from someone who literally lives or dies (in a business sense) by his ability to speak well. As you read at the start of this chapter, we can all speak. But here's the hard part. Getting people to listen.

The good news is that help is on its way, and I know from over twenty-five years' experience that what you're about to read works.

How the three Rs will help

In terms of what you'll learn, it's worth reflecting on the three Rs.

The first R stands for ***Reinforced***. There will be ideas you come across that you're already using. Good. You see,

Andy Murray still practises his tennis. He's constantly reinforcing his skills. That's a great quality to possess, and it's always worthwhile reinforcing what you already know.

The second R stands for ***Reminder***. Some of what we explore you may have come across before, but it's something you need reminding of. It's not something you're using in your communication, even though you've heard it before. My goal in reminding you is to ensure that what you know translates into an actual change in how you communicate with others.

And the third R stands for ***Reveal***. No matter how experienced you are, I believe some of what you're about to explore will be new to you. You'll discover some fresh insights and ideas you've never considered before.

How the book is written

In terms of my approach to writing, I think it's fair to say my style is informal, hopefully accessible, and perhaps on some rare occasions even mildly amusing. You'll come across quotes that will drive home my message in what is a brief and memorable way, and at the end of each chapter there is a section called 'My One Thing' (MOT). This provides you with an opportunity to identify one action or insight you intend to apply as a result of reading that chapter. You'll also see some 'Pause for Thought' moments. Sometimes it's good to actually stop reading and take some time to reflect on what you've just read and how it applies to you.

I also tend to use the phrases 'presentations' and 'speaking' interchangeably. Of course, these won't always be the

most appropriate terms to use in relation to how you're communicating, but hopefully you'll forgive me and tailor the terminology to your own particular situation.

I've split the book into three main sections. The first looks at the Seven Great Sins of Speaking, and is followed by Eight Great Ways to Speak so People Really Listen. Finally, I include a short section called I'm Glad You Asked That, which explores the top three questions I'm asked about speaking.

By the time we finish, you'll have a toolkit of ideas and actions you can use. Some will be more relevant and used more regularly than others. That's to be expected. Communication is a vast topic and is played out in a variety of contexts and settings, both in and outside of the workplace. Use what is appropriate for your situation but be aware of the rest – you never know when you might need them.

Right, I think we're ready.

So let's begin our journey together and start with some of the most common mistakes communicators make when presenting their message. I wonder how many you've sometimes been guilty of and have perhaps witnessed others doing? Let's find out.

PART 1:

The Seven Great
~~SINS~~
of Speaking



SIN 1:

A FAILURE TO MAKE YOUR MESSAGE

Sticky

OR

Memorable

Vicky was excited. I mean extremely excited. A friend of hers had arranged an opportunity for her to attend their company staff conference, where a former Olympic athlete would be speaking. The organization was investing a considerable sum of money for this celebrity to address over 300 staff.

A week after the event, Vicky and I met up. As a professional speaker myself, I was keen to hear about the impact the celebrity had made and the ways his message would help his audience.

‘So what was he like Vicky?’

Vicky appeared starry-eyed as she recalled the event.

‘He was gorgeous. All the women instantly fell in love with him. In fact, some of the guys probably did too.’

‘Interesting,’ I replied. ‘But what would you say you took away from his message?’

‘Well,’ continued Vicky, clearly excited as she relived the experience, ‘if you were patient you could wait around at the end and have your photograph taken with him and his Olympic medal.’

‘That’s brilliant Vicky, but can I ask you this: what was your key takeaway from his presentation?’

Vicky paused before finally replying: ‘That’s a tough one. I can’t remember exactly, but I know he was really good.’

It got me thinking. How often do we hear a message but very quickly forget it? Sometimes that might be acceptable if the speaker’s message was meant solely to entertain. But what if it isn’t? What if you have an important message to communicate that you need people to remember?

The problem is we're often so busy focusing on what we're going to say that we don't take time to think about how to say it in a way that people will remember.

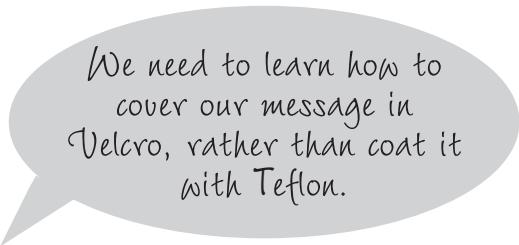
The challenge you face as a communicator is not that the attention span of your audience is necessarily short – it's that their attention is constantly being bombarded by messages and distractions screaming 'listen to me, notice me'. Believing that saying something once in a potentially unengaging way is going to be remembered by people is, I'm afraid, a reflection of either naivety or arrogance, or perhaps even a combination of both.

Advertisers know they need to get your attention and then communicate their message in a way that is memorable. After all, what's the point of an organization investing in advertising if you then can't remember the point of their message? They know that getting your attention is just the start. They then need you to remember their message.

That's crucial for us to remember as communicators.

Ever heard the phrase '*people won't remember what you said, but they will remember how you made them feel*'? Personally, I think that could be a cop out. How about when we communicate with people, our aim is that they'll remember how we made them feel AND what we said?

Here's the deal:



We need to learn how to cover our message in Velcro, rather than coat it with Teflon.

Making his message sticky and memorable was a priority for Steve Jobs. That's why, when he wanted you to remember something, he'd repeat it over and over. Why? Because repetition aids retention. I'll say that again – repetition aids retention. He wasn't bothered if people said 'Steve, you mentioned that earlier'. He knew that. But he intuitively knew the following:

Your message needs to stick
if it's going to be a hit.

Repetition is one way to do that. We'll be exploring lots more ways throughout the book, but let me share one approach I've used to make my message sticky and memorable – using visual and quirky language. And the reason? Well the reality is, the more people hear overused and overfamiliar phrases, the more those words will over time, figuratively speaking, 'go in one ear and out the other'.

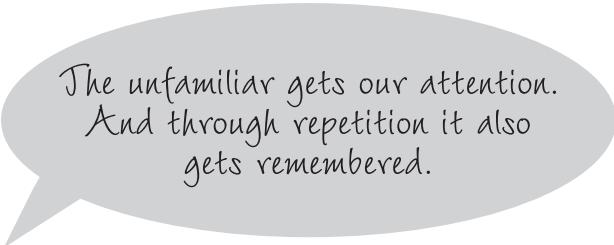
So, for example, in my book *SUMO (Shut Up, Move On)* I explore a number of SUMO principles. Here's what they could be called if I expressed them in a more familiar way:

1. Take responsibility.
2. Have a positive attitude.
3. Set goals.

However, the language I use to describe each principle is phrased in a less-familiar way:

1. Change your T-shirt.
2. Develop fruity thinking.
3. Ditch Doris Day.

Here's the deal:



The unfamiliar gets our attention.
And through repetition it also
gets remembered.

Here's another way I've used the above strategy to get remembered.

My name is Paul McGee. I think you'd agree there's nothing particularly memorable about that name. My appearances in the media are occasional at best and, compared to many people operating in the world of motivational speaking, my life story is rather tame.

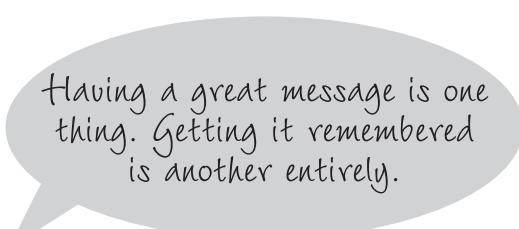
But my brand name – 'The SUMO Guy' – gets me remembered. It gets people's attention. It immediately conjures up a visual image and creates interest. Agree? The reality is I don't wear a sumo outfit or prance around on stage dressed in an oversized thong. Which might disappoint some, but probably comes as a relief to many. Either way, my brand name is memorable.

Then, explaining that SUMO is an acronym which can stand for Shut Up, Move On (or sometimes Stop, Understand, Move On) also gets me remembered. It's short and simple (words that have often been used to describe me,

in fact). But because it's short and simple, and also different and memorable, it sticks in people's minds.

Now relax. I'm not suggesting you have to come up with some weird or wacky way to communicate your message. I've simply shared a strategy that works for me. You're going to be learning many more, but although the context in which you speak is likely to be vastly different to mine, you might want to start thinking about how you could use less-familiar language to express a familiar idea.

The point I want to stress is this:



Having a great message is one thing. Getting it remembered is another entirely.



Pause for Thought

Think about the ways you communicate your messages to others. Could your approach ever be described as boring or bland? Do you say things the way you've always said them? If not, great; but if you do, then perhaps it's time to freshen up your style. Look for ideas, especially in the second section of the book, to see how you can make your message more sticky and memorable – trust me, there'll be loads. In fact you've been given two already. First, repetition – be prepared

to repeat your message in different ways. Second, use less-familiar language – language that gets people's attention and causes them to want to know more.



My One Thing

If you were to focus on one of the ideas we've briefly explored to make your message more sticky and memorable, which would it be?

1. Using repetition more.
2. Using less-familiar language to communicate a familiar idea.

SIN 2:

DROWNING
PEOPLE
IN DETAIL



There are occasions when our communication challenges are due to something being lost in translation. It happens. But here's another reason. Sometimes our message is lost in information. In other words, we've communicated so much detail that it's hard for people to grasp everything, never mind remember it.

Drowning people in detail results in us overloading our audience's brains. When that happens you've literally buried the treasure within your message in an ocean of content, and your key point is lost at sea. When this happens, people can feel mentally exhausted and a Mexican wave of yawning can quickly spread across the room.

Admit it. You've been in such meetings, haven't you? I certainly have.

A few years ago, I was attending a conference in Orlando, Florida. One speaker had been given a twenty-minute slot to talk about leadership. It just so happened that he'd written a book called *The Twelve Laws of Leadership*. I sat back in anticipation.

Now twenty minutes is a reasonable amount of time – but not necessarily enough time to cover all twelve of his leadership laws in depth. But that's what he attempted to do anyway. It became as engaging as listening to a long list of different size screws being read out from a builder's catalogue – particularly towards the end of the talk when he realized he was running out of time.

And here's the thing. Of all those twelve laws he spoke about, guess how many I remember? None. Seriously, I cannot remember a single one. Quite simply, my brain

had been overwhelmed with content that had been crammed into the twenty-minute time slot, and the speaker had made no attempt to make what he said either sticky or memorable.

A far more effective approach would have been if he'd said: 'I wrote a book called *The Twelve Laws of Leadership* and in the time we have together today I'd like to explore three of them.' Now, not only would the chances of me retaining what he'd said have increased dramatically, I might also have been tempted to buy his book to discover what the other nine were.

Now this next point is crucial. As communicators, it's vital we embrace the following advice.

Say more about less.

Don't get me wrong – detail is important. I'm not suggesting we simplify our content to the point where it has little meaning or impact. People won't respond to vague platitudes that contain few or no facts. The problem isn't that we shouldn't include detail. The problem is we shouldn't overwhelm people with it.

Here's the reality:

A presentation that covers everything usually achieves nothing.

The question you have to ask (and we'll explore this in more detail later) is: how much information and what level of detail does this particular audience require? If you work in finance and need to update your boss on the current financial situation of the company, you're likely to go into more detail than if you were speaking to a group of non-finance people who work at the company.

Here's the deal:



If you want to speak so people really listen, then you need to ditch the one-size-fits-all approach to your communication.

Here's an example of someone who was obsessed with how he communicated his message and got close to slipping into the trap of drowning his audience in detail.

Ken Segall, in his book *Insanely Simple*, recalls his role as a marketing executive working with Apple computers. The marketing team was reviewing the content for an advert for the iMac. Here was the challenge. The advert to be shown on TV was for thirty seconds, and Steve Jobs felt there were four or five really important messages that needed to be communicated.

The marketing agency team, which included Segall, disagreed. Their concern was that if they covered too many points the audience wouldn't remember any of them.

Jobs was not budging.

But then Lee Clow, one of the agency team, did something that got Jobs's attention and powerfully made his point. He tore up five pieces of paper and crumpled them up into five balls. He then threw one of the balls of paper to Steve Jobs. Jobs caught it and threw it back. Then Clow threw all five balls of paper to Jobs at once. Jobs didn't catch a single one of them.

Lee Clow's point was simple. The more things you ask people to focus on, the fewer they'll remember. Jobs got the point and agreed to a much simpler advert than originally planned.

Here's the deal:

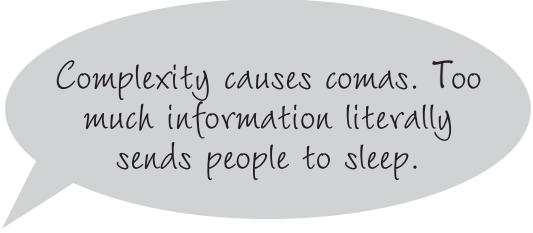
When you say too much
you'll achieve very little.

Here's something we often forget when we're communicating with others.

Our biology doesn't help us.

Confused? Let me explain.

The brain can tire easily. Listening is hard work. So is trying to grasp and retain a lot of information. It can literally wear the brain out. Brain cells use up roughly twice as much energy as any other cells in the body. It might not weigh much, but in comparison with the rest of your body your brain takes a lot of energy to operate. Give it too much information that's difficult to understand and you're left with the following issue:



Complexity causes comas. Too much information literally sends people to sleep.

So, next time you're running a team meeting, teaching a lesson, making a presentation or having a conversation, remember this.

“

Your communication will often benefit from the SLIM approach. Say Less, Impact More.

”

And if you know that you do have a lot of information to cover, don't try and do so in one continuous sitting. A good meal is enjoyed because there are some natural breaks between starter, main course and dessert. And a brain break is as important as a belly break.

A meal can be ruined if people are stuffed with too much food – the same goes for your communication. So, give people time to digest what you've said rather than stuffing more content down their throats. If you don't, you might not literally make them sick, but they could become sick of hearing you speak.

Harsh? Maybe. But I've sat in too many meetings where, far from being engaged, people look like they're giving up the will to live. You see, the mark of a great communicator is often determined by what they don't say. They recognize their fascination for detail might not be shared by everyone, and that talking too much might be feeding their ego but doing very little to serve their audience. Increasing your word count doesn't mean you'll appear more intelligent on your subject. It invariably means you'll appear more boring and verbose.

Remember: your aim is to speak so people really listen, not to speak so you sound really impressive.



Pause for Thought

Is this a sin you're sometimes guilty of committing? If so, relax, because help is at hand. There are some key chapters in the second section of the book that you'll find really helpful – not only in atoning for this sin, but also helping you to avoid committing it in future.

Make sure you pay particular attention to the chapters 'Start at the end' and 'Sort out your skeletons', where you'll find great advice that will help clarify and

crystallize your message, and structure it in a clear and concise way. You'll also find exploring our next great sin of speaking really helpful in determining just how much detail people require when you speak.



My One Thing

Remember this crucial point.

If you want to communicate with influence and impact:

remember the SLIM approach. Say Less, Impact More.

SIN 3:

A FAILURE TO CONSIDER
OR UNDERSTAND YOUR
**AUDIENCE'S
NEEDS**



It's a common trap. A regular mistake. To some extent you might not even see this as a big deal. Trust me, it is.

The problem? We focus so much on what we're going to say that we forget to focus on *who* we're saying it to.

You see, it's possible to deliver a great talk in a great way – but to the wrong audience. If you're going to make an impact it has to be relevant.

Here's the deal:

If you don't tailor your message, you'll fail with your message.

Not knowing where your audience is at and what their needs are is like throwing a fire extinguisher to a drowning man and hoping it will help.

Now, clearly it's vitally important to consider what you're going to say, but equally important remember you're speaking to people, not into a vacuum. So, the more you can discover about your audience in terms of their needs, their priorities and their concerns, the more you are able to tailor your message to them.

I've had one or two challenging clients over the years. The one who asked me not to use humour in my talk was particularly difficult. That's the equivalent of asking me to stop watching football or avoid eating chunky chips with mayonnaise. It's just not going to happen.

But my most challenging customers are usually those who, when I call to discuss the event I'm speaking at, brief me in one of two ways. They either:

1. Give me such convoluted and complex answers to my questions that they might as well be speaking in Swahili (and trust me, my grasp of Swahili is almost as bad as my DIY skills).
2. Give such vague answers that I might as well be having the theory of quantum physics explained to me by a two-year-old.

The experience might be pleasant enough, but I'm still none the wiser on the subject.

The fact is, the less I know or understand about my audience, the more difficult it is to target or tailor my message.

So, in a world that's full of selfies and self-obsession it's important to realize this: if you want to communicate successfully with others, whether that's to an audience of one or many, remember this.



It's about them. Not you.

If all you do is focus on your message without even thinking about who you're going to say it to, you've dramatically decreased your ability to influence your audience. Your preparation should start with 'Who am I talking to?' before you've clarified what you're going to say.

That means before you speak you might start by doing some listening. Listen to colleagues, customers and anyone

who can help you understand more about your audience. And, trust me, listening is not a natural gift that we all possess. It's actually a skill to be developed, and you only get good at it through practice.

Now when I say ‘listen’, that doesn’t mean never saying anything. A stuffed parrot doesn’t speak. But it’s not a great listener. So silence isn’t always golden. In fact, it could mean you’ve switched off, or are simply waiting for your turn to talk.

So, if you want to listen well and understand more about your audience, then ask questions. Ask questions that help uncover their issues so that you can then speak to their situation, rather than into a void. Even if you know your audience well, still think about the following.

Useful questions would include:

- What’s going on in your world at the moment?
- What’s important to you right now?
- What would you say are your three biggest challenges at this time?
- What’s going well in your world?
- What knowledge do you already have on my topic? (This is crucial. If you oversimplify, you lose credibility and appear patronizing.)
- If there was one thing I could do to help you right now, what would it be?

Now before you say ‘Well they’re fairly obvious questions’, ask yourself this. How often do you ask them, or at least consider them?

Clearly, if you're speaking to a large audience you can't ask everyone these questions, but you might be able to ask one or two people. And in a worst case scenario where you're not able to talk with anyone beforehand, you can still make an educated guess about the answers to some of those questions.

Simply asking yourself 'If I was in their shoes, what would some of my issues be likely to be?' will influence how you tailor your message. Knowing your audience also means you're able to decide if you can use jargon in your talk. If they're a techy audience, they probably want you to 'talk nerdy to me'. But not every audience will. That's why you need to reflect on these questions.

And remember this. People care about themselves. They care about their world, their lives and the people closest to them. That's not selfish. It's reality. So the more you can understand their world and consider their needs, the easier it will be to connect with them. And the more likely they are to listen to you. And I mean really listen. Why? Because you're relevant. You're scratching where they're itching.



Pause for Thought

How much do you consider your audience and seek to understand their needs before you communicate with them? Reflect on the six previous questions. Which two would be most helpful to reflect on? If there was another question worth adding to the list, what would it be?



My One Thing

Want to speak with influence and impact? Know your audience, not just your message.

SIN 4:



FOCUSING ON
FEATURES

RATHER THAN
SELLING BENEFITS

I'm not a mind reader (although I think my wife wishes I was). And it's highly unlikely that I've met some of the people you speak to. But there's something I'm fairly confident predicting. When you stand (or even sit) to deliver a talk, give a presentation, teach a lesson or lead a meeting, there are some questions your audience are asking themselves at a subconscious level:

Why should I care?

Why is this important?

How does this affect me?

And the reality is, sometimes we fail to spell out the answer to those questions, and then wonder why we've failed to engage our audience or make the impact we were intending.

OK, sometimes we're communicating in a more social setting. Perhaps even talking about trivial matters with friends. But that's not the context I'm referring to here. Neither am I suggesting that when you speak, those questions are right at the forefront of everyone's minds. But trust me, they're at the back of their minds. That's true for all of us. And if you're not addressing those unspoken questions directly or indirectly, people's attention can start to drift elsewhere. And the consequence? Quite simply, you fail to connect with your audience.

You see, whether you like it or not, we're all in sales. For some of you that's an obvious statement to make. For others, perhaps less so. However, there will be times when we have to sell ourselves and our ideas to other people. Think about it – on a day-to-day basis you're probably

having to influence people that can range from your customers and colleagues, right through to your friends and family. (And if you have children, you'll know how much you need to influence and persuade them – although you may more commonly refer to it as begging and bribery.)

But because we often don't see ourselves as selling a message, we fall into the trap of focusing on the features rather than the benefits of what we're saying.

Here's an example of how I fell into that trap. I was talking to the managing director of a company who was interested in hiring me. One of her staff had heard me speak and – fortunately for me – went back to work with rave reviews, and the managing director was keen to know more.

'So what do you talk about?' she asked. Here's what I responded with:

'Well, I talk about a formula called E + R = O. It's not the Event, it's how we Respond that influences the Outcome. I also talk about the need to overcome faulty thinking and develop fruity thinking. I do this by looking at seven questions, which include "Where is this issue on a scale of 1–10 ... Where 10 equals death?" And I also talk about a SUMO principle called Remember the Beachball. This is where two people are looking at the same thing, i.e. the beachball, but I see three different colours to the ones you see. I see blue, white and green, while you're seeing red, yellow and orange.'

The managing director said they'd think about what I'd outlined and would be in touch.

I never heard from them again.

The problem was that not only was I drowning them in detail, but the detail itself was not particularly engaging. What was I doing? Talking about the features of my SUMO message rather than the benefits.

