



# resonate

PRESENT VISUAL  
STORIES THAT  
TRANSFORM  
AUDIENCES

Nancy Duarte  
author of *slide:ology*



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## Foreword

Great presentations are like magic. They amaze their audiences. And great presenters are like magicians. In addition to practicing regularly, both are reluctant to reveal the methods behind their performances. Among magicians, it is acceptable to reveal secrets to those who are committed to learning the art and becoming serious magicians. In that same context, Nancy Duarte is offering a one-of-a-kind learning opportunity, available to those who take presentations seriously.

***Resonate cracks the code on how to orchestrate the invisible attributes that shape transformative audience experiences.***

It all starts with becoming a better storyteller. Possessing the power to influence the beliefs of others and create acceptance of new ideas is timeless. The value of storytelling transcends language and culture. As we move rapidly toward a future of improved connections between people, cross-pollinated creativity, and digital effects, stories still represent the most compelling platform we have for managing our imaginations—and our infinite data. More than any other form of communication, the art of telling stories is an integral part of the human experience. Those who master it are often afforded great influence and enduring legacy.

Nancy Duarte understands how to align ideas to create world-shaping responses. No one else has been so exclusively focused on mastering the presentation space as a discipline, and few have worked across a broader spectrum of client profiles and communication challenges. She is passionate about building systems that make creative results replicable and scalable.

***Nancy Duarte has an insatiable curiosity about processes—with a relentless drive to codify practices that have defied specification by others.***

Over two decades and dozens of economic cycles, she has attracted extraordinary talent to her organization, and with a singular vision has established it as the industry leader. In fact, Duarte Design now lays claim to working with half of the world's top fifty brands, and many of its most innovative thinkers. The analysis and insights in this book are distinctly competent.

Knowing a magic secret doesn't make you a magician. You have to do more than just read instructions. Without exception, great presenters are very deliberate about learning how to refine and reveal their ideas. They hone their words, sweat the structure, and practice their craft rigorously. They constantly seek and adapt to feedback.

***If great presentations were easy to build and deliver, they wouldn't be such an extraordinary form of communication. Resonate is intended for people with ambition, purpose, and an uncommon work ethic.***

Applied with passion and purpose, the concepts in this book will accelerate your career trajectory or propel your social cause. At Duarte Design, we see it happen every day. Few pursuits in professional self-improvement have as much potential leverage. All you really need is an idea. Most of the influential presenters throughout history—including those profiled in this book—started with one really good idea. You may be incubating that class of idea, or you may be one slide deck away from it; either way, you need to get it out in the open so that we can all benefit from it.

Nancy Duarte wants you to become a thought leader. She hopes you can give the rest of us the structure and direction we need to navigate challenges and opportunities, and help us interpret our goals. She expects you to make sense of chaos. She dares you to be transparent and evocative, motivational and persuasive. Above all, she trusts you to inspire action for our greater good.

Dan Post  
President and Principal, Duarte Design

*Enjoy the journey!*



# Introduction

Language and power are inextricably linked. The spoken word pushes ideas out of someone's head and into the open so humankind can contend with adopting or rejecting its validity. Moving an idea from its inception to adoption is hard, but it's a battle that can be won simply by wielding a great presentation.

Presentations are a powerfully persuasive tool, and when packaged in a story framework, your ideas become downright unstoppable. Story structures have been employed for hundreds of generations to persuade and delight every known culture.

Two years ago, I set out to uncover how story applies to presentations. There seemed to be a storylike magic to the presentations that caused change and spread broadly. Since I already had the context of thousands of presentations my firm had created for smart companies and causes, I studied what I didn't know: screenwriting, literature, mythology, and philosophy—allowing myself to be led on a fascinating journey.

Early in my research, I stumbled on this graphic made in 1863 by German dramatist Gustav Freytag that he used to visualize the five-act structure popular in Greek and Shakespearean dramas. It shows the “shape” of a dramatic story. The drama builds toward a climax and then resolves.



When I saw Freytag's pyramid, I knew that powerful presentations must also have a contour. I just didn't quite know what the shape looked like yet. I also knew that presentations are different from dramatic stories because in a presentation, it's rare to have a lone protagonist whose story builds toward a single climactic moment. Presentations have more layers and have disparate pieces of information to convey. Dramatic stories have a single climax as the crowning event whereas great presentations move along with multiple peaks that propel them forward.

I'll never forget the Saturday morning when I finally sketched out a shape. I knew that if it was accurate, I should be able to overlay it onto two very different yet game-changing presentations. So I painstakingly analyzed Steve Jobs's 2007 iPhone launch and Martin Luther King Jr.'s “I Have a Dream” speech. Both mapped to the form I had sketched. I cried. Literally. It felt like such a mystery had been revealed.

There's something sacred about stories. They have an almost supernatural power that should be wielded wisely. Religious scholars, psychologists, and mythologists have studied stories for decades to determine the secret to their power.

