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CHAPTER 1

Why Resonate?

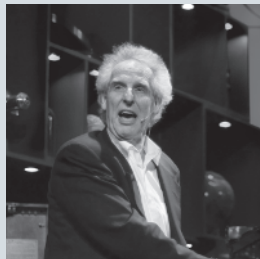
Persuasion Is Powerful

Movements are started, products are purchased, philosophies are adopted, subject matter is mastered—all with the help of presentations.

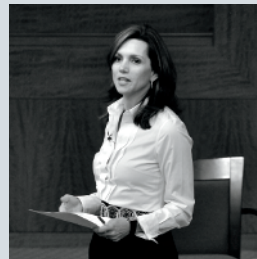
Great presenters transform audiences. Truly great communicators make it look easy as they lure audiences to adopt their ideas and take action. This isn't something that just happens automatically; it comes at the price of long and thoughtful hours spent constructing messages that resonate deeply and elicit empathy.

Throughout the book, you'll learn from some of the greatest communicators. Each is different and yields a unique insight, yet they share a common thread: They all create a groundswell of support for their ideas. These communicators don't have to force or command their audiences to adopt their ideas. Instead, the audience responds willingly with a surge of support.

Great Communicators



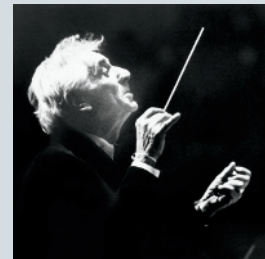
MOTIVATOR
Benjamin Zander,
Conductor, Boston
Philharmonic Orchestra



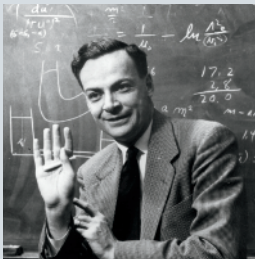
MARKETER
Beth Comstock,
Chief Marketing
Officer, GE



POLITICIAN
Ronald Reagan,
Former President of
the United States



CONDUCTOR
Leonard Bernstein,
Conductor, New York
Philharmonic Orchestra



LECTURER

Richard Feynman,
Professor, California
Institute of Technology



PREACHER

John Ortberg,
Pastor, Menlo Park
Presbyterian Church



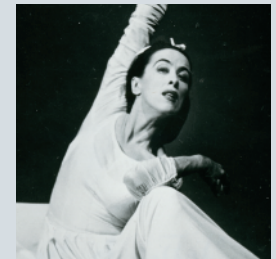
EXECUTIVE

Steve Jobs,
Chief Executive
Officer, Apple Inc.



ACTIVIST

Martin Luther King Jr.,
Civil Rights Activist



ARTIST

Martha Graham,
Contemporary Dancer

Resonance Causes Change

Presentations are most commonly delivered to persuade an audience to change their minds or behavior. Presenting ideas can either evoke puzzled stares or frenzied enthusiasm, which is determined by how well the message is delivered and how well it resonates with the audience. After a successful presentation, you might hear people say, “Wow, what she said really resonated with me.”

But what does it mean to truly resonate with someone?

