



CHAPTER 1

Hit Your Mark

Utilizing Intention to Maximize Message Impact

Every objective must carry in itself the germs of action.

—CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

If you are a leader in the corporate arena, your role will not only require you to influence the thoughts and feelings of stakeholders inside and outside of your organization, but also to motivate their actions through your vision and ideas. This is no small feat, and it will likely happen on a daily basis, sometimes with high stakes in the balance. Great leadership is practiced one conversation at a time, and someone communicating a message must understand how they want their audience to react before being able to deliver it with impact. Actors are masters of verbal and nonverbal communication; experts at driving their messages home with intent. In this chapter, we will detail our three-step process for influential communication as well as the concepts of intention and objective (the effective communicator's secret weapon), to allow you to engage others by influencing emotions and motivating action.

THE LEGEND OF PHIL DAVISON

As of this writing, if you enter the words “worst speech of all time” into Google’s search engine it will bring up over 18 million results. But the very first entry on the very first page of results is a video of a man named Phil Davison. Additionally, if you do a Google search for “worst speaker of all time” it is Phil Davison who once again comes up on the first page of results. (We will pause here for you to go watch the video on YouTube. Trust us, it’s worth it.) The speech that Davison delivered brought him international infamy and was named “top political rant” of all time by the *Washington Post*. The story of Phil Davison is an interesting tale and one that offers important lessons for all of us who are tasked with influencing others with our communication.¹

In 2010, Phil Davison was an aspiring politician in Ohio, a tall and soft-spoken man who still lived with his father in the same house where he had grown up. Davison’s political career began when he walked into the Board of Elections for Stark County one day and filled out an application to run for the office of County Treasurer. Davison had been working as a local councilman at the time and decided he wanted to make a difference in his community and help people.

Davison had first become interested in the idea of public service when, as a child, a local politician had knocked on his front door, introducing himself and asking Davison’s parents for their vote. Davison was intrigued by this man who had come into his house—connecting with Phil and his family on a personal level, right there at their kitchen table. Davison had listened intently to the man and decided way back then that he would pursue a similar calling himself one day. He loved the idea of meeting people, of understanding their concerns and then helping them make their lives better. During the years before the speech, Davison had been involved as a volunteer with local politics, often donating money to the local Republican party and helping out at various events and fundraisers. But mounting a campaign of his own was something that would need to wait until further down the road. For now, he was happy building relationships, making connections, and

paying his dues, biding his time until the moment was right for him to run for office himself.

Then, in 2010, that moment arrived.

Davison had been working as a councilman when he was notified by a local Republican leader that there was an open position. “I thought, ‘This might be my one shot,’ ” said Davison. Urged on by party leaders, he decided the time for him to run for office had finally arrived. The Republican party of Ohio was looking for a candidate to run for the position of Stark County Treasurer and they thought Phil would be a perfect fit. Davison learned that there were five other candidates on the ballot and all six of them had been invited to speak to a group of Republican insiders in Canton, Ohio—the very people who would decide which of the six candidates would get their endorsement and support.

Excited by the opportunity to introduce himself to local leadership, Davison went to work on his speech. He sat down at his kitchen table on a Sunday afternoon and began writing, composing a well-crafted speech that established his credibility, detailed the problems facing Ohio, and proposed a handful of clear, practical solutions that he planned to implement if elected. He threw in a relevant quote from Albert Einstein to drive the theme of his speech home and made sure the powerful phrasing and repetition in the speech would make his points more memorable. He wrote the speech in longhand and then typed it up the following day. Davison called a friend and asked him to watch while he rehearsed his speech. When he had finished the practice run, Davison was energized. The speech suddenly “came to life,” he recalled, “it breathed, it moved.”

The night of the speech was soon upon him and Davison felt confident and ready. He put on his best suit and headed to Canton where the influential Republican Party insiders were gathering to pick their candidate. He arrived early and did his best to mingle with the other people in attendance. The party chairman approached him and they shook hands. The chairman had placed six numbered slips of paper in a hat and invited the candidates to draw a slip to determine the order in

which they would speak. Davison drew the number 6, which meant he would be speaking last, the grand finale of the night's proceedings.

The other speakers took the stage and, one by one, gave their speeches. Finally, it was Davison's turn. He set aside the microphone, judging that he would not need it. You see, something had happened prior to delivering the speech that changed the circumstances for Davison and would soon change the temperature of the room. Before taking his place amongst the other candidates, Davison had been approached by one of the local party leaders who wished him luck with his speech but informed him that party insiders had already decided which of the six candidates they would be backing in the election. "I was told, 'The vote's in and you're not getting it,' " he recalled. Davison was shocked. For years, he had given money and volunteered his time to help these people. He felt humiliated and betrayed. How could this have happened?