It's still the dawn of the information age, and we are all overwhelmed with too many messages bombarding us and trying to lure us to acquire and consume information (then repeat the process over and over). We are in a more selfish and cynical age, which makes it tempting to be detached. Technology has given us many ways to communicate, but only one is truly human: in-person presentations. Genuine connections create change.

You'll notice that *change* is a theme throughout the book. Most presentations are delivered to persuade people to change. All presentations have a component of persuasion to them. This notion may ruffle some feathers. But isn't there usually a desired outcome from what's classified as an informative presentation? Yes. You're moving your audience from being uninformed to being informed. From being uninterested in your subject to being interested. From being stuck in a process to being unstuck. Many times the audience needs to do something with the information you're conveying, which makes your presentation persuasive.

So whether you're an engineer, teacher, scientist, executive, manager, politician, or student, presentations will play a role in shaping your future. The future isn't just a place you'll go; it's a place you will invent. Your ability to shape your future depends on how well you communicate where you want to be when you get there.



How to Use *Resonate*

*Resonate* is a prequel to my first book, *Slide:ology*. When I wrote *Slide:ology*, I thought the most pressing need in communications was for people to learn how to visually display their brilliant ideas so they were clearer and less overwhelming for the audience to process. Come to find out, there was a much deeper problem. Gussying up slides that have meaningless content is like putting lipstick on a pig.

Presentations are broken systemically, and the methodology in *Resonate* uses story frameworks to create presentations that will engage, transform, and activate audiences. After more than twenty years of developing presentations for the best brands and thought leaders in the world, we've codified our Visual Story™ methodology so you can change your world!

Below are design elements to be aware of:

- The green **www** symbol signifies there's additional material at [www.duarte.com](http://www.duarte.com) about the subject.
- The Presentation Form™ is used as an analysis tool throughout the book and is visually expressed as a *sparkline* (a term developed by Edward Tufte).
- The **bold text** is for the reader who wants to just skim and get a nugget from each spread.
- The **blue body text** signifies my personal stories or excerpts from speeches.
- There are citations from several sources in the body copy, but some deserved extra emphasis and are pulled out in **orange text**.

This book is simultaneously an explanation, a how-to guide, and a business justification for story-based messaging. It will take you on a journey to a level of presentation literacy that very few have mastered. Using techniques from story and cinema, you will understand key steps for connecting to the audience, deferring to them as the hero, and creating a presentation that resonates.

Invest Your Time

Be forewarned: A high-quality in-person presentation takes time and planning, yet pressure on our time prevents us from preparing high-quality communications. It takes discipline to be a great communicator—it's a skill that will bring a big payoff to you personally and to your organization.

But a recent survey conducted by Distinction had some startling findings. Of the executives surveyed, over 86 percent said that communicating clearly impacts their careers and incomes yet only 25 percent put more than two hours into preparing for *very high-stakes* presentations. That's a big gap.

The result of investing in an important presentation is unparalleled in any other medium. When an idea is communicated effectively, people follow and change. Words that are carefully framed and spoken are the most powerful means of communication there is. The lifework of the communicators featured in this book are proof.

Hope you enjoy,

*Nancy*

DISTINCTION COMMUNICATION EXECUTIVE SURVEY RESULTS

1	2	3
How would you rank the importance of personal presentation skills in what you do?	What do you find the most challenging part of creating a presentation?	How much time do you spend practicing for a "high-stakes" presentation?
86.1% Communicating with clarity directly impacts my career and income.	35.7% Putting together a good message.	12.1% I seldom have time to practice at all.
13.8% I present from time to time but the stakes don't seem all that high.	8.9% Creating quality slides.	16.2% 5-30 minutes.
0% I don't do any formal presentations.	13.8% Delivering the presentation with confident skills.	17.0% 30 minutes to one hour.
	41.1% All of the above!	29.2% One to two hours.
		25.2% More than two hours!



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?

