1 Adopting a Communication Mindset

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Consider your communication mindset as a platform—every time you deliver a message, whether it's verbal or non-verbal, written or spoken, you'll stand on your communication mindset as the basis for all you do. Your communication mindset will ask you to think strategically, analytically, and empathetically about your audience and what matters to them. It will ask you to clarify the work that your communication is meant to do. And it will invite you to make choices about the words, channels, visuals, and multimedia assets that will comprise your message. It is not only a starting place, but the foundation for all effective communication. So let's dive in.

Know Your AIM

Nearly every class, workshop, or seminar I've led in the past decade at Stanford and beyond has begun with one simple yet elegant framework (Figure 1.1). So, of course, my first book should also begin in the same fashion. It's not just at the heart of all I teach and coach around communication, but I believe it's at the heart of all great leadership communication.

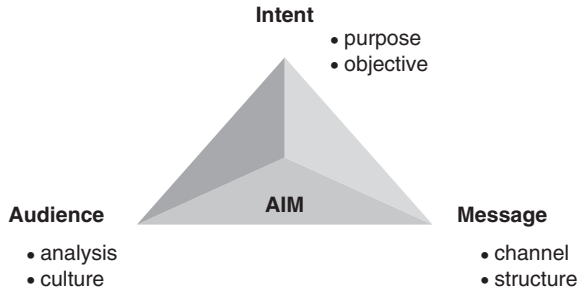


Figure 1.1 AIM triangle

Source: L. Russell and M. Munter, *Guide to Presentations*

While I wish I had developed it, there's nothing that I've seen or created on my own that's a better place for a leader to start. Lynn Russell (then at Columbia Business School) and Mary Munter (then at Dartmouth's Tuck School) co-created this model and included it in their book *Guide to Presentations*. But I believe it applies equally well to written and interpersonal communication as well as presentations. I've deployed this on ten-foot-high slides behind me at the Qualtrics Summit and sketched it on the back of a napkin at Starbucks while coaching an entrepreneur on her startup. It really does offer a beginning for most of the important communication that we engage in.

Order is important here . . . crucial, in fact. We must begin first in the shoes (or seats) of our audience. Once we know who we are addressing, we have to clarify our intent; what do we want them to do, think, or feel as a result of this communication? Only by clarifying Audience and Intent can we move on to Message. Inboxes around the planet are chock full of emails the recipient does not need to see, because too many people "blast out a message" rather than slowing down to tailor the communication to the right audience for the right reason (e.g., Intent).

Let's explore each of these elements in order. Let's begin with Audience.

Audience: The Starting Point for All Communication

I challenge leaders to devise as many methods of audience analysis as possible. "How can you get to know your readers before they open the email or pick up the pitch book? How can you learn about an audience before you are in front of them?" Typically, the responses I get fall into three broad categories: online research, personal contacts, and "creative espionage."

LinkedIn and Google searches top the online examples; finding information about individuals, groups, or firms with whom you plan to communicate has never been easier. It's relatively simple to find company bio pages, recent conference presentations, or public blog sites. Those who dig a little deeper may find their way to Glassdoor to research a firm or leader; this site often offers more subjective information, as its entries are largely provided by former employees—many of whom may have a bit of an ax to grind. Go deeper still, and you may find yourself amid 10-K reports on publicly traded firms, briefs on non-profits, and other forms of disclosure information that's public but not as quickly surfaced. In my reputation management class, we discuss the fact that almost everything online is permanent; once posted, even if taken down, it can still often be discovered.

Leveraging personal contacts makes up the second, often deeper, round of analysis. Can I find somebody in the audience to serve as a "mini focus group" for my message? Can I test out a few phrases or stories with a sample audience before I use them on my actual audience? Further, if I can find somebody who has recently spoken to this group who's willing to share that experience, all the better. The true gold is finding somebody who failed with this group and can share why. They might be able to tell you, "We were pitching a software solution, but they've shifted all their funding to cloud-based startups." Or: "I focused my recommendations on global expansion right when the firm announced layoffs and cost-cutting measures." While LinkedIn provides a great resource in and of itself, it can also

yield valuable ideas about who you might contact for a one-on-one conversation. When I'm searching for a personal contact, I look both at who is currently at the firm, and who has recently left the firm or group. Recent employees may be able to be much more candid than current ones.

