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## 40 Hours to Success: How PM Ellen Chisa Prepares for a Talk (http://www.5050pledge.com/ellen-chisa/)

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"Luck favors the prepared mind" is a maxim that Product Manager Ellen Chisa has lived by throughout her speaking career.

Since her earliest days giving talks for Model United Nations and in her speech course in high school, she has spoken at SXSW, CreativeMornings, and Greylock Partners' #ProductSF conference (https://vimeo.com/119361584). She's also taught General Assembly courses, spoken to a group of 1000 at Harvard Business School, and she has even developed and taught an entire three-month product management alumni seminar at her alma mater, Olin College.



(<http://www.5050pledge.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Screenshot-2016-01-14-15.35.28.png>)

She has a lot of PM experience to pull from – with more than five years experience building products across Microsoft and Kickstarter, and now building products at Boston-based Lola Travel.

Through all this experience, Ellen has carved out a method that works for her (which is something we've heard before (<http://www.5050pledge.com/caterina-rizzi/>)). She doesn't beat around the bush though: It takes a healthy dose of time. Ellen estimates she spends about 40 hours developing one amazing talk. If you want a great, memorable talk, you have to do the work. There are no shortcuts to prepare yourself to go up on stage and persuade an audience.

We chatted with Ellen to understand and share what she's learned over the years in developing this process to create engaging and focused talks.

## 1. Prepare a Quick Narrative (5 hours)

"The first part is writing out the narrative and the core mission of the talk," Ellen explains. Having a mission is an important starting point that many people skip over. Make sure you know what you want your audience to have gained when you step off the stage, and what you want to accomplish, too. Building this narrative helps Ellen understand what pieces are important, and get an initial sense of the overall flow of her talk.

This step is where you develop the personality of your talk, too. "People often feel like they don't have anything unique to say. That's not true. Everyone really does have something to share, it's just about sharing it differently." Even if the specific items you're speaking about seem overly common, your experiences and the narrative you weave are guaranteed to be unique (<http://www.5050pledge.com/natalia-burina/>). Spend the time here to make sure you're confident with the overall narrative as it relates to your mission.

2. Rewrite It (5-10 hours)

Next? Get started by writing a first draft of your talk. “After I’ve prepared the narrative, I rewrite the talk like an essay, over and over again. It’s about getting the essence of what I’m trying to communicate down.”

(http://www.5050pledge.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/ellen-chisa-notebook.jpg)

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One approach that Ellen uses for rewriting her talks is to go back and ensure that she’s framed the talk in a way that makes sense for the audience. In her most successful presentation at Microsoft, where she spoke to a group of designers, Ellen says, “I framed my presentation from the angle of the people I spoke to. I said to our designers, ‘Let’s walk through our user journey together.’ It was more emotional. It was not a top-down ‘This is what the hierarchy says,’ talk.”

She presented her ideas to 30 designers that day and, afterwards, “One of the designers emailed me to say it was an amazing presentation of ideas,” she says. To help ensure your talk resonates in the same way, it is key to rewrite with your audience in mind.

3. Move Onto Slides and Practice Alone (10 hours)

“I take special care during this stage to fix where the narrative of the talk doesn’t match my slides.” It’s easy to get off track once you start adding in the details. This step is an important one, to make sure you don’t stray from your original mission.

Practicing alone will also alert you to other large problems in the presentation, like if the talk is nowhere near long enough or if it is far too long for the time slot you’ve been given. “Everything I do is way shorter than it’s supposed to be,” Ellen says of her own practice sessions. This step ensures that she’s able to identify any similar problems, and shore up the talk before getting other people involved in helping to craft it further.

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If you haven't practiced alone before, Communispond CEO Bill Rosenthal provides a blueprint for practicing solo here (<http://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesleadershipforum/2013/06/19/the-only-way-to-prepare-to-give-a-presentation/>).