As Davison took the stage, he looked out into the audience and took a breath. Many of the party leaders kept their heads down, avoiding eye contact, while others sported buttons endorsing other candidates. As he unrolled his notes, Davison was overcome by emotion and he launched into the speech that would make him famous. Pacing like a caged animal, he locked in on the audience, pointing, glaring, gesticulating: "My name is Phil Davison . . . *and I will not apologize for my tone tonight!*" He delivered every word of the speech he had so carefully prepped and rehearsed. And in less than six minutes, he was done. Davison folded his notes and placed them back in his breast pocket. He took his seat and waited patiently as the votes were counted. A few minutes later, the winner was declared. Davison, alone, headed to the parking lot, got into his car and drove the 40 minutes back to his small hometown of Minerva.

The next morning Davison got up and grabbed the local newspaper to see the coverage of the election. As he read the paper at his kitchen table, the phone rang. It was a college friend, now living in New York. The friend informed Davison that the video of him giving the speech had gone viral and was burning up the Internet. Phil was dumbfounded. Why would anyone be interested in a speech by a losing politician in

a local race in Ohio? He would soon find out as the telephone began to ring with one call after another: first the BBC, then *Good Morning America*, *Comedy Central*, CBS, ABC, NBC, and Fox. Local television reporters swarmed his front door requesting interviews. One reporter even told him: “Mr. Davison, I’ve been a reporter for 30 years now and I’ve never been as afraid to go to someone’s door as I was today.”

As momentum from the video continued to build, the speech popped up in the most random places: a professor in Sweden screened it for her students, college kids would watch it on repeat and then recite it word for word. A beverage company approached Davison to be the spokesman for a new Red Bull-type drink they were about to launch. And it didn’t stop there—soon Hollywood came calling. Davison starred in a television commercial for Volkswagen alongside reggae legend Jimmy Cliff. That commercial, which featured a clip of Davison’s famous speech, played during the Super Bowl—the most-watched television program of the year. It became a whirlwind journey toward celebrity for the aspiring politician from Minerva. Davison admitted that the sudden fame was not easy to handle. “It was embarrassing, it was exciting, it was new to me. I was scared.”

And it was just about at this point in the Phil Davison saga where we enter the story.

When our first book, *The Pin Drop Principle*, was released we were frequently asked to speak at events and conferences, and as part of our presentation, we would often show the Phil Davison video because it was a perfect example of intention and objective going haywire for a speaker. The raw emotion of Davison’s delivery—the ranting and pacing and pointing and glaring—did not support the message he was attempting to deliver. This mismatch made Davison appear unhinged, like a lunatic possessed by demons. The incongruence in *what* he was saying versus *how* he was saying it not only confused people, it made Davison look like he was out of control.

One day, after showing the video to a group of executives, we started to wonder what had happened to Davison after he gave that famous speech that turned him into an Internet sensation. We decided to try and locate Phil to see if we could help him develop his skills as a speaker and

improve his communication style. For us, it was a chance to put our methodology to the test with what was arguably our most challenging test subject to date: the man known as “the worst speaker of all time.”

After locating Phil and explaining to him who we were and what we were attempting to do, he agreed to come to Chicago. We explained our three-step process and detailed how actors and great communicators start by analyzing their audience and then identifying an objective to pursue. We explained how a speaker’s body is a billboard and that every aspect of someone’s communication—their posture, gestures, vocal dynamics, and movement—contain information that an audience will use to form their perception of them. And we explained that by controlling the intention cues you send out, in the manner of a great actor, you can ultimately control how an audience will feel about you.

When the coaching session was over, Davison finally understood why his speech had gone off the rails: the anger he was expressing created incongruence, or mixed messages, between what he was saying and how he was saying it. We asked him if he still remembered the words to the speech that had made him famous and if he would be willing to redo it, adjusting his intention cues this time so that they now supported the words. Davison was game so we set up a camera and started filming. As he began speaking, a transformation began to take place. Whereas the original speech made Davison look like a maniac, he now appeared relaxed, confident, and professional. He was passionate and likeable, his personality coming through in every moment. The same content now resonated in a way that it hadn’t before. (To access and view this video go to www.pinper.com and click on the bullseye image in the bottom right corner of the screen.)

Since becoming famous, Davison has gone on to make appearances on television and at various conferences across the country. He is often recognized on the street or in airports. When we asked Davison how he felt about the fame and notoriety that this famous speech had brought to him, here is what he had to say: “The *Washington Post* said that ‘Phil Davison’s rant will never be usurped.’ That’s a helluva statement—it means you can’t beat it! Do you know what I’m saying? ‘Never be usurped.’ Never. *Never*. Not ‘might not be.’ *Never be usurped*. And I will

take that with me until the day I die and they put me in my grave. That counts for something, doesn't it?"