However, if I'd sold the benefits of my message rather than just the features, I might well have included the following:

'My material explores the importance of people taking responsibility for their actions. People who feel more empowered and responsible are far more likely to be engaged in their work. Your staff will learn how they cannot always influence the events that happen to them, but they can focus on their response. That means when challenges and changes come, people don't have to passively accept that their outcomes will be negative, but by taking ownership of their response they can create better outcomes. This can lead to increased job satisfaction and can help overcome a victim mentality, which can often develop particularly in challenging times.'

Do you see the difference?

Now I'm talking about the benefits of my SUMO material. Likewise, I can highlight the importance of reducing conflict, saving time and improving communication by talking about my 'Remember the Beachball' principle. The beachball is just a metaphor. It's not the benefit. However, by explaining the metaphor in such a clear and visual way, I can then help people appreciate the benefits both to them and others in understanding why people have different

perspectives. By talking about the benefits I am in fact answering the questions ‘Why should I care?’ and ‘Why is this important?’

Here’s an example of where selling the benefits can cause people to take action when previously they didn’t.

A park in the US used to have a sign:

‘Clear up after your dog.’

Some people simply ignored the sign. After all, ‘Why should I care if there’s a bit of dog poo lying around the place?’ But then three extra words were added to the sign. The dog owners were given a compelling reason why they should clean up after their dog. The new sign simply read:

‘Clean up after your dog.

Children play here.

And guess what? No more dog poo. Highlighting the benefit of cleaning up their dogs’ poo changed the dog owners’ behaviour. They now saw a clear reason to do so.

Here’s the deal:

People need to understand the why-in before you can get their buy-in.

Now, be aware that you might clearly see the benefit and impact of your message, but your audience might not. That’s not because they’re dumb and ignorant, but perhaps they’ve never had to think about what you’ve said before.

Remember: people are not mind readers. Don't assume they automatically see the benefits of what you're discussing – you sometimes have to spell it out. And that could be as simple as saying 'what that means for you is ...'.

Let me finish with another example where highlighting *why* people should care results in greater engagement.

Climate change was not high on people's agendas fifteen years ago, and simply being told about the features of global warming through a series of graphs and charts was not enough to get people's attention. It had to be spelt out *why* people should care. Most people now realize that talking about global warming is not just for their benefit, but for the benefit of their children and their children's children.

It's a message that appeals less to our immediate self-interest, but more to our moral values. In many ways, people are being challenged to consider this – do you want to be part of a generation who, due to greed and an unwillingness to face up to the problem, screwed it up for future generations? In this example, the issue is less about a benefit to gain, but about a cost to avoid by the actions we take. But it's still selling a message, not just simply talking about the features of the issue.



Pause for Thought

So, how effective do you think you are in highlighting the benefits of what you've got to say? Do you get so caught up in talking about the features that the

benefits are lost? Could what seems clear to you be less obvious to your audience?

And if what you have to communicate is challenging or difficult news (such as having to make cutbacks or enforce redundancies), have you highlighted the consequences of doing nothing? Remember, sometimes the benefit may need to be framed more as a cost to avoid – for example, if we don't make cutbacks, potentially everyone's job is in danger. Either way, if you're going to communicate with influence and impact, you must start talking more about benefits and not solely about the features.



My One Thing

Imagine that when you're speaking your audience is holding a sign which simply says this:

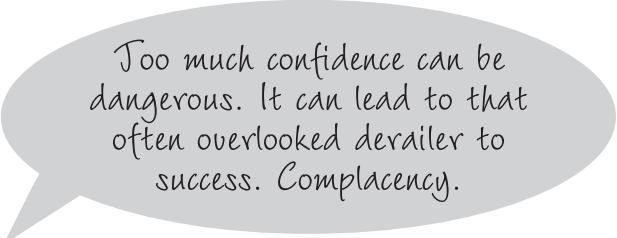
'WHY SHOULD I CARE?'

SIN 5:



**WINGING
IT**

Some time ago, I wrote a book called *Self-Confidence*. I'm convinced a lack of confidence can seriously undermine our ability to achieve success in life and result in us not fulfilling our potential. So my next point may surprise you.



Too much confidence can be dangerous. It can lead to that often overlooked derailier to success. Complacency.

The sin of 'winging it' is rarely, if ever, committed by nervous people who are inexperienced in speaking and who are suffering from a heavy dose of self-doubt. No. Winging it is far more likely to be a mistake made by relatively experienced and generally confident people.

The phrase 'winging it' actually comes from the world of acting, and refers to an actor who has not learnt the script and so relies on prompts from the wings to help them deliver their lines.

Winging it in terms of speaking relates to little planning or preparation in terms of what you're going to say. Previous experience and confidence can lure you into a potentially false sense of security. And, let's be honest. If you are experienced, deliver talks regularly and know your subject well, then you can perhaps get by with little planning and preparation. You can rely on your previous preparation from the past to help you deal with the present. So why bother preparing anymore?

Well that's an understandable point. I don't disagree. Entirely. But if that's a fair description of you, I'd like you to reflect on the following:



The enemy of excellence is
not mediocrity.
The enemy of excellence is
being fairly good.

You see, if you consider yourself to be just mediocre (i.e. average at best) when speaking to others, then there's clearly room for improvement.

But if you're fairly good at speaking (i.e. above average, certainly in comparison with other people you know), then the temptation is to ask: why work at getting even better?

Why bother with any more preparation or planning? You're fairly good. And I'm not suggesting you aren't. But that's the problem. When that's the case you're less likely to take the small but important steps to move from being 'fairly good' to excellent.

Hey, if you're mediocre it's obvious you need to improve. You know without planning and preparation this could become not just a painful experience, but also potentially humiliating as well. So, to avoid that possible scenario, you make sure you plan, prepare and practise. No one is ever going to accuse you of winging it.

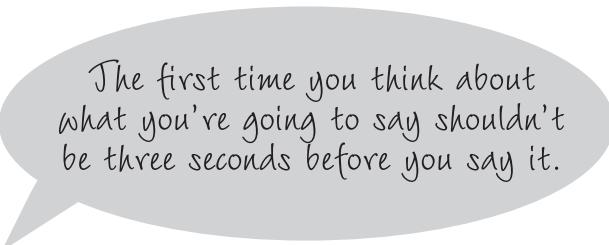
Here's the deal:



If you care, you prepare.

Now, if you're giving a presentation you've done countless times before, I'm not suggesting you lock yourself away for three days in an attempt to avoid being accused of winging it.

But I am suggesting this:



The first time you think about what you're going to say shouldn't be three seconds before you say it.

Even taking two minutes to compose yourself and think about your audience and why what you're going to say will be relevant to them could be helpful.

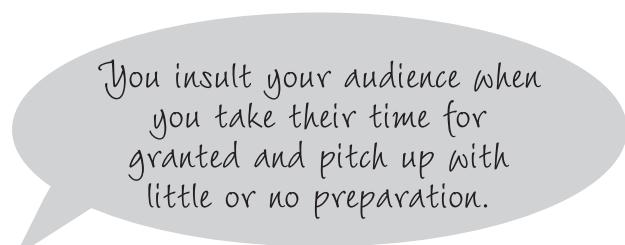
Of course you could settle for being 'fairly good' – but wouldn't it be far more fulfilling if you thought about what you could do to move closer to excellence? Think about how that might increase your influence and create even more impact on others.

The truth is, it might not require lots more work, but it will require some work. And although I appreciate a lack of time is often used as the reason for winging it, the reality is that most talks would benefit from even five minutes more preparation time. That's not too much to ask, is it?

Now, if you recognize you have a tendency to wing it, I've got some good news. First, by reading this book (this far, anyway) you're indicating a willingness to improve your skills. Second, the next section of this book is packed full of tools, tips and techniques to help you move to the next level. And if you consider yourself mediocre in terms of how you communicate with others, then your honesty will be rewarded. Perhaps your next 'realistic' goal is to become 'fairly good'. If that's the case, great, because you will also discover what you need to help you on your journey.

So remember: complacency can be a killer. Its impact over time is subtle but still tangible. Sometimes you have to wing it, because you're thrown in the deep end at short notice. But those occasions are the exception.

Never forget the following:



You insult your audience when
you take their time for
granted and pitch up with
little or no preparation.



Pause for Thought

So, is winging it something you can relate to? If so, for what reasons? Complacency? Lack of time? Or not seeing your communication with others as a priority compared to other aspects of your role?

What do you think will be the consequences to you and others if you continue with this approach?

Perhaps the answer to that last question will determine how much you engage with the rest of this book. I sincerely hope you do recognize the impact and benefit of moving from fairly good to excellent. Not just for you.

But also for your audience.



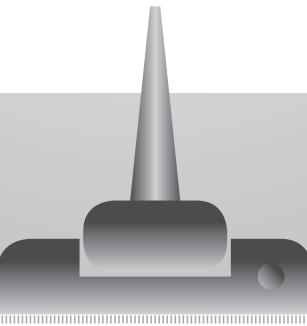
My One Thing

Beware the dangers of complacency creeping up on you. Stay on top of your game in order to raise your game.

SIN 6:



**SHOWING
SLIDES**



THAT SUCK...
THE LIFE OUT
OF YOUR AUDIENCE

When it comes to adding impact to our message, slides can make a real difference. But we've all experienced the following, haven't we? In fact, millions of people around the world are experiencing it right now. It's not death by PowerPoint – that would be a merciful relief in many cases. No. It's more slow, drawn-out torture by PowerPoint.

As my friend and fellow speaker Steve McDermott says: 'Most people don't use PowerPoint. They abuse it.'

I've sat through hundreds of presentations at staff conferences, delivered by people within the organization. On occasion, I'm completely captivated by the speakers before me. Engaging, interesting, relevant ... I'm actually left thinking, as the paid professional speaker, that I need to raise my game.

But on other occasions it's a very different story.

It's not that I need to raise my game. Sometimes I need to raise the dead.

I just don't get it, do you? What is it about rational, intelligent people who suddenly dispose of common sense when it comes to using slides? Some people fail to realize that they're making a presentation – not reading a script out to us. In fact, if all they do is read out a list of bullet points (and remember, bullets can kill), then why are *they* even necessary? How about they save us all a lot of time and effort and simply email the slides over to us? If we have any questions we can always contact them.

When it comes to slides, we need to rescue common sense from the rubbish bin and start applying large doses of it

to how we produce our slides. I mean, come on, how many audience members have said either of the following:

‘I wish the font you used was smaller.’

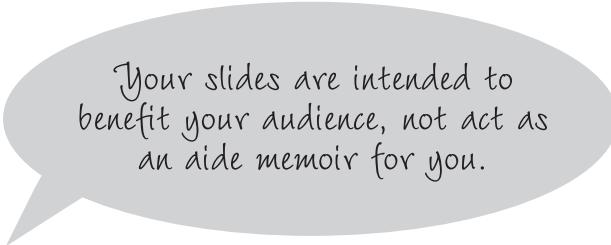
Or:

‘I wish they’d crammed even more content onto the slide. Such a waste of white space otherwise.’

Trust me, no one, and I mean no one, ever said either. Yet many presenters use slides where you’d think small font and crammed content were compulsory. Remember, you’re giving a presentation, not conducting a sight test.

So, please get real. Embrace reality.

Here’s the deal:



Your slides are intended to benefit your audience, not act as an aide memoir for you.

They’re there to enhance your presentation and to support your message. They’re not intended to be a replacement for you.

Ever read the great bible about presentations that states ‘thou shalt only use text on slides’? Me neither. It doesn’t exist. But here’s the good news. You are allowed to use images on slides. They’re not childish. They’re not unprofessional. They’re incredibly helpful if you use appropriate ones. (But images of cats are rarely appropriate, by the way.)

Remember:

The goal of your presentation is to cause insomnia. Not cure it.

But if you want to know how to ensure your audience enters a deep sleep, just use a monotone voice and talk through slide after slide after slide. Make sure there's so much detail on your slides that you feel compelled to say 'I know you can't read this, but ...'. Hey, that's bound to make your audience sit up ... and want to leave the room. And many would, if it was acceptable to do so. I really believe it's time to park our politeness and start our own crusade by launching an all-out attack on slides that suck. Someone needs to be brave enough to say to people that whatever software they're using (it doesn't have to be PowerPoint), this isn't working.

And let me be clear, it's not actually the number of slides used that is the real issue. It's the amount of information on the slides that is crucial. Trust me. More content does not equate to more value, particularly when it's crammed onto a single slide. Usually it leads to more confusion, and most people haven't got the time or the fortitude to sit in a darkened room trying to make sense of something that is about as understandable as some badly faded hieroglyphics on a tomb wall in Egypt.

Here's the deal:

Simple is beautiful.
Seriously, it is.

Believe me, your intelligence is not directly proportional to the number of bullet points you can talk through within a given time frame. Your goal is not to conduct eye tests on your audience by your use of a small-sized font.

So what do you need to do?

If you are going to use slides, here are a few tips to get you started.

1. Leave preparing slides until after you've prepared your talk – they're supposed to enhance your presentation, not be the star of the show.
2. Use dark colours on a light background.
3. Be big and bold in your font size. Think headlines when it comes to slides, not a script. Fonts like Helvetica and Calibri tend to be the easiest to read on screen.
4. Images increase impact. So use some. And not clipart, as that's too dated. There are thousands of pictures you can access on the internet, so start searching.
5. Keep text to a minimum. It's OK to have text on slides, just not too much. Let your slides breathe – give the text space. Words need to look like they're in an open field, not a crowded commuter train.
6. Remember: slides are meant to benefit your audience – not act as a prompt for you. So, if necessary, have your own notes as a reminder.
7. Some of the greatest talks ever given never used slides. You may have the technology, but that doesn't mean you have to use it.



Pause for Thought

If you use slides, do your current slides need ditching or developing? Which of the tips listed do you need to act upon first? If you don't use slides, in what ways could they enhance the way you currently communicate with others?



My One Thing

You're the star of the show. Your slides are simply your supporting act.

SIN 7:



Now, I have no intention of rambling on about why people ramble. Brevity is best. Particularly when talking about rambling.

Be honest though, have you ever heard a talk, presentation, lecture or been in a meeting and thought WTF ... ?

What The Friday was that all about?

The reality is the person speaking may have been good with words – although they probably used too many of them – and is likely to be knowledgeable about their subject. But here's the harsh fact: when they're finally finished, you're still clueless about the point of their message.

The reality is they've just spent ages taking you on a rather un-magical mystery tour. You're not sure of the destination you've arrived at and, even if you are, you remain mystified as to why you're there.

I genuinely believe that when they're communicating to others, no one asks 'How can I bore and confuse my audience?' But it's clearly a talent some people have been born with.

So why does it happen? Well, there are several reasons.

Sometimes it can be a combination of arrogance and ignorance in terms of what some people think is required in order to engage their audience. Or, to put it another way, they haven't a clue how to communicate effectively, but they seem blind to the fact.

And that is despite the clear signals from their audience (glazed eyes, checking emails, getting out their sleeping

bags and putting on their pyjamas). Some speakers still plough on thinking: ‘if I talk long enough about this topic, something will eventually strike a chord with them.’

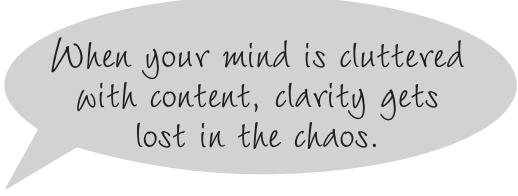
Believe me, it rarely does.

They may also genuinely believe ‘I’m really interested in this topic, so you should be too’. (This goes back to Sin 3: ‘Failure to consider or understand your audience’s needs’.)

And some people actually enjoy the sound of their own voice. Ever come across that kind of person before? They’re comfortable speaking in front of others, but the challenge is they’ve become so comfortable that they’ve failed to notice you slipping into a coma.

But perhaps the biggest reason for a speaker rambling on is a lack of clarity in their mind with regards to what they actually want to achieve with their message.

The truth is:



*When your mind is cluttered
with content, clarity gets
lost in the chaos.*

Ultimately, a lack of a clear direction and a final destination in terms of where the talk is going, means the speaker gets lost and inevitably loses their audience at the same time. This painful journey can be fuelled by Sin 5: ‘Winging it’. But believing you can wing it and muddle through will not cut it. It will simply lead to a pointless and confusing ramble. Sadly, people are so used to being subjected to such experiences that they often view them as the norm.

But here's some good news, particularly if you recognize you're a fully paid up member of Ramblers Anonymous.

I can guarantee you one thing. If you have taken people on a ramble, there is one phrase that does engage your audience and immediately gets their attention. Two magic words.

'And finally.'

Inside people's minds they're giving you a standing ovation when they hear that phrase. I admit that internal ovation is born out of relief more than joy, but at least you've got their attention. Finally. Just a pity you couldn't achieve that throughout the whole of your presentation.

But relax. It doesn't have to be that way. Trust me, it doesn't – as we'll see from our next section. You're about to discover a number of simple but practical strategies to aid speaking with clarity and purpose.



Pause for Thought

Could you ever be considered guilty of rambling? If so, what's the reason? Take a moment to reflect. Perhaps there's a combination of reasons. If it's related to lacking clarity, you're going to find the chapters 'Start at the end' and 'Sort out your skeletons' particularly helpful. And if your rambling is due to you enjoying speaking, you're about to discover a number of insights and ideas that will help your audience enjoy listening to you too.



My One Thing

When you're next speaking, imagine your audience is holding up a huge banner that says:

'SO WHAT'S YOUR POINT?'

(You may remember some of your audience members are also holding a banner that says 'WHY SHOULD I CARE?')

And finally ...

So, we've come to the end of our first section exploring the Seven Great Sins of Speaking. Let's recap them:

1. A failure to make your message sticky or memorable.
2. Drowning people in detail.
3. A failure to consider or understand your audience's needs.
4. Focusing on features rather than selling benefits.
5. Winging it.
6. Showing slides that suck ... the life out of your audience.
7. Taking people on a pointless ramble.

Now, if you were to identify the top three sins you need to stop committing, what would they be?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

OK, confession is one thing. Now it's time to make sure you stop committing those sins and turn your speaking round by embracing new ways to speak with influence and impact.

Let's move on to our next section.

PART 2:

Eight Great Ways to

speak



so
People
Really

Listen

WAY 1:

GET
REAL

Sophie was in her mid-thirties. Outgoing, confident and above all friendly, I immediately warmed to her. We were speaking at the same conference, and I sat back and relaxed as I awaited her presentation. And then she took it. No one else in the audience, including me, saw her do it. But the effects were immediate.

She swallowed the ‘I’m now giving a presentation pill’.

The change was dramatic. She transformed from a relaxed, confident, friendly person into formal presenter mode within seconds. Humour, warmth and personality took their leave, and they were replaced with the corporate cloak of seriousness, slickness and stacks of slides.

The slides were animated with good graphics and she wore a smart business suit and looked extremely professional.

But there was a problem.

She’d stopped being the Sophie we could relate to.

She spent most of her time talking at the screen rather than to her audience. It was clear that she’d rehearsed. But it almost felt too polished. There was clearly no place for humour or relating her material to what other speakers before her had talked about. Sadly, Sophie had forgotten the following:

Being professional doesn't
mean you have to be boring.

Her eye contact was almost non-existent, as was her smile. What had happened to that warm and engaging person I'd been speaking to only minutes earlier? And why did Sophie seem so unaware that she was clearly not connecting with her audience?

Perhaps the clue lies in an old fairytale told by Hans Christian Andersen called *The Emperor's New Clothes*. In the story, a vain Emperor is fooled into believing that the new outfit that has been made for him is actually magic and can only be seen by wise people. People who are stupid will not be able to see the clothes. Not surprisingly, no one wants to look a fool, and so everyone compliments the Emperor on his new clothes. People play along with the pretence, except that is for a small child who points out that he isn't wearing any. As is often the case, it took the innocence of a child to point out the obvious.

OK, so how does this relate to speaking and presenting, and to my experience of watching Sophie?

I genuinely think that many people believe they're good at communicating because no one has told them otherwise. I'm guessing Sophie did what she did because that's how she'd always done her presentations and no one had suggested they weren't as good as they could be. Perhaps she, like many others, had become a victim of a conspiracy of silence.

But why?

Well, maybe those speaking are in senior positions and people don't want to talk out of turn and possibly offend the boss – a potentially career-damaging move. In other situations, audience members are just too polite and don't

want to offend people. Their niceness prevents them from being honest. (Not everyone has the courage to say what one church member is reputed to have said: ‘Great sermon Vicar. I haven’t slept that well in ages.’) People can also be reticent about speaking the truth in case their criticism is met with the response ‘Well, I’d like to see you do better’. Many people shy away from speaking or presenting so feel less comfortable being critical of someone who at least has the guts to do something they’d prefer to avoid.

And as mentioned previously, people sadly have got so used to experiencing poor presentations that they see it as the norm – so why point out something that is so commonplace anyway?

So there you have it: a few possible reasons why some people can be poor presenters, but remain oblivious to the fact – because just like the Emperor, no one has told them the truth. If I was coaching Sophie, just like if I was coaching you, one of the first ‘truths’ I’d point out is the importance of being real. Quit hiding behind a façade and bring more of who you are to your audience.

So how can you be real?

Start by remembering you’re communicating with human beings and not, as some organizations call them, human resources. If you stopped using the phrases ‘giving a speech’ or ‘delivering a presentation’ and replaced them with ‘I’m having a conversation’ or ‘I’m telling a story’, then you’d immediately appear more real.

Remember:

You're trying to develop a relationship with your audience when you communicate with them.