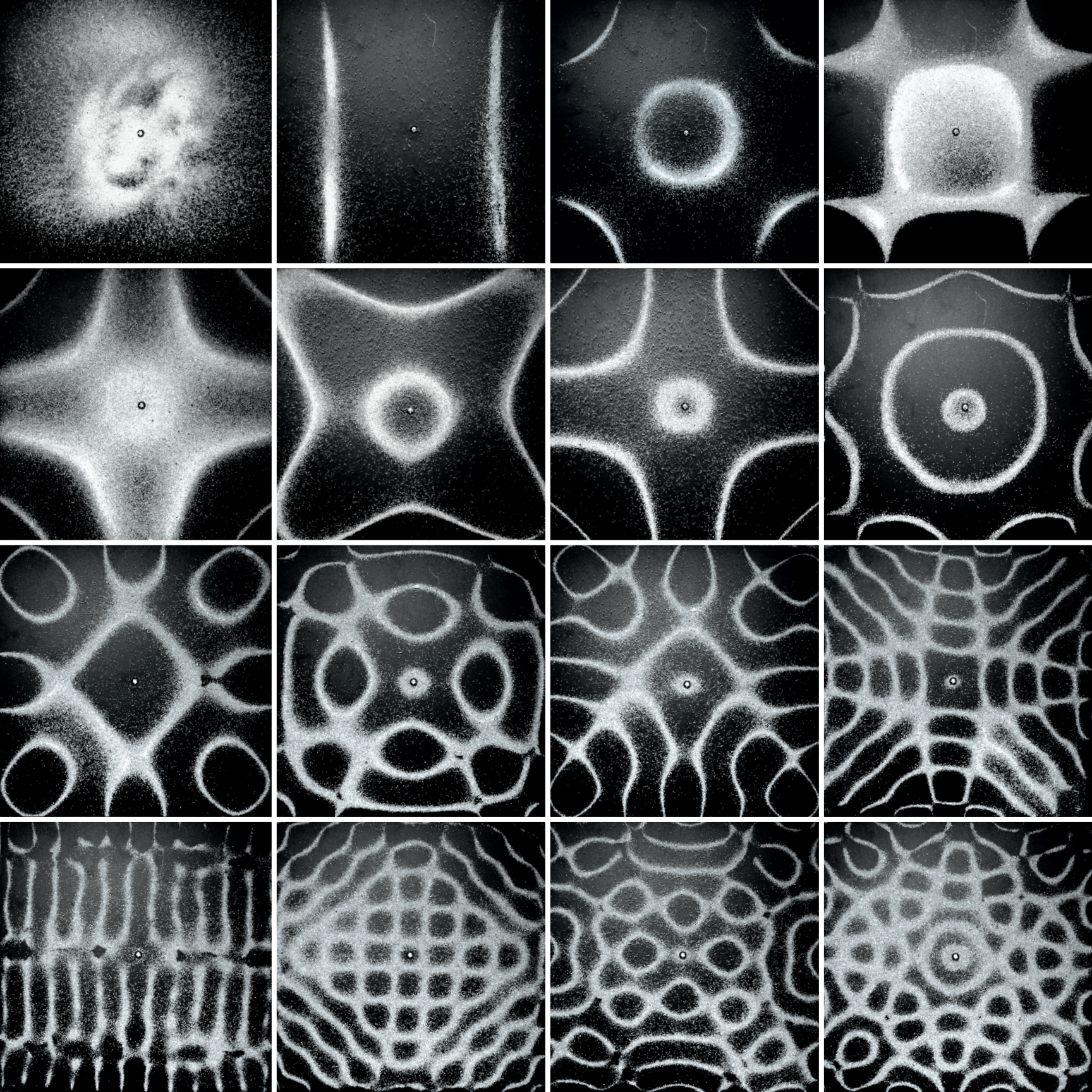
Let’s look at a simple phenomenon in physics. If you know an object’s natural rate of vibration, you can make it vibrate without touching it. **Resonance occurs when an object’s natural vibration frequency responds to an external stimulus of the same frequency.** To the right is a beautiful visualization of resonance. My son poured salt onto a metal plate that he then hooked up to an amplifier so that the sound waves traveled through the plate. As the frequency was raised, the sound waves tightened and the grains of salt jiggled, popped, and then moved to a new place, organizing themselves into beautiful patterns as though they *knew* where they “belonged.” [www](http://www.duarte.com)

There is more at
www.duarte.com

How many times have you wished that students, employees, investors, or customers would snap, crackle, and pop to exactly where they need to be to create a new future?

It would be great if audiences were as compliant and unified in thought and purpose as these grains of salt. And they can be. **If you adjust to the frequency of your audience so that the message resonates deeply, they, too, will display self-organizing behavior.** Your listeners will see the place where they are to move to create something collectively beautiful. A groundswell.

The audience does not need to tune themselves to you—you need to tune your message to them. Skilled presenting requires you to understand their hearts and minds and create a message to resonate with what’s already there. Your audience will be significantly moved if you send a message that is tuned to their needs and desires. They might even quiver with enthusiasm and act in concert to create beautiful results.



Change Is Healthy

Presentations are about change. Businesses, and indeed all professions, have to change and adapt in order to stay alive.

Organizations go through a life cycle of starting up, growing, maturing, and eventually declining—that is, unless they reinvent themselves. A business is usually founded because someone came up with a clear vision of the world in the future as an improved place. But that improved world quickly becomes an ordinary world. Once an organization arrives at maturity, it can't get too comfortable. To avoid potential decline, it must alter and adapt its strategy so it's at the right place at the right time in the future. If an organization doesn't take a new path, it will eventually wither. Communicating each move carefully to all stakeholders and clients becomes critical.