On that note, here's a tip about your "gatekeeper" when you first approach a new organization: mine your conversation with that person effectively. If someone at the firm is arranging your visit, pepper that person with questions at both a macro and micro level. Everything from "What has marked the success of recent speakers?" to "Do the men in your office wear jackets and ties to work?" is fair game. If you've been invited to submit a column or blog for a publication, likewise, ask them to share two or three examples of successful recent submissions.

Over the years I've enjoyed the strategies my MBA students have provided in the realm of "creative espionage." They have found social media posts on Instagram and Snapchat that mention the firm or individual. Some have gone so far as to apply for a job at a firm they wish to solicit for business to see how the firm represents itself to prospective employees. I've known people who've posed as secret shoppers and attended information sessions or participated in online webinars to better understand a firm and its offerings. One student (jokingly, I think!) shared the strategy of figuring out the "watering hole" for a team of interest to him and hanging out there to see what casual conversation he could overhear.

I often share the story of my colleague Ray McNulty, president of the National Dropout Prevention Network, who was invited to deliver a workshop on a Saturday morning for a group of public school teachers. This "mandatory in-service" was far from popular with the faculty who were required to attend. He arrived early and the host had not yet shown up to open the door. He listened intently as the teachers began to assemble, grousing about the need to come listen to this "expert" on a Saturday morning. They were a bit sheepish

when they realized who he was when the person with the key arrived and welcomed him.

Let me be clear: I don't endorse duplicitous or deceptive measures for audience research; but I do appreciate the lengths that some leaders will go to better understand their audience before they try to write or speak to them. If only more leaders went to this effort.

It's also crucial to emphasize that any time we communicate with others, there is both a primary and secondary audience. Our primary audience is on the "to" line of the email or seated in front of us when we speak. These audience members are the primary reason for the communication to occur. Anybody with whom they choose to share the message would then be a secondary audience. Table 1.1 shows typical primary and secondary audiences with whom a leader may communicate.

Table 1.1 Primary and Secondary Audiences

Primary Audience Members	Secondary Audience Members
Regional directors	The field managers they supervise
Junior partners at a VC firm	Senior partners who will decide to invest
A journalist	All of those who read her column
Advisors to a senior leader	The senior leader
Sales team members	Customers who will ultimately buy

Thus far our discussion of audience members has been around intentional primary audiences: individuals or groups of people whom we've designated to receive our communication. Yet we cannot end this section without a discussion of unintended secondary audiences. An email we intend "for your eyes only" is forwarded to a wider group. A person who was listed as BCC mistakenly hits "reply all" and comes "out of hiding." A disgruntled employee or customer secretly films an interaction with you and posts it on YouTube for the world to see. The classic example I provide is Mitt Romney's 2012 election bid, when he thought he was having a private conversation

with a limited group of high-net-worth donors. But unbeknownst to Romney, a bartender with an iPhone propped against a water pitcher recorded and then broadcast the entire chat widely, arming the Obama campaign with controversial sound bites for the remaining six weeks of the campaign. As a leader, you need not cower from such communication possibilities, but should simply commit to owning your communication so that if an unintended audience hears or reads it, your words still do the work you intend them to do.

Audience-centric communication provides the foundation for everything else in this book. It's not simply the first part of the AIM model, it's the place all leaders must begin their work to inform, influence, or inspire others. Occasionally a student will ask me for a letter of recommendation without telling me the name of the recipient. I say I'm willing to write the letter, but that it's going to be much stronger and more effective if I can tailor it to the organization and role to which the student is applying. Without a clear audience in mind, how can a leader provide an impactful message?