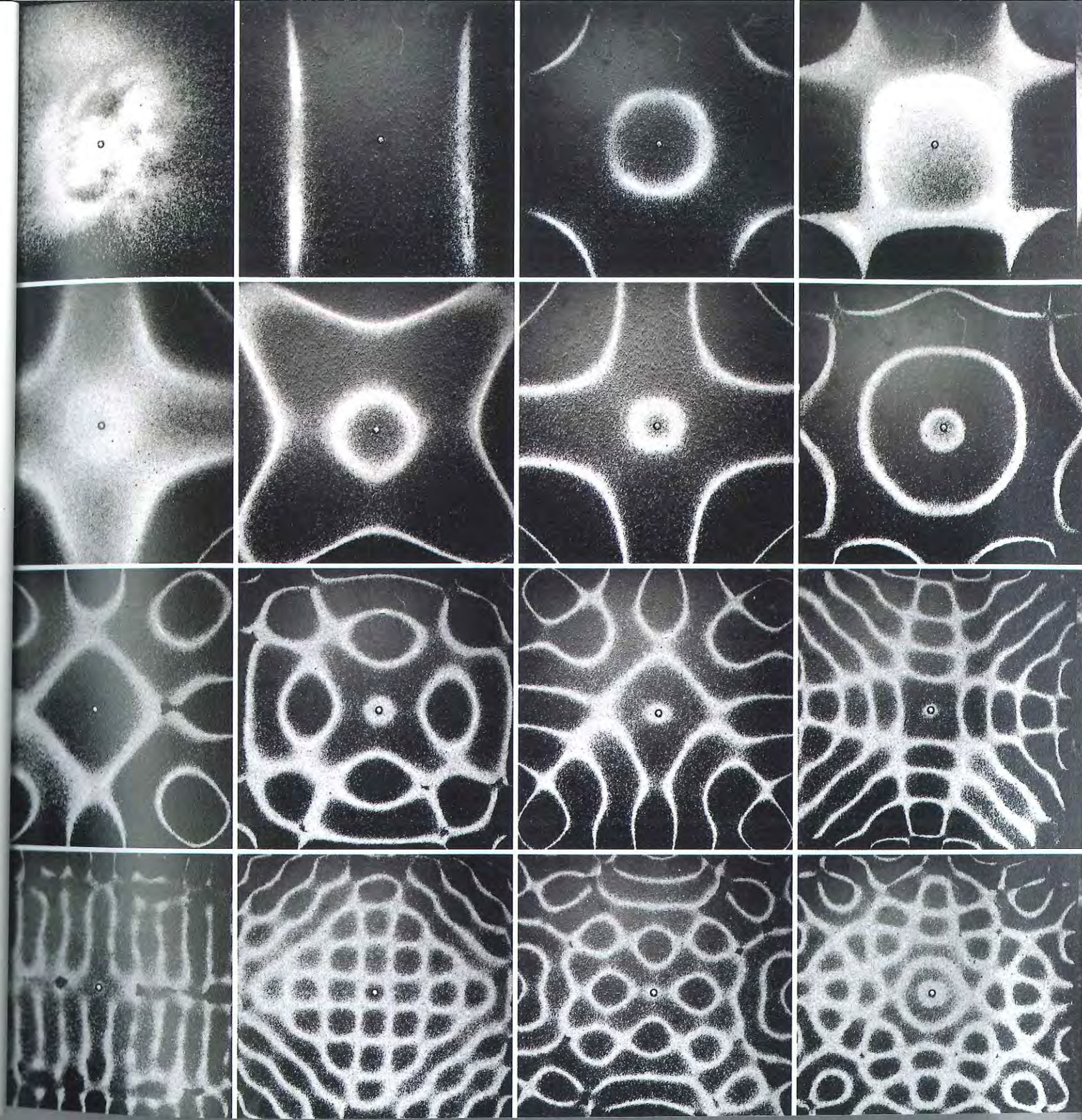
Let's look at a simple phenomenon in physics. If you know an object's natural rate of vibration, you can make it vibrate without touching it. **Resonance occurs when an object's natural vibration frequency responds to an external stimulus of the same frequency.** To the right is a beautiful visualization 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](http://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*

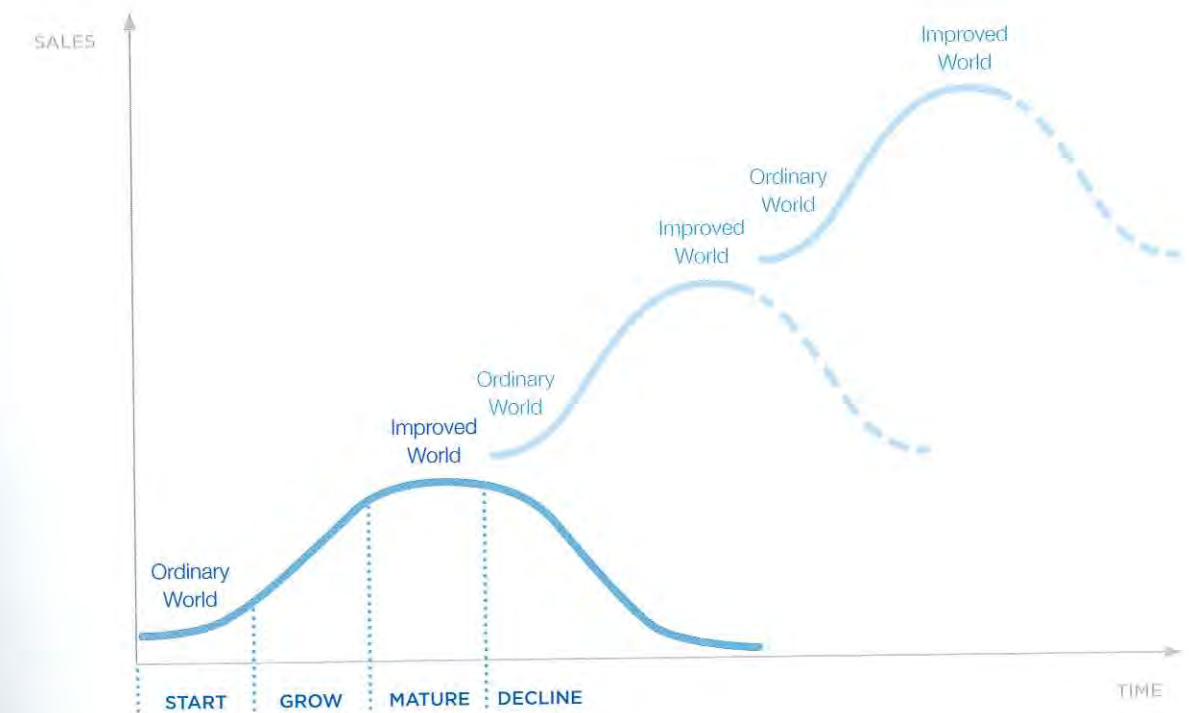
are healthier than those that don't. Many times the future cannot be quantified with statistics, facts, or proofs. Sometimes leaders have to let their gut lead them into uncharted territories where statistics haven't yet been generated.