It takes gutsy intuitive skills to move toward an unknown future that involves unfamiliar risks and rewards, yet businesses must make these moves to survive. Companies that learn to thrive in the chronic flux and tension between *what is* and *what could be*

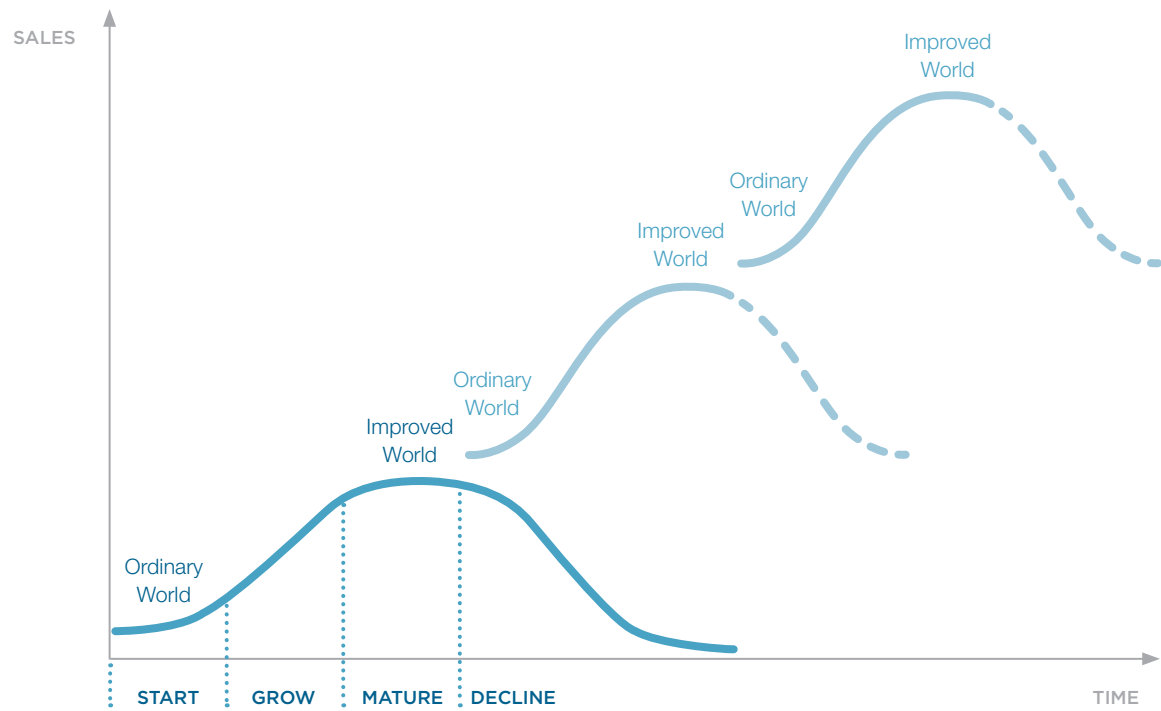
are healthier than those that don't. Many times the future cannot be quantified with statistics, facts, or proofs. Sometimes leaders have to let their gut lead them into uncharted territories where statistics haven't yet been generated.

An organization should make continual shifts and improvements to stay healthy. That makes even simple presentations at staff meetings a platform for persuasion. You need to persuade your team to self-organize at a distinct place in the future or it could bring the demise of the organization.

Getting ahead of the next curve requires courage and communication: Courage to determine the next bold move, and communication to keep the troops committed to the value of moving forward.

Rallying stakeholders to move together in a common course of action is all part of the innovation and survival process. Leaders at every level in an organization need to be skillful at creating resonance if that organization is to control its own destiny.

Business Transformation



**“Progress is impossible without change;
and those who cannot change their minds
cannot change anything.”**

George Bernard Shaw

Presentations Are Boring

Presentations are the currency of business activity because they are the most effective tool to transform an audience, yet many presentations are boring. Most are a dreadful failure of communication, and the rest are simply not interesting. Could there be a way to resuscitate them to a point where they not only show signs of life but actually engage audiences with rapt attention?

If you've been trapped in a bad presentation, you recognize the feeling almost immediately. You can tell within minutes that it's just not good; it doesn't take long to recognize a corpse! To make matters worse, it's becoming more and more difficult to keep an audience's attention as global cultures become media-rich environments. Slick ad agencies and Hollywood producers spend enormous amounts of time and money to build a pulse and rhythm into their media. While entertainment has raised the bar for audience engagement, presentations have become less engaging than ever.

