



# Book Move the World

## Persuade Your Audience, Change Minds, and Achieve Your Goals

Dean M. Brenner  
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### Recommendation

Someone who writes a book about persuasive communication should be able to present information in a masterful, engaging style. Dean M. Brenner saw this challenge and conquered it. His book is a pleasure to read, thanks to his first-rate writing and valuable ideas. To add to the fun, he peppers his chapters with many witty quotes about public speaking, like this from Mark Twain: “It usually takes more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.” Brenner’s top-notch book will teach you how to influence others with your communication and presentation skills. And if he repeats himself a little, it’s just so you’ll know what to emphasize. *BooksInShort* recommends this book to salespeople, coaches, politicians and managers, and to anyone else who must stand up and speak. Start reading now if you want to emulate the smooth-talking guy Twain once praised by saying, “He could persuade a fish to come and take a walk with him.”

### Take-Aways

- When speaking in public, communicate clearly and with a distinct purpose. Your listeners will judge your credibility, presentation skills and word power.
- Follow the “GAP Method”: Set “goals,” know your “audience” and have a “plan.”
- Establish a communication goal with results you can completely control.
- Know your audience’s viewpoints, wishes, “history, decision-making style and capacity to act.” To learn what your listeners want, ask them.
- Create a communication plan that covers the “building blocks of persuasion: why, what, how, why not” and “what next.”
- Twelve hours after your speech, people will recall only up to 25% of your message. What they remember depends on what you decide to emphasize.
- Use reason to persuade people, and emotion to motivate them.
- Ignore common public-speaking myths. Put your hands in your pockets if you want, and don’t tell an opening joke if you’re not genuinely funny.
- Know when to stop. Audiences rarely wish that a speaker had talked longer.
- Be authentic. Substance always beats style.

### Summary

#### Convincing Communications

What if every time you spoke, you could influence others as much as you wanted? To achieve that level of persuasion, you need thorough knowledge about the people you’re trying to reach. While style is important to a good communicator, substance and authenticity are even more crucial. Great communicators speak genuinely and have something meaningful to say.

“The power of persuasion is one of the most useful and crucial skills for lasting professional and personal success.”

Few people can communicate powerfully and persuasively. When you are listening to a speech, how long does it take for some other audience members to get bored and distracted enough to start texting on their cellphones? Speakers often set out to inform, but not to persuade. That is a tactical mistake. If you want to convey information, you have to be persuasive. Under the best of circumstances, audience members will recall only up to 25% of your message just 12 hours after you deliver it. Thus, emphasizing your primary points is essential. Speakers often fail to prepare properly and to set manageable goals for what they want to accomplish. The other fatal flaw that besets presenters is talking too long. Audiences rarely wish that a speaker had talked longer. Indeed, their reaction is often quite the opposite.

## Use Your Leverage

The more you define your core communication objectives, and the more solidly you prepare and plan to achieve those goals, the more effective you will be when you get up to talk. Listeners will measure you as a speaker according to your credibility, your presentation skills and the power of your words. These three pivotal factors are interdependent. Put them all to work.

“Everything flows more easily when we know who we are speaking to, what their issues and prejudices are, and what they will be most interested in.”

Consider the classic example of how to move a giant rock with a lever. Three variables determine how far the rock will roll: where you place the fulcrum, how long the lever is and how much weight you put on your end of the lever. To do a great job, you must move the fulcrum close to the rock, use a long lever and put lots of weight on it. In this “leverage metaphor,” the fulcrum is how well you know your listeners. The better you understand them, the more leverage you will have. The lever is your message. To make it more powerful, make it clear and strong. As the speaker, you are the weight applied to the lever, the power that changes people’s minds.