**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 Guber<sup>1</sup>

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 Godin<sup>2</sup>

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."<sup>3</sup>

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 Maupassant<sup>4</sup>



## 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.<sup>5</sup> 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 McKee<sup>6</sup>

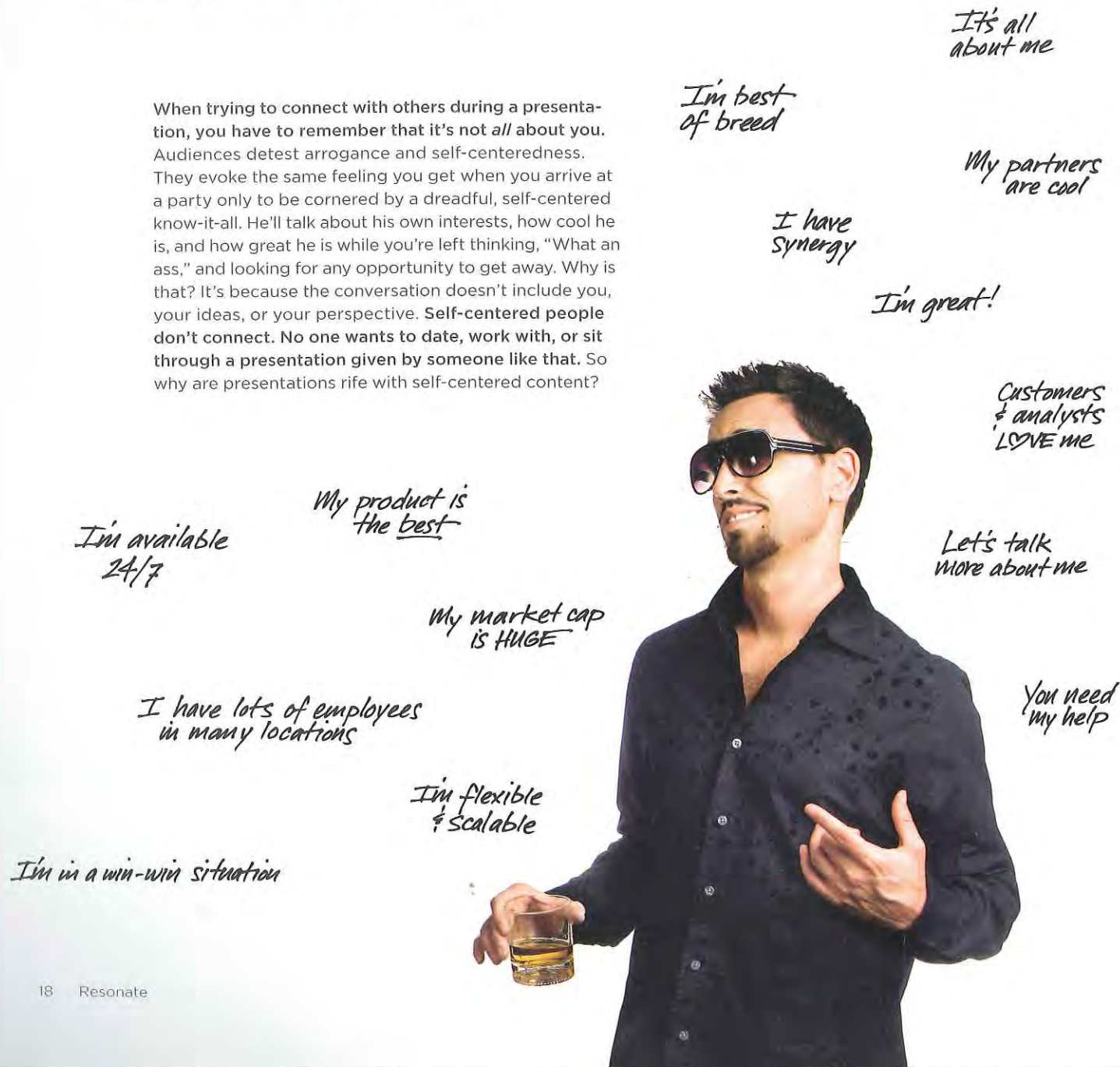
Information is static; stories are dynamic—they help an audience visualize what you do or what you believe. Tell a story and people will be more engaged and receptive to the ideas you are communicating. **Stories link one person's heart to another. Values, beliefs, and norms become intertwined. When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