Intent: Your Reason for Communication

Now we move to Intent, the second part of the Munter/Russell model. Certainly there are numerous ways to describe the goal, objective, or outcome of a communication. I like their choice of "Intent" not simply because of the great acronym it creates, but because of the clarity of the word. It's both the intention in my mind as a speaker or writer, and the action in the minds of the audience. It's not simply what I want the audience to think, say, or do, it's what they choose to do as a result of the communication.

Take the example of a senior Stanford hospital leader—we'll call him Ken, although that's not really his name. I was coaching Ken to lead a town hall meeting with his staff. Halfway through a rehearsal of his presentation, I interrupted and said, "What's your intent?"

He replied as many of us might: "I want to impress them."

"Okay, great, Ken," I said. "But that's all about you! What do you want the staff to think, say, or do as a result of this town hall?"

After a short pause, he said, "Oh, I see. . . . I want them to be impressed."

"Fair enough!" I said. "But that's still all about you. What do you want them to do?"

He paused and then said, "Treat patients with dignity."

The room (and the talk) shifted in that insight. We did not have to make sweeping changes, but now we had a north star to which we could align our efforts. Without clarity of intent, we are like a ship without a compass. We might somehow show up at our location, but it's not by design.

In March 2019 I shared the stage at the annual Qualtrics X4 Summit with Barack Obama and Oprah Winfrey. (I'm pretty sure Barack and Oprah don't mention me if they describe the occasion; there were hundreds of presenters. But my talk on Storytelling with Data was indeed between their two keynotes. I'll take it!) I was incredibly moved by Oprah and her clarity of intention. She shared that she made a choice very early in her career to not produce a single episode of her show without a clear statement of intent with which everybody on the production team could align. She told the audience that the event that triggered this clarity was an episode she produced about infidelity. On this episode, a male guest, seated between his wife and his mistress, shared that he'd gotten his mistress pregnant. Oprah acknowledged, "No wife should endure that on national television. And I had to ask myself and my team, 'What's our intent here?'" She went on to share, in her signature empowering style, that when we align our actions with our intent great things come to pass. We're better able to cause our communication to make an impact we intend, and more importantly, an impact in which we can believe.

Back on earth with us mortals, I urge my students to set a single clear intent for every communication they have—something from the

audience's viewpoint that the speaker intends to bring forward. Here are some examples:

- Embrace our company's technology
- Endorse my candidacy publicly
- Invite me to their office for a longer conversation
- Agree to take on a volunteer commitment to lead this effort
- Eliminate negative references to a former employee

Whether we are designing and creating a web page, delivering a TED talk, proposing marriage to our spouse, or sending a tweet about an upcoming theater production, we need to be crystal clear on our intent before we open our mouths or hit send on our keyboards.

How Communication Intent Has Evolved in Silicon Valley

One of the many colleagues I've come to know at Stanford is Raymond Nasr, a lecturer who specializes in communication. He offers his insights within a popular elective, Entrepreneurship and Venture Capital, which is taught by Eric Schmidt and Peter Wendell. Raymond served as Eric's communication director and speechwriter for decades at Novell and later at Google.

Raymond recalls that in the 1970s and 1980s, communication was largely a "secretarial function," and certainly not strategic. "In the late 1970s and early 1980s, communications as a profession was not what it is today by any stretch of the imagination. It was on the margin. A notch above secretarial,

(*Continued*)

largely administrative—and it really was often a case of an administrative assistant or a secretary taking down notes from a CEO, putting it into a format that would be distributable on paper, and giving it to the members of the press. They would in turn write the story about what the CEO wanted to say. So managing the narrative was dead easy. It would be a press release with the quotes embedded into the *San Jose Mercury* news article, and that was it.