## The “GAP Method: Goals, Audience, Plan”

Use the Gap Method, combining goal setting, audience knowledge and good planning to become a more powerful, persuasive communicator. This strategy’s central principle is that the more you understand your audience members – their motivations, interests, beliefs, likes and dislikes – the better a communicator you will be. The Gap Method involves three variables:

- **“Know your goals”** – What is your communication objective, that is, what do you want your audience members to do after they hear your message?
- **“Understand your audience”** – You cannot convince people if you don’t know who they are, where they are coming from and what motivates them.
- **“Map your plan to persuade”** – Prepare a schematic for moving the members of your audience from their current frame of mind to the thoughts and actions you advocate.

## Setting Goals with Results You Can Control

Before you speak, set clear, “multilayered” “macro and micro” goals. Do not tie your goals to outcomes you cannot control. For example, your communication goal as a salesperson may be to gain a \$50,000 sale from your presentation. This is not a wise goal, because you cannot control the external factors that govern the results. The people who hear your powerful presentation may want to buy your product, but they could need a senior executive’s approval or they could face a corporate budget freeze. Instead of focusing only on closing deals, prepare to make the most powerful sales presentation possible to influence your audience, be it an individual prospect, an executive team or a room full of potential new clients. Base your goals on doing the task well, not on the outcomes you hope to achieve.

“Be clear. Be brief. Be seated.” (Franklin Delano Roosevelt)

Great communicators need long- and short-term goals. For example, your longer-range objectives as a salesperson might include reading trade journals to learn as much as possible about your industry, practicing compelling ways to articulate your product line’s value proposition and thoroughly researching your prospective customers. These steps prepare you to be persuasive. To start generating short-term objectives, ask yourself this question before talking to prospects: “When you walk out of the room or hang up the phone, what do you want [them] to think or do?”

## Learning About Your Audience

To give a successful speech, gather information about your audience members so you can direct your message to them in a way they find “digestible” and “memorable.” To persuade an audience, you must know all about its members. Create an “audience profile” that includes:

- **“Audience history”** – Your listeners’ context or background shapes their thinking. For example, if you are talking to managers whose firm has filed for bankruptcy, you must know about the filing and consider how it affects their attitudes.
- **“Frames of reference”** – People filter everything they hear through their own point of view. Their perspective, which may be “emotional, financial, ethical, ideological or competitive,” informs the image they have of you, your product and the common ground you hope to share with them.
- **“Needs and desires”** – What benefit do you offer that your listeners want?
- **“Capacity to act”** – The most powerful sales presentation in the world has little immediate financial impact if you make it to someone who lacks the authority to buy.
- **“Decision-making style”** – Are your listeners more likely to decide on an emotional basis, to make decisions based on facts or to use a bit of both? The answer to that question tells you what kind of a presentation to create.

“Having goals is always a good thing, but without a plan to achieve those goals, the goals don’t matter as much.”

Don’t speak at your audience members; speak with them. Put yourself in their shoes by adopting their perspective as much as possible. To persuade them, you must see things as they see them, so you need to know what’s on their minds. How can you find out what your listeners think and feel? The answer could not be simpler: Just ask them. Unfortunately, most speakers are afraid to take this step. They fear:

- **Squandering people’s time** – Asking questions to discover what your audience members want makes their time with you more valuable, because your message will be more focused. If you know what they care about, you can address those issues directly.
- **Getting dismissed** – Are you afraid to reconnect with sales prospects because they might take the opportunity to cancel your upcoming appointment? This is specious reasoning. If prospects want to cancel, they don’t need a call from you to do so.
- **Looking ignorant** – Actually, you will look like a conscientious, prepared person.
- **Seeming intrusive** – This is not an issue if your queries are responsible and professional.
- **Losing an “improvisational” edge** – Speaking with real insight and information will make you a better improvisational speaker.

# Creating a Well-Conceived Plan

Follow five essential steps – the “building blocks of persuasion” – to develop a presentation plan:

1. **“What: Create a vision for your audience”** – Help listeners visualize a positive future based on undertaking the actions that you recommend.
2. **“Why: Make the vision and the audience benefit real”** – Motivate people to act.
3. **“How: Provide the necessary details”** – Spell everything out completely.
4. **“Why not: Anticipate and resolve likely objections”** – Don’t ignore people’s issues.
5. **“What next: Map out the next steps and your call to action”** – Be sure your audience members know precisely what to do after the presentation.