When you view your presentation as a conversation it creates a different tone to your delivery. And guess what? You'll appear more real and less wooden as a result.

And here's another crucial point. It's difficult to buy in to your message if people don't first buy in to you. So your goal is not to simply have a conversation, but to also create a connection.

Here's the deal:

Connection is crucial.

The context of this will clearly influence your approach, but here are four insights to help you connect with your audience, whatever the size.

1. **Passion outweighs polish.** If the subject matter means a lot to you, then make sure your audience knows that. That doesn't mean jumping up and down like a kangaroo on steroids. But express through your energy and tone of voice why you believe what you're talking about matters and why it should matter to them. An audience is likely to be both more forgiving and receptive when they sense your passion. Remember:

Being too polished can actually become a barrier.

Your communication could be perceived more as an act or performance than genuine and authentic, which is exactly how Sophie came across.

2. **We like people like us.** None of us are perfect, so where appropriate be prepared to share some of your struggles, not solely your successes. Clearly don't share too many or you can lose your credibility. But if you appear too clever and portray your life and career as one big breeze, people will not relate to you. And when they don't relate to you, they don't connect with you.

The truth is:

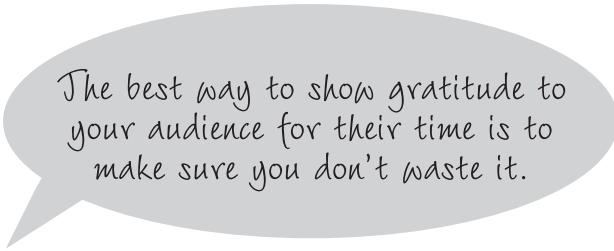
Bragging bores. Big time.

Now, weave your credibility into your message by all means. Share your successes. But if you get the balance wrong, you'll alienate rather than engage your audience. Most people have had challenges in their lives – sharing yours connects you to the people you're speaking to.

3. **Park your platitudes.** It seems to be a tradition for many speakers to try and ingratiate themselves with their audience. Remember, when you say 'thank you

for inviting me', most of your audience didn't have a say in whether you spoke or not. (Thank the organizers, not your audience.) Be careful of showing too much deference to people. Telling people what an honour and a privilege it is to be there bores most people. The best way to show respect is to deliver a message of value.

Remember this:



The best way to show gratitude to your audience for their time is to make sure you don't waste it.

4. **Give it to me straight: too much slick makes people sick.** Be honest. Talk from experience. Share your story. I'm often hired by organizations to share ideas on how they can deal more positively with change. I share my story of losing my job through ill health and wondering if I'd lose my house as well.

In other words, I'm saying to my audience 'I've struggled through some major changes too'. The changes I've experienced and the challenges I've faced could be very different to theirs, but I highlight the varied emotions I experienced – loss of identity, uncertainty; positivity one minute, desperation the next. My audience quickly realizes they're not being lectured at by someone who feels superior to them, but being spoken to by someone who has empathy with them.



Pause for Thought

What would be your main insights from reading this chapter? Have you ever come across someone like Sophie? Are you ever guilty of parking your personality and going into corporate presenter mode? When you speak, which version of you do most people see – the real you (which is still well prepared and professional) or the wooden corporate version?



My One Thing

We've explored several ideas in this chapter, including the fact that people may consider themselves better communicators than they actually are because no one has told them otherwise. We've also explored four ways to connect with your audience. Here's a reminder:

1. Passion outweighs polish.
2. We like people like us.
3. Park your platitudes.
4. Give it to me straight.

Which **one** of the above will you give particular attention to when you're next communicating with others?

WAY 2:



A question I commonly ask people is this:

‘Who is the most important person you’ll ever talk to?’

And the answer?

Youself.

Think about it. Whose opinions and thoughts do you tend to listen to most? Whose advice do you ultimately act upon? In a nutshell: your own.

You see, the conversations we have with ourselves can have a profound effect upon us. These internal conversations or thoughts can determine whether or not we even take the opportunity to speak to others. Seriously, that’s how important and influential they are.

For instance, if your internal conversation goes something like this: ‘I hate giving presentations, I get so nervous’ or ‘What’s so good about me that I want to stand up and speak?’ – then you’re struggling before you’ve even started. It’s like an athlete being disqualified for making a false start – we can disqualify ourselves through our internal self-talk.

But the flipside is also true. We can put ourselves in a far better position to achieve success if our attitude and mindset are right. Obvious? Absolutely. But not something we always pay attention to before we speak. So let’s explore three areas where you need to think about your attitude when it comes to making an impact as a communicator.

1. Your attitude towards your topic

Now there’s just a possibility that you’re sometimes required to speak on a subject that is unlikely to be voted ‘The world’s most sexiest and engaging topic ever’. Am I right?

I once had to deliver a seminar on behalf of another training company called ‘How to discipline employees and correct performance problems’. Bet you’re gutted you missed that one, aren’t you?! Equally, if your topic of expertise is ‘Gas fitting in Siberia’ or ‘The history of the Belgian Boomerang Association’ you might not see the crowds flocking to hear you. But on a more serious note, you may have to give a financial update, present a business plan or talk about issues related to health and safety. And here’s the danger. You convince yourself before you’ve even started that the topic is boring.

I’ve actually spoken at conferences and heard other speakers announce at the start of their presentation ‘And now for the boring bit’. Guess what? It usually is. And labelling your topic as boring is not only self-fulfilling but also insulting to your audience. It’s self-fulfilling because if your attitude is ‘this is boring’ you’ll do nothing to make it engaging and interesting. Second, you’re insulting your audience by basically saying: ‘I’m about to waste your time by talking about something which has no relevance or interest to you’. Agree?

Can I possibly suggest that, if that’s the case, you shouldn’t be talking about it? Seriously, you shouldn’t. However, what we usually mean by the term ‘boring’ is that we recognize it might not be the sexiest topic on the planet, and could even be quite complex, but people do still need to know about it. Hopefully it does have some interest or relevance to people, otherwise it would be a complete waste of time talking about it. I mean, what intelligent person would spend thirty minutes or more talking about a subject that they knew had no relevance or interest to their audience? Please tell me you don’t know people like that.

You see, here's what's absolutely crucial to understand if we're to speak so people really listen. It's a reminder of what we looked at earlier in the Fourth Great Sin of Speaking: 'Focusing on features rather than selling benefits'.

Communication is far more than telling. It's about selling.

Why? Because both in and outside the workplace you have to sell both yourself and your ideas, whatever the context. Manager, supervisor, teacher, politician, job candidate, work colleague, student, lecturer, salesperson, parent ... the list goes on.

So your aim is actually quite simple. Make sure your attitude to what you're going to say is positive. Maybe your message won't be life changing. People might not be moved to tears or doubled up with laughter as you explore the health and safety aspects of climbing a ladder or looking at last quarter's sales figures. But even so, it's down to you and no one else to help your audience understand why they need to listen to you.

The truth is:

You've got to sell it,
not just say it.

You have to be clear in your own mind why what you're about to say has some relevance and interest to your audience. Now admittedly, it might not score very high on the

scale of relevance and interest, but it must at least register a score. If it doesn't, then you really do have to question why on earth you're talking about it.

Here's an example from my own experience of the importance and impact of your attitude towards your topic.

Fiona was interesting. She was a finance director I was coaching.

'The problem is Paul, finance is really boring to most people. I hate having to talk about it, but I always have to do a fifteen-minute slot about it at the staff conference.'

I asked 'So how do you deal with delivering a dull topic to an audience who don't want to hear it?'

'Well, I just try and race through it as quickly as possible and get it out of the way. Finishing it doesn't really give me a sense of satisfaction, but more a sense of relief.'

Sad, eh? A person of influence and knowledge feeling so negative and uninspired about speaking to her colleagues. However, our coaching session had only just begun, and I realized the first thing we needed to work on was her attitude.

I started by challenging her about her assumptions. She assumed people find the topic of finance boring. Really? Is that always the case? After all, money makes the world go round, and finance can be fascinating to some people. What people struggle with is being drowned in complex detail that seems to have no direct impact or relevance to them. Now that approach *is* boring. But if financial information is communicated in a way they can grasp, and they're not overwhelmed with figures, then why shouldn't

people find it of interest? The financial health of the organization has a direct impact on their future.

What Fiona needed to do was to give people a reason to be interested. Her audience needed to understand why they should care – and that was up to her to spell out – rather than having to figure it out for themselves. In other words, she had to sell what she was about to say, particularly if, on the surface, the topic didn’t appear to be especially engaging.

Fiona took my advice and focused more on the question ‘How can I make this more interesting?’ rather than the defeatist ‘Why is this so boring?’ Now, she didn’t receive an Oscar for her performance, or even a standing ovation. But as I sat in the audience, I noticed people were engaged. She didn’t apologize for talking about finance. Instead she allowed her passion for the subject to come over to her audience. She even managed to include some visual images rather than a stream of figures. Was there room for improvement? Absolutely. But I’ve a funny feeling that next time she stands up to speak, her colleagues won’t be wishing they could get up and leave.



Pause for Thought

How would you describe your attitude towards your topic? Are you eager to speak or just relieved when it’s over? In what ways could you develop a more positive attitude to what you’re talking about?

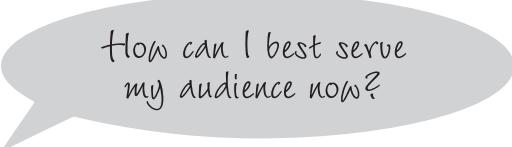
Now, onto the second area we need to focus on.

2. Attitude towards your audience

I readily admit that speaking in front of an audience can be daunting at times. There's a sense in which, when you stand to speak, you're exposing yourself to others (figuratively speaking, that is). Clearly, this is less the case when in a more informal sit-down meeting, but there is something about having all eyes focused on you that can make you feel vulnerable.

Of course, some people thrive on being in the spotlight, but many others will happily do all they can to avoid it. Part of the reason for this could be because we're concerned that our audience is in some way judging us and wanting us to fail – a belief which can understandably heighten our anxiety. But in the majority of situations (I admit there may be some exceptions), the audience wants you to succeed. Now, we'll look at dealing with nerves and anxiety in more detail later on in the book, but if you want to help create confidence in yourself, you need to focus your attention on the most important people in the room – the people you're talking to.

Focus less on you and more on them. Your attitude in preparing to talk, whatever the context, is simply this:



How can I best serve
my audience now?

When we focus less on what can go wrong and more on how we can make things go right for our audience, our confidence grows and our nerves subside.

Remember the Third Great Sin of Speaking – ‘Failure to consider or understand our audience’s needs’? This

is your opportunity to address that. Think more about the benefit and value you can bring to those you're speaking to.

The truth is:

The more you think about
your audience, the more
they'll think of you.

It's crucial we get this clear in our heads. It's about them.

Their needs.

Their concerns.

Their challenges.

Your goal is simple. Relate *your* message to *their* world.

By doing so you're channelling your understandable nervous energy away from yourself and more towards your audience. And remember, no matter how senior you may be in terms of your position in the organization, your goal is to serve your audience, not to appear superior to them.

Likewise, if your audience is more senior than you, your goal remains the same. Serve them. There must be some reason you've been asked to speak. There must be some value you're there to bring – otherwise, why have you been asked to speak?

So, unless you're part of an organization that enjoys the sadistic and humiliating ritual of seeing their staff die on stage, my guess is you're speaking for a positive reason. So

be mindful of that and see speaking as an opportunity to grasp, not a calamity to be avoided.

Here's the deal:

If you want to really help your audience, think about how to serve them, rather than simply impress them.

OK, now let's explore the third and final area in relation to our attitude.

3. Your attitude towards yourself

While we may worry about what our audience thinks of us, often our biggest critic is actually someone else. Ourselves. Having coached several hundred people over the years, I'd estimate that two-thirds are overly critical of their performance.

Now don't get me wrong – wanting to improve is a positive thing. And self-reflection is a great way to grow and develop. But ...

Be aware of your inner critic – the voice inside your head that highlights your weaknesses and undermines your confidence.

And here's the challenging part – your inner critic's impact on you can occur before, during and even after your talk.

However, please don't confuse this with the voice that keeps you on your toes and wants you to be at your best. I refer to that voice as your inner coach. But the inner critic does the opposite – it undermines your confidence. And it's these conversations you have with your inner critic that create the anxiety many people experience when they speak or present to others.

So how can you overcome it?

First, look back to our previous point. Focus on meeting your audience's needs. You cannot have two simultaneous conversations going on inside your head. When you're thinking about how best to help others, you cannot also be beating yourself up.

Second, recognize that the voice inside your head is not unique to you. Believe me, I've worked with thousands of people around the globe looking at the whole area of mindset. The challenge of the inner critic is a common phenomenon across all cultures. It's not just you, OK?

So accept that you're not weird. You're rather normal. Well, to some extent anyway. And remember, the conversations in your head are just thoughts. And you can decide how long you entertain them for. The best way to do this is not to say 'I must stop thinking negative thoughts'. Trust me, that won't work. The key is to replace the unhelpful conversations with your inner critic with more constructive ones. Here are some phrases and questions you might like to focus on.

Before your talk:

'Relax, this is an opportunity to serve my audience.'

‘The only reason I’m speaking is because someone believes enough in me and trusts me to do a good job.’

‘Remember, it’s about them.’

‘You’ve done the preparation, you know your purpose, now be present and give it your best.’

‘My audience wants this to go well.’

After your talk:

‘What can I learn from that experience?’

‘What went well?’

‘What, if anything, would I do differently next time?’

These are far more constructive in their tone. So start using them, because I can assure you they will make a difference.

Hang on ... there's more

There are some people, however, whose challenge is not their inner critic. It’s actually the opposite. Their issue is more to do with their ‘inner complacent’. These people are prone to being too relaxed, and are more likely to be guilty of the Fifth Great Sin of Speaking – ‘Winging it’. They’re caught up in their own complacency and seem to lack the self-awareness or desire to appreciate that no matter how experienced they are, they can always improve. As a result, they don’t seek out feedback, and if they were to receive any negative feedback they’d be quick to dismiss it. Sadly, their attitude is not ‘how can I improve?’ Their complacency both blinds and deceives them, and prevents them from seeking ways to get better. In fact, some would say such complacency borders on arrogance.

Here's the deal:

Self-delusion suffocates
self-development.



Pause for Thought

We've already reflected on your attitude towards your topic, so how would you rate your attitude towards your audience? Do you agree that it's helpful to see yourself as serving them? Are there times when you think such an attitude would not be helpful? If so, when?

And what about your attitude towards yourself? Could you identify with the inner critic at all? If so, when are you most aware of it – before, during or after your talk? Perhaps you sense you may at times be complacent. If so, I hope reading this book is challenging some of that complacency.



My One Thing

Decide now which one of these three areas you need to focus on to help you speak with influence and impact:

- Your attitude towards your topic.
- You attitude towards your audience.
- Your attitude towards yourself.

WAY 3:

START
AT THE
END

Imagine you've been asked to give a presentation at work, or make a pitch to a client, or present at a job interview. What's the first question most people ask themselves? In my experience it's usually this:

'What am I going to say?'

Seems a fair question, doesn't it? But wait.

Do yourself a favour. Don't start there.

Here's what you need to ask yourself.

'What's the purpose and the point of what I'm going to say?'

Or to put it another way:

'What am I aiming to have achieved by the time I've shut up?'

You see, if you're not clear on the point of your communication, it's the equivalent of standing blindfolded in a boxing ring, throwing your arms about in the vain hope you might hit your opponent. If you're not sure of the target you're aiming for, then almost everything you say will miss the mark – unless you're really lucky. And I'd rather you relied on skill than luck if you want to speak with influence and impact.

Here's the deal:



Without clarity of purpose you'll lack confidence and conviction.

Let's be honest, how can you make a positive impression if you're not totally clear on the impact you're trying to make? But the reality is that many communicators suffer from something I call fuzzy focus. Trust me, when you find yourself saying the following, you're already in trouble.

'I just want to give people an update.'

'I'm just going to chat through some slides.'

'I'm telling people what I know about the topic.'

Ever heard or said any of those? They seem harmless enough, don't they? But remember the phrases from earlier? 'Why should I care?' and 'So what's your point?' Well, your words could fall on deaf ears unless you've given people a good enough reason to sit up and listen.

In order to achieve that, you need to be clear on your answers to the following questions *before* you start to plan what you're going to say.

If we return to the above examples, ask yourself: why is this update important? In what way will my audience benefit from what I'm going to say? Will this update require them to stop or start doing something? If so, what; and when do they need to take action?

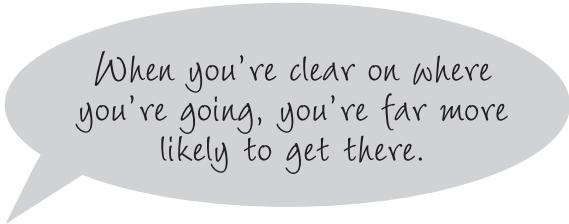
And what's the point of you just 'chatting through some slides'? You sound more laid back than a holidaymaker sipping cocktails on Wigan Pier. I want to be engaged and be given a reason why I should listen. You being laid back can lead to your audience tuning out.

So, be clear on why what you're going to talk about is important to your audience. What problem or issue are

you addressing, and how will they benefit from what you're saying?

Finally, don't just tell people what you know about a topic. Believe me, your audience isn't that bothered by what you know. What they really care about is how your knowledge will help them in some way.

The reality is:



When you're clear on where you're going, you're far more likely to get there.

If you want to speak so people really listen, you're far more likely to succeed if the audience understands how the journey you're taking them on will help them. But they're unlikely to be a willing travelling companion if they're asking themselves: 'So what's the point of what I'm hearing?'

Now, in order to 'start at the end', here are three things you have to be clear about in your own mind. If you're not, there'll be confusion in other people's minds. What I'm about to share is one of the most important takeaways you'll ever have. Digest this and I guarantee you'll talk with greater clarity and purpose.

Ever had a KFC? I haven't, but it's on my bucket list. But it's not KFC I want to talk about. It's KFD. It's the KFD takeaway that will make all the difference to how you communicate.

So let's unpack what those three letters mean for you and your message. Here goes.

K = Know Be clear on what you want your audience to know. Remember not to overwhelm them with content and drown them in detail. Ask yourself: what's the number one fact my audience absolutely has to know as a result of my talk?

F = Feel People don't change behaviour or buy in to a cause simply because they have the knowledge. They need to feel affected emotionally as well. So, how do you want your audience to feel AFTER you've spoken? Challenged, motivated, inspired, confident, reassured, entertained? There's possibly a combination of emotions, but if you had to choose just one, which would it be?

D = Do So, people can know stuff and even feel different. But what do you want them to do as a result? If you're not clear on what you want people to do, believe me your audience will not do anything. You may have amused them, entertained them and even made them think. But so what? Was your message just there to fill time, or to make a tangible difference? As my friend and communication expert Andy Bounds says: 'If you don't point out the next step, there won't be a next step.'

So start your preparation by working through the KFD process before you move onto preparing your content. By doing so, you'll save time and it will help you decide what content to include and what to leave out. As a result, you'll be more focused when delivering your message and can communicate with greater clarity and therefore confidence. Trust me, that will make a refreshing change from

some of the presentations your audience have had to endure previously.



Pause for Thought

How focused are you when it comes to delivering your message? Do you naturally ‘start at the end’ in terms of your preparation? In terms of using the KFD approach, think of situations when that would be especially appropriate.



My One Thing

Identify **one** presentation you need to give (or conversation you need to have). Now ask yourself:

- What one thing is it absolutely crucial that my audience know?
- How do I want them to feel?
- What **one** thing do they need to do next?

WAY 4:

**SORT OUT YOUR
SKELETONS**

As you'll discover later, it's my son Matt who's the medic in our house, not me. Applying Savlon and a plaster is the sum total of my medical expertise, which I admit isn't a great deal of help if you've broken your leg. But even I've worked out the following: without a skeleton we'd all resemble a crumpled up piece of clothing. We might not see it, but our skeleton holds everything together. The same is true in our communication.

Without a strong skeleton or structure your talk or presentation can literally fall apart. You may remember the Seventh Great Sin of Speaking that we explored earlier was 'Taking people on a pointless ramble' – well, this chapter will show you several alternative ways to plan the journey you and your audience are taking, without unnecessary diversions and pointless stop offs.

1. Always use the 3 Gs

This is the simplest and most generic of skeletons in terms of how you structure your communication. It can be applied to any presentation, talk, or meeting, and is not dependent on context. The 3 Gs are ...

Grab 'em
Give 'em
Goodbye.

Let me elaborate on each one.

Grab 'em. Put quite simply, decide how you will start your talk. What's going to happen in the first ninety seconds to ensure you have your audience's attention? We'll explore

this more in our next chapter ‘Grab ’em by the eyeballs’, where you’ll discover several other ideas that will help you create a compelling opening to your talk. Above all, make sure you answer the underlying question in your audience’s minds – ‘*Why should I care?*’

Give ’em. So what will be your main points? What do your audience need to know in order that your objectives are achieved? What do you want to show them on the journey? Where are the intended stop-off points? What stories or examples can you use to both illustrate your points and also make them memorable?

Goodbye. Lots of people work on their opening, but give little thought to their close. The danger can be that people continue to ramble because in answer to the question ‘Are we nearly there yet?’, the reply from some presenters might as well be: ‘I’m not sure. I haven’t quite decided where “there” is.’