"But then there was this company called Apple. Their strategic communication was revolutionary. They realized that there was so much power in narrative that they needed to manage every element of it, in-house. See, before, often the chip guys and the hardware guys would hire a PR firm to take that notepaper from the secretary, turn it into a press release, and put it on some fancy letterhead. The PR firms had relationships with the press corps. So companies would hire an agency to do PR work. Instead, Apple said no, we're going to manage every element of our complete experience. From the launch of the products, to the events, the financial industry analysts, product publicity, and packaging to executive communication—everything is going to be integrated under one umbrella."

Raymond sees this evolution as both key to his success at the biggest names in tech (Apple, Novell, and Google) but also as a key ingredient to our success at Stanford. Our community already had the appetite for skills in strong and strategic communication, so we began to provide valuable courses that met this need. The fact that icons Wendell and Schmidt purposefully embed Raymond Nasr into their course speaks volumes about how valued communication is as a discipline within the Silicon Valley ethos, and why it has grown so steadily at Stanford.

Message: Delivering on Your Intent with Words That Matter

We might say that the final element of the Munter/Russell model is where the magic happens. Once you've familiarized yourself with your audience and clarified your intent, you're ready to communicate. You're ready to share your message.

If audience is the "who" and intent is the "why," message is the "how." So now the question I urge students to answer is how they will structure and channel their message.

The channel for your message is the medium you choose for your communication. If you need to scale your communication to a broad audience, maybe you'll choose to prepare a talk that can be filmed and shared on YouTube; or you might choose to write a blog post that you can publish broadly, such as on Medium or LinkedIn. Consider what medium will be most approachable for your audience: earning your colleague's buy-in right before the big meeting might be a job for a Slack message or a chat in the hallway, whereas a thank-you note for a job interview might be best accomplished through a handwritten note (what can I say: I'm old-fashioned). Some questions to ask yourself before you make this choice: How far do I need my message to go? How long do I want my message to "last"? How formal is my message? What medium is easiest for my audience to access, use, or understand?

Too often we rely on just a few familiar channels instead of considering the wide range of choices we have to deliver our message. One activity I often do with my MBA students is to co-create a list on the board of all the possible channels available to share a message. I draw three long lines across the whiteboard making a row for Oral, Blended, and Written. Across the top I write "highly interactive" in the top left corner, "moderately interactive" in the center, and "minimally interactive" on the right corner. Then, for the next 15 to 20 minutes, we come up with different channels

available to share a message: send an email, call a meeting, write a memo, tweet, send a text, deliver a talk. For each medium a student mentions, we discuss how interactive this choice would be. Often that has to do with how many recipients there are for the communication; a meeting with just one other person is highly interactive, but if 1,000 people are in the room not so much. Once enough stickies have made it to the whiteboard, students begin to see the wide array of choices available to them. Leaders committed to inspiring action on the part of their audience may have to be creative in what vehicle they choose to share that message. Further, a complex message may require multiple channels to achieve the desired result. I may need to send a teaser email in advance, deliver a great presentation, follow up with two or three key stakeholders, and send a final email synthesizing the message and reminding people of the action needed.

Figure 1.2 shows an example of just a few.

	Highly Interactive	Moderately Interactive	Minimally Interactive
Oral	1 on 1 Conversation Phone Call	Small Group Meeting	Voicemail Town Hall Podcast
Blended	Video Call	Meeting with Slides Live Webinar	Posted Recording of Webinar
Written	Text Slack Shared Document	Email Facebook Post Blast email	Handwritten Note Snail Mail Printed Bound Document

Figure 1.2 Communication channel choices by interaction level

Yet, we fall back all too often on the two most familiar methods: calling a meeting or writing an email. When students begin to look at this more robust menu of options, they begin to see how becoming a more strategic communicator is possible. It becomes easy to see that a more complex message may require a mix of several different channels, strategically designed in concert with one another.

Once you've chosen your channel, it's time to get down to the business of structuring your message. Many of my students choose to use an outline to generate some structure. What are the main points you wish to make in your communication? What are the key reasons and examples you can offer in support of those points? Once you've assembled a robust scaffold for your communication, you're ready to write, speak, chat, text, parlay, meet, or communicate in whatever other channel you've selected. Let your information about your audience inform your tone and word choice. (Don't worry, we'll talk about this process in depth in our upcoming chapters on speaking and writing.)