# 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?



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."<sup>7</sup> 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

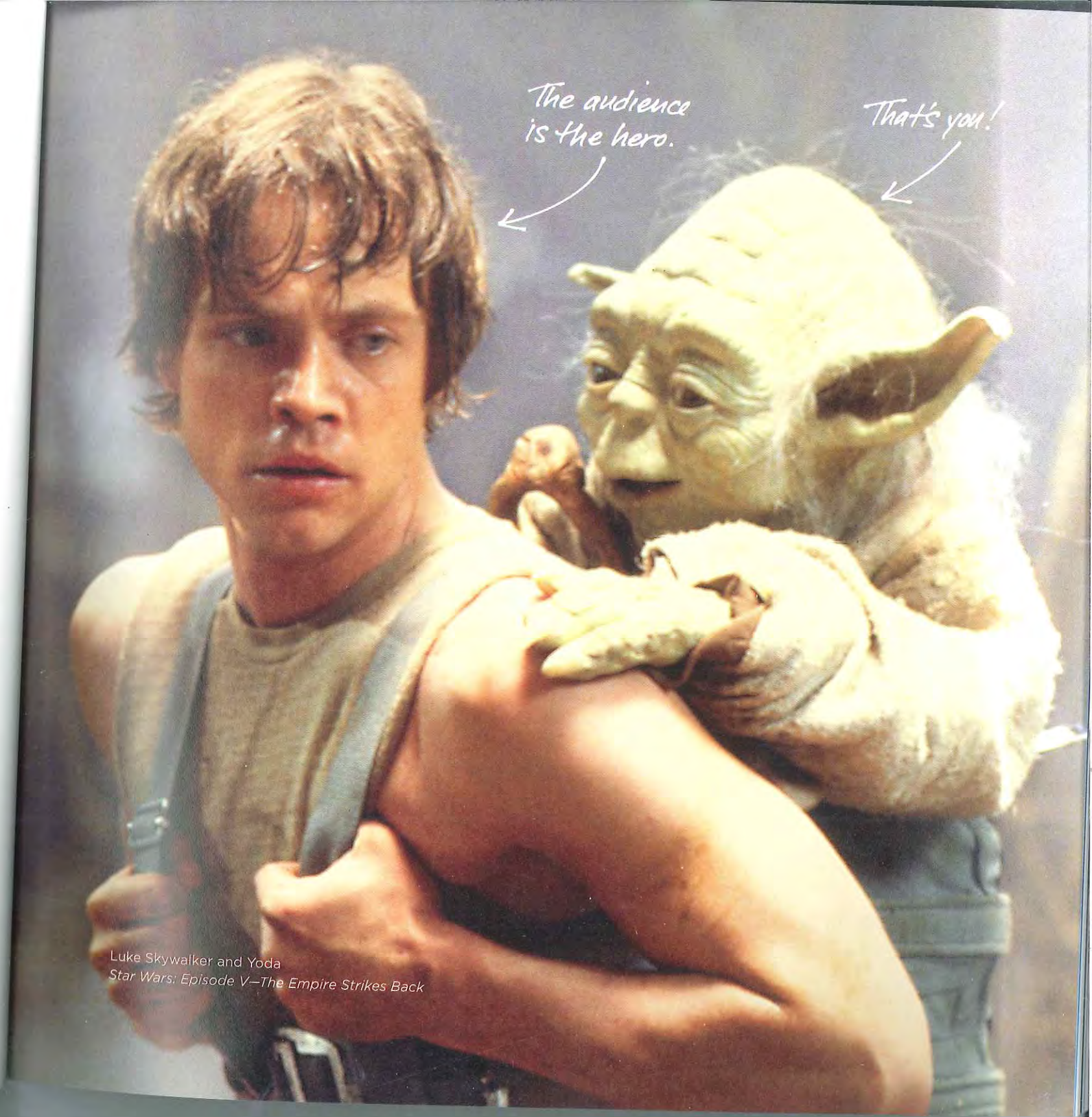
magical gifts so he can overcome his initial fears and enter into the new journey with you.