So why then, if presentations are so bad, are they scheduled? People inherently know that connecting in person can yield powerful outcomes. We crave human connection. Throughout history, presenter-to-audience exchanges have rallied revolutions, spread innovation, and spawned movements. **Presentations create a**

catalyst for meaningful change by using human contact in a way that no other medium can. Many times it isn't until you speak with people in person that you can establish a visceral connection that motivates them to adopt your idea. **That connection is why average ideas sometimes get traction and brilliant ideas die—it all comes down to how the ideas are presented.**

Presentations with a pulse have an ebb and flow to them. Those bursts of movement result from contrast—contrast in content, emotion, and delivery. In the same way that your toe taps to a good beat, your brain enjoys tapping into ideas when something new is continually developing and unwrapping. Interesting insights and contrasts keep the audience leaning forward, waiting to hear how each new development resolves.

It takes a lot of work to breathe life into an idea. Creating an interesting presentation requires a more thoughtful process than throwing together the blather that we've come to call a presentation today. Spending energy to understand the audience and carefully crafting a message that resonates with them means making a commitment of time and discipline to the process.

There is a simple way to determine whether it's worth putting this level of commitment into a presentation...

Just ask yourself: How badly do I want my idea to live?



The Bland Leading the Bland

The presenter's job is to make the audience clearly "see" ideas. If your ideas stand out, they'll be noticed.

The enemy of persuasion is obscurity.

You can learn what attracts attention by examining the opposite: camouflage. The purpose of camouflage is to reduce the odds that someone will notice you—by blending into an environment. When is blending in appropriate for a communicator? Never. The more you want your idea adopted, the more it must stand out. If the idea blends with the environment, both its clarity and chances for adoption are diminished. An audience should never be asked to make decisions based on unclear options.

Don't blend in; instead, clash with your environment. Stand out. Be uniquely different. That's what will draw attention to your ideas. Nothing has intrinsic attention-grabbing power in itself. The power lies in how much something stands out from its context. If you go hunting with your college buddies and don't want to be confused with their prey, you'd be advised to wear safety orange. Since there's nothing in the woods that particular color, you'll stand out.

In communications, standing out from the "environment" means standing out among your competitors or even contrasting with your own organization. You must show how your idea contrasts with existing expectations, beliefs, feelings, or attitudes if you want to gain the audience's rapt attention. It certainly feels safer and easier to conform to the well-worn groove of sameness than to stand out and be vulnerable. But being buried in a sea of sameness does not yield greatness or solve big problems.

It can be scary running around your bland organization with a safety orange target on your back. It's risky, and it takes fortitude to be different among friends and foes. But it's important for your message to stand out, or it won't be remembered.

While you don't necessarily need to rebel against the current messages and content, you do need to lift them out of the drab, traditional way they are communicated. Identify opportunities for contrast and then create fascination and passion around these contrasts. Presentations today are boring because there is nothing interesting happening. They have no contrast, and hence interest is lost.



People Are Interesting

A great way to stand out is to be real. Presentations tend to be stripped of all humanness—despite the fact that humans make up the entire audience! Many corporations condition employees to put meaningless words together, project them on a slide, and talk about them like an automaton. The cultural norm is for presenters to hide behind slides as though that's a form of skilled communication. Look at the slides to the right. These are real statements taken from real presentations. They're meaningless. Yet these statements were written to attract and lure customers to products or services. It's the wrong bait.

Presenters think they can hide behind a wall of jargon, but what people are really looking for at a presentation is some kind of human connection.

By far the most human, transparent, and relational form of communication takes place when two people share common beliefs and create a connection based on beliefs. A presentation is an ideal opportunity for connecting because it's one of the few forms of interaction in which people are involved with one another *in person*.

Deep connections are what make a great presentation stand out. **Forming connections is an art, and when it's practiced well, the results can be astounding.**

Being human and taking risks are the foundation of creative results. Taking risks shows you're willing to tap into something your gut is telling you will work, without letting your head talk you out of it. That's creativity and humanness at its best. Unfortunately, many cultures stifle risk-taking, and many workplaces constrain human connectedness.

“Being true to yourself involves showing and sharing emotion. The spirit that motivates most great storytellers is ‘I want you to feel what I feel,’ and the effective narrative is designed to make this happen. That’s how the information is bound to the experience and rendered unforgettable.”

Peter Guber¹

It's easier to rattle off jargon and keep communication emotionally neutral. But easiest doesn't always mean best.

These statements are from real presentations that have had all the humanness sucked out of them. It's easier to hide behind messages like these instead of tapping into what is human about us.