To this day, that speech remains the only public speech Phil Davison has ever given.

In his groundbreaking 1956 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, psychologist Erving Goffman used imagery of the theater and the idea that human beings are "social actors"² to discuss communication and social interaction. He used the term "performance" to refer to any activity an individual does in front of observers, whether that be chatting with a neighbor in the front yard, facilitating a training session at work or interviewing a candidate for a job. And, like an actor on the stage, Goffman believed that during these performances an individual provides meaning to their audience by the manner in which they behave at any given moment. According to Goffman, when an individual comes in contact with other people, they modify their behavior depending on the audience and setting—much like what an actor does onstage. Goffman believed that individuals, like actors, each have a "front stage" and "back stage" persona and act differently depending on the "setting" in which their "performance" is taking place.³ Front stage behavior is what one does when they know others are watching them, such as during a presentation at work, walking through a crowded city intersection, or running a meeting with clients. Back stage behavior is different, more private and relaxed, such as when they are at home or alone on a hike in a forest. In both behaviors, people adjust their intentional cues—their voice, dress, attitude—is an attempt to control or guide the impression that others will develop about them. The reason for this is usually to avoid embarrassment or enhance one's stature in the eyes of others. For example, a person will behave differently when meeting with the CEO in a boardroom than they would when speaking to a childhood friend over drinks. Said Goffman, "The part one individual plays is tailored to the parts played by others present."⁴

When actors train in their craft, they don't study the anatomy of the face or which muscles are used for a smile and which are used for a frown. They train themselves to access emotions through intention, knowing that when they feel a specific emotion on the *inside*, it will show

on the *outside*. And what others see as a result will then impact their perception of the person. This idea transfers well to anyone in the corporate arena who is tasked with communicating a message to others. If you are presenting something that is meant to excite people but you don't personally feel excited by the proposal, that will likely be read as apathy by your audience and they may mirror back disinterest in kind. Albert Mehrabian, in his landmark study on communication, established that the congruence of your communication requires that three channels—*verbal* (what you say), *vocal* (how you say it), and *visual* (how you look)—be absolutely in sync.⁵ When people take in your message, they are deciphering meaning from your delivery to determine how they should feel about what you are saying and how they should respond to it. A congruent message will help to establish trust with a listener by creating alignment and clarity between what is being said and how someone is saying it. It will also ensure consistency with your message, which is also important since studies have shown that when all three channels of communication are aligned, it is more likely that your message will be understood. When they are not, you send mixed signals to an audience that may confuse them or provide an opportunity for your message to be misinterpreted. When someone's communication is incongruent, an audience will barely listen to the message. They will be confused and focused on untangling the mixed messages rather than on the main topic. As communicators, we naturally feel the impulse to be congruent with all three channels of communication, and whenever our attitude is inconsistent with our behavior, we feel discomfort and a natural inclination to resolve it. This is important to understand when you are attempting to influence someone else with your message. If you are communicating something positive or inspiring, an audience will need to hear that reflected in your voice and see it in your body language. Your verbal communication channel communicates facts and information—a crucial element when influencing others. Your nonverbal communication communicates something different but equally important: your attitudes and emotions and how you want them to *feel* about the information. Intention is the glue that binds your verbal and nonverbal communication together. With a strong intention behind your words,

that intention will ensure congruency of message and do your communication work for you.

The art of communication is the language of leadership.

We all communicate every day of our lives, whether we choose to or not, and we all

—JAMES HUMES

want something as a result of the messages we are communicating. Think about it. Your teenager throws a ball in the house and it shatters a vase—you deliver a message. Your employee shows up late to work for the third day in a row—you deliver a message. Your in-laws invite you to dinner and ask how your job search is progressing—you deliver a message. In all of these scenarios you clearly seek something from the other party and want them to feel a certain way and take certain actions as a result of hearing your message. The question is, how does one do this effectively?

Daniel J. O’Keefe, a professor at Northwestern University, has defined persuasion as “a successful, intentional effort at influencing another’s mental state through communication.”⁶ To influence an audience, you have to start by understanding their needs so you can not only meet but exceed them. And not just their needs—but also their beliefs, desires, concerns, and constraints. In fact, any aspect that will play a factor in their decision-making process will provide you with useful information to help customize your message. As comedian Patton Oswalt has pointed out, “Every audience is different,” so it is important that you “make every audience *your* audience.”⁷

Engagement—perhaps the most vital ingredient for effective communication—is the willing state of attentiveness an audience must be in for you to be able to influence them. If an audience has tuned you out, it doesn’t matter how knowledgeable you are or how interesting your information is, because little can be achieved if your audience is distracted or asleep. As a communicator, when it comes to hitting the mark with an audience, it is not enough that *you* understand why the information you are presenting is important to them, your audience must receive it with the same urgency. And that can’t happen without engagement. As Teller (born Raymond Joseph Teller), the silent half of the magical performance duo Penn & Teller (and a former Latin teacher)

points out, a speaker “has a duty to engage.” And not just engage, but “transform apathy into interest.”⁸ The same goes for someone in the corporate environment. Whether delivering a message to clients, detailing a new policy to team members, or updating the CEO on a recent purchase order, it is your job to not only engage them with your message, but also create a change in their knowledge, feelings, or behavior as a result of them hearing the information being shared.