Other speakers end abruptly or fizzle out like a fading firework. Why? They’ve just not given enough attention to their goodbye. And please, please don’t end on questions. That’s never a great way to say goodbye. Questions may come towards the end, but shouldn’t be at the very end.

Why?

Here’s the main reason. If you end on questions it’s your audience, not you, who determines how your presentation ends. They have control, not you. A possible scenario could be that the last question asked is one you don’t know the answer to, which could potentially harm your credibility. And that’s not how you want to end your presentation. That’s not a smart move. So always ensure you have the

last word. That means that after the last question you take control and end in the way *you* want to end. It might be with a story, a quote or a recap of your key points. Often it's helpful (and indeed necessary) to spell out what the next steps are, or the specific actions people need to take as a result of your talk. So make sure it's a strong goodbye.

The deal is:



Last impressions last.

2. The Aristotle approach

Aristotle was a Greek guy who arrived on the scene around 200 years after Aesop (we'll talk more about him later). His interests ranged from poetry to politics, but he's known above all for being a philosopher and scientist who was influenced by another couple of Greek guys, Socrates and Plato.

Now here's how Aristotle can help us to communicate with influence and impact. He came up with a five-point plan to create a persuasive argument. It's a technique that the late Steve Jobs used – and he was a guy who was legendary for his presentations and the amount of time he spent preparing them. So, I guess if it's good enough for Steve ...

Here are Aristotle's five steps:

1. Tell a story or deliver a statement that arouses the audience's interest.
2. Pose a problem or question that has to be solved or answered.

3. Offer a solution.
4. Describe the specific benefits of the solution.
5. Make a call to action.

Aristotle may have been a philosopher, but he knew the power of simplicity. His approach was simple. Straightforward. Direct. Just like your communication needs to be.

Steve Jobs and many like him didn't slide out of their mothers' wombs as gifted orators. They weren't in the nursery playground making speeches while other children built sandcastles and played hide and seek. But what they did do to become great communicators was learn strategies to engage their audience, work hard and practise. And sometimes that begins with following the advice of a Greek philosopher on how to structure your message.

3. The power of 4 Ps

I first came across this approach via Andy Bounds. I've referred to Andy previously, and in my opinion he has to be one of the world's best communication coaches, which is why I asked him to write the foreword to this book. The 4 Ps are more specific than the 3 Gs, and this is a structure to use only in certain contexts. This would include when you need to communicate bad news, or when you want to persuade people who are senior to you and want a short and concise presentation. The 4 Ps are Position, Problem, Possibilities and Propose. Let's unpack these further.

Position: The current situation is X.

Problem: The problem or pain caused as a result of position X is ...

Possibilities: The options we have in dealing with position X.

You can then outline a range of options to deal with the problem and it might be appropriate, depending on the situation and the audience, to ask others for their ideas on possible solutions. (People are generally more enthusiastic about their own ideas.)

This ‘possibilities’ step is also helpful in reassuring people that whatever conclusion you reach, you have explored other options. It helps people, especially those who might not automatically positively embrace your message, to at least see the logic of your argument given the alternative options.

Propose: This is the step when, having looked at the possibilities, you propose a specific option.

The ‘4 Ps’ approach again provides the skeleton to which you can add the flesh of your argument and provides a clear route for your journey.

4. Chronological and logical

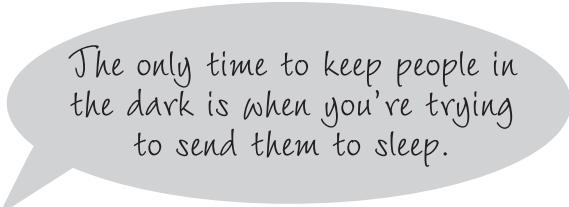
Sometimes your talk will simply be a chronological and logical journey. There’s no need to complicate matters. Keep it simple. So it might unfold in the following way:

- Let’s start by looking back.
- During this time we did the following as a company ...
- Now we find ourselves at ...
- What we’ve learnt is ...
- Where we’re going now is ...

- We're taking that particular route because ...
- The challenges we anticipate are ...
- Together we'll overcome these challenges by ...
- The first thing you need to do is ...

This journey is very clear. It's logical, but can include stories and slides to help illuminate the journey. You could even have an opening slide of a map where the journey you're taking is highlighted.

The deal is:



The only time to keep people in the dark is when you're trying to send them to sleep.

This example could be used to structure a meeting, not just a presentation. And by following it you keep people on track and, hopefully, as a result no one will get lost. And note the ending. It's a call to action with the focus being on the next step.

5. Adopt a three-point turn

This is a term you're probably more familiar with in a driving context – although in my case a thirteen-point turn might at times be more accurate. As skeletons go, it's the one I use most regularly. It will still incorporate the 3 Gs, which I believe are a guiding principle for all presentations, but it also provides some real flexibility as well as a focus in terms of your structure.

Clearly, the nature of what you want to talk about will sometimes require you covering more than three points, but when you have a more generic topic or more of a free reign on what you want to talk about, it's a simple formula to follow. For a brilliant example of a three-point turn, let's go this time to a man born in California, of Syrian rather than Greek stock – it's someone I've referred to previously – our old but sadly departed friend Steve Jobs.

When you have a moment, Google 'Steve Jobs 2005 Stanford Commencement Speech'. In the opening thirty seconds of his speech he says the following:

‘Today I want to tell you three stories from my life.
That’s it. No big deal. Just three stories.’

And that's exactly what he does. His whole speech is centred on three stories. But such a simple approach was typical of Jobs. The stories are deeply personal, drawing from his own life experience, and are rich in visual imagery and personal insight. But what holds it all together is the simple structure of having three points. If you want an example not just of this approach but also of the power of stories and the impact of a strong goodbye, then please, do yourself a favour. Make it a priority to watch this speech. It will take you less than fifteen minutes to do so.

So, before reading any further, decide when in the next twenty-four hours you intend to watch it. If you don't decide now, you'll forget. Please don't just skip onto the next point – we're almost at the end of this chapter anyway. Make a date to watch it. You won't be disappointed.

Oh, and by the way, having read this section you'll start to notice how often things are expressed in threes – trust me, you will.

That's the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Right, I'm off to munch on a Mars Bar. Apparently one a day helps you work, rest and play.



Pause for Thought

What's the typical way you go about structuring your communication? Which of the ideas explored do you use already? How aware are you of the need to sort out your skeletons?



My One Thing

To avoid taking people on a pointless ramble, sort out your skeletons. We explored five possible ways to do this. Which one will you choose to use in your next presentation?

- The 3 Gs.
- The Aristotle approach.
- The power of 4 Ps.
- Chronological and logical.
- Adopt a three-point turn.

P.S. Don't forget to watch that Steve Jobs video.

WAY 5:

GRAB 'EM
BY THE



You know that phrase ‘Never judge a book by its cover?’ Nice sentiment, isn’t it? But it’s almost impossible to do. Agree?

When Susan Boyle stepped on stage in 2009 to perform on the television show *Britain’s Got Talent*, everyone was judging her. And I mean everyone. Moments later that first impression changed. Forever.

Now Susan Boyle was able to do that because she had an amazing voice. She helped create a historical TV moment because of it. But let’s be honest, most of us are unlikely to be able to call upon a similar talent to engage our audience. Am I right? (And if I’m not, put this book down, get yourself an agent and get touring.)

Now, apart from her incredible voice, Susan also had another advantage that we often won’t have when communicating with others. Her audience weren’t sitting there checking work emails on their phones and seeing how many ‘likes’ they’d had from their latest Facebook post. Neither had their brains been exhausted from having previously sat through endless presentations where they’d been bombarded by facts and statistics. She had a captive audience waiting to be entertained.

We, on the other hand, might not be so fortunate.

That’s why, whatever the context of your communication, your initial engagement with your audience is crucial. I’m not saying it’s impossible to overcome a nervous, hesitant start. But it is difficult. When you fail to engage your audience at the beginning of your talk you’ve made your job twice as hard. People can be quick to switch off and aren’t always easy to turn back on. Not only that, but if you

possess a degree of self-awareness (which sadly a number of presenters and speakers clearly don't), you'll be aware you're not engaging your audience, which can further fuel your anxiety, which in turn can hinder your ability to communicate effectively.

On the other hand, if you make a good strong start where you immediately engage your audience, something else is likely to happen too. You begin to relax.

The question is: how do you grab people by the eyeballs and get their attention? (Remember, even in a one-to-one meeting with someone, you still want to get their attention and make an impact.) Let's explore four ways. I'm not suggesting you use all of them at the same time – but do make sure you are conscious of using at least one of these strategies the next time you speak.

1. Create a compelling title

This is something most people never give any thought to. But by doing so you could have gained your audience's attention before you've even opened your mouth.

Here's what I mean.

I have a lot of experience in the area of stress (my family and friends reckon I'm good at creating it). In my early days as a speaker, I didn't place much focus on the title of my talks. So very often my name would appear on the conference programme alongside the word 'Stress'. Now because of my high-energy style I was often placed on the programme just after lunch. However, most of my audience hadn't seen me before, and so would be unaware of my style. All they had to look forward to after their plate full of egg sandwiches, onion bhajis and sticky toffee

pudding (hopefully not all on the same plate) was to listen to some guy harp on about stress.

But what if my title was different? What if alongside my name was the headline ‘What to do when you’re all stressed up with no one to choke?’ It creates a different impact, right? And that’s what I started to call my talks on stress. Now of course you also have to know your audience. I’m not suggesting when you next present to a senior group of people within your company you have to come up with a fun, creative and possibly amusing title. But I am saying, think more about your title.

I also speak on relationships at work. Depending on the context I might use the title ‘How to build winning relationships with customers and colleagues’. Nothing earth shattering, I admit. But it does at least give my audience a clear benefit and reason to listen to me. Alternatively, I have also called the same session ‘How to handle not strangle the people you live and work with’. It gets your attention, doesn’t it?

The Virgin Group have a staff survey called ‘How deep is your love?’ What a great way to engage their staff rather than simply calling it ‘Staff survey’. And it’s completely in keeping with their company culture.

Here’s another example of how I’ve used a title to grab my audience.

For several years I’ve worked with a Premiership football club in Manchester. (I won’t say which one, but they wear blue.) Occasionally I’ve run workshops for both players and staff. These are normally optional to attend, but when I was working with the Under 21s it was mandatory. It was

fairly obvious from the players' body language that a number of them didn't want to be there. However, as they drifted into the room in their ones and twos I revealed the title of my session. I posed it as a question.

My opening slide simply said this: '*Success. Is it just a matter of luck?*' Even before I began speaking, the players who arrived early were discussing the question among themselves. They were immediately engaged and I hadn't even started. Result.

The same can apply to the subject headings of your emails. I wanted to have a meeting with one of the coaches at the club I work for. He was well known for two things. Rarely replying to emails, and having an obsessive desire to improve as a coach. Initially my subject heading was 'Catch up coffee?' But just before I pressed send, I re-read my email. Then I asked myself a question. Have I even given this guy a compelling reason to open my email, never mind read it? I changed the title. The new one read '*How to make next season even better*'. I got a reply within thirty minutes.

I share these ideas in the public presentation masterclasses that I run. One delegate who worked in health and safety – a notoriously dry topic in many people's minds – started to use the following title for his talks: '*Safety doesn't happen by accident*'. Clever, don't you think? Another client, an insurance company that works with schools, used this title when presenting on the impact of staff absenteeism: '*Does absence really make the heart grow fonder?*'

However, I couldn't finish this particular tip without sharing what I consider to be one of the best titles for a

talk I've ever come across. It came from a guy who works for a local council in England. He was in charge of cemeteries in the area (a bit of a dead-end job if you ask me). Due to the age of some of the gravestones and a spell of heavy rainfall, some of them had become unstable and therefore unsafe. In one instance, one gravestone had actually fallen over and injured a woman. The purpose of his talk was to warn the public of the safety issues and also ensure that unstable gravestones that people were responsible for were kept secure. The title of his talk? '*Monumental erections – how to keep yours up.*'

I rest my case.



Pause for Thought

So, what do you reckon – could you come up with a more engaging title for your presentation than the one you currently use? If so, play around with a few alternatives. Let the ideas marinade in your mind. In my experience the title will come to you when you're least expecting it.

2. Remember the 90/90 Rule

Let's be very clear. Aside from your title, creating a strong opening really does start the moment you open your mouth. It's been suggested that, when you're giving a talk or presentation, ninety percent of the impact you're likely to make on your audience is made within the first ninety seconds. Some say it's even less. Either

way, you've a golden window where you can begin to either win or quickly lose your audience. Now we already know we judge a book by its cover, and that first impressions are powerful (although clearly not always right). So it's important that from a mindset point of view, you hit the ground running in terms of your opening remarks.

That doesn't mean eventually. That means immediately.

Have an attitude that you're running a sprint race, not a marathon. In a marathon you can afford to make a slow start. In the 100 metres you can't. Even Usain Bolt is vulnerable to defeat or disqualification if he makes a slow or false start. And those opening ninety seconds of your talk are as much about what you don't do as about what you *do* do.

So don't start with a long rambling pile of platitudes about how honoured you are to be there. It might be polite, but can I be honest with you? It's also boring (we mentioned this in a previous chapter, if you remember). Don't start by showing a first slide that's full of a list of objectives for your session, and then slowly go through them one by one. Is that a safe and standard opening? Absolutely. Will it help you stand out from the crowd? Nope.

Also, avoid starting with a joke unless you're a comedian or have used it so many times previously that you know you're guaranteed a laugh. Could it work? Yes. In fact, it could help you get off to a flyer. But if it doesn't, you're already fighting an uphill battle that you've created. You might recover, but why put yourself in that position in the first place?

Now, as for what you do in the first ninety seconds, there are lots of options. We'll be exploring them throughout the rest of this book. But simply having an awareness that your opening is important and can make an impact is crucial. When I'm coaching my clients I expect two things at the beginning of their talk. Energy, and for them to be engaging. OK, if you're talking to a small group of people the energy may be different compared to speaking to a large group, but even so, don't treat this as a laid back, casual conversation that you're having at the end of an extremely tiring day. Be relaxed by all means, but also be focused. Be clear on what you're going to say or do from the moment you open your mouth. You get to create that first impression. So don't leave it to chance. Influence it by how you begin within the first ninety seconds.

So, depending on the context, your goal is that your audience is having some (or all) of these thoughts:

- This could be interesting.
- I need to listen to this person.
- I'll check my phone later; I don't want to miss this.
- I'm intrigued. I want to know more.
- Whatever I was thinking before has gone right out of my head.
- I'm gutted I'm going to have to leave early. This sounds like it's going to be great.
- I've a funny feeling I'm going to enjoy this.
- Wow, they certainly know what they're talking about.

So remember:



It's the 'GO/GO Rule' — not
the 'I'll Warm Up
Eventually Rule'.

Here's the third way to grab your audience by the eyeballs.

3. Involve your audience

Speaking and presenting can be viewed as a one-way form of communication, where you do all the work and your audience are nothing more than passive spectators. But that doesn't have to be the case. You might want to start with the intention, 'In what way can I involve my audience?'

There are several ways. Here are just a few:

Get them to physically do something. This is particularly the case if they've been sat around for a long time before you speak. Get them moving in order to create some energy. I might ask people to stand, meet up with someone in the room and discuss what's going well in their world at the moment, or what they've got from the conference so far. Or I might prime them for my talk by asking them to discuss what their single biggest challenge is at work right now. I will then often ask people to shout out their answers to me.

Other times I ask people to raise their hands to a question such as ‘How many of you have flown in the last two years?’ It not only creates immediate engagement, but it provides a link to the opening point I want to make in my talk.

In my ‘How to Communicate with Influence and Impact’ seminars I actually have some of my key messages typed up on paper inside an envelope. I then randomly hand out the envelopes to my audience members. I’ve eight envelopes in total, each containing a separate point. People take note of the number on the envelope and only open it when I ask them to do so. It’s a great way of keeping people’s attention, particularly if you happen to be the person with the envelope.

If you’re running a team meeting you could start with the question ‘Who’s got some good news related to work they’d like to share?’ One client I know who does this then hands out some small treats – usually chocolates or mini cakes – to the people who’ve shared. It creates energy and engagement immediately.

Sometimes the involvement may be less physical, but more mental or emotional. I might say: ‘If I had to use a metaphor to describe my life, I’d say it’s a bit of a rollercoaster. I’ve had some highs but I’ve had some lows along the way too.’ Then I pause and look at my audience and ask, ‘Can anyone else relate to that?’ I then pause again while maintaining eye contact. People begin to nod. If they don’t, I break the silence by saying ‘So it’s just me then’. This usually creates a laugh, and then I repeat the question. I’m getting my audience to realize

that when I ask a question, I am after some kind of response.



Pause for Thought

Take a moment to reflect on how you can involve your audience when you're communicating with them. Which of the ideas I've given could work for you? When could you next try this approach?

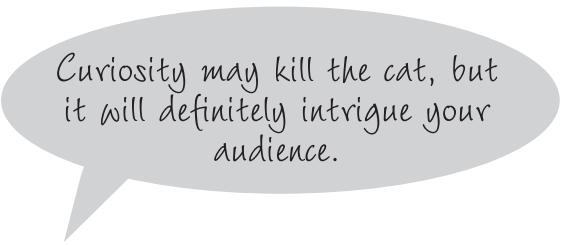
Now for our final idea on how to grab people by the eyeballs.

4. Create curiosity

I have a confession. I quite like a bit of gossip. When someone says 'Can I let you in on a secret?' the last thing I'm thinking is 'Are you sure that's wise? Have you really considered the implications of what you're about to tell me?' I may try and temper my enthusiasm on the surface, but deep down I'm screaming 'Tell me, tell me'.

I once had a girlfriend who would say 'You'll never guess who I saw today ...' and when I asked who, would reply 'I better not say'. What? Who does that? I'd nag her relentlessly the rest of the day (to be fair my nagging had normally got her to spill the beans in less than three minutes) as there was no way I was going to be left in limbo. I just had to know. I think deep down I'm not the only one who feels this way.

The truth is:



Curiosity may kill the cat, but
it will definitely intrigue your
audience.

You see, most people are suckers for wanting to know something others don't. Maybe it feeds our ego and makes us feel important. Perhaps there's just a natural sense of curiosity within all of us. After all, it's the insatiable curiosity of a small child that helps them discover their world. The reality is that curiosity and human development are inextricably linked. Think for a moment of how many TV soap operas use this technique to ensure we stay tuned after the adverts or remember to record the next episode. Millions of people were gripped in the late 1970s by one simple question: 'Who shot JR?' If you're too young to remember, make sure you Google it. You'll be staggered to learn who *really* shot him. And did he survive? You'll have to find out, won't you?

My curiosity has even been the cause of family rows. I'm not a huge fan of quiz shows, but there are times when I'm channel surfing that I stumble across one. *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?* is one show that never fails to grab my attention. Within minutes I'm hooked. And the cause of our family rows? It's when the contestant, having wrestled for what seems like hours before giving their answer, then sits and stares anxiously, waiting to see if they're right or not.

The wait can be excruciating. Finally, the quiz host (in this case, Chris Tarrant) looks like he will put them and us out of our misery. And then what does he say? Something along the lines of ‘We’ll find out if you’ve won £250,000 right after the break’. I don’t care if we’ve a restaurant table booked. I’m not even bothered if we’re already running twenty minutes late. I have to know what happens next.

Now here’s my point. How about we tap into this human desire for ‘filling in the gaps in our knowledge’ when we’re speaking, and by doing so speak in a way that means people really want to listen?

Here’s how I do it.

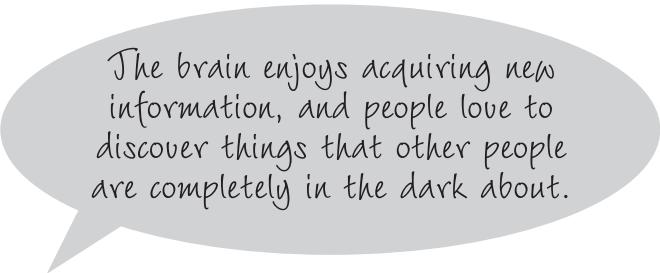
When I’m talking about SUMO, I explain that it’s an acronym standing for Shut Up, Move On. However, I then recall the challenge I had with some schools who were keen to use the SUMO principles with children but weren’t keen on the phrase ‘Shut Up’. I explain my dilemma, but don’t immediately reveal how I overcame this objection.

I want to create some curiosity.

Eventually I let my audience ‘into the secret’ by explaining that SUMO can also stand for ‘Stop, Understand, Move On’. In many respects, I’m aiming to welcome my audience into my world and reveal something to them that the majority of people who are familiar with my work don’t know. But there’s more. Later in my presentation I explore the importance and consequences of the choices we make both in and outside work. Then I say something along the following lines.

'You'll love this next point.' I then pause and lean forward towards the audience, and then say in a quiet voice: 'Sumo as a word, not as an acronym, but as a word in Latin, can mean this ...' Once again I pause briefly before finally unveiling what it can mean. Want to know? OK then. Sumo in Latin can mean 'I choose'. Very few, if any, of my audience would have known that.

Here's the deal:



The brain enjoys acquiring new information, and people love to discover things that other people are completely in the dark about.

Another way to create curiosity is to ask questions. Here are some I've read or heard in the last few months:

- What's the number one challenge affecting hospitals today?
- What five things should you do every day to improve your life?
- What's the single biggest cause of stress in people's lives?

Pose a question that doesn't have an obvious answer and your audience are immediately engaged. Then explain how you intend to answer that question in your presentation. Trust me, you'll have people's attention.