At XYZ Co. we create new, innovative businesses that would minimize the return-on-investment period for both strategic and financial investors, while experiencing significant revenue expansion.

XYZ Co. is an international company of more than twenty talented professionals dedicated to maximizing sales opportunities and revenues throughout Europe and North America for quality media owners with leading online and/or print brands.

XYZ Co. improves quality of life by improving capability maturity.

XYZ Co. creates the ultimate global alliance to monetize the Internet. We are the most reliable partner for global performance-based multichannel commerce, offering best-of-breed technology, services, and network to make more money with the Internet.

XYZ Co. is an online global resource center and membership community dedicated to helping small-business owners succeed and prosper.

XYZ Co. delivers to our clients their design team's intent and vision, at the lowest overall total delivered costs, with no sacrifice in quality, on time, and at, or more typically below budget.

XYZ Co. creates a center for rapid prototyping of innovations that encourage rapid failures to create innovations of all kinds that create both an inbound and outbound gradient.

XYZ Co. enriches lives with superior products at exceptional prices.

XYZ Co. provides every athlete—from professional to recreational runners to kids on the playground—with the opportunity, products, and inspiration to do great things. XYZ Co. helps consumers, athletes, artists, partners, and employees reach heights they may have thought unreachable.

Facts Alone Fall Short

You can have piles of facts and still fail to resonate. It's not the information itself that's important but the emotional impact of that information. This doesn't mean that you should abandon facts entirely. Use plenty of facts, but accompany them with emotional appeal.

There's a difference between being convinced with logic and believing with personal conviction. Your audience may agree with the thought process you present, but they still might not respond to the call. People rarely act by reason alone. You need to tap into other deeply seated desires and beliefs in order to be persuasive. You need a small thorn that is sharper than fact to prick their hearts. That thorn is emotion.

“The problem is this: No spreadsheet, no bibliography and no list of resources is sufficient proof to someone who chooses not to believe. The skeptic will always find a reason, even if it's one the rest of us don't think is a good one. Relying too much on proof distracts you from the real mission—which is emotional connection.”

Seth Godin²

At some point in your life, you've had your emotions aroused. You've experienced a chill down your spine or a sick feeling in the pit of your stomach. When something resonates emotionally, you feel it physically.

Currently, emotion is a powerful driver of consumer behavior, but it didn't used to be. Before the 1900s, people rarely expressed emotion publicly; it was not socially acceptable to discuss feelings or desires. Products developed were solely marketed as items of necessity, not items of *desire*. As PR and advertising became prevalent, companies began to compete based on consumer desire and not necessarily

consumer need. Suddenly, irrelevant objects became powerful symbols of status.

Today, appealing to emotion is commonplace. Ads can make us laugh or cry, feel sexy or feel guilty. A full range of emotions can be felt during one thirty-minute television show. Even restaurant menus tantalize us with food that will make us feel decadent, surprised, or enraptured. We can't escape it.

So today more than ever, communicating only the detailed specifications or functional overviews of a product isn't enough. **If two products have the same features, the one that appeals to an emotional need will be chosen.**

Aristotle said that the man who is in command of persuasion must be able “to understand the emotions—that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited,” and that “persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions.”³

Consumers are accustomed to emotional appeal, and they are most certainly ready to respond emotionally to a presentation. So why don't we present emotion? It's uncomfortable. It's an especially tough skill for analytical professionals to adopt. It's easy to think, “I don't get paid at work to *feel*, I get paid to *do*.” And that's true. But if your team isn't motivated to move forward or your customers aren't motivated to buy, then you are in trouble.

Including emotion in a presentation doesn't mean it should be half fact and half emotion. It also doesn't mean there should be boxes of tissue under each seat. It simply means that you introduce humanness that appeals to the desires of the audience. It's not that difficult to evoke a visceral reaction in an audience if you use stories.

“The public is composed of numerous groups whose cry to us writers is: ‘Comfort me.’ ‘Amuse me.’ ‘Touch my sympathies.’ ‘Make me sad.’ ‘Make me dream.’ ‘Make me laugh.’ ‘Make me shiver.’ ‘Make me weep.’ ‘Make me think.’”