In most cases, an audience in the corporate setting will be open to hearing your message—at least at the start. They want to learn, want to have better clarity or want to feel inspired by what you have to say. But it is your job to connect with them on an emotional level from the moment you enter the room until the last visual aid is displayed. If you ever wonder whether your audience is engaged or not, there is an easy way to find out: look at their faces. And not just their faces, take in their nonverbal communication. The messages they are sending back to you contain very important information. Warning signs that your audience is disengaged or bored include few questions being asked, people avoiding eye contact, blank stares, doodling, or disengaged body language such as slouching, crossed arms, or yawning. For a speaker communicating a message, eye contact is a vital tool for engagement and building rapport. If you are not staying attuned to the intentional cues being provided to you by your audience, you will likely miss fully interpreting them.

The most effective way to ensure engagement in your meetings or presentations is to create a *pattern interrupt* (or “change-up”)—something you do or say that is designed to break behavior patterns or habits that can lull your audience into a state of complacency. Surprise your audience with something interesting or unexpected at frequent intervals throughout. Shift gears by changing speakers or topics. Divide your audience into groups and incorporate physical activity, if appropriate. Introduce a new visual aid or solicit feedback or opinions from people. Make your meetings and presentations a dialogue instead of a monologue. This will help you to keep the room alive. Schedule breaks to give people a chance to step away and return refreshed and ready to re-engage with your message.

CONSEQUENCES OF POOR COMMUNICATION

Think about the role you currently hold at your present company. Are there consequences that could result from poor communication? There most certainly are, and in the corporate arena, these consequences can have significant costs. Set aside hurt feelings or damaged trust, technological advances have changed the way information is shared in the workplace. Much of our communication happens through e-mail or texting, which removes body language and vocal dynamics from the equation, reducing the odds even further that your message will be received as intended. This is why emojis are so popular. When sending a written message, traditional intention cues such as facial expressions and vocal tone are not available, so an emoji serves as a visual qualifier to help express the intention behind the words and to avoid misinterpretation by the receiver. One study found that most people who receive an article (or long e-mail) read only around 50 percent of the content unless relevance has clearly been established upfront. Another found that people are much better at communicating and interpreting tone in vocal messages than in text-based ones. In the experiment, one group of participants read statements into a tape recorder, taking either a sarcastic tone or serious tone, while another group e-mailed the same statements. When it came time to guess how accurately each of their messages would be received, both groups predicted a 78 percent success rate. Surprisingly, the partners of the participants who spoke their messages correctly identified the tone 75 percent of the time while those who read the statements on e-mail had only a 56 percent success rate.⁹ These numbers are worrisome as they provide clear evidence that bullseyes are not being hit when it comes to our daily communication on the job. Chances are that most people can recall an instance when information was communicated from one person to another—perhaps even through various channels—and somehow ended up morphing into something entirely different than what was originally intended. Situations like this can cause stress and conflict within a team, harming relationships and even affecting the way employees view the company itself. There are many reasons why communication gets short-circuited during a meeting or

presentation. Faulty technology, audience fatigue, confusing jargon, and poor acoustics can cause barriers that hinder your ability to deliver your message clearly. But in too many instances, the problem is much simpler and boils down to the fact that your personal communication was not as clear as it needed to be. Perhaps you were not fully prepared or you didn't totally understand the needs of your audience. For one reason or another, the arrow that was your message did not hit its mark.

When communication is poor between managers and their direct reports, it can have a devastating effect on morale and overall engagement within an organization. We will talk in greater detail about this subject in upcoming chapters, but according to both the Smith School of Business at Queen's University and the Gallup organization, disengagement results in a 37 percent higher absentee rate for employees, 49 percent more accidents, and 16 percent lower profitability for the company itself.¹⁰ Specific consequences of poor communication include lack of team cohesion, unclear messaging, wasted time and resources, damaged relationships, low employee morale, higher turnover rates, lost revenue, and even injury or death. One recent example of poor communication having devastating consequences occurred when a group of teenagers took a class trip to Spain.