#### 4. Practice with a Harsh Friend (5-10 hours)

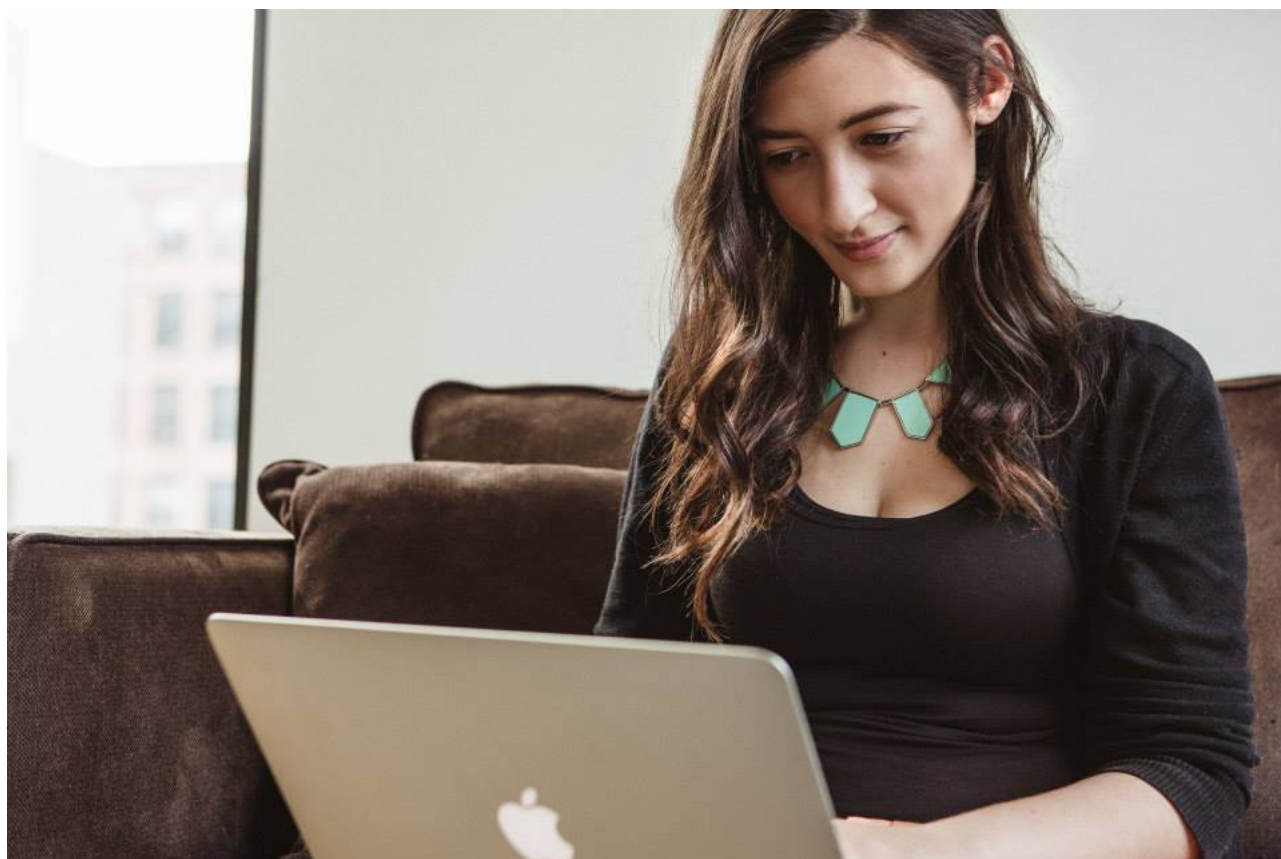
After you've already done the work of getting your preliminary ideas down – re-focusing through rewrites and practicing by yourself – it's time to put your talk to the test in front of a critic who can give you helpful feedback. This doesn't work for everyone (<http://www.5050pledge.com/caterina-rizzi/>), but it's a common denominator in almost all the great speakers we talk to.

Ellen does admit that this can be nerve wracking. She recognizes that it can also mean she has to start from square one if the talk is a miss with her trusted colleague.

"Then I refine from there. Sometimes I start completely over. It's better to find out the talk needs refining at this stage than much later." To help your friend help you, make sure to share with them the mission of your talk, along with some the information about the event too.

#### 5. Refine (5 hours)

Refining your talk is as much about revisiting that narrative and sharpening it as it is getting all the details and inflections right. Ellen believes that the best way to polish your talk is to get inspiration from others.



(<http://www.5050pledge.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/ellen-chisa-laptop.jpg>)

"Listen to people who are good speakers and figure out why. I've never had a speaking coach, but I've gone out and found great speakers and watched them." Think about how and why they're using certain phrases, how they choose to pace the various parts, how their intonation and energy changes. There's a lot more to giving a great talk than just getting

up on stage, and clicking through slides.

Want some more solid tips on how to refine your talk and polish it? LeWeb co-founder Loic LeMur has some great takeaways on how to be a great public speaker (<https://medium.com/@loic/what-makes-a-good-public-speaker-ab34b4e6fb20#.9fp4hsgcm>).

(<http://www.5050pledge.com/unexpected-tips-for-women-speakers-from-women-who-own-the-stage/>)

## Preparation Builds Respect for Your Work

Ellen believes all this work – up to 40 hours per talk – is well worth it. She’s planning to expand her speaking this year, from applying this method to develop each of her talks. “I want to commit myself to speaking once per month,” she shares.

What has Ellen found, in systematically building her talks in this way, and delivering her message on stage?

“People take me more seriously,” she says simply. All this speaking has elevated her career and the amount of respect she gets as a professional. “And the more women there are on stage, the harder it becomes for people to say that there aren’t women in the industry.” That’s a mission we are already fighting hard to realize.

by the5050pledge (<http://www.5050pledge.com/author/the5050pledge/>)



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