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.**



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.**

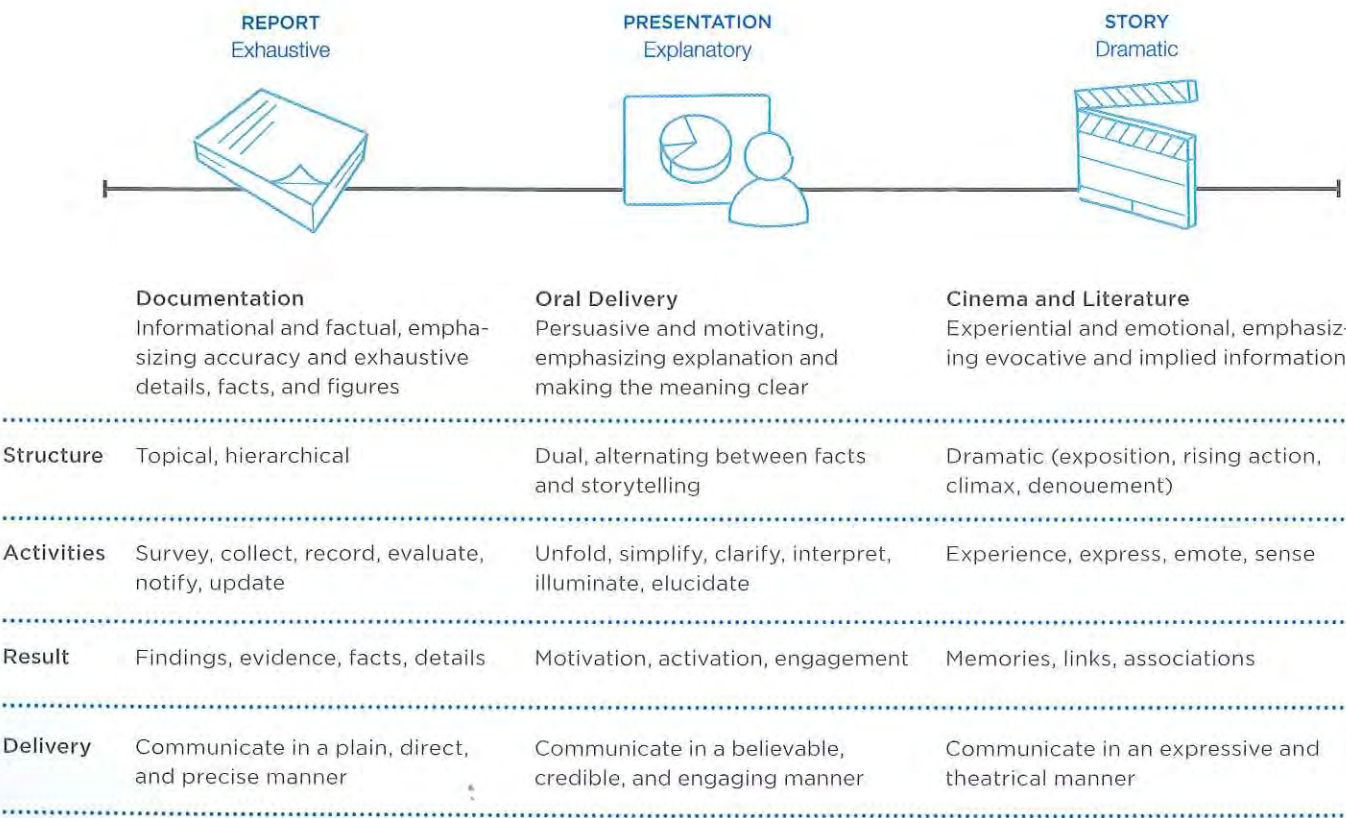


# Lessons from Myths and Movies



# Incorporate Story

All types of writing, including presentations, fall somewhere in between two extreme poles: reports and stories. Reports inform, while stories entertain. The structural difference between a report and a story is that a report organizes facts by topic, while a story organizes scenes dramatically.<sup>1</sup> Presentations fall in the middle and contain both information and story, so they are called explanations.



It's become the cultural norm to write presentations as reports instead of stories. But presentations are not reports. Many people who create presentations are stuck in the mindset that if they use a presentation application, like PowerPoint, to create a report, the report is a presentation. It is not! Reports should be distributed; presentations should be presented. Documents masquerade as presentations, and these "slideuments"<sup>2</sup> have become the *lingua franca* of many organizations. While documents and reports are very valuable, they do not need to be projected for the purpose of hosting a "read-along."

So if a report primarily conveys *information*, then stories produce an *experience*. Blending the two creates a perfect world for your presentation where facts and stories can be layered like a cake. Navigating between fact, then story, then fact, then story creates interest and a pulse. Mixing report material with story material makes information more digestible. It's the sugar that helps the medicine go down.

It's more comfortable and less time consuming to present flat, data-driven static reports, but that approach doesn't connect people to ideas. The moment you know you need to create a presentation and not a report, shift your mindset from solely transferring information to creating an experience. This is the first step in moving along the spectrum away from a pure report toward a story.

There are plenty of opportunities to use dramatic story structure in presentations. But how do you create a dramatic experience? **Creating desire in the audience and then showing how your ideas fill that desire moves people to adopt your perspective. This is the heart of a story.**

This chapter will draw insights from the best story methods available today: mythology, literature, and cinema. Once you understand their power, you'll see why great presentations move away from reports and closer to stories.