This past year, a young Dutch girl named Vera Mol packed her bags and joined her classmates on a trip to northern Spain. Once there, she and a group of 13 other teenagers decided to try a favorite extreme sport: bungee jumping. They gathered at the top of a 130-foot bridge and, one by one, took turns jumping. Once all of the other teens had finished the jump, night had begun to fall. As darkness filled the night sky, it was finally Vera's turn. She put on the harness and stepped to the edge of the bridge. As Vera took a deep breath, trying to calm her nerves, the Spanish instructor in charge of the jump suddenly shouted out a command to her. "No jump," he said, "It's important, no jump!" Vera, misunderstanding his pronunciation and instead reacting to the urgency in his voice, thought he had said, "Now jump!" and threw herself from the edge of the bridge. This simple misunderstanding proved fatal for the young teen. The harness Vera was wearing had not been properly secured, and she plunged to her death.¹¹

One sector where communication plays a crucial role is the medical industry, where poor communication costs the U.S. healthcare system \$1.7 billion a year.¹² A study by the Institute of Medicine found that up to 98,000 people die every year in the United States as a result of medical errors, and communication mistakes were the primary cause of inadvertent patient harm in over 70 percent of cases.¹³ These are very troubling numbers for sure, but there is a silver lining. According to the New England Journal of Medicine, when there is proper communication between doctors and nurses, medical errors are reduced by a remarkable 30 percent.¹⁴ We spoke to Ramesh Kaushik, a heart surgeon in New Delhi, about the role communication plays for someone in his field. According to Kaushik, who has performed more than 500 heart surgeries and transplants, “Communication is extremely essential for successful outcomes.”¹⁵ He detailed the multiple levels of communication that take place during a single surgery and how each interaction must address the individual needs and expectations of each stakeholder. “Patients need clear communication regarding their illness, the line of treatment chosen, the likely outcomes, as well as the risks involved. The patient’s relatives need to know the same and also understand the role they can play in rehabilitation. Doctors who are part of the team need to be aligned on the treatment chosen and should feel as involved and committed as the lead doctor.

Paramedics need to understand their critical role in providing supportive treatment that will lead to a successful outcome.

The difficulty lies, not in new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones.

All this communication effectively translates into quality patient care and an excellent patient experience.”¹⁶

—JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES

When an employee is working with customers, communication takes on an important role as well, offering a perfect opportunity to create a strong and positive first impression for your company. Every single interaction a customer service agent has with a customer impacts the way that the customer will feel about your company—specifically, whether they will want to do business with you and how they will speak

about you to others. But various challenges can hinder effective interactions between a customer service agent and the customer they are attempting to assist. Think about your previous experiences and how an interaction with a customer service agent affected your overall feelings toward the company. The manner in which you are treated by the hotel staff at check-in often creates the initial impression you have about the hotel itself. The greeting you receive from the restaurant's host sets the tone for the entire dining experience. Interactions over the phone pose their own set of communication challenges as customer service agents on the phone are dealing with one call after another in rapid succession. A customer service agent who communicates through chat adds to the challenges by regularly being required to multitask or manage several screens or clients at a time, a fact that most customers generally do not realize. In face-to-face customer service interactions, there are visual and vocal cues that provide feedback to an agent in the form of facial expressions, eye contact, and tone of voice. But none of these are available when assisting a customer over chat, which often causes customers to become even more frustrated.

Communication is vital for developing and strengthening the relationship between an organization and its customers. Since a customer service agent often creates a company's first impression with a customer, in many instances, they are the initial face of that company's brand. Every single experience, every conversation, and every interaction that the people in your organization have with your customers contributes to the overall feeling your customers will have about the company itself. To generate loyalty and trust, every single employee—from customer service agents to management to the cleaning crew—must be attentive to the needs of your customers and treat them with courtesy and respect. And to be able to do this successfully, effective communication is paramount.

Anyone who leads a team or manages other people knows that at some point they will be required to present information or deliver feedback to others. It might happen in a boardroom, at a client site, or even in a one-on-one setting with a subordinate. For some, having to speak in front of a boss or client fills them with anxiety. Their heart rate increases, their breathing becomes shallow, and they start to obsess

about mistakes they may make in the moment that could embarrass them or hurt their credibility. We will talk in upcoming chapters about how professional actors learn to manage nerves and share some techniques that you can use to manage stress and utilize it to energize your performance. While nearly every speaker or leader feels some level of anxiety before they present information in front of others, understanding the difference between good stress (called *eustress*) and bad stress (called *distress*) can make a world of difference.