So, if you want to grab people by the eyeballs, create curiosity. Create in them a sense of wanting to know what you're going to say. Don't make it too easy and tell them everything in the first five minutes. Take them on a journey. Whet their appetite, but don't give them the dessert before they've had time to digest the starter. To keep people engaged, keep them curious.



Pause for Thought

How much time and consideration do you give to the first ninety seconds of your talk or meeting? How conscious are you of making a strong start, and the benefits of doing so? Reflect on your last talk or presentation. What were you doing, consciously or unconsciously, to grab your audience by the eyeballs?



My One Thing

We've explored four ways to grab your audience by the eyeballs and engage them from the start. Choose one of the following to use in your next talk.

1. Create a compelling title.
2. Remember the 90/90 Rule.
3. Involve your audience.
4. Create curiosity.

WAY 6:

BECOME AN

Artist



I'd like to start this chapter with a little mind experiment. Don't worry, it's nothing dangerous. There's no need to sign a disclaimer form. You can remain fully clothed if you wish, although it's not compulsory (but probably advisable if you're reading this in a public place). And no prior knowledge or experience is required. Are you ready? Good. Here goes.

I'd like you to think of a word. Just one word.

Breakfast.

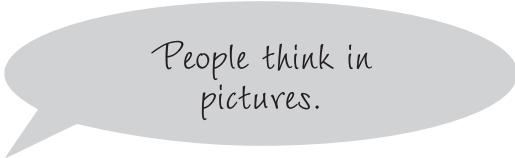
Now briefly close your eyes and for three or four seconds think of 'breakfast'.

What images come into your mind? Bacon sandwiches? A bowl of cornflakes? Muesli? Sausage and egg? Deep fried Mars Bar with curry sauce and chips?

OK, so what did you think of? I'm curious.

Now, be honest, did you think solely about the word 'breakfast' and see it written in black on a white background? I thought not. Me neither. Now, from that brief experiment I think we've just tapped into something very interesting and, yes I realize, pretty obvious too.

The deal is:



People think in
pictures.

You see, when it comes to our five human senses (the others being hearing, taste, touch and smell), sight is the

dominant one in relation to the speed with which we receive and process information. So here's my question. When it comes to how you communicate with others, how intentional are you in creating pictures in people's minds?

Think back to the First Great Sin of Speaking we explored earlier, 'A failure to make your message sticky or memorable'. Could one of the main reasons for this be the lack of images we use to engage our audience when communicating with them? Well, here's the good news. You're about to discover some simple and practical ways to become an artist and paint pictures in people's minds ... and you won't even need a paintbrush to do so.

For the time being, let's focus on five (I'll devote a whole chapter to another one later).

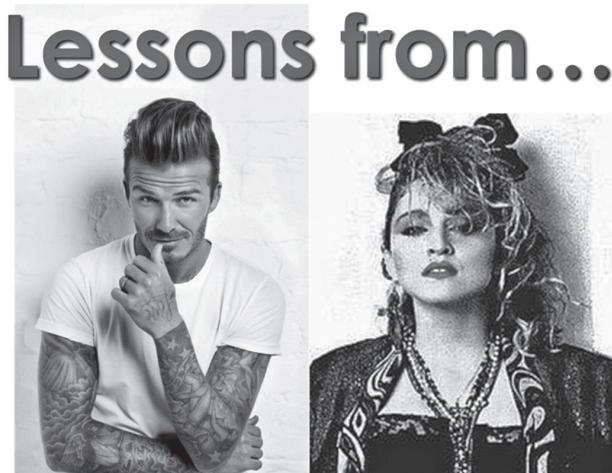
1. Slides

Yes, it's a simple one to kick off with. We know slides can suck because they're loaded with text, which is about as engaging and interesting as studying the latest European Union legislation on the import and export of brussel sprouts.

Now, we explored how to develop engaging slides in an earlier chapter – it was the Sixth Great Sin of Speaking – so you may want to review the tips I gave you at the end of that chapter. However, here's a quick reminder of one of my key points.

If you ever use slides, look to reduce (not eliminate) text and where possible use more images. For example, when I explore one of my SUMO principles – 'Hippo Time is OK' – I could introduce it by showing the words on a screen. But I don't. I simply show an image of a hippo

that fills the screen. Likewise, in my Presentation Master-class I have a section called ‘Lessons from Beckham and Madonna’. Here’s the slide I use:



Remember:

Images increase
impact.

If you still need convincing of this fact, cast your mind back to 3 August 2015. That was the day when the world woke up to the Syrian refugee crisis – when the picture of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi was posted around the world, his body washed up on a beach in Turkey. It was that single image, more than any set of statistics, that ultimately caused people to take the plight of Syrian refugees seriously.

2. Props

When I speak at events I always request a small table. Not only do I want a place to put my glass (I drink a lot during my presentations ... water that is), but I also want room for my props. Interestingly in our high-tech age, the use of props is not something most audiences are expecting. Visual slides maybe. Even video. But props? But here's the deal – they make an impact.

I was running a Presentation Masterclass very recently where a woman brought with her a large bucket with sticky plasters placed on various parts of it. Why? She wanted to illustrate that companies may be filling their ‘buckets’ with profit but, due to poor systems, fraud, and theft, some of those profits were leaking out. In some people’s eyes the sticky plaster might not have been the most effective metaphor, but she wanted to demonstrate that her ideas would help repair those leaks and help the company retain more of its profits.

Now here's the interesting point. I sit through hundreds of presentations during my work, but Anne's presentation sticks out. Why? It was visual. It was memorable. And it was a little unusual.

Bill Gates's prop when he wanted to talk about his desire to eliminate malaria was to bring on stage a glass container, inside of which were some live mosquitos. Just over five minutes into his talk, and to the great dismay of his audience, Gates released the mosquitos into the auditorium, although he reassured them these particular ones were not carriers of malaria. Even so, it's fair to say that this particular prop certainly gained his audience's attention. His live demonstration will never be forgotten, not

just by those listening to him that day, but the hundreds of thousands of people who have subsequently viewed his talk online.

There are numerous occasions where I find props are sometimes simply the best way to make my point. I'd be lost without them. When I travel abroad on a speaking engagement (my wife refuses to let me take them on holidays) I always carry them in my hand luggage – I'm paranoid about losing them. I'd hate for them to go missing and end up in some remote place in the Antarctic – or even worse, Aberdeen. (And if you're from Aberdeen, I'm just teasing ... they happen to be my favourite Scottish football team.)

One of my props that I use regularly is a beachball. Not something you'd necessarily expect a guy from the not so sunny city of Manchester to be associated with, I admit. Interestingly though, it's one of the things I'm remembered for. I have mentioned this particular prop previously, but let me go into a little more detail.

When inflated, my beachball has six separate colours: blue, white, green, red, yellow and orange. However, when I hold up the beachball in front of my audience, I do so in a way that means they see only three of the six colours. I am also seeing three colours, but because I'm on one side of the beachball and my audience is on the other, we're actually seeing different colours from each other.

The point I'm making is that in life people can be looking at the same situation (the beachball) but depending on their perspective they can see things very differently from other people. I then slowly turn the beachball round while saying, 'if we want to build better relationships with others

and communicate more effectively with people, we need to stop thinking our perspective is the only perspective there is – and move on to see things from other people’s perspectives’.

By the time I’ve finished speaking, I’m now seeing three colours of the beachball I couldn’t see before, and so too are my audience.

Trust me. That is a lot easier to explain and has a far greater impact on my audience when I have a physical prop (i.e. the beachball) with me than when I don’t.

This was highlighted when my friend Dave (and you’ll hear more about him later) came to hear me speak. He’s one of my closest friends and he was very familiar with my SUMO principles, including ‘Remember the Beachball’. Dave’s a highly experienced speaker, so when I finished my talk I was really keen to get his feedback.

‘So what was your biggest takeaway Dave?’ I hesitated at this point, because Dave has a reputation for being rather blunt and brutal in his opinion. (He reckons being born in Yorkshire may have something to do with his lack of diplomacy.)

But I needn’t have worried. Dave was impressed, although he did mention he thought my shoes looked like rejects from a charity shop. (It’s sometimes hard to believe that he works part time as a self-esteem counsellor.)

‘Mate, your beachball illustration was bloody brilliant.’ (Although to be fair his language was slightly stronger.)

‘Really?’ I replied. ‘But I’ve talked about it for years. I’m surprised something you’re so familiar with would make such an impact.’

Then he said something very interesting – which isn’t a common occurrence for Dave but, like a solar eclipse, it’s worth waiting for.

‘The thing is Paul. When you’ve talked about the beach-ball previously, you’ve explained it while talking over the phone. Today I saw it.’

The deal is:

Props are not just
for rugby.

If you want to stand out and be remembered, then look for ways in which you could use a prop in your next talk or presentation.

3. Use visual language

Sometimes you don’t need to use slides or props to paint pictures. Those are external tools, but here’s the really cool thing – you can create images in people’s minds by using your own internal tools – the words you use. You see, in terms of painting pictures our words become the pallet from which we paint.

But here’s the deal:

Some speakers only use the colour
grey – and not even fifty shades
of grey. Just one shade. Dull.

You've heard the phrase 'A picture paints a thousand words', right? Well trust me, there's something in that. The problem is you'll fail to create much of an impact and impression if the only colour you're using is grey. But the more visual you make your language to describe something, the more sticky and memorable it is. Your words can literally create pictures on the screens of your audience's minds.

For example, you're probably familiar with the phrase 'it was like trying to find a needle in a haystack' when you want to illustrate the extreme difficulty of trying to find something. You've also probably heard the phrase 'it was like herding cats' when you're trying to explain the challenge of organizing people. These illustrations do work, but I want to challenge you to develop or use less-familiar ones. The reality is, the more common a phrase is – even if it's visual – the less its impact. You see, there really is more than a grain of truth in the following:

Familiarity breeds contempt.

Well, it might not quite be contempt, but the brain notices the new and the different and pays less attention to the normal. It's intrigued by the novel.

So here are some examples I've come across recently that caught my attention. Why? Because I'd not come across them before, but they were great examples of using visual language.

- It was like trying to ride a bike in really soft sand. Plenty of effort, but little progress.
- It's like trying to do a jigsaw without a picture on the box.
- It was like playing golf in the dark. With a black golf ball.
- I was so angry I looked like a pitbull chewing a wasp.
- It was like trying to teach a dog how to lay an egg.
- It was like trying to explain the internet to an ant.
- We write our successes in sand but we carve our failures into concrete.

One client was trying to explain to me the significant change her own health organization needed to go through, and used a visual metaphor to illustrate her point. She said: ‘If we sold books, it’s not like being a WHSmith and trying to become a Waterstones – it’s far more radical than that – we need to become an Amazon.’ Immediately I understood the challenge they faced and, like the previous examples, her illustration was vivid, sticky and got the point across quickly.

One of the most effective communicators I’ve come across, who uses visual language brilliantly, is Beryl. I love Beryl. She’s my financial adviser and has been so for over twenty-five years. She’s friendly, personable and is clearly an expert in her field. But they’re not the only reasons why I’ve retained her services for over a quarter of a century, and recommended her to countless other people. I’m sure lots of other financial advisers possess similar qualities to Beryl. So what’s the reason?

She simplifies stuff.

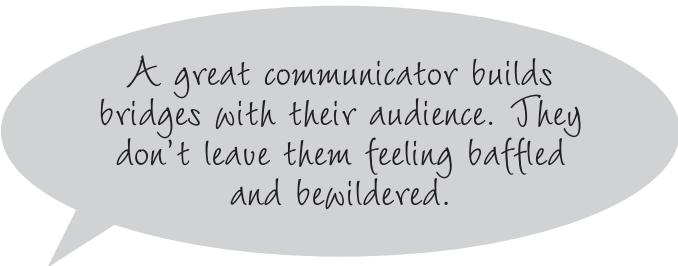
Now that doesn't sound particularly earth shattering, I confess, but it does mean a great deal to me. Why? I love words. But I hate figures. Figures make me feel uncomfortable. It's like I'm wearing my right shoe on my left foot. So when I hear technical financial terms like compound growth and asset backed security, my brain disengages. It fails to function and I'm tempted just to switch off. But that's not a helpful attitude on my part. Financial matters are important – and that's where Beryl comes in.

She demystifies it all. She speaks in a language I understand. Having mentioned the financial jargon, Beryl will then go on to say, 'so what that really means is ...' She even gets out a piece of paper and draws illustrations. I don't find this patronizing. I find it helpful. Remember, people think in pictures.

Now I don't think I'm struggling to grasp financial terminology because of a lack of basic intelligence, but Beryl realizes that, like a lot of people, if you're not especially familiar with certain terms then you might need some help grasping them. Sadly, not everyone is like Beryl.

Many communicators spew out a whole host of facts, figures, jargon and acronyms and fail to take into account not only their audience's needs but also their knowledge. What they fail to understand is that a lot of people in their audience aren't comfortable saying 'Maybe it's just me, but I haven't a ruddy clue what you're on about'. And neither is their silence necessarily an indication of their understanding. It could well be a reflection of their confusion.

The truth is:



A great communicator builds bridges with their audience. They don't leave them feeling baffled and bewildered.

Beryl is a very successful businesswoman. But she's learnt that knowing the words to a song doesn't make you a great singer, and neither does being a financial expert make you a successful financial adviser. However, adding clear communication to your knowledge and expertise will do. Believe me: what works for Beryl can also work for you.

Just make sure you mind your language ... and make it visual.

OK, so in this chapter so far we've explored how slides, props and visual language can all be used to paint pictures. Now let's explore two more tools.

4. Illustrate your point

It's easy at times to talk solely in theoretical abstract terms as you communicate key ideas and concepts. Now you, personally, may be both engaged and enthused by such thoughts and have the ability to see clearly how they all fit into the bigger picture. But there's a chance your audience won't. You see, abstract art doesn't attempt to represent external reality, and if I'm honest, plenty of presentations I've heard are rather similar to a piece of abstract art – they don't connect with reality.

Words such as transformation, synergy, paradigm, re-engineer, leverage and customer-centricity might sound impressive, but what do they actually mean? What are they actually saying? Your challenge is to connect what you're saying to people's worlds so that they 'get it'.

The truth is:

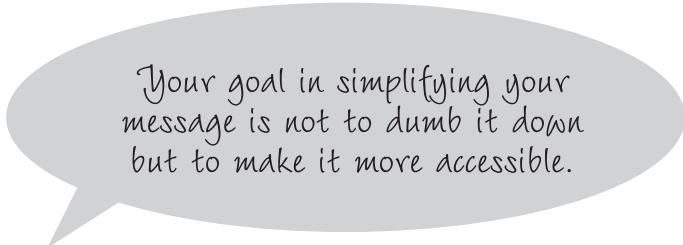


Some people say a
lot but communicate
very little.

No speaker should expect their audience to wade through their complex waffle and try to work out what on earth they were on about. Challenge your audience to think, by all means, but don't imprison them in a chamber of confusion.

So what do you do?

First, remember this:



Your goal in simplifying your
message is not to dumb it down
but to make it more accessible.

Let me illustrate what I mean. In my talks I want to introduce my audience to a SUMO principle called '**Fruity Thinking**'. It's an idea based on Cognitive Behavioural

Therapy and Solution Focused Thinking. But that's a bit of a mouthful, so I call it '**Fruity Thinking**'. I start by talking about the **T.E.A.R.** process, Thinking, Emotions, Actions, Results. The point I want to make is that the quality of our thinking can ultimately impact the quality of our results in life. Now I genuinely believe I give a clear and concise explanation of what I mean, but it still remains an intellectual concept. What I need to do is to bring this alive, and turn a concept into a concrete and meaningful example. In other words, I need to illustrate my point.

Here's what I do.

I talk about Frank.

Frank was someone who clearly didn't want to be on my training session. He'd been sent. Although judging by his body language, he looked like he'd been sentenced to come. Noting his unease as he entered the room, I walked over to welcome him.

'Hi, I'm Paul McGee. I'm running the session. Nice to meet you' I said, as I extended my hand to shake his.

'What time does this finish?' he replied, as he ignored my outstretched hand and avoided making eye contact.

Before I had a chance to reply, Frank looked around the room with a look of contempt and continued 'I've no ruddy idea why I'm on this course. I retire in seven years'.

At this point, I unpack my encounter with Frank with my audience and relate what happened in relation to the **T.E.A.R.** process. I explore the possible thoughts Frank was having about my session even before he walked into the room. These thoughts, which I think is fair to say were

along the lines of ‘I don’t want to be here’, would affect Frank’s feelings or emotions. His thoughts and emotions would influence his actions. (Interestingly, Frank’s actions were mainly in the form of non-actions. He spent most of the session sitting with his back to me.) Then I ask, ‘And do these actions influence his results? You bet.’

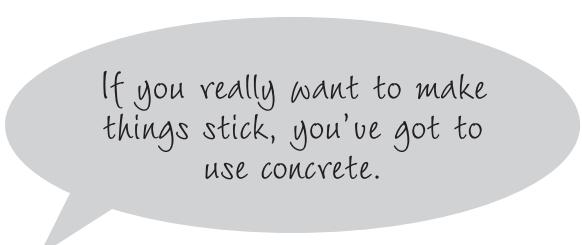
I then explain how I knew what Frank’s results were because he wrote them on an evaluation form.

‘I thought today would be a complete waste of time.
And I wasn’t disappointed.’

Thanks Frank.

I also tell a story about how I worked with Sir Clive Woodward, the coach of the England Rugby Union team who won the World Cup in 2003. I explain how it all started with a conversation inside my head, i.e. my thinking, and how I decided to write to him after I read his book *Winning*. The story unfolds as I also send him a copy of my SUMO book and, having read it, Sir Clive contacts me to say he wants me to work with him. I use the story as a concrete example of how the T.E.A.R. process plays out in real life.

The deal is:



If you really want to make things stick, you’ve got to use concrete.

5. Turn figures into pictures

Remember my friend Dave, the guy so blunt he'll tell you if he thinks your newborn baby looks like a shrivelled up alien? Well, coupled with his skills of tact and diplomacy, he's also trained his brain to do some remarkable things (although sadly that doesn't extend to remembering my birthday). He once memorized Pi to 22,500 digits. Yes, you read that right – twenty-two thousand and five hundred digits. To be fair, he doesn't get out much.

He can also memorize a shuffled pack of playing cards and five minutes later recount the exact order back to you. Impressive, eh? But here's the thing. This isn't some magical talent that was bestowed upon him at birth along with his mop of ginger hair and chunky fingers. Maybe we'd like to think it was, but the reason for these remarkable achievements is a little more down to earth. It's simply this.

He works hard and he's developed a strategy.

And it's the strategy he uses that can help you to communicate with more influence and impact. Here's what he does. It's simple really.

He turns figures into pictures.

Let me explain.

For instance, if we explore how Dave remembers playing cards, part of his strategy is to turn something abstract like the card the two of clubs into something more concrete and memorable. What does he do? He turns each playing card into a person. Yep that's right – each card represents a person that is memorable to Dave.

Here's how he does it.

Let's stick with the two of clubs example. The number two becomes the second letter of the alphabet, B. The suit in this case begins with the letter C, so he memorizes the name of someone with the initials BC. It doesn't have to be the name of anyone we all know, just as long as it's known to him. I understand from Dave that the person he associates with the two of clubs is actually someone known to most of us – the former US President Bill Clinton.

You see, we're programmed from birth to recognize and take note of faces. (Although if you want to remember the names of those faces you'll need to give Dave a ring.) Which explains why Bill Clinton is easier to remember than the two of clubs. OK, I guess you're wondering 'this is all very well and good, but how does this idea help me?'

I'm glad you asked.

To start with, be aware when you're using figures in your talk or presentation that you don't overwhelm your audience with too many, unless it's absolutely necessary. Clearly, some are needed to make your point, but be careful of the dangers of overkill. And no matter how much data you use, figures like 37 percent, 428,734 or £18 trillion can appear utterly meaningless to your audience. Your challenge is this. Like Dave does with his playing cards, you have to turn figures into something more memorable, and you do that by making things more visual.

Here are two ways you can do that.

First, percentages. The phrase 'Nearly four out of ten people' is far more memorable and easy to comprehend

than ‘thirty-seven percent’. Next time you watch or listen to the news, notice how often they use this strategy to communicate the latest research figures. Second, figures in isolation don’t mean a great deal. So compare them to something else. For instance, you might want to say £18 trillion is the equivalent to what this country would spend on education for the next X amount of years. The figure now has some meaning because of this comparison.

Several years ago, I heard a guy on the radio talk about how much greater a dog’s sense of smell is compared to a human’s. Now the example he used might not be completely accurate, but it’s a picture that’s still locked into my mind. In trying to explain how much greater a dog’s sense of smell is than a human’s, he said it’s like comparing the size of a postage stamp to the size of a football pitch. I think you get my point, don’t you? That comparison immediately helps us grasp how much greater a dog’s sense of smell is compared to our own.

Here’s one final example of how to use your paintbrush to make figures meaningful.