Henri René Albert Guy de Maupassant⁴

Stories Convey Meaning

Ever since humans first sat around the campfire, stories have been told to create emotional connections. In many societies, they have been passed along nearly unchanged for generations. The greatest stories of all time were packaged and transferred so well that hundreds of illiterate generations could repeat them. Our early ancestors had stories to explain day-to-day occurrences in nature such as why the sun rises and falls, as well as more overarching metanarratives about the meaning of life. **Stories are the most powerful delivery tool for information, more powerful and enduring than any other art form.**

People love stories because life is full of adventure and we're hardwired to learn lessons from observing change in others. Life is messy, so we empathize with characters who have real-life challenges similar to the ones we face. When we listen to a story, the chemicals in our body change, and our mind becomes transfixed.⁵ We are riveted when a character encounters a situation that involves risks and elated when he averts danger and is rewarded.

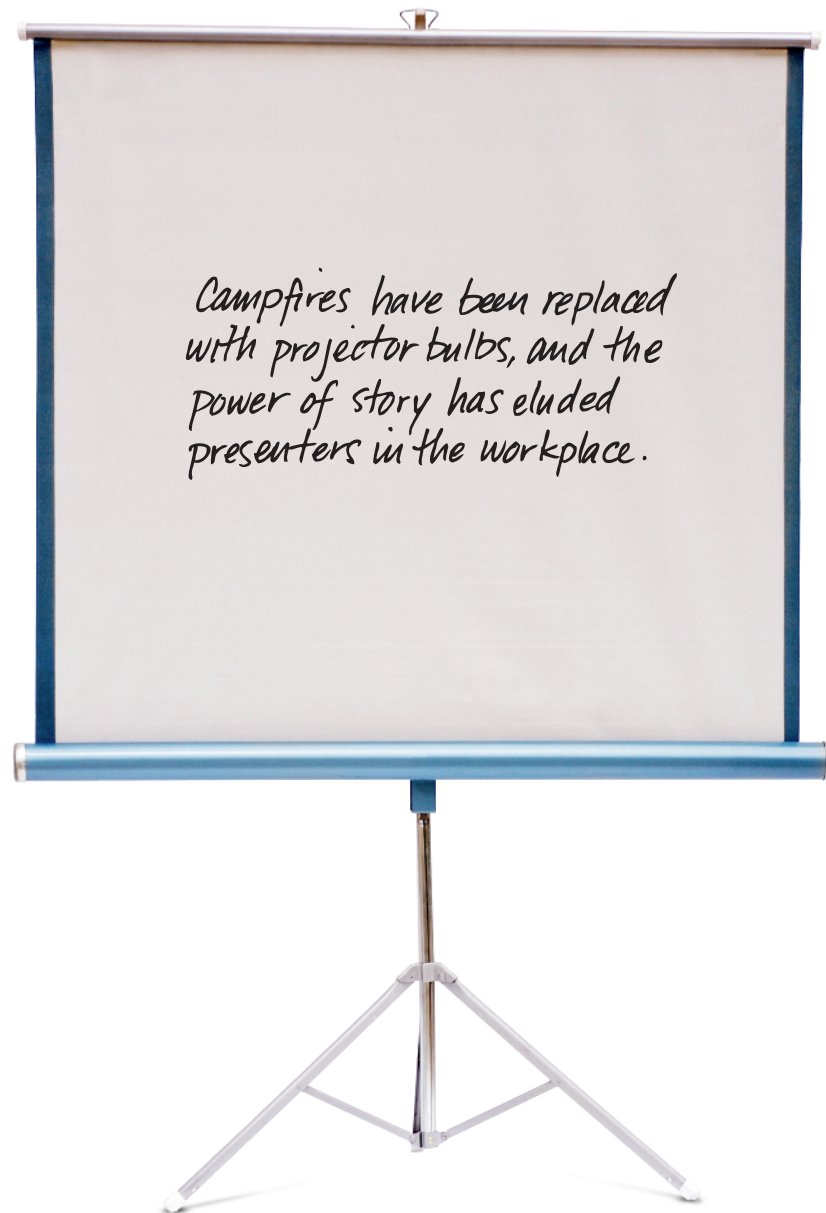
If you're like many professionals, using stories to create emotional appeal feels unnatural because it requires showing at least some degree of vulnerability to people you don't personally know all *that* well. Telling a personal story can be especially daunting because great personal stories have a conflict or complication that

exposes your humanness or flaws. But these are also the stories that have the most inherent power to change others. People enjoy following a leader who has survived personal challenges and can share her narrative of struggle and victory (or defeat) comfortably.

“The best way to unite an idea with an emotion is by telling a compelling story. In a story, you not only weave a lot of information into the telling but you also arouse your listener’s emotions and energy. Persuading with a story is hard. Any intelligent person can sit down and make lists. It takes rationality but little creativity to design an argument using conventional rhetoric. But it demands vivid insight and storytelling skill to present an idea that packs enough emotional power to be memorable. If you can harness imagination and the principles of a well-told story, then you get people rising to their feet amid thunderous applause instead of yawning and ignoring you.”