The concept of “public speaking” was first developed by the ancient Greeks; however, over time, the term has become a bit outdated, weighted with negative connotations. Many people have mental scars from an experience in a high school or college speech class in which they were forced to stand up and speak in front of others and then be criticized by the entire group. In our methodology and for the purposes of this book, we’d like you to jettison the term “public speaking” from your vocabulary and replace it with a much simpler word: *communication*. This will help strip away the stigma most people have ingrained in their psyche about past experiences. Public speaking is nothing more than communicating with someone outside of your home, and it is something we all do every day of our lives. Whether it happens at a networking party, while meeting potential clients in their warehouse, or during a keynote presentation to an audience of subject matter experts, in the end, communication is simply two parties sharing and receiving messages for mutual benefit.

Aristotle’s treatise, *Rhetoric*, was written in the 4th century BC and is widely regarded by rhetoricians as the single most important work on persuasion ever written. In it, Aristotle writes that a speech can be broken down to three distinct elements: *speaker*, *subject*, and *audience*. Think of Steve Jobs unveiling the iPhone, Winston Churchill delivering his “Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat” speech to Parliament, or Dave Chappelle performing stand-up comedy at Madison Square Garden. Each of these examples can be distilled down to the same three elements that Aristotle detailed nearly 2,500 years ago: Speaker. Subject. Audience.

In the years before television and the Internet, actors would travel from town to town performing on makeshift stages wherever crowds

would gather. This is where the business concept of “a plank and a passion” originated, and this same idea is no different for someone presenting a new HR initiative, detailing their quarterly report to shareholders, or teaching a classroom of fifth-graders the difference between a trapezoid and a triangle. As Aristotle pointed out, we are all just speakers communicating a message to an audience. But doing so effectively is a different matter, as unexpected situations or circumstances can arise that may require a deft touch to satisfy the needs of the moment. And as anyone who has seen a boss lose their temper or a politician flub the answer to a question, when communication goes wrong, it can often go very, very wrong.

THE PERSUASION EQUATION: INTENTION AND OBJECTIVE

The methodology we detail in this book and in our trainings with executives around the globe is based on the actor’s approach to communication. It follows the simple premise that whether you are pitching a product, delivering a presentation, running a meeting, or showing your neighbor how to change a flat tire, the success of your communication depends upon two things. First, you must identify an *objective*—something you want or need from your audience. And second, you must choose an *intention* that will assist you in the pursuit of that objective. We describe objective and intention like this:

Objective = What You Want

Intention = How You Are Going to Get It

The dictionary defines intention as “an aim that guides action.”¹⁷ For an actor, it is the tool that differentiates an amazing performance from a forgettable one. For a speaker, it works the same way. Intention fuels the emotion behind your words and infuses them with meaning. It provides passion and purpose to your delivery and it is this element that allows you to influence your listener and motivate them to action. Essayist Emma Hardman describes intention as the “pre-verbal firings of electricity in the brain.”¹⁸ A strong intention connects us to our overall objective—the goal

we hope to accomplish with our message. Grant Halvorson, a Columbia University professor who has studied the importance of intention, found that implementing a strong intention with your communication will double the likelihood that you will achieve your goal.¹⁹

An important study at Case Western Reserve University became the first major scientific demonstration with regard to the ways in which intention physically manifests itself and affects the recipient receiving the information. “When you send an intention, every major physiological system in your body is mirrored in the body of the receiver,” wrote Lynne McTaggart in her book *The Intention Experiment*.²⁰ The study also suggested that intention was more than just a change in posture or body language, but that an actual attunement of energy was needed in order to reach an audience and connect with them in any meaningful way. By putting the focus on your audience and projecting your intention toward them, it will not only bring your message into better focus, it can actually help you switch off certain neural connections, allowing you to relax and perform better in the moment. According to research done at the University of Toronto, intention can give someone a reduced sense of self-awareness and create a transpersonal experience for both the sender *and* receiver of a message.²¹ This is what Stanislavski called the *communion* between a speaker and an audience—the “invisible currents which we use to communicate with one another.”²² Think of any great speech or presentation you’ve ever seen or heard—Kelly McGonigal, Barack Obama, Winston Churchill, Ronald Reagan, or Amy Cuddy. If you watch any of these leaders communicating at the height of their abilities, there is an electricity in their delivery that engages you so completely it borders on a transformative experience. This type of experience is what we are referring to when we talk about the power of intention for someone communicating with others. According to an article in *Scientific American*, “A body of psychological research shows that conscious, purposeful processing of our thoughts really does make a difference to what we do . . . [the] intentions we formulate to carry out specific tasks in particular circumstances . . . increase the likelihood that we will complete the planned behavior.”²³

Without a strong intention behind your words, your message will be ambiguous at best to an audience. And without clear intent you run the

risk of people not knowing how to feel about your message or what to do with the information they have just heard—resulting in confusion or apathy. In a negotiation, for example, if there is ever ambiguity or lack of specificity with a detail or item, both sides will fill it in or use it to their advantage. This is why clarity and specificity are important. Essayist Emma Hardman describes the problem like this: If there is “a gap between intention and action . . . between thought and speech, between meaning and words—the gap is a black hole that words fall into.”²⁴ The ability to communicate clearly is vital to ensure that an audience receives a message in exactly the manner it was intended. If you are not clear why your message is important to them, your audience won’t be either.