Starting with AIM sets you up to speak to the exact audience before you for the reasons that matter to you. This useful pre-work need not be time-consuming or laborious, but those few minutes you devote to investigating your audience, intent, and message will pay dividends when it's time to share your thoughts with the world and inspire others to action.

Beyond AIM: The Leadership Communication Canvas

If you have a complex message that needs to be delivered in a high-stakes setting, you might expand upon AIM by taking a more nuanced style of preparation. The model we have found helpful is a nine-box Leadership Communication Canvas, which encourages you to take a thoughtful, multifaceted approach to sharing your content.

At a business school like Stanford it's not unexpected that we would be a veritable factory of communication. While we witness (and often coach) an enormous volume of material, until 2007 there was not a standard approach to help students create communication they wished to share. MBAs come into our program with strong—dare I say excellent—experience in writing and speaking through their undergraduate degrees and their work as bankers, consultants, managers, and entrepreneurs. But we had as many approaches to creating communication as we had enrolled students. The solution we found was to guide students—with the help of a professional communication coach—to look not at "templates to complete" for documents and presentations, but rather a "canvas to create" whenever facing an issue that requires a thoughtful communication strategy.

Many of our students are extremely familiar with Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur's business model canvas from their best-selling book *Business Model Generation*. This widely adopted, open-source approach to creating and launching a business provides the necessary framing and questions for any entrepreneur. The authors describe the business model canvas as "a shared language for describing, visualizing, assessing, and changing business models" (12). It's been adapted for use in non-profit ventures, government initiatives, and internal campaigns within larger firms. Its simplicity and focus have made it an essential part of many entrepreneurs' (and entrepreneurship faculty members') toolkits.

Since this was a language many of our students already knew, we adapted their work with a specific focus on the needs of a leader with a powerful message to share. We've provided the canvas here for you to see (Figure 1.3), and blank copies can be downloaded at http://www.jdschramm.com/mastery for you to use in creating content for your next communication. The nine boxes provide categories for the key aspects of any communication (written, spoken, or both). While we will treat the boxes sequentially, the art of crafting a key communication must be more fluid and organic. Begin anywhere on the canvas

you wish—in fact, change the size and shape of the boxes to suit the needs of your particular mission. As you know from our discussion of AIM, however, we will begin on the far right side with Audience.

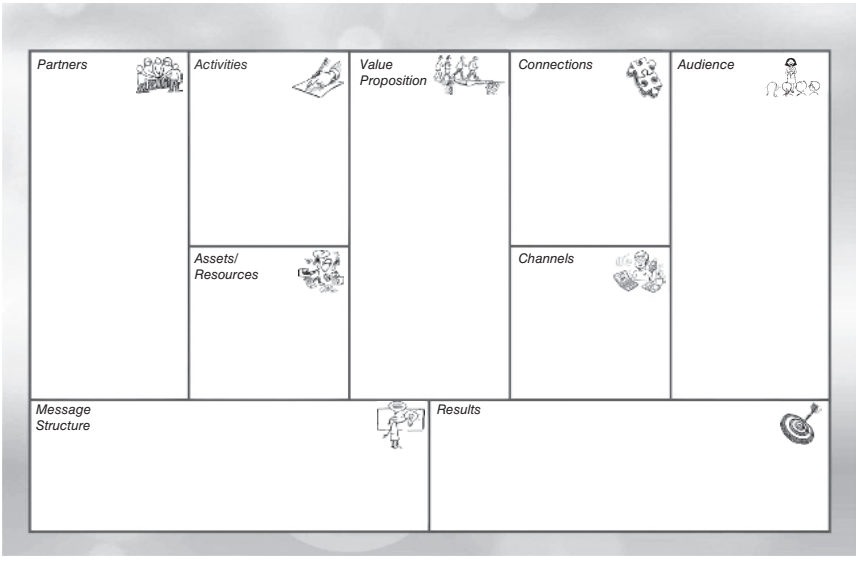


Figure 1.3 Leadership communication canvas

Audience: Who Needs to Hear (or Read) Your Message?