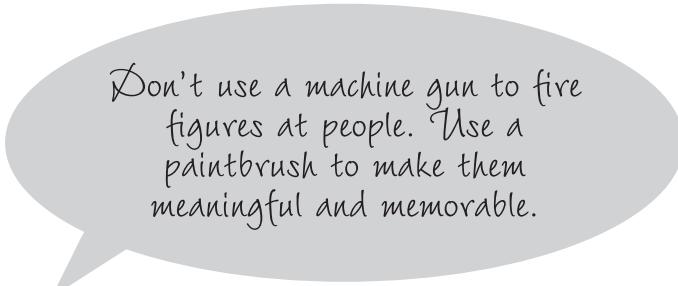
In his book *The 8th Habit*, Stephen Covey refers to a poll of over 20,000 employees and draws out figures from this poll related to employee engagement. But to be fair, they’re figures that can be quickly forgotten. So what does Covey do? He turns these figures into a memorable example that people can identify with. He distils the feedback of over 20,000 employees and relates it to a football team. (He uses the term ‘soccer’, but I’ll forgive him.)

This is what employee engagement scores would look like if transposed on to a football team. Here are some examples.

Only four of the players would know which goal they were attacking, of which only two would care. And nine of the players would be more caught up in competing against each other than their opponents. (For those of you wondering, I believe the team in question was not Chelsea FC in the latter months of Jose Mourinho's second spell in charge.)

But do you see what Covey was able to do? Suddenly, statistics and percentages have far greater meaning. Even if you're not into football, the illustration is powerful. And it's far stickier than a long list of percentages. Agree?

Here's the deal:



Don't use a machine gun to fire figures at people. Use a paintbrush to make them meaningful and memorable.



Pause for Thought

How conscious are you of making what you say visual? We've talked about slides previously, but if you've not taken the hint already, in what ways could you make your slides more visually engaging? Or are you happy with the way they are?

What about props – have you ever used them? Have you seen other people use them effectively? Is there one part of your presentation that could be enhanced by using a prop? If so, what prop would you use?

How conscious are you of the need to illustrate your points with examples? Remember: what is clear in your head might not be so clear in your audience's.

Do you use figures when you communicate with others? How could the ideas we've explored help you to share those figures in a more memorable and meaningful way?



My One Thing

We've explored five ways to paint pictures in your audience's minds.

1. Slides.
2. Props.
3. Use visual language.
4. Illustrate your point.
5. Turn figures into pictures.

Which one will you focus on to ensure when you next speak you do so with greater influence and impact?

WAY 7:



LEARN
LESSONS

FROM JC, JO, AND
THE GREEK GUY

Strange title to this chapter, don't you think? I mean, who's Jo for starters? And JC? And as for the Greek guy, well are we talking ancient or modern?

Well sit back and relax, as you're about to find out what these three people have in common, and how they can help you speak so people really listen.

Let's start with the Greek guy. His name was Aesop (pronounced ee-sop). Does the name ring a bell? Well, ever heard the story about the Tortoise and the Hare? He wrote it. And does the term 'sour grapes' sound familiar? That's a phrase taken from one of his fables. Now some of the facts about Aesop are a little sketchy, but here are some of the things that were said about him.

Aesop was a storyteller (although sometimes called a fabulist), and is credited with writing a number of stories that I guess could be summarized as 'lessons in life'. These stories were commonly called fables, a literary genre that typically features animals, mythical creatures or forces of nature (like the wind), which are given human qualities such as the ability to speak. Born in Greece around 600 years before Jesus hit the scene, interestingly quite a lot has been made of his physical appearance. Pot-bellied with a misshapen head, short arms, bandy legs, a flat nose and squinty eyes, it's fair to say he was no George Clooney, although with the power of Photoshop if he were around today his publicist would probably have him resembling Tom Cruise.

Now, how much of the above is accurate is questionable (and any resemblance to me is entirely coincidental), but he has become associated with stories that, 2,500 years after his death, are still told throughout the world. So he certainly left a legacy.

OK, so who's JC? Well, we actually referred to him a moment ago – it's Jesus (although some people call him Jesus Christ, hence the initials).

It's fair to say there's probably more known about Jesus than Aesop, although I tend to ignore the Hollywood depiction of him as a really good looking guy with long fair hair and deep blue eyes. Perhaps not the most typical look for a guy born in the Middle East of Jewish stock, I think ... or is it just me?

So what's Jesus's connection with Aesop? Simply this. Stories.

Think about it – he was always telling them. Ever heard the parable of the Good Samaritan? (A parable, unlike a fable, uses human characters to get its message across.) You might not remember the precise details, but most people get the gist of the story. Samaritans were the despised enemy of the Jews at the time, and the Jews had enough problems as they were living under Roman occupation. Jesus had a technique for engaging an audience by often answering a question with a question of his own, or in this case, telling a story.

The question posed to him in this instance was 'Who is my neighbour?' Now, he could have gone on to make a long, emotive speech packed with platitudes and feel good soundbites, done face painting with the kids, passed out bunches of daisies and asked everyone to join hands and breathe in the cosmic energy. But that approach wasn't this former child refugee and part-time carpenter's style.

He told stories.

Stories that were relevant to his audience, easily remembered and often packed with emotion.

His goal was never simply to appeal to people's intellect, but to their heart also. In fact, like many communicators of his day, he'd tapped into a strategy for audience engagement that, as we'll see a little later in this chapter, has a lot of scientific support behind it. And, like Aesop, Jesus's stories are still told today, as indeed is the story of his life.

So that's Aesop and Jesus. So who's Jo? Is she some other figure from history who hung out with the Jews and the Greeks? Was she better looking than Aesop?

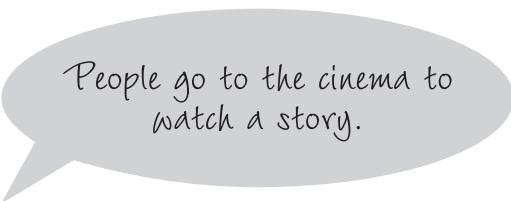
Well, actually Jo is, as I write, still around today. Here's a bit of her background.

Jo is from the South West of England, and she started life as a researcher and bilingual secretary for Amnesty International. And this next bit I find really fascinating. It was while she was on a delayed train from Manchester to London that she conceived the idea for a book. Now despite going on to live on benefits and have her book proposal rejected by several publishers, it did go on to do rather well. In fact, it went on to sell over 400 million copies – I don't know about you, but I think that's fairly impressive. Her book, though, was seen as appealing mainly to young boys, and her publisher was concerned boys might not want to read a book written by a woman. So she was asked to drop the name Jo (an abbreviation of Joanne) and replace it with two initials. So she did. Jo is perhaps more commonly recognized by the initials J.K. – and also by her surname. Rowling. And like Aesop and Jesus, it's fair to say she's a rather good teller of stories. Certainly according to Harry Potter fans she is.

OK, now let's be realistic. There's a very good chance that 2,000 years from now, if people are still alive on this planet, they probably won't be discussing your PowerPoint presentation from last week or your talk at the recent staff conference. And copies of your speech are unlikely to be turned into an epic film series at a later date. But do yourself a favour anyway. Tell stories. Why? Well, for a whole host of reasons.

You see, starting from cave paintings over 20,000 years ago right up until this very moment in time, telling stories has been fundamental to how we communicate with others. As I write, the new Star Wars film *The Force Awakens* has been released, and is currently competing with Father Christmas for the public's attention. And, ultimately, what is Star Wars? It's a story.

Here's the deal:



People go to the cinema to watch a story.

Whether it's reading a book, watching a TV soap or even listening to the latest gossip where we work, the fact is we all love a good story. And that's the case whatever our age and whatever our cultural background. But why?

Science has the answer.

When we listen to a talk or presentation which is loaded with facts, figures and bullet points, a certain part of our

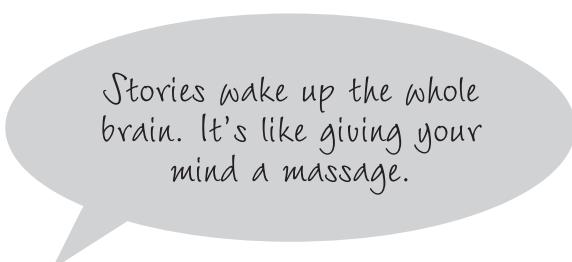
brain is activated. The information hits the language processing parts in our brain, where we decode words into meaning. And that's it. The rest of your brain and its functions remain largely undisturbed.

Now imagine this. In terms of a metaphor, if your brain was represented by a family of five people living at home, when you communicate just facts and figures, only one of the family is awake and there's just one room in the house with the light switched on. The rest are sleeping in darkness.

But when you tell a story, things change. Suddenly the whole house is awake and virtually all the lights are on.

You see, when you tell a story it's not just the language part of the brain that is activated, but every other part of the brain that we would use when experiencing the events of that story. When you're telling a story you can quite literally plant ideas, thoughts and emotions into your listeners' minds.

Here's the deal:



Stories wake up the whole brain. It's like giving your mind a massage.

If you describe running away from a particular threat, there's activity in the motor cortex of your audience's brain even when they're sitting stationary, listening to you. And using words such as 'baked bread', 'fresh coffee' and

‘scented soap’ can elicit a response in the part of our brains devoted to smell.

Crazy, eh? But there’s now so much scientific research on the subject (gathered from brain scans and the work of neuroscientists) that helps us understand the power of stories and their effect upon the brain.

But you don’t really need science to convince you, do you?

Jesus, Jo and Aesop are proof that stories work. Your own experience confirms that. The reality is:

Ideas can outlive people
when they're expressed
through stories.

You see, stories engage the whole person – not just their intellect but also their emotions. They’re far more memorable than when you’re communicating data or a set of statistics. And if you want to change or influence people’s behaviour, don’t think appealing to their rational brain is all that’s required. Far from it. You need to engage their emotions as well. And that, quite simply, is where stories excel.

The deal is:

Facts tell.
Stories sell.

During Barack Obama's first presidential campaign in 2008, he told a humorous and yet also inspiring story about addressing a meeting of only twenty people. He's feeling tired and miserable, when one woman aged around 60 suddenly starts a chant ... 'Fired up? Ready to go!' Others begin to join in and Obama shares how just after a few minutes he himself was feeling fired up and ready to go. It illustrates how just one voice can make a difference, and it's a story he continued to tell throughout his campaign to become president (if you want to check out the story, go to YouTube and search for 'Barack Obama fired up' – it's well worth watching.)

So why don't we use stories more? Well, if you've any sense you will from now on. But the reality is many speakers shy away from using them. And I think there are several reasons why.

First, I still think we're blinded by the corporate cloak of professionalism that somehow believes stories are for children. They're often seen as a form of entertainment rather than education.

The question is: why can't education be entertaining at times?

Second, I think people are uncomfortable using them. Perhaps there's a sense of losing credibility when you say 'Let me tell you a story'. Although to be fair, if you did open your talk by saying 'A long time ago in a land far, far away, there lived a beautiful princess' you might struggle to engage the guys at the accountancy conference ... or anyone over the age of four for that matter.

Third, I think stories are not used extensively because we're so busy trying to get our slides right, or concentrating on our content, that we've completely overlooked how

we're going to communicate our message in a sticky and memorable way.

Fourth, most people aren't even sure how to put a good story together.

And finally, I think most people are unaware of the science behind the power of stories and their effect upon our brains.

So how can you incorporate more stories into your communication?

Well, for starters, be aware you don't even have to use the word 'story'. Don't tell people you're going to tell them a story – just tell it. For instance, here are some examples of openings that could be used to start a story.

'I bumped into one of our customers last week. What they had to tell me might surprise you.'

'I remember my very first job. The lessons I learnt have stuck with me until today – particularly my first day managing a group of people on a production line.'

'A friend of mine was telling me about an incident that happened to him while he was on holiday last summer.'

Here's how I open one of my stories:

'How many of you have kids in the room?' I then wait for a show of hands and then attempt some low level humour by adding 'I don't mean under the tables ...' (And then briefly act out them stooping down to converse with their child under the table. 'Here's an iPad. I'll change your nappy later.') Trust me, it's funnier when you see me do it.

Then I'm straight into my story.

'My son Matt was 15 at the time. He came home from school one day and said "Dad, I want to become a doctor".'

I go on to explain my surprise at this career choice as I knew from previous conversations that he hated biology. Then comes the pivotal moment in the story: his reply.

'Dad, we've got a new teacher. Mrs Shaw. She's a lot stricter than my previous teacher. In fact, some of my mates don't even like her. But because she's strict, we actually get to learn something in the lesson. And she's really passionate about the subject.'

I then talk about the challenges he faced in even getting into medical school as it's one of the most competitive courses to get on in the whole of the country. Then after a short pause I continue.

'My lad's 22 now. He's in his fifth year. Studying medicine. And I realized as I told this story about Mrs Shaw, that I'd never even met her. So a while back I sent her a card.'

I then explain what I put in the card, including the phrase 'I tell everyone you're M.A.D. – "Making A Difference", because you were the catalyst for my son wanting to become a doctor, and I just wanted to say thank you.'

The story continues. 'Mrs Shaw got back in touch ...' I then proceed to tell the audience what she wrote back to me, and I give particular attention to her closing phrase. 'Your card just made my ... (and I pause before adding) year.' I finish, not by saying 'So the moral of the story is ...'. No. I just simply say the following. 'Never, ever, forget the impact and importance of showing people appreciation.'

Trust me; it's a powerful story – and not just when I'm talking to teachers. It also highlights the power of one person and the impact they can have on other people's lives.

Here's what I'd like you to do. Open up your mind more to this whole idea of stories and when to use them. Be on the lookout for stories from your own life. In fact, you may be telling them without even realizing it.

For instance, when you're at a job interview giving an overview of your career and highlighting examples of your achievements – you're telling your story. When you're giving a summary of your company's finances over the last twelve months – you're telling the story of the financial journey over the last year. Sometimes you're telling the 'big story', but you can also use little stories or anecdotes and examples that add colour and context to your message. For example, the big story is your career over the last fifteen years. The little stories are when you talk about specific situations that occurred during your career.

So, when preparing your next presentation or speech, begin by asking yourself 'What's the story here? What's the journey I'm taking people on and what's my key message?'

How to get good at telling stories

Well, I hope you're now convinced of both the power and necessity of stories, which don't have to be based on fantasy or animals that speak but instead on everyday life. However, I do think that despite all we've explored so far, there could still be one thing holding you back from using them.

Maybe deep down you don't think you're very good at telling them.

If that's the case, here are some ideas to help you improve your skills. And if you do think you're pretty good, my approach is still the same. Here are some skills to get even better.

1. Artistic license is OK

The key to a good story is the big idea that comes from it. Your aim, in most cases, is not to recount every single detail in chronological order and recount verbatim what was said and who said it. You're telling a story, not giving testimony in court in a murder trial.

All the stories I tell in this book and in my presentations are true. But I'm not going to suggest that my Mrs Shaw story is a 100% accurate account of everything that happened when my son said he wanted to become a doctor. I've missed parts of the story out. For instance, the card I sent to her was actually sent via a friend's daughter who still studies at the school. But this information adds nothing to my message and is unnecessary detail. Likewise, my conversation with my son is not taken from a transcript. Fortunately family conversations are not recorded in my house.

So, start first by thinking about the point of your story. Make sure it's not being included purely for the sake of it. Second, think about the key points within the story. So, if I was to do that with my Mrs Shaw story, it would look like this.

The point of my story:

Remember to show appreciation to the people who make a difference.

Key points to include:

- My son Matt wants to become a doctor.
- He doesn't like biology.
- He does now – he has a new teacher.
- Mrs Shaw is strict and passionate.
- Matt is now training to be a doctor.
- I send a card to thank Mrs Shaw.
- My card makes her year.

I suggest you go through the same process if you have a key story you want to tell. Write down the key points – trust me, it will help enormously in bringing clarity.

Now I can take a good two minutes to tell that story – but you were able to read through the key points in less than thirty seconds. It's a great exercise to do, especially if you're not used to telling stories. And remember, a good story doesn't have to last long. It doesn't have to be an epic. It's likely to be a brief scene in the film, not the entire movie. So why don't you identify a story you could tell, and write down the key points you would like to include.

2. Give us some detail

I know watching films in black and white can be nostalgic, and that black and white photography can be evocative and powerful. But when it comes to telling stories, bring some colour. Give us some detail. If there are people in your stories, give them names. I tell a story not about my son and a teacher, but about Matt and Mrs Shaw. I tell you

how old Matt was, and include details about Mrs Shaw's character. She was strict – some of his mates didn't even like her. She's passionate about the subject. I've not described what she looks like as I've never met her, but I can give you some detail about her character.

When you're retelling a story, you're in a sense rerunning a movie in your mind. Your goal is to help your audience see what you see – so create pictures in their minds. They'll fill in some of the gaps, that's fine – but they do need some detail.

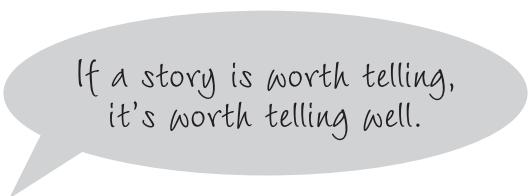
3. Get some support

Telling stories well can be incredibly powerful and profound. They can inspire people to take action and challenge them to think and behave differently. They can help create an atmosphere and cause people to sit up and listen. And some people are, I confess, natural storytellers – not just in a work context, but a social one too. Some people can have a captive audience over the dinner table, and can quite literally cause people to stop eating. You see, stories can in some ways hypnotize us – they have the ability to connect with people at a deep level.

Not all of us are naturally gifted in this area. That's fine. But that's not a reason to settle for mediocrity. When it comes to communicating with influence and impact, this is too important a skill not to seek to enhance.

So seek support. Have a coach. Maybe even join an organization called Toastmasters, who provide training in public speaking skills through their local clubs (their website is www.toastmasters.org). At the very least, complete the exercise I outlined earlier in this chapter. You owe it to yourself and your audience to do so. And practise your stories.

My wife Helen has, it's fair to say, heard my stories a few times – although to be honest, they're mainly about her anyway. The truth is:



If a story is worth telling,
it's worth telling well.

I recognize some are shorter than others; they're more of a little anecdote. But certainly for your longer stories make sure the first time your audience hears it is not the first time you have told the story out loud. Practise telling it out loud. To the cat. The dog. The mirror. Just make sure you get used to telling it.

So there you have it. The Greek guy achieved notoriety and left a moral legacy. Jesus managed, whether intentionally or not, to start what is now the world's largest religion in terms of followers. And Jo managed not only to make a lot of money, but also got kids, particularly boys, interested in reading. There really is something about stories – and if you're wise you'll seek to use them.



Pause for Thought

Think about someone you know who is a good storyteller. Is it a friend, colleague, comedian? What makes them so engaging as a communicator? What can you learn from them?

How intentional are you about using stories when you communicate with others? When's the next opportunity you'll have to use a story as part of your communication?



My One Thing

If you want to speak so people really listen, then tell stories. But tell them well. What's the single action you need to take now to become more effective at communicating through stories?

Here are three options:

- Seek support (check out Toastmasters or get a coach).
- Start practising out loud.
- Complete the exercise on page 153.

Oh, and remember to check out that Barack Obama video. Fired up...

WAY 8:

SHINE

AT QUESTION TIME

Now this is an area that can often be overlooked when exploring how to communicate with influence and impact. But how we deal with questions can be crucial to our success. Not every meeting or presentation will include time for questions, but when they do, handling them badly can see your credibility crumble in seconds.

When Tony Blair reflected back on his time as Prime Minister of Britain, he recalled how much he struggled with Prime Minister's Question Time. He considered one of his triumphs as PM to be seeing it go from a twice weekly affair down to just once a week. In his autobiography he describes the anxiety he felt in preparing for Question Time and the relief he felt when it was over. For another week at least. For someone who was considered to be a confident communicator, I find this rather interesting – although not surprising.

You see, there's one reason above all why Tony Blair and countless other politicians and presenters dislike questions. Control. You have far less control over how this part of your presentation or talk will unfold. A difficult or unexpected question could be lurking around the corner, and how well it's handled could determine how well your overall message is received. If handled well, your answer could help further your argument, reinforce your message, and confirm your credibility. However, if dealt with badly, all your previous hard work could be unravelled in a matter of moments.

Now, unless you have the control of a political dictator and an audience as compliant as a group of North Koreans listening to their leader, you don't really have any guarantees

as to how question time will go. That's the bad news. The good news, however, is that with some planning and preparation you can greatly increase your chances of this being a positive and less stressful experience. (Which explains why Tony Blair and others before and after him took so much time to prepare for Prime Ministers Question Time. They recognized the devastating consequences if they failed to do so.)

So, what can you do to prepare for question time? In some presentations I've attended, audience members have been briefed beforehand on what questions to ask. This can certainly help to maintain a degree of control, and once one or two planned questions have been asked, it can help the presenter to relax and can often stimulate and trigger questions from other people that had not been planned.

If you take this approach, just make sure the questions have some credibility and are not seen as obviously planted. For instance, the question 'Would you agree that we are a marvellous organization, led by an incredible leader and staff who work here should feel grateful to do so?' would clearly see most people reaching for their sick bags.

But what if the above is not an option – what can you do then? Here are five ideas.

1. Communicate when questions can be asked

Either you or whoever is running or chairing the meeting or event need to make people aware of when they can ask questions. In smaller meetings, questions might be encouraged throughout the presentation, but for more formal, larger presentations these are normally towards the end.

2. State how long you have for questions

If this part of the presentation is not managed well, there can be a complete loss of control. I've seen meetings drag on and overrun purely because there's been no set limit on the time for questions. The audience shouldn't be in control of when questions finish. You should. So set a time limit. That has the benefit of focusing both you and your audience.