In a series of experiments done at University College London, Dr. Sophie Scott used brain scanning techniques to show that when a human being listens to another person speak, they actually divide the person’s message into sections and store (and remember) each part in a different part of the brain.²⁵ The words themselves are placed in the left temporal lobe where they are processed, but the vocal *dynamics* of the words—*how* the words are delivered—goes to the right side of the brain—the area that is also associated with music and visual images. This is why the words alone are not enough. Lack of vocal intentionality will cloud your message and leave your audience (at best) confused and (at worst) unmoved. Communicating with intention penetrates both sides of a listener’s brain. Think about how a news anchor changes their vocal delivery, tone and facial expressions, when they are talking about the tragic devastation caused by a hurricane versus how they report on an inspirational story about a young girl attending space camp with dreams of becoming an astronaut. The former makes us feel sadness and empathy while the latter uplifts us.

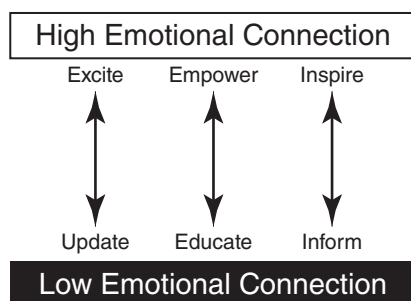
To help you better understand how these two aspects of communication fit together, look at the phrase below, a simple framing device we call “The Persuasion Equation”:

I want to _____ my audience so (Intention) that my audience will _____. (Objective)
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Great actors learn early on in their training that the concepts of intention and objective are essential partners in creating believable and captivating performances on stage or film. The same idea can benefit anyone who has to communicate information in the corporate arena. For any communicator, once a specific objective has been chosen and an intention activated, the pairing of these two elements will inform all aspects of one's delivery and enable a person to communicate with credibility and confidence. As Stanislavski observed, "When an actor is completely absorbed by some profoundly moving objective . . . he throws his whole being passionately into its execution."²⁶

When identifying your intention, always express it as a verb—a strong action word that can activate and inform your delivery. For example, your intention might be to inspire your children to act in a certain way, or to reassure a colleague that a decision was correct. Intention helps you get to the *what* of your message. Your objective comes into clarity once you choose your intention. Let the chosen intention guide you to the bullseye of your message—whether interviewing for a job, leading a meeting, or providing feedback to a team member. Intention involves motivation and various intentional tactics you will use in the pursuit of your objective.

As a speaker moves from one intention to the next, noticeable changes should take place in eye contact, facial expressions, voice, and body language to help signify and communicate that change to the audience. We will talk about the most important intention cues for you to focus on in upcoming chapters, but each of these transitions from one intention to the next must be clear. For example, the intention at the opening of your meeting might be to *greet* your attendees, but could shift to *reassure* as you begin presenting new industry findings, and then to *excite* as you unveil the latest product you will be launching to drive holiday sales. The changes and adjustments you make in your delivery are a direct result of the intention cues you are using at any given moment. It is these intention cues—the vocal and physical manifestations of your intention—that will ensure the words and delivery match the message and help you achieve the desired result you seek with your audience.



When choosing an intention, verbs that offer the opportunity for a high emotional connection are preferred versus verbs with a lower emotional connection. As you can see in the diagram above, *inform*, *educate*, and *update* have low emotional charges and are less likely to move an audience to action, while *empower*, *inspire*, and *excite* have higher emotional charges, making them better choices to motivate or influence someone. Imagine you are attending an industry conference and are in the audience for a keynote speech by a leading expert in a given field. Would you rather be *excited* by the information they are sharing or *informed* by it? *Inform*, *update*, *review*, and *report* are generally low emotion snoozers, sometimes called *treadmill verbs*, because they have no destination which

Outcome is not in your control. What's in your control is your effort and your intentions.