Yes, welcome back: we're right back at AIM. By now, you already know that all effective leadership communication begins with a focus on the recipient. The first step a leader must take is to define who precisely needs to hear the message being created. This may seem obvious in some cases. For example, "I want prospective employees to hear my message and join my firm." But for a leader communicating in a complex and nuanced way, it's crucial to ponder carefully not just who I *can* reach . . . but who I *must* reach. It is not simply the people seated in front of me (or on the "to" line of an email). This may be my primary audience, but in all leadership communication there is a secondary audience. A pitch to a junior partner at a VC firm will only be funded when a senior partner endorses it and takes it to an

investment committee. A cover letter in application for a job may be reviewed by an HR recruiter who decides whether or not the hiring manager will ever see or know of this candidate. At this phase of a communicator's work, it is crucial to brainstorm all the possible primary and secondary audience members, then settle on a short list of the most crucial audience members to target. It's ideal if somewhere along the way a leader can pull a "test audience" together to read or view a communication and respond before it goes forward. The greater the stakes of the message, the more useful a test audience can be for a leader's success.

Value Proposition: What Do You Bring to the Table for This Message?

Staring back from the center of the canvas is the question, "Why you?" Why are you the one to bring forth this communication? What is your credibility, your source that powers you to make this message come forward? In large organizations there may be some debate over whose signature should be at the bottom of a communication; in campaigns much thought goes into whether a candidate or a representative should deliver a message. As a leader with a communication to share, what is your authority to speak or write on the subject? If there is a gap in your knowledge or people's perception of you, can that be offset before you deliver a message? Or if not, can the message be crafted in such a way that the gap is not an impediment to your success?

Channels: What Vehicle Will You Use to Share Your Message?

At times your channel will already be chosen for you. If your boss calls a meeting and asks you to provide an update on a deal you are trying to close, the vehicle is an in-person meeting with your colleagues. If you receive an email from a colleague requesting your input on an idea, you hit reply and, voilá, you have chosen the

channel of email to share your message. But for high-stakes messages, it is important to brainstorm all of the possible channels available to deliver a message. Feel free to review the exercise in Figure 1.2 we share in the AIM section of this book for more on how to brainstorm a rich canvas of channels for your communication.

Connections: What Will Engage the Audience?

Earlier we considered how to get the right bodies in the room (or right eyes on our report). Now that we've made that decision, how do we engage the audience with our topic? A writer can do this with a compelling, clear subject line—one that is directly tied to an action item and engages the reader to open the email. Speakers can use storytelling, statistics, or questions to bring the audience into their world. But once you get the audience there, you must embrace them to remain engaged. Much has been written and shared about effective storytelling skills for leaders. (See my personal favorite books on this in appendix D.) In fact I'm stunned that the topic is, hands down, the greatest request I get from prospective consulting clients. People are moved by a well-told story and seek out the ability to craft effective stories when they write and speak. When leaders entertain questions, they often experience the greatest level of engagement of the entire presentation; in fact, many leaders have found that they continually reduce the time spent "telling the troops a message" and more time "fielding questions." It is in this moment of personal sharing that we can create the greatest connection.

Assets/Resources: What Do You Already Have or Can You Develop to Move Your Audience?