Robert McKee⁶

Information is static; stories are dynamic—they help an audience visualize what you do or what you believe. Tell a story and people will be more engaged and receptive to the ideas you are communicating. **Stories link one person’s heart to another. Values, beliefs, and norms become intertwined. When this happens, your idea can more readily manifest as reality in their minds.**



*Campfires have been replaced
with projector bulbs, and the
power of story has eluded
presenters in the workplace.*

You Are Not the Hero

When trying to connect with others during a presentation, you have to remember that it's not *all* about you. Audiences detest arrogance and self-centeredness. They evoke the same feeling you get when you arrive at a party only to be cornered by a dreadful, self-centered know-it-all. He'll talk about his own interests, how cool he is, and how great he is while you're left thinking, "What an ass," and looking for any opportunity to get away. Why is that? It's because the conversation doesn't include you, your ideas, or your perspective. **Self-centered people don't connect. No one wants to date, work with, or sit through a presentation given by someone like that.** So why are presentations rife with self-centered content?

*It's all
about me*

*I'm best
of breed*

*My partners
are cool*

*I have
synergy*

I'm great!

*Customers
& analysts
LOVE me*

*I'm available
24/7*

*My product is
the best*

*Let's talk
more about me*

*My market cap
is HUGE*

*I have lots of employees
in many locations*

*You need
my help*

*I'm flexible
& scalable*

I'm in a win-win situation



Most presentations start with “me-ness.” Somewhere in the front of the slide deck is the dreaded “it’s all about me” slide that typically looks like one of the slides to the right.

It is important that the audience know something about you and your company. There are other ways to communicate this information (like a handout) so you can focus on the people in the audience right at the onset and focus your presentation so it resonates at their frequency instead of yours.

As a presenter, it’s easy to feel like your product or cause should be the most important thing on the minds of the audience. You may even think, “I’m their hero, here to save them from their helplessness and ignorance. If they only knew what I know, the world would be a better place.” If you show up and chatter about yourself, your products, and your synergies, you will become the self-centered know-it-all at the party, and the audience will want to flee.

Instead, embrace a stance of humility and deference to your audience’s needs. Begin the presentation from a shared place of understanding.

Make it about the audience.

SELFISH APPROACH

- About us
 - Company history
 - Market cap
 - # employees and # locations
- About our product and service
 - What it is
 - How it works
 - Why it’s better than the alternative
- Call to action (ideally)

SAMPLES FROM BAD PRESENTATIONS

XYZ Co. Equity Partners, LLC

- Founded in 1988 in Anchorage, Alaska
- Invest in companies who:
 - Provide professional IT services
 - Offer exceptional technical and project management expertise
 - Deliver complex data and information management solutions as systems and/or applications integrators
- Average annual revenue: \$51.5M

XYZ Co. Software

- Established in 1984
- Headquarters: San Francisco, CA
- Integrated P&C Insurance software and services
- Focused on Alternative Risk & Self-Insured markets
- Recognized leader in risk management solutions
- Over 100 customers in U.S. and Canada

The Audience Is the Hero

You need to defer to your audience because if they don't engage and believe in your message, you are the one who loses. Without their help, your idea will fail.

You are not the hero who will save the audience; the audience is your hero.

Screenwriter Chad Hodge points out in *Harvard Business Review* that we should “[help] people to see themselves as the hero of the story, whether the plot involves beating the bad guys or achieving some great business objective. Everyone wants to be a star, or at least to feel that the story is talking to or about him personally.”⁷ Business leaders need to take this to heart, place the people in the audience at the center of the action, and make them feel that the presentation is addressing them personally.

When you're presenting, instead of showing up with an arrogant attitude that “it's all about me,” your stance should be a humble “it's all about them.” Remember, the success of you and your firm is dependent on them, not the other way around. You need them.

So what's your role then? You are the mentor. You're Yoda, not Luke Skywalker. The audience is the one who'll do all the heavy lifting to help you reach your objectives. You're simply one voice helping them get unstuck in their journey.

The mentor is often personified as a wise person such as The Oracle in *The Matrix* or even Mr. Miyagi in *The Karate Kid*. As mentor, your role is to give the hero guidance, confidence, insight, advice, training, or

magical gifts so he can overcome his initial fears and enter into the new journey with you.