“Be authentic to your personality, position and message.”

Your purpose is to get your listeners to act. Your results depend on persuasion (based on a reasoned, logical presentation) and motivation (based on reaching people’s emotions). Add six crucial elements to the building blocks above to complete your communication plan:

1. **“Pick your 25%”** – Since listeners will recall only 25% or less of your presentation 12 hours later, constantly underline the crucial points you want them to recall.
2. **“Don’t keep your audience in suspense”** – Surprise endings are great for movies but terrible for presentations. Make sure your audience knows where you are going.
3. **“Clearly articulate your main point”** – If you can’t do that, you don’t have one.
4. **“Clearly articulate the supporting points”** – This keeps the audience engaged and in sync with you. As you close, offer a meaningful, memorable summary.
5. **“Design an opening that grabs attention”** – Don’t lose your audience at the outset.
6. **“Design a close that is powerful”** – Repeat the “what,” the “why” and the “what next,” so people end up energized and prepared to do what you advocate.

## Public-Speaking Myths

People often are very misinformed about public speaking. Some common myths:

- **“Be funny and always start off with a joke”** – What if you are not funny? Save the jokes for professional comedians unless you are naturally humorous.
- **“Strong gestures and body language add energy to your speech”** – They also may seriously distract onlookers from your important points.
- **“Always use powerful eye contact”** – Eye contact is important, but don’t force it. You do not want to make your audience members uncomfortable.
- **“Never put your hands in your pockets”** – Why not? Feel free to do so if it makes you feel more comfortable.

“Good strategy and good tactics together are required for success...strategy without tactics leads to inflexibility. Tactics without strategy leads to disintegration.”

Don’t worry about these hackneyed myths. But pay attention to two critical truths about public speaking: Always be yourself. And don’t distract your audience. To keep them engaged:

- **“Speak in bullet points”** – That will help people remember what you have to say.
- **“Speak in sentences with simple noun-verb construction”** – Build your argument with “strong active-voice verbs.”
- **“Provide internal summaries of your message and be your own narrator”** – Your audience is going on a journey that you are conducting. Be a helpful guide.
- **“Don’t forget the ‘what’s in it for you,’ or WIIFY”** – Use phrasing that highlights the listeners’ benefits. For example, you could say, “This matters to you because...”

“Delivery skills are the means, not the end...ultimately the substance of the product will determine its success.”

To establish your dynamic presence at the podium, wait a few seconds before you begin to speak. Start out with an opener that truly grabs people’s attention. Practice it until it is perfect. Use strategic pauses to emphasize important points. If appropriate, speak directly to individual audience members. Talk loudly enough for people to hear you without straining. Maintain positive body language. Use visuals if they aid your presentation, but don’t make them the presentation. You must be the focus of attention, not your slides. To control your nervousness, pay attention to preparation and performance, not to the presentation’s outcome. The more you prepare, the more confident and relaxed you will be.

“The mind is a wonderful thing. It starts working the moment you are born and never stops until you get up to speak in public.” (columnist Roscoe Drummond)

Every public speaker must have credibility. Demonstrate reliability by knowing your information cold. Don’t build up your audience’s expectations unrealistically. Deal in solutions, not promises. Be honest and forthright. Your primary focus must be the people who are in front of you. Clearly demonstrate why your message is important to your audience, so people will pay close attention. If you follow these recommendations faithfully, you will be able to persuade others to act as you wish. This powerful skill is remarkably valuable in business and in life.

## About the Author

**Dean M. Brenner** is founder and president of The Latimer Group, which trains executives to be effective communicators. He chaired the Olympic Sailing Program to help the U.S. sailing team.