Many times a great talk or blog begins with a story, a photo, an experience, a statistic, an insight. Consider the building blocks you already have for a communication. Use whatever form is comfortable

for you to capture these ideas into a single place. Much to my husband's chagrin, my favorite collection spot is a large sheet of sticky top-flip chart paper. My study is often covered with these sheets as a way to visually capture the elements of my next HBR blog or keynote presentation. Others work with a sketch pad and illustrations, like Dan Roam suggests in *The Back of the Napkin*. Still others prefer a spreadsheet or document on their tablet or laptop. Where you pile up your inventory of assets doesn't matter; what matters is that you pile them up. Consider TED talks, cartoons, photographs, charts, graphs, anecdotes—anything that could be fashioned into the communication you are creating. For students doing a traditional report or essay, these may be the "note cards of evidence" that can be arranged and rearranged into a clear and compelling argument. (Yes, I realize I may be dating myself by referencing note cards!) Often it's useful to dream about what resources you wish you had. "Find inspiring story of faculty interaction on a global study trip" can be a placeholder for research I need to complete in order to finish my communication.

While it's certainly true that in brainstorming, no idea is a bad idea, to be efficient you will want to consider how much effort you'll need to acquire your assets. A leader needs to discern what level of investment is warranted for this level of return. In the TED library you'll find countless examples of talks that used vivid assets to help the speaker deliver a message: Jill Bolte holding a human brain, Bill Gates opening a jar of mosquitoes, Jamie Oliver emptying a wheelbarrow full of sugar on stage, or Lior Zoraf asking the audience to crowdsource the weight of a live ox next to him on the stage. Make it happen if the investment of obtaining it will be worth the reward.

Activities: How Can You Reach the Audience That Needs to Hear Your Message?

These actions all exist in the preparation portion to be sure your well-crafted communication doesn't fall on the proverbial "deaf ears."

What do you do to ensure the right people get into the room to hear what you have to say? Who can you get to "invite" people to your meeting or forward your email with a note of their own endorsement? An example of how publishing used to function may be helpful here to illustrate what NOT to do. Authors often work in solitude creating a book. When done they turn it over to a team of editors who finish the work and prepare it to be printed. Finally, a different team of publicists steps in to schedule book signings and events once the book is finished. Many an author has painfully pulled up in front of a bookstore to see a timid and small crowd to buy a handful of the books. This activity was not reaching the right people (or anybody really). What activities can you take on while creating your communication to ensure people will show up to the meeting, read the blog, or attend the event? Leaders today must cause the audience more than ever before.

Partners: Who Can Help You Do This?

Another program at Stanford, the Arbuckle Leadership Fellows, explains in their promotional materials that you are a leader because others follow. If they don't follow, then you are not leading. This is abundantly clear in communication. To be truly effective you will need to rely on others to help you create, test, refine, and disseminate the message. While crafting a message, consider (and capture in a list) those whose partnership will be crucial to the success you seek. Tactically you may need a designer to assist with slides, an editor to clean up your report, or a coach to rehearse content with you. Strategically you may need to get some early adopters who agree with your message to get an advance copy of a blog or a preview of what you will share at a management team meeting. Perhaps the message you are sharing will be supported if you have an executive champion within the organization or a thought leader outside the organization who can echo and amplify what you write or speak. Know who these

individuals are and how to approach them so you're successful at delivering your message.

In one of the programs I founded at Stanford, LOWKeynotes, I encourage students at this stage of development to list people they do not yet know who they want to enroll as partners in getting their talks created and delivered. I challenge them to find the academics on campus who have published in this field, the leaders of organizations committed to similar ideals, or the luminaries who have already spoken or written about this topic and seek their help. It is never easier to reach out to thought leader than when you are a student and can ask their help in a project you are creating. But readers who are not students can still approach others for input. Use LinkedIn, for example, to see how closely connected you may be to just the right partner for your message. Finally, don't ignore the value of devil's advocates in helping you create your message. It is invaluable to have a critic who is not afraid to poke holes in your report or find flaws in your presentation structure. Doris Kearns Goodwin's remarkable book *Team of Rivals* paints a compelling portrait of how President Lincoln sought out this resource. Barack Obama employed a similar approach by asking two of his most vociferous adversaries in the primary (Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton) to play key roles in his administration. Who can you engage to be your rigorous critic as you develop your message?

Message Structure: How Will You Frame the Message?