# Drama Is Everything

Presentations have the potential to hold an audience's interest just like a good movie. You might be thinking that it takes years to write a successful screenplay, and you have a real job to do. But isn't part of your "real job" to communicate ideas well, help people understand objectives, and persuade them to change? Building your presentations with some of the attributes from myths and movies will help your ideas resonate with others.

Great stories introduce you to a hero to whom you can relate. The hero is usually a likeable sort who has an acute desire or goal that is threatened in some way. As the story unfolds and trials are met with triumph, you cheer for the hero until the story is resolved and the hero is transformed. As author Robert McKee explains, "Something must be at stake that convinces the audience that a great deal will be lost if the hero doesn't obtain his goal."<sup>3</sup> If nothing is at risk, then it's not interesting.

Your communications follow a similar pattern. You have a goal that needs to be reached, but there will be trials and resistance. However, when your desire is realized, the outcome will yield remarkable results.

One of the reasons presentations are dull is because there are no identifiable story patterns. In the next few pages, you'll review story models actively used in Hollywood that are fundamental to a good screenplay. These forms work! They are not formulas or rigid sets of rules—they address structure and character transformation, yet also leave room for flexibility and creativity. After you review the Hollywood story forms, you'll be introduced to the presentation form. It's a similar form, but one that's tailored to presentations. Applying these methods will help craft your message and unlock the story potential in your presentations.

## Story Pattern

The most simplistic way to describe the structure of a story is situation, complication, and resolution. From mythic adventures to recollections shared around the dinner table, all stories follow this pattern.

RELATABLE AND LIKABLE HERO	ENCOUNTERS ROADBLOCKS	EMERGES TRANSFORMED
<p><i>Snow White</i></p> <p><b>Situation:</b> Snow White takes refuge in the forest with seven dwarfs to hide from her stepmother, the wicked queen.</p>	<p><b>Complication:</b> Snow White is more beautiful than her stepmother so, disguised as a peddler, she poisons Snow White with an apple.</p>	<p><b>Resolution:</b> The prince, who has fallen in love with Snow White, awakens her from the spell with "love's first kiss."</p>
<p><i>E.T.</i></p> <p><b>Situation:</b> A group of alien botanists visit earth. After a hasty takeoff, one of them is left behind. And he wants to get back home.</p>	<p><b>Complication:</b> Ten-year-old Elliott forms an emotional bond with E.T., a task force tries to hunt down E.T., and he and Elliott get very sick.</p>	<p><b>Resolution:</b> E.T. and Elliott build a communication device and escape on a bicycle. E.T. is rescued and tells Elliott he'll be in his heart.</p>
<p><i>Avatar</i></p> <p><b>Situation:</b> Jake Sully is a paralyzed ex-Marine who is selected for the Avatar program, which will enable him to walk through a proxy Na'vi body in the land of Pandora.</p>	<p><b>Complication:</b> Jake falls in love with a Na'vi woman, Neytiri, in Pandora. As the humans encroach on the forest seeking valuable minerals, Jake is forced to choose sides in an epic battle.</p>	<p><b>Resolution:</b> Under Jake's leadership, the Na'vi defeat the humans. Jake is permanently transformed into a Na'vi and gets to live on Pandora with Neytiri.</p>



# Story Templates Create Structure

Screenwriters use tools to create strong story structures. Syd Field is considered the father of Hollywood's story template. In his book, *Screenplay*, Field uses concepts from the three-act structure first proposed by Aristotle to create the Syd Field Paradigm, shown on the right. Field noticed that in successful movies, the second act was often twice the length of the first and third acts:

- **Act 1** sets up the story by introducing characters, creating relationships, and establishing the hero's unfulfilled desire, which holds the plot in place.
- **Act 2** presents dramatic action held together by confrontation. The main character encounters obstacles that keep him or her from achieving his or her desire (dramatic need).
- **Act 3** resolves the story. Resolution doesn't mean ending but rather *solution*. Did the main character succeed or fail?<sup>4</sup>

All stories have a beginning, middle, and an end. There's a defining point in which the beginning turns into the middle and the middle into the end. Field, a leading screenwriting teacher, calls these *plot points*. A plot point is defined as any incident, episode, or event that

spins the story around in another direction. Each plot point sets up the story for a change.