—AMIT SOOD

means you never know when you are done. According to psychologist Ann Latham, choosing a treadmill verb is a mistake because it provides “an open invitation to talk on and on with no particular outcome in mind” and “leaves most people bored and disengaged.”²⁷

An objective, if properly aligned with intention, should result in a message that changes your audience’s knowledge, attitude, or action with regard to the topic being presented. As a communicator, your objective is always something you need to accomplish to move your audience to action. As Stanislavski explains, “Life, people, circumstances . . . constantly put up barriers. . . . Each of these barriers presents us with the objective of getting through it Every one of the

objectives you have chosen . . . calls for some degree of action.”²⁸ In the end, without a strong intention behind your delivery—one that is specifically in line with your objective—your audience will not know how to feel about your message or what you want them to do as a result of hearing it. Conversely, a strong intention will power the arrow of your message toward the bullseye of your objective. When pursuing your objective, ask yourself the same three questions an actor asks when rehearsing a scene in a play or film:

1. *What do I want?*
2. *What is in the way of what I want?*
3. *How am I going to get what I want?*

In his book *The Actor and the Target*, Declan Donnellan writes: “The actor cannot act a verb without an [objective] . . . all an actor can play are verbs, but even more significantly, each of these verbs has to depend on a target . . . either direct or indirect, a specific thing seen or sensed, and, to some degree, *needed*.”²⁹ The same idea is at play when someone is communicating in the business arena. Think of a recent interaction with someone you needed to influence in which you were unsuccessful in getting what you wanted. This could be during communication with a spouse, a client, or a coworker. As you look back, is it possible that your delivery was the reason you did not get what you wanted? Were your intentions simply not communicated clearly enough at the time? Did your physical and vocal delivery not support the message?

As you begin to consider your own individual communication and how you can start to incorporate an awareness of intention and objective into it, understand this: once your objective and intention are aligned, they will often do your communication work for you. Influence involves emotion, so it is important that people feel something as a result of hearing what you have to say. A strong intention, activated properly, will inform all aspects of your communication—body language, facial expressions, vocal dynamics, and the rest. As best-selling author Simon Sinek puts it, “Our internal wiring, though complicated and messy in practice, is pretty straightforward in intention.”³⁰

THE PINNACLE METHOD THREE-STEP PROCESS

The simple yet essential three-step process outlined below is the framework that underpins our entire methodology. It comprises the three important steps that should be done sequentially when communicating a message to others. The three steps are:

1. *Analyze* your audience
2. *Understand* the reaction your message should elicit
3. *Modify* your delivery to achieve that result

No matter the message you are tasked with delivering—whether it is good news or bad, complicated or simple—the first step in the process of influential communication is analyzing your audience and understanding who they are and what benefit you can provide to them. Once you understand the wants and needs of your audience you can move to the second step, which is understanding how you want them to feel and, subsequently, what you want them to do as a result of hearing your message (again, this is your objective). The third step in the process is the one that professional actors do so well: modifying your vocal and visual intention cues to accomplish your objective.

Audience analysis is a complicated process but an essential place for you to start. If you ever go into a client meeting or begin a presentation without knowing with whom you are about to speak, you are walking into trouble. How can you satisfy the needs of your audience and customize your message for them if you don't know who they are? When it comes to analyzing an audience, there are many factors to consider, but for the sake of simplicity we will provide the three most important ones:

Demographic factors

The demographic make-up of your audience is the first area to analyze and this includes identifying the age, marital status, gender, education level, occupation, religion as well as cultural,

racial, and ethnic backgrounds of the various people with which you are communicating.

Psychographic factors

The second area to analyze is psychographic factors, such as any attitudes, beliefs, values, loyalties, preconceived notions, and feelings that are already in place with this audience before you even utter your first word. How much do they know about the topic or information you will be presenting? How much do they not know? If they are all experts on the topic you will need to approach the material differently than if they have no prior knowledge and the information is completely new to them.

Situational factors

Do your research ahead of time so you have a thorough understanding of the situational factors at play for your meeting or presentation: the size of the group, the time of day you will be meeting, the occasion, the length of the event, and the size of the room and seating arrangement for your listeners. Each of these elements will affect how you will deliver your information. For example, if the meeting is happening in the morning, your audience and their energy level will be different than if the group is listening to you speak at the end of the workday.

Whether defining your personal brand, running a meeting, or building a relationship with someone you have just met, understanding this simple three-step process and utilizing intention in the pursuit of a specific objective will improve your ability to engage and influence others in profound and noticeable ways. We all want something as a result of our communication and the clearer the message, the easier it will be to hit the bullseye and get what we want.

Blueprint to Bullseye—Chapter 1

Preparation Guide for Presentations

1. What topic are you presenting?
2. Who is your audience?
 - a. Demographic analysis
 - b. Psychographic analysis
 - c. Situational analysis
3. What challenges could you face with this audience and this topic? (List three.)
4. What difficult questions might you be asked by this audience? (List three.)
5. What is the objective you hope to accomplish as a result of your audience hearing your message? (Be specific.)
6. What intentions will best help you accomplish your objective? (Choose from: excite, persuade, challenge, reassure, inspire, motivate, empower, etc.)