Now armed with all the ammunition from the top seven boxes, it is time to assemble your structure. The genre you've chosen (op/ed piece, for example) may dictate a bit of a structure to you. Or you may have a completely blank canvas (pun intended) as you decide how to begin, develop, and close your message. At a fundamental level the advice passed on from preachers since the early 1900s remains sound: Tell 'em what you're gonna say, tell 'em, and tell 'em

what you just told them. Most solid communications have an introduction that previews, a body that delivers content in a clear way, and a conclusion that reviews and calls the audience to some level of action. That tried-and-true approach may work just fine for a simple email or a short, informative portion of a meeting. However, a more nuanced structure may be needed for a new product pitch to investors or a TED-style talk as a keynote.

The research and writings of Nancy Duarte provide me inspiration when I am creating a talk. Through her work designing hundreds of thousands of presentations over the years at her firm, Duarte Design, Nancy has uncovered a simple sparkline that underlies all great presentations (Figure 1.4).

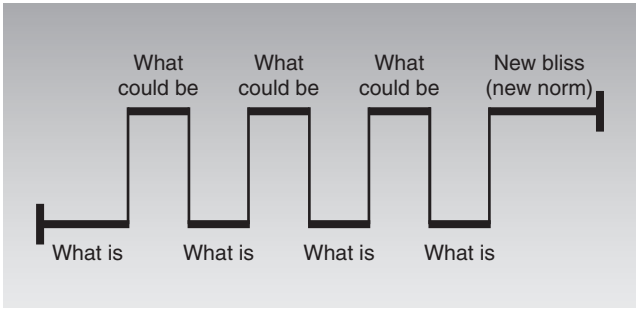


Figure 1.4 Nancy Duarte's "Sparkline" for great presentations
Source: From *Resonate by* Nancy Duarte, Wiley 2010.

A speaker must begin with a sense of the status quo—"what is"—and then articulate "what could be." A strong persuasive presentation will tack back and forth, like a sailor against the winds of resistance, between what is and what could be until, near the end, the speaker calls the audience to a "new bliss" and engages them with a clear call to action. In her book *Resonate*, Duarte details how this sparkline can be found in talks as disparate as Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, Eva Peron's appeal to the people of Argentina from the balcony, and Steve Jobs's introduction of the new

iPhone. As you create the structure of your communication, consider the contrast between what currently exists and what is possible. Outlining these distinctions as you deliver can bring the audience along with you.

(*Side note:* I strongly encourage you to purchase and devour Nancy Duarte's book *Resonate*, but if you cannot imagine reading another book right now, take 20 minutes and watch her great TEDx East talk, "The Secret Structure of Great Talks." This quick view will offer you the key aspects of the sparkline in Nancy's own words. The iTunes version of her book includes video and audio files to the great talks she analyzes. I personally reference both the digital and print versions regularly.)

Results: What Do You Want the Audience to Think, Say, or Do After You Communicate?

Many leaders will begin their message development in this bottom right quadrant with a clear statement of intent. Occasionally a leader may have a multilayered intent—for example, "Today I want them to visit my website and contribute, but ultimately I am committed to ending the scourge of slavery on the planet." Jim Collins's great work on BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals) has inspired thousands to dream big and capture in writing what you wish to achieve. We only can achieve a BHAG by writing and speaking about our intended results with others. In an academic environment, I get stymied by students who tell me that the result they want is to "get an A on the paper." Grades on assignments are such a small goal. Instead, write to change lives, organizations, and the world. Write to cause a business leader to adopt your strategy; write to not simply summarize what the case provided, but to synthesize that information into clear insights, and you will earn the A. Set your eyes on a result that you believe is attainable, but have your wider vision on the greater difference you can make.

The Leadership Communication canvas is not the framework I deploy for every talk I coach or deliver. But when the stakes are high and when the message has the potential to last, then I do turn to this canvas. Kara and I even created a canvas for this book, which you can see on my website at jdschramm.com/mastery. When the going gets tough, knowing that this clear plan can guide you is a crucial form of motivation.