3. Anticipate tough questions

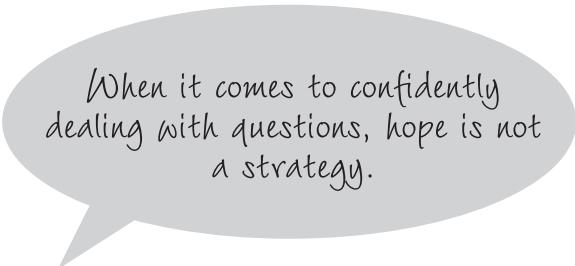
Several years ago I worked with a large outplacement organization where I helped people back into employment. I ran a two-day interviewing skills course where a colleague would conduct mock interviews on day two. As part of the preparation, I would ask the group which question they would hate to be asked during the interview. I'll never forget one guy's reply. Andy confessed:

‘I hate it when they ask “What are your weaknesses?”’

This is indeed a question favoured by many interviewers, although it's usually asked in tandem with the question ‘What are your strengths?’ It is an interesting question, though, as clearly we don't want to answer in such a way that completely destroys our chances of getting the job. The reply ‘To be honest, I'm not really a team player. I'm considered lazy, and I have no drive or ambition. Anger management is still something I struggle with, and I go to pieces when under pressure,’ will guarantee the interview comes to an abrupt end. Although you'll probably receive top marks for honesty.

Anyway, back to Andy and his weakness question. ‘So how do you respond to that question?’ I enquired. ‘Well, I just hope they don't ask it,’ he replied.

Here's the deal:



When it comes to confidently dealing with questions, hope is not a strategy.

So, make a list of tough questions that you might be asked. If you were in your audience, and for whatever reason wanted to give the speaker a challenging time, what questions would you ask? If you're not sure, ask someone else. Then, once you've identified some, start to prepare your answers. Of course, there may well be a question you hadn't anticipated. Fair enough. But you will be able to anticipate most questions, particularly when you've spent time considering and understanding your audience's needs.

4. Be honest

When you wing it, you waffle. So when you don't know the answer to a question, be honest and state 'I'm not fully aware of the facts on that particular topic. However, I'd be happy to get back to you when I do know the answer.' Then quickly move on to the next question. The reality is you might not know the answer to every question – so admit the fact. Deal with the situation confidently and quickly. Don't labour the point, don't shine a spotlight on your ignorance.

Acknowledge you don't know, offer to follow up and then move on.

Here's how I handled not knowing an answer to a question.

In my talks I refer to an experiment commonly known as 'Pavlov's dog experiment'. It's an example of how, in this case, a dog can be conditioned to respond to a certain stimulus. The point I'm seeking to make is that equally, as humans, we can be conditioned to respond to situations and stimuli in a particular way. One audience member interrupted by asking: 'What breed of dog was it?' Perhaps this was crucial to their understanding of the experiment, I don't know – although I suspect not. My reply was to the point:

'That's a fascinating question that I haven't been asked before. In all honesty, I'm not sure of the breed of dog. So I'll Google it and get back to you. Thanks for asking.'

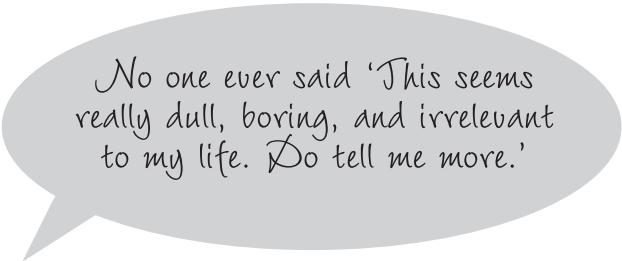
5. How to overcome no questions being asked

Apart from being asked a question you don't know the answer to, another awkward moment can occur when questions are invited and you're greeted with deathly silence. And as you continue to stand in the stillness, a mixture of emotions may be felt. Possibly you're feeling a sense of relief, particularly if you weren't looking forward to this part of the presentation. No questions means you can end your talk and there's no unexpected curveball question heading your way. Even so, such an ending certainly doesn't leave you or your audience on a high. It's also a missed opportunity to clarify or reinforce some of the points you've made.

But what if you were hoping for questions and didn't get any? What's that a sign of? Your audience is sick of the

sight of you? Maybe they sense your discomfort in speaking and simply want to spare you any further misery by not prolonging your agony. Or perhaps they were the ones in agony, suffering from a boring presentation and are desperate for some pain relief in the form of a coffee break or hearing from the next speaker. Perhaps the silence is born out of a real lack of interest in what you were talking about. Your message may have lacked relevance and, as you'd expect, no one is keen to know more about something they have no interest in.

The deal is:



No one ever said 'This seems really dull, boring, and irrelevant to my life. Do tell me more.'

Of course the opposite could also explain why there are no questions. You've done such a brilliant job covering your topic and addressing all the key points that people genuinely don't have any questions. The fact remains that, whatever the reason, no questions at the end of your talk can create a feeling of tension and possible anti-climax.

So what do you do?

It's simple. So simple, in fact, and so obvious (which everything is in hindsight, remember?) that you'll be staggered more people don't adopt this approach. Here's what you do.

You ask the first questions. Yup, that's right. If your audience doesn't have a question then you ask yourself the first question. Here's what you do – or to be more precise, here's what you say and do:

'I've now got five minutes for questions. Who has the first question?'

Pause. Look around the audience and make eye contact. Some people are a little self-conscious about speaking out in front of others. Making eye contact and smiling is more likely to encourage them. However, if there seems to be no sign of anyone asking a question, say this:

'A question I'm often asked is this ...'

And then proceed to reveal the question. It breaks the silence, makes you appear in control, and overcomes the awkward 'Who's going to be the first person to ask a question' moment. Trust me, if you do this then once you've finished answering your own question people will feel more comfortable asking their own. Believe me. It works.



Pause for Thought

Do you ever include questions as part of your presentation? If so, how do you currently prepare for them? Can you relate at all to how Tony Blair felt about dealing with questions, or do you feel more confident? If you don't currently include a time for questions in your communication with others, would there be a benefit to doing so?



My One Thing

Your ability to deal with questions is crucial when it comes to communicating with others. It really can be your chance to shine and establish your credibility – if you handle it well. If you don't use all the strategies covered in this chapter, choose one you will include in future. Here's a reminder:

1. Communicate when questions can be asked.
2. State how long you have for questions.
3. Anticipate tough questions.
4. Be honest.
5. Be prepared when there are no questions.

PART 3:

I'm Glad You
Asked That...



QUESTION 1:

**IS IT POSSIBLE TO
GET RID OF MY**

NERVES.

**BEFORE
PRESENTING?**

I could keep my answer to this question very short.

No. No it's not possible to fully get rid of your nerves. But you may be surprised to hear that I'm not actually sure you want to.

Here's the deal:

The key is to learn how to handle your nerves, not be strangled by them.

Seven ways to manage your nerves

One of my delegates said to me recently: 'I'm OK speaking to people if I have a pint in my hand.' Well that might calm his nerves, but here are seven insights and tips that will help you manage your nerves ... particularly when drinking a pint is not an option.

1. Remember nerves are normal

This is especially the case if you don't present regularly or if you're presenting a topic for the first time to people you're keen to impress. You see, we humans like to feel in control, so going into a situation that is either new or unfamiliar to us will inevitably cause a little tension.

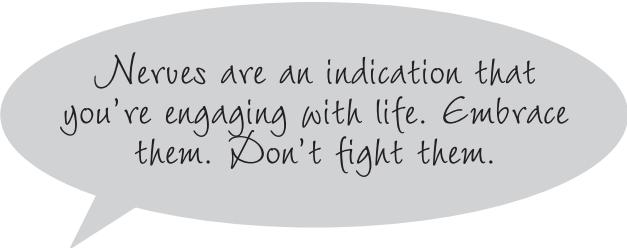
That's the primitive part of our brain just doing its job.

It's keeping you on our toes and alert to the potential challenges of a new situation. Its release of adrenalin and cortisol is its way of preparing you. And it's these hormones,

when released into your system, that cause you to feel nervous and experience feelings often described as ‘butterflies in your stomach’.

Now, rather than fight such feelings, it’s probably best to accept they’re normal. It’s your body’s natural response to the situation it’s faced with. As the author Rob Bell says, ‘Make friends with the butterflies’. I love that phrase.

The deal is:



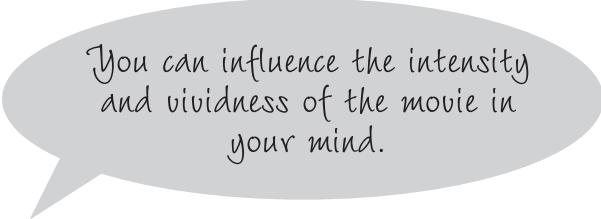
Nerves are an indication that
you're engaging with life. Embrace
them. Don't fight them.

But the word ‘nerves’ has so much negative baggage attached to it. So here’s an idea. What’s happening when you’re nervous is that adrenalin is being pumped around your body – so perhaps use the word ‘adrenalized’ to describe how you’re feeling rather than ‘nervous’. This word has more positive connotations attached to it. Yes, you may still feel nervous, but you’re using a more empowering word to describe your feelings, and that in itself can help increase your confidence.

2. Manage your movies

The brain is an incredible piece of hardware. However, be aware that it cannot tell the difference between a real or vividly imagined event. So, if you imagine things going wrong in your mind before the presentation, your brain will respond as if the scenario is actually taking place – a condition sometimes referred to as anticipatory stress.

Again, let me emphasize that this is a normal response. However, here's the good news.



You can influence the intensity
and vividness of the movie in
your mind.

The 3D technicolour version of things going wrong is definitely not helpful. If you're tempted to futurize the presentation going badly in your mind, how about imagining it in a fuzzy or blurred focus and in black and white? Or even better still, imagine the presentation going well. A positive projection of your future event could actually result in you feeling calmer. A technique I've used when I find my mind running away with itself and creating its own personal disaster movie is to remember this: you're the director of the movies in your mind.

And you can always shout 'Cut!'.

3. Focus on your audience

Our nerves can be perpetuated due to the fact that our underlying question may well be 'What do people think of me?' If that's the case, our energy is being focused inwardly, and this can increase our feelings of anxiety. A more effective question that will divert our energy and attention outwardly would be '*How can I best help my audience?*' Your brain can only hold one thought at a time. So when it's occupied thinking about this question, there's less opportunity for worrying and feeling anxious. (You may remember we've explored this idea previously.)

4. Be prepared

OK, so that just won this year's award for the world's most obvious piece of advice. But without preparation and using many of the ideas outlined in this book, you'd have a right to feel nervous. And if the talk you're making is important, and for whatever reason you've not put the time in to prepare, then it's understandable that your nerves are increasing. One approach some people adopt is to convince themselves that what they're doing is no big deal and that they'll just be able to wing it. This may relax you, but it does very little to prepare you mentally to give your best. So increase your preparation (which includes practising it out loud) and decrease your nerves.

5. Have a contingency plan

Nerves can stem from the fact that you're concerned things may go wrong. Well guess what? There will be occasions when they do. Rather than hope this never happens, anticipate it instead. Technology problems? Have a backup. For instance, it's wise to anticipate, as I did recently, what you would do without being able to show slides. If you're travelling to give your talk, expect traffic delays and difficulty parking.

This is not being negative. It's being prepared.

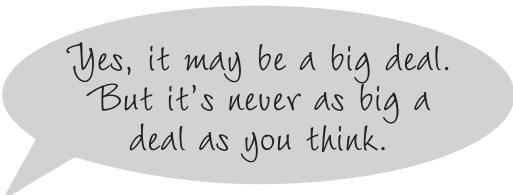
Having a backup plan and preparing for the worst means you're reducing (you can never fully eliminate) potential surprises.

6. Get perspective

In your eyes, this may indeed be an important presentation. A new job or promotion may be riding on it. If things don't go well, a possible worst case scenario is that you might look or feel a little stupid. If that happens, do this.

Take a moment to look at yourself in the mirror. Guess what? You're still alive. Is it possible that some time in human history someone felt even worse than you right now? And if you have messed up, is it possible that someone has messed up even more?

Now, does this make you instantly feel a whole lot better? Probably not, but it is planting the seed to see what happened to you in perspective. In many ways we need to get over ourselves. The universe does not revolve around us. All eyes in the room may at some stage have been focused on us, but they're not anymore. Other events will quickly occupy people's minds.



*Yes, it may be a big deal.
But it's never as big a
deal as you think.*

At the 2015 Miss Universe competition the host Steve Harvey announced the wrong winner. Can you believe that? The wrong contestant was crowned. Steve's an experienced compere, but he announced Miss Colombia as the winner rather than the actual winner, Miss Philippines. Now, will he be remembered for such a gaffe? Absolutely. Will he now face a firing squad? Unlikely. Will he have felt awful about it in the weeks after it happened? Probably. After all, he's a professional who cares deeply about what he did and the impact he's made.

But having taken responsibility, apologized and corrected his mistake, I believe he will one day be able to look back

at the whole event and smile. And if he was to ask himself ‘What can I find that’s positive in this situation?’ I reckon he’d come up with lots. Without such a mistake I would not even have known the competition had taken place (me along with several million other people, in fact). I’d certainly never heard of Steve Harvey before this, but because of this mistake he’s now achieved a far higher profile.

Whatever you’re about to do, in terms of a presentation or job interview, get perspective. On a scale of 1–10 where 10 equals death, where is it really?

7. Slow your breathing

When we’re anxious our breathing is often fast and shallow, which increases our heart rate and further fuels our nerves. So we need to take control of our breathing. Think about it. Have you ever seen a stressed out yoga teacher?

Exactly. That’s my point.

But you don’t have to adopt the lotus position just before you speak in order to calm your nerves. Simply do the following. Inhale normally and exhale slowly. Maybe even follow the advice of ‘take a deep breath’ (but don’t hold it for too long). The key though is in the exhaling. The release of your breath. Take it nice and slowly and as you do you’ll notice your heart rate begins to slow down too. And you begin to relax.

Here’s a final thought when it comes to managing your nerves. You may well be experiencing what psychologists call the *illusion of transparency*. This occurs when you have

an exaggerated sense of how obvious your nerves are to your audience. In fact, your nerves are rarely as evident to your audience as you might think. I call it the ‘calm duck syndrome’ – admittedly not the most sophisticated of intellectual terms, but it makes the point. Like you, the duck appears calm on the surface, but underneath it’s paddling like crazy. So relax ... it’s very unlikely that your audience will appreciate how nervous you’re actually feeling.



Pause for Thought

Are nerves an issue for you at all when it comes to communicating with others? If so, in which specific situations?

If nerves are something you suffer from, I would suggest you read this chapter again. It’s so easy to race through something hoping you’ll come across the magic pill that will immediately alleviate all your anxiety. Such a pill may exist, but it’s unlikely to be legal, and being too relaxed can actually undermine your performance. So make sure you digest what’s been explored in the previous pages. If nerves aren’t much an issue for you, then who do you know who would benefit from the ideas and insights we’ve been exploring?



My One Thing

In this chapter we explored seven ways to more effectively manage your nerves. Decide which one you will focus on in particular to ensure you handle, and are not strangled by, nerves.

1. Remember nerves are normal.
2. Manage your movies.
3. Focus on your audience.
4. Be prepared.
5. Have a contingency plan.
6. Get perspective.
7. Slow your breathing.

QUESTION 2:

IS IT EVER
APPROPRIATE TO USE



HUMOUR

IN MY PRESENTATION?

I'm convinced humour can be appropriate – and in some cases desperately needed – when communicating with others. It can actually be the vital ingredient that results in your audience both remembering and engaging with you. But be careful. When it's inappropriate or delivered badly it can lead to you being remembered for all the wrong reasons.

In my experience of listening to hundreds of presentations, it's hard to remember one that wouldn't have benefited from at least a small injection of humour. Although to be fair, I've never been present when management are announcing staff redundancies or some other bad news – in which case humour would be highly inappropriate and even offensive.

But why can it be so helpful? Well, let's explore some reasons.

At a very basic level, when someone meets you their underlying question is this: friend or foe? The brain is making instant snap judgements about people from the moment you lay eyes on them. And interestingly (and you've probably never thought about this before), one thing they'll notice is your teeth.

Really? Come on, I hear you say, is this my rather weak attempt at humour? Well actually, it's not. But let me put it another way. People will notice your facial features, especially whether you smile or not. You see, when we greet strangers we often smile at each other, which is a habit some experts suggest we learnt from our primitive ancestors, who were basically saying when they smiled, 'I come in peace, I have no intention of taking your family

as slaves, or boiling you alive in goat's milk. Not on this occasion anyway.' Which is well worth remembering next time someone smiles at you.

So, when you use humour that results in some people laughing, metaphorically speaking, not only are they opening their mouths (and showing their teeth), but they're also opening their minds. You see, humour causes people to be more relaxed. When a person laughs it releases endorphins in the brain – feel-good chemicals. And when they're relaxed they feel less threatened and therefore more receptive to your message. As the American comedian Chris Bliss says:

Laughter turns walls
into windows.

It's an incredibly powerful way to put people at ease, and is one of the quickest ways of getting people to like you. Which is exactly what you're hoping to achieve if you want to speak so that people really listen.

Here's the deal:

Humour can release tension,
create a connection and cause
people to become more receptive
to you.

As the author Ken Robinson says: ‘If they’re laughing they’re listening.’ Great. That’s wonderful to hear if you’re a naturally humorous person who seems to possess the gift of making others laugh. But what if you don’t? What then? Is it possible to be funny, even when you’re not?

I believe it is.

You might not end up taking your own one-person comedy show on tour, but I believe it is possible to inject humour into your communication. Before we look at how you can do it, here’s something to be aware of.

Remember the chapter ‘Get your attitude into gear’? The whole premise of that chapter was the importance and impact of your attitude. In other words, open your mind before opening your mouth. But if you currently have the mindset ‘I’m not funny and I never will be’, then let me reassure you – you’re right.

If your attitude to your audience is ‘they’re a miserable bunch, they never laugh at anything’ then again, I’d suggest you’re right. And if your thoughts on the topic you’re talking about are ‘this has to be the driest, dullest topic on planet earth’ then it will be.

Get my point? You have to push the door to your mind slightly ajar in order to believe it’s possible to inject at least a little humour into your message. And notice I said ‘humour’ and not ‘tell jokes’. I’m known for using humour in my talks. In fact, I love making people laugh. But I’m lousy at telling jokes. In fact, worse than lousy.

Ask my kids.

I have the capacity not only to ruin a punchline but also to forget it entirely. So guess what? I don't tell jokes – and my advice to you is that unless you're extremely talented at doing so, and are almost certain your audience will laugh, then you shouldn't either. There's an art to telling jokes that is actually harder than it seems.

So, if jokes are off the agenda in most cases, what could you do? Here are some options.

1. Tell amusing stories

Yes, we're back to the lessons from JC, Jo and the Greek guy. Most people will at times experience something funny in their day-to-day lives. If you'd tell it to friends over dinner, or to colleagues in the canteen, then it's got the potential to be used in your presentation. Providing, that is, it meets the following criteria:

- When you told the story, did the people you told it to enjoy it, or at least smile?
- Would this story not only be amusing but also relevant to your message?
- Thinking about the people you're presenting to, are you comfortable telling them this story? Are they easily offended?

If you're presenting to strangers, perhaps use a story you're confident most people will find amusing, recognizing the potentially diverse mix of people you're speaking to. Your story about what happened on the rugby tour or your friend's hen party may be one to keep for a select audience, while the one about what happened to you

when you went shopping with your family, or an event that happened at work, may have broader appeal. In fact, I'd encourage you to make a note of when amusing things happen to you – you never know when you might want to use them.

For instance, I tell a story about managing thirty women when I worked for a food production company. The women were on the production line making economy beefburgers.

I tell my audience: 'I learnt two major lessons from that experience. Number one. Don't eat economy beefburgers.' I then pause and wait for a reaction – as I want to give them time to process what I've said. It doesn't bring the house down, but it does get a few laughs. Going back to my earlier point, I start to notice some people's teeth – they're smiling. Now I've delivered this line often enough to be able to gauge by the response what kind of audience I've got. There has been the very rare occasion where I've failed to even gain a small titter. But that's OK, though it can be a little unnerving. The point is I've not set this up as a joke; I'm just including it as part of my background about myself. Their silence doesn't signal the end for me, but it might signal that I need to be careful how I use humour during the rest of my presentation with that particular audience.

Oh, and if you want to know which stories are the best in terms of humour, they're usually the ones told at your expense. When Andy Murray, the British tennis player, won the BBC Sports Personality of the Year award in 2015 he told the following anecdote in his acceptance speech.

He recalled hearing someone say that spending time with Andy Murray (if you're not from the UK he has a reputation in some people's eyes of being a dour Scot) would be like spending a weekend in Worthing. Andy's reply to this rather snide put down was: 'To be fair, I think that a bit harsh on Worthing.' This is a perfect example of using humour at his own expense. By making himself the butt of the joke not only does the audience relax, but he also appears more likeable.

So stories are one way to inject humour. What about some others?

2. Video clips and amusing pictures

You could show an amusing picture or a video clip. Make sure the clip isn't too long (definitely no longer than two minutes) and that if you include any text on the picture it's large and bold enough to be read by everybody. As humour can be subjective, if you're showing a video remember it's safer to introduce the clip in a low-key way rather than saying 'what you're about to see is hilarious'. It might be, but if it's not, you've created an awkward moment. It's your audience who will determine whether it's hilarious or not, so it's better to undersell rather than oversell the impact of what they're about to see.