Changing your stance from thinking you're the hero to acknowledging your role as mentor will alter your viewpoint. You'll come from a place of humility, the aide-de-camp to your audience. A mentor has a selfless nature and is willing to make personal sacrifices so that the hero can reach the reward.

Most mentors were heroes themselves. They have become experienced enough to teach others about the special tools or powers they picked up on the journey of their own lives. Mentors have been down the road of the hero one or more times and have acquired skills that can be passed on to the hero.

When you step up to give your presentation, you might be the most knowledgeable person in the room, but will you wield that knowledge with wisdom and humility? Presentations are not to be viewed as an opportunity to prove how brilliant you are. Instead, the audience should leave saying, “Wow, it was a real gift to spend time in that presentation with (insert your name here). I'm armed with insights and tools to help me succeed that I didn't have before.”

Changing your stance from hero to mentor will clothe you in humility and help you see things from a new perspective. **Audience insights and resonance can only occur when a presenter takes a stance of humility.**

*The audience
is the hero.*

That's you!

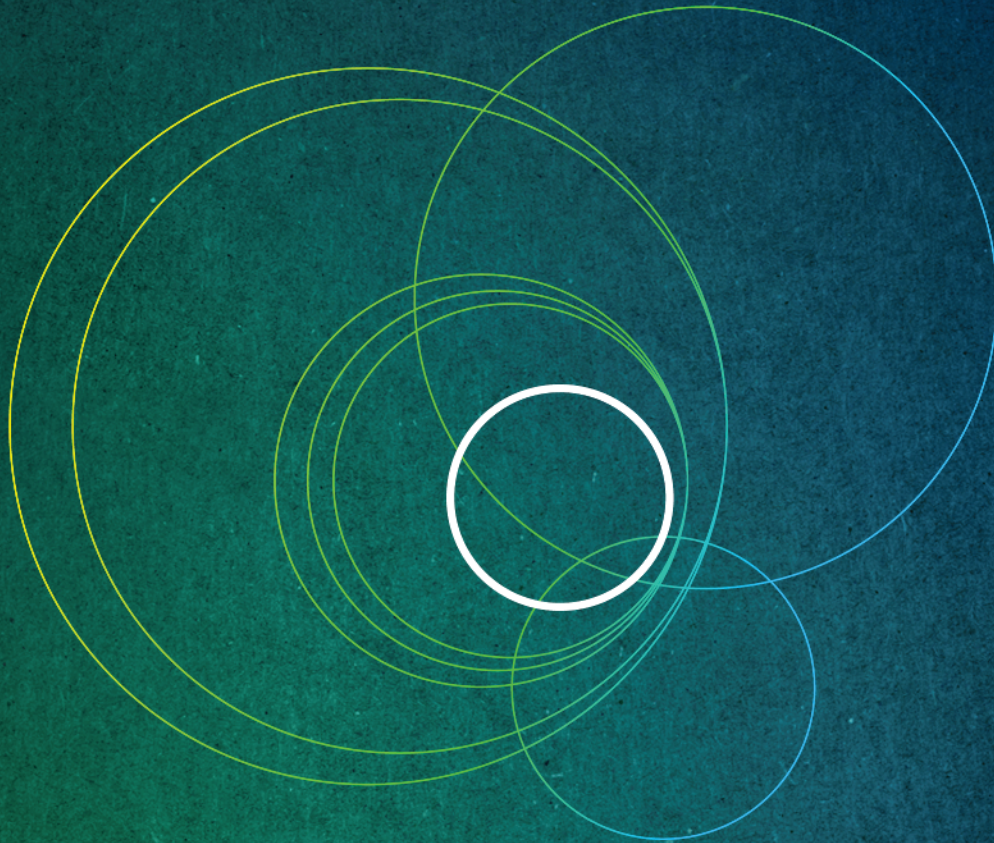


Luke Skywalker and Yoda
Star Wars: Episode V—The Empire Strikes Back

Presentations have the power to change the world. The nexus of almost every movement and high-stakes decision relies on the spoken word to get traction, and presentations are a powerful platform to persuade.

But presentations are broken; they are considered a necessary evil instead of a tool of great power. That power springs from the presenter's ability to make a deep human connection with others. Instead of connecting with others, presentations tend to be self-centered, which alienates audiences. The opportunity to transform is diminished when audiences don't feel a connection.

Changing your stance from that of the hero to one of wise storyteller will connect the audience to your idea, and an audience connected to your idea will change.



RULE #1

**Resonance
causes change.**