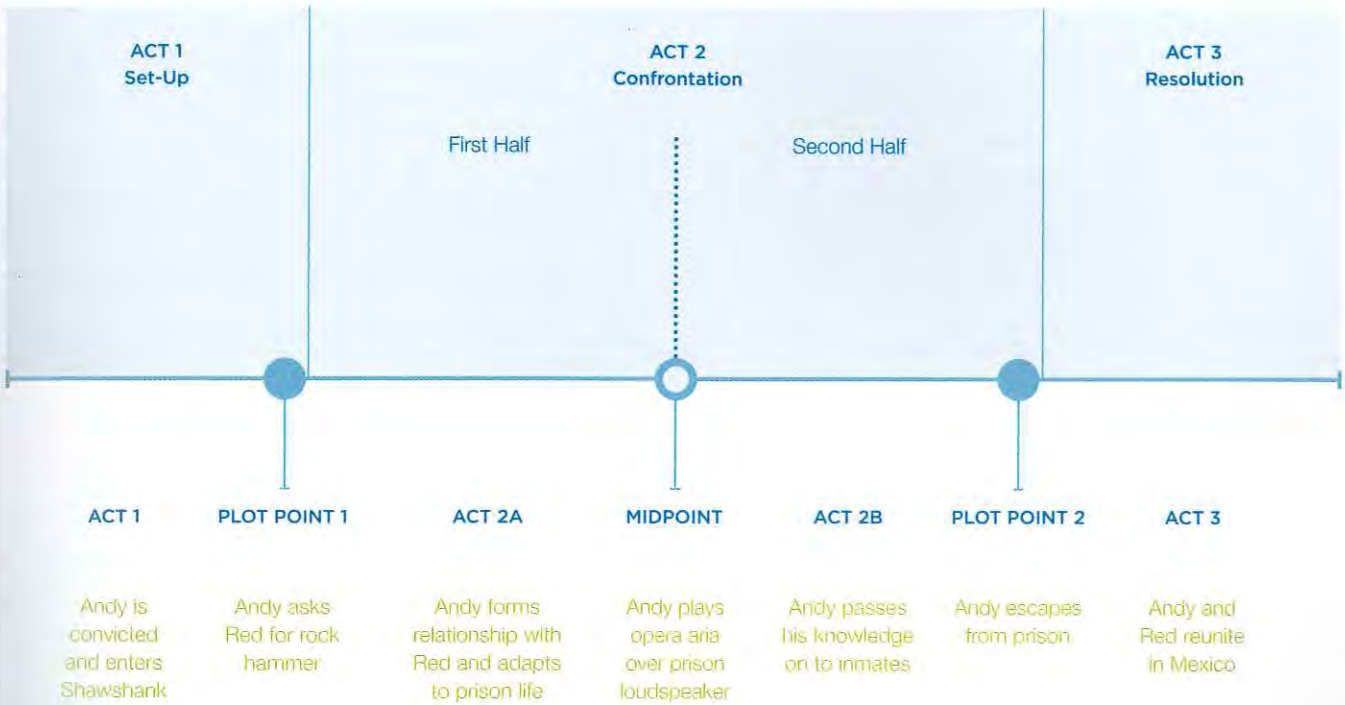
A great presentation is similar to a screenplay in several ways:

- It has a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- It has an identifiable, inherent structure.
- The first plot point is an incident that captures the audience's intrigue and interest. In presentations, we'll call this a *turning point*.
- The beginning and end are much shorter than the middle.

This is a form, not a formula. It's what a screenplay would look like if you could X-ray it and examine its structure. The movie *Shawshank Redemption*\* is shown to the right with the acts and plot points annotated.

Field's model makes sense as a template for scripting movies; however, it is only partially applicable to presentations. Next, we'll examine an additional story form that will supply some of the missing pieces.

Syd Field's Paradigm<sup>5</sup>



**\*SHAWSHANK REDEMPTION STORY** Andy, a young banker convicted of murdering his wife and her lover, is sentenced to Shawshank Penitentiary. In prison, Andy meets and forms a relationship with Red, another convicted killer, and then becomes an ally and trusted friend of the warden. When his attempts for a retrial fail, he escapes from Shawshank. At the end, Andy makes his way to Mexico, where he and Red are reunited.



# The Hero's Journey Structure

Another story model to consider is *The Hero's Journey*, drawn from the psychology of Carl Jung and mythological studies of Joseph Campbell.

The wheel to the right is an overview of The Hero's Journey that has been slightly simplified by Christopher Vogler, author of *The Writer's Journey*. Vogler spent years as a story analyst for screenplays in Hollywood and uses this as a form for his analyses. Starting at the top of the wheel, move clockwise through the steps. The gray text of the innermost circle walks you through the stages of The Hero's Journey: (1) Heroes are introduced in the Ordinary World, where (2) they receive the Call to Adventure. (3) They are initially reluctant and might even Refuse the Call but (4) are encouraged by a Mentor to (5) Cross the First Threshold and enter the Special World, where (6) they encounter Tests, Allies, and Enemies. (7) They Approach the Inmost Cave, where (8) they endure the Ordeal. (9) They take possession of their Reward and (10) are pursued on the Road Back to the Ordinary World. (11) They experience a Resurrection and are transformed by the experience. (12) They Return with the Elixir—a boon or treasure to benefit the Ordinary World.<sup>6</sup>

Heroes endure physical activities (outer journey) but also experience internal transformations to their hearts and minds at each stage. This inner journey is represented by green text in the second ring. Then, the outermost ring uses *Star Wars: Episode IV* as an example, showing the outer journey in gray text and the inner journey in green.

An important insight emerges when The Hero's Journey is represented in a circle: It creates a clear division between the *ordinary world* and the *special*