3. Use quotes

Quotes can be a short and simple way of injecting humour into your message. One I regularly use isn't even intended to be particularly funny, but some people find the visual imagery amusing. '*If you're riding a dead horse, dismount.*'

Now there are literally thousands of humorous quotes to be found online. Personally, on the laughter scale some

rank higher than others, and remember humour can be very subjective. But at least by using them you can lighten the atmosphere and defuse some of the seriousness that so often pervades presentations. Here are some examples, most of which will need some introduction or putting into context. Although they could be delivered verbally, they may work better being shown on a slide:

‘If quitters never win and winners never quit, then who was the fool who said “quit while you’re ahead”?’

‘I wouldn’t mind change if everything wasn’t so different afterwards.’

‘When life shuts a door ... open it again. It’s a door. That’s how they work.’

OK, this is a bit of a random one, but it brought a smile to my face:

‘I dream of a better world where chickens can cross the road without having their motives questioned.’

This also made me smile:

‘The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits.’ – Albert Einstein

This next one is ideal if you want to talk about communication and the art of listening:

‘Oh, I’m sorry ... did the middle of my sentence interrupt the beginning of yours?’

Or if you have a presentation that’s full of facts and figures, you can always say ‘I’m a little concerned about this next quote ...’

‘Get your facts first, then you distort them as you please.’

Or if you’re introducing the importance of team work you can show a quote and say ‘I suggest you *don’t* subscribe to the following piece of advice ...’

‘If someone says “Expect the unexpected”, slap them in the face and say “You weren’t expecting that were you?”’

Trust me, the choice of quotes to use is endless. *Remember, not everyone will find them funny, and that’s OK.* Your goal is to try and inject some humour – you’re not auditioning for your own television comedy series.

What if you say something you think is amusing and there’s absolutely no response?

OK, be prepared. Sometimes your attempts at humour might not produce even a titter or a polite fake smile. I’d like to say that’s never happened to me. But it has. Fortunately I’m prepared, and interestingly enough my reaction to not getting a laugh usually generates a laugh. Here are some phrases I’ve used when my humour has been met by deathly silence:

‘That wasn’t meant to be funny, and clearly judging by the response it wasn’t.’

‘That was designed to get a silent laugh ... And it seems to have worked.’

‘That was an attempt at humour for those of you who were wondering.’

‘That worked better in rehearsal.’

Fortunately, I rarely have to use them, but it's helpful to have some responses ready just in case. If you had to choose one you'd use, which would it be? And if you can think of any of your own or you've heard others used, please let me know (my details are at the back of the book).

As I've said before, humour is very subjective. And some people might be like me – they find things funny, but you can't always tell from their face.

Seriously, I do often laugh. But internally.

However, I have a relative who is the complete opposite. Boy do they show their teeth, and it's often accompanied by a noise that a large gathering of hyenas would be proud of. I'd love to reveal who it is, but for the sake of family harmony and my future survival I better not. (They'd probably kill me.)

In wrapping up this section on the use of humour, it's worth reflecting on the following. Making a presentation or giving a talk is like preparing a meal for someone. First, know your audience. It's no use serving an Indian meal to someone who hates spicy food. And even if you get the dish right (i.e. you tailor your message to your audience), you've still got to think about the ingredients you use. Humour is like one of those ingredients. Used in the right amounts it can make a presentation – but just like adding certain spices to a meal, the advice 'use sparingly' will at times be worth following. And if you're unsure about using humour, the following is worth heeding:

When uncertain, pull
the curtain.

In other words ... if in doubt, leave it out.



Pause for Thought

Be honest, could you ever be accused of being too serious? In terms of your communication, do you ever use humour? If not, what's stopping you? Consider some of the contexts in which you communicate with others – are there occasions when an injection of humour would be beneficial? And if so, why? Perhaps it's time to bring your humour into the workplace a little more often – particularly when people are under a lot of pressure and some light relief might be welcomed. What do you reckon?



My One Thing

So humour could be a great way to make your message memorable and engaging. We explored ways you could do that:

- Tell amusing stories.
- Show video clips and amusing pictures.
- Use quotes.

Which one of the above strategies will you use to help you communicate with influence and impact?

QUESTION 3:

HOW IMPORTANT IS

BODY

LANGUAGE

**WHEN
COMMUNICATING
WITH OTHERS?**

The temptation when we look at the issue of body language is to focus solely on the obvious, but sometimes superficial, points like ‘what to do with your hands’ and ‘make sure you maintain good eye contact’. Now, although eye contact and the use of hands can be important, I’d like to start by returning to some deeper and more important aspects of our communication.

We’ve already referred previously to the chapter ‘Get your attitude into gear’, but I’d like to do so again. The reality is that your attitude towards your topic, audience and yourself will impact your body language – probably far more than you realize.

Here’s the deal. In order to communicate with influence and impact, it’s vitally important that we understand the connection between our minds and our bodies. They’re actually inextricably linked, and engage and interact with each other in ways many of us are unaware of. Unfortunately, too many books have treated body language as a sole entity, as if it exists in isolation, separate to what’s going on inside your head. In my opinion, this approach is rather unhelpful.

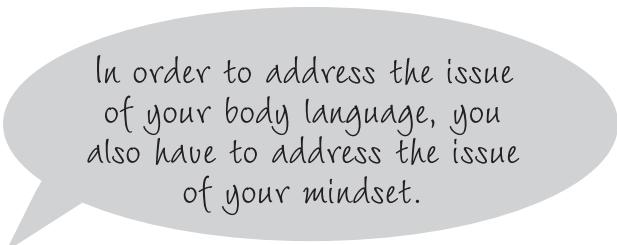
Let’s see why.

Picture the scene. You’re in a cafe with friends, relaxing and joking. You recount an interesting and amusing event that happened at work that week. Now hold that picture there. At that precise moment in time, how conscious are you of your body language? Probably not at all. You see, at that moment you’re feeling relaxed, are among friends and have something you want to say. And without any coaching or advice from a body language guru, the odds

are you'll be projecting a relaxed and confident image. Agree?

Your body language has as much to do with what's going on in your head and how you're feeling as it does with your body.

So ...



In order to address the issue
of your body language, you
also have to address the issue
of your mindset.

For instance, if you're speaking at an event and you don't want to be there, feel under pressure and want to finish as quickly as possible, that will be reflected in your body language. Obvious, eh?

But here's something I find really fascinating.

Your body language doesn't just send a message to your audience. It also sends a message to yourself.

Confused? Let me explain.

William James, often dubbed the father of modern psychology, argued that how you carry yourself, your posture, your breathing and your facial expressions, are all affected by the way you think, feel and behave. In other words, he was championing the whole mind–body connection. Now James left this planet over a hundred years ago, but it's the more recent work of social psychologist and associate professor at Harvard University, Amy Cuddy, that has

brought James's insights right into the 21st century and underpinned it with scientific research.

Once you've finished this book, please do yourself a favour and visit the website TED.com. Then type the name Amy Cuddy into the search bar and watch her talk 'Your body language shapes who you are'. You'll find it an incredibly valuable twenty-two minutes of your time. In that video, Cuddy makes a number of important points – as she does in her book *Presence: Bringing Your Boldest Self To Your Biggest Challenge*. So please make sure you make a note to watch it.

To whet your appetite, let me distil some of her insights for you, because what she has to say will prove invaluable to you in becoming a more confident communicator.

One of her key messages is simply this. When we act with confidence we feel more confident. Interestingly, Cuddy's research revealed that your physiology, particularly your posture, affects how you feel. William James articulated it another way. 'I don't sing because I'm happy, I'm happy because I sing.'

In a nutshell, confidence is affected by both your mindset and your body language. As simple as it sounds, if you want to feel more confident, act more confident.

You see, it's just possible that you follow all those tips I outlined in the chapter on how to deal with your nerves and yet you still feel you're struggling to manage them. What could ultimately make the difference to how you're feeling is simply acting and behaving in a confident manner. Now, don't rely solely on this approach to the omission of all the other ideas I have outlined – but incorporate it alongside them.

In my book *Self-Confidence*, I highlight that life is about learning to live with a degree of self-doubt – but seeing it as your companion rather than your master. In other words, make sure it's in the back seat of the car, not the driver's seat. If you don't, and you allow your self-doubt to dominate, you strangle your own voice. You can literally shrink, from a physical perspective. And people who lack confidence or, as Cuddy describes it, a sense of power, literally make themselves smaller. They stand less tall. They slouch. They lower their gaze and avoid eye contact. They send the message to their audience 'I don't want to be here'. And Cuddy's point is that they're also sending the same message to themselves, therefore further undermining their confidence.

So what do we need to do?

Act confident.

Sounds simple enough, but in reality what does that mean?

It means following your parents' advice and also remembering how soldiers stand on parade. Stand up straight. Chin up. Shoulders back. Legs apart. Not only do you look more confident (and think about it, the last thing a soldier wants to do is look scared, even if they are), but Cuddy's point is that you'll begin to feel more confident too.

When you look at the animal kingdom, from peacocks through to chimpanzees, if they want to demonstrate a sign of power they make themselves physically bigger. Amy argues we should do the same. Not in order to appear dominant – but to appear confident. Believe me, people want to trust you, and that's really difficult to do when your body language conveys that you don't appear to trust

yourself. The Hugh Grant bumbling, slightly hesitant film character can be endearing to a degree, but would you really want to see his behaviour being consistently displayed by someone?

So, returning to the mind–body connection, think of their relationship as being like two ballroom dancers. By allowing your body to be the lead partner, your feelings will, according to the research Cuddy outlined, automatically follow. Or to put it another way:

Right feelings follow
right actions.

To help you act and behave in a more confident way, think about your answers to the following questions:

- How would a person who was feeling confident act in your situation?
- How would they sound?
- Where would they look? (I'll give you a clue – not at the ground.)
- What message would they portray with their facial features? (A smile perhaps?)
- If they were shaking hands, how would they do that?

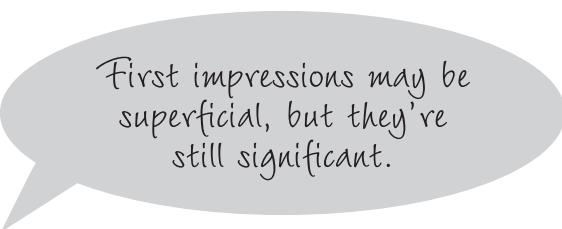
Now remember, this is a two-pronged approach to projecting confidence. Mindset and behaviour. And your goal is to appear confident, not intimidating. So excessive eye contact is a no-no. It's either interpreted as flirting or an arrogant attempt to try and dominate someone.

Also, be sensitive to the culture of your audience. I'm usually sensitive to how my body language can be interpreted differently in some countries, but mistakes can still be made. I have to confess that my audience in Iran were more than gracious in their acceptance of my thumbs up sign, which I was informed later was the equivalent of showing a Western audience my middle finger. Still, I did it with a smile.

Now it's not just body language that's important to consider when exploring the impact of non-verbal communication.

Be aware also of the messages you send by the clothes you're wearing (or perhaps not wearing).

Here's the deal:



First impressions may be superficial, but they're still significant.

If in doubt, I'd rather over dress than under dress when I'm speaking; but whatever I'm wearing, I'm conscious that I'm communicating a message to my audience. Now, I recognize what you wear is a matter of taste, but take time to consider what message you'd like your clothes to communicate to your audience, and also think about how you feel wearing them.

If, for whatever reason, you don't feel comfortable wearing something, then don't wear it. Trust me, if you don't feel comfortable that will affect your body language and how

you come across to others. Also, be more aware of what other people wear, and ask yourself: ‘Would I look good in that?’ Get feedback from an honest friend about what you’re wearing. If in doubt, send a photo of yourself to my mate Dave. He might not be your friend, but he’ll definitely give you some honest feedback.

In summary

When it comes to body language, let’s move from the trivial – he scratched his nose nineteen minutes into his talk which indicates he’s probably lying – to the significant. Let’s grasp the bigger picture here – the mind–body connection. And although we might need to act confident even when we’re not initially feeling it, your goal in doing so is not to deceive others but to give yourself the best opportunity to serve them.

That comes from a sense of ‘I’m glad to be here – I’ve something to say’ rather than ‘I apologise for my presence – I know I’m not worthy of your attention’. OK, I’m exaggerating a little, but you get my point don’t you?

Want to communicate with influence and impact? Want to speak so people really listen? Then be present in the moment (rather than wishing it was over) and own your space. Don’t shrink. Expand. Smile. And engage in eye contact. Remember that through your body language you’re having entire conversations – without saying a word. And those conversations are not just with your audience, but with yourself too. So be more aware of those conversations, and make sure they’re serving your message, not strangling it.

Oh, and one final point. Be aware of your audience's body language. If they're frothing at the mouth or walking out in large numbers, that's probably not a very good sign.



Pause for Thought

How aware are you of the impact your body language has on your audience? How about the impact it has on how you're feeling? In terms of what you wear, how much attention do you give this? I was once told that if I'm selling to a managing director I should dress like a managing director – which is great advice – if they're the same gender as you. Either way, is it possible your wardrobe needs an upgrade and your body language needs an uplift?



My One Thing

You simply have one action to take. Watch that TED talk by Amy Cuddy.

So what's next for you?

Well, we've just about finished our journey together. I hope it's been a worthwhile trip for you. Here's a quick reminder of some of the places we visited, with the aim of enabling you to speak so people really listen.

We started by uncovering '**The Seven Great Sins of Speaking**'. Here's a quick recap of them:

1. **A failure to make your message sticky or memorable** ... so make sure you cover your content in Velcro, rather than coat it in Teflon.
2. **Drowning people in detail** ... SLIM down your content. Say Less, Impact More.
3. **A failure to consider or understand your audience's needs** ... so get to know your audience, not just your message.
4. **Focusing on features rather than selling benefits** ... so make sure you answer your audience's question: 'Why should I care?'

5. **Winging it** ... so beware the dangers of complacency – and perhaps even arrogance.
6. **Showing slides that suck ... the life out of your audience** ... so remember you're the star of the show – and as for your slides, do they need ditching or developing?
7. **Taking people on a pointless ramble** ... so make sure you answer the question 'So what's your point?'

The main part of our journey focused on '**The Eight Great Ways to Speak so People Really Listen**'. Let's remind ourselves of some of the stop off points and highlights of our tour.

1. **Get real** ... so bring your personality to your communication, and remember that connection with your audience is crucial.
2. **Get your attitude into gear** ... especially in relation to your topic, your audience, and yourself.
3. **Start at the end** ... and focus on what you want people to Know, Feel, and Do (KFD).
4. **Sort out your skeletons** ... without structure or direction your talk will fall apart.
5. **Grab 'em by the eyeballs** ... you need to start by getting people's attention – so make sure they're engaged within the first ninety seconds.
6. **Become an artist** ... let's paint pictures and be more visual with our words, our slides, and even by using props.

7. **Learn lessons from JC, Jo and the Greek guy** ... start using the oldest and most effective communication tool in human history – tell stories.
8. **Shine at question time** ... handle them well and you'll enhance your credibility – and add impact to your message.

As you reflect back on those eight destinations, were any of them particular highlights for you? Perhaps, just as we like to reminisce by looking through old photos, it would be worthwhile revisiting and reminding yourself of some of the key highlights of our journey together – particularly the ‘My One Thing’ section at the end of each chapter.

Finally, we spent some time exploring ‘**I’m Glad You Asked That ...**’: the three questions I’m often asked about speaking and presenting. They covered the following areas.

1. **Nerves** ... they’re normal and there’s plenty you can do to handle them, not be strangled by them. I gave you seven strategies to start with.
2. **Humour** ... when you lighten up, your audience open up ... their minds.
3. **Body language** ... there’s a mind–body connection we need to be aware of, and remember your body language sends a message to yourself – not just your audience.

So there you have it – our time together is drawing to a close. What we’ve explored wasn’t meant to be a precise

prescription on how to communicate, but rather a set of principles and ideas to help you speak so people really listen. Hopefully you believe you have something worthwhile to say – and what you've discovered in reading this book will help you to say that with greater confidence and conviction from now on.

Be aware that having the opportunity to speak and present to others is both a privilege and a responsibility. Many people don't recognize it as such, and therefore fail to maximize their influence and impact on others. Sometimes that's due to ignorance, other times arrogance, and occasionally in some parts of the world because they're unable to access the tools and ideas required to communicate more effectively.

If you've read this far, I sense you're now aware of not just your privilege and responsibility, but also the opportunity you have when you raise your game as a communicator. From Winston Churchill to Barack Obama, there are many examples of how words can change a nation. Your aspirations might not be quite the same as those guys, but never doubt that your words can profoundly impact people's lives, whether spoken privately or publically, or in your personal or professional life.

They might not change the world, but they could change someone's world.

From business to politics, and from education to philosophy, words matter. They can enrich, stimulate and challenge people's thinking. But whether they fall on deaf ears or on open minds, it's not solely down to what you say.

It's down to how you say it.

To me, raising your game as a communicator is not some self-indulgent hobby. It actually provides an opportunity to make a difference. Deep down I think that's the case for us all. So seize the opportunities that developing this skill provides. Refuse to be a mere spectator in life.

Be a player.

Be aware that you won't please or connect with everyone. And that's OK. In fact, in my experience the only way to avoid any kind of criticism is to say nothing, do nothing, and be nothing. Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't believe that's in the script for what our story on earth should be – an endless quest to avoid criticism.

I hope reading this book proves to be a springboard to you achieving even more success, and causes you to give talks that start talks – in the words of author and speaker Rob Bell.

Remember, speaking with influence and impact is not simply for the chosen few. It's for the many.

But it doesn't happen by magic.

It happens through hard work, practice and the humility to recognize that we can all improve from wherever we currently find ourselves.

What's next for you? Only you can decide. But here's some advice I hope you find helpful.

Be bold. Sometimes be brave. And above all, have some fun.

Whether or not our paths should cross in the future, I really do wish you success in making a difference – and I wish you success in speaking – so people really listen.

Enjoy the journey.

Paul McGee

So what did you think?

I'd love to find out the ways in which this book has helped you, and which ideas you intend to implement. So here are a few ways we can connect – and I promise you will receive a reply.

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Email: Paul.McGee@theSUMOguy.com

Text: +44 (0)7771536666

If you want to tell a wider audience what you thought of this book, you can always leave a review on Amazon.

About Paul McGee



Paul McGee is a conference speaker, seminar presenter, communication coach and bestselling author.

His academic background is in behavioural and social psychology, and his early career was spent in Human Resources and People Development.

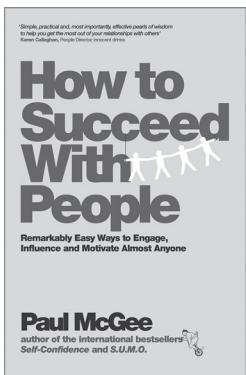
He's one of the UK's leading speakers on change, inspiring leadership and communicating with confidence. His thought-provoking, humorous and practical approach to life has seen him speak in 40 countries and he's sold over 200,000 books worldwide. He also works on a consultancy and coaching basis with an English Premier League football team.

He developed the SUMO (Shut Up, Move On) brand in 2002 and more recently launched SUMO4Schools, a programme designed to help young people realize their potential and develop skills for life.

He's curious about faith, fascinated by people, and passionate about football, family and friendships.

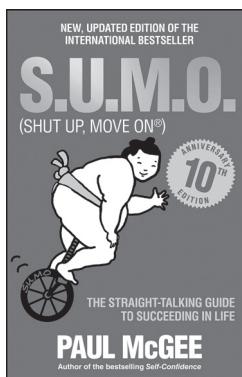
To find out more about his work, visit www.theSUMOGuy.com.

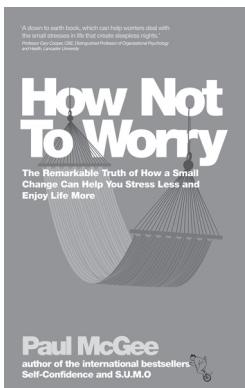
Other books by Paul McGee



*How to Succeed With People:
Remarkably Easy Ways to
Engage, Influence and
Motivate Almost Anyone*
(2013)

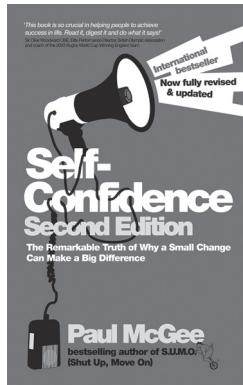
*S.U.M.O. (Shut Up, Move On), 10th Anniversary
Edition: The Straight-Talking
Guide to Succeeding in Life*
(2015)



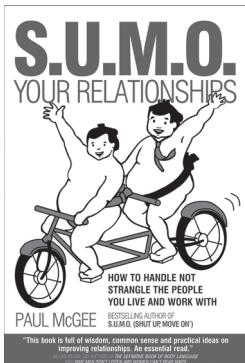


How Not to Worry: The Remarkable Truth of How A Small Change Can Help You Stress Less and Enjoy Life More (2012)

Self-Confidence, Second Edition: The Remarkable Truth of Why A Small Change Can Make a Big Difference (2012)



S.U.M.O. Your Relationships: How to Handle Not Strangle The People You Live and Work With (2007)



Want Paul to speak for your organization?

Paul McGee speaks around the world at conferences and company events. From a keynote address to a one-day seminar, he addresses the following areas:

- Inspiring leadership
- How to survive and thrive in a changing world
- How to communicate with influence and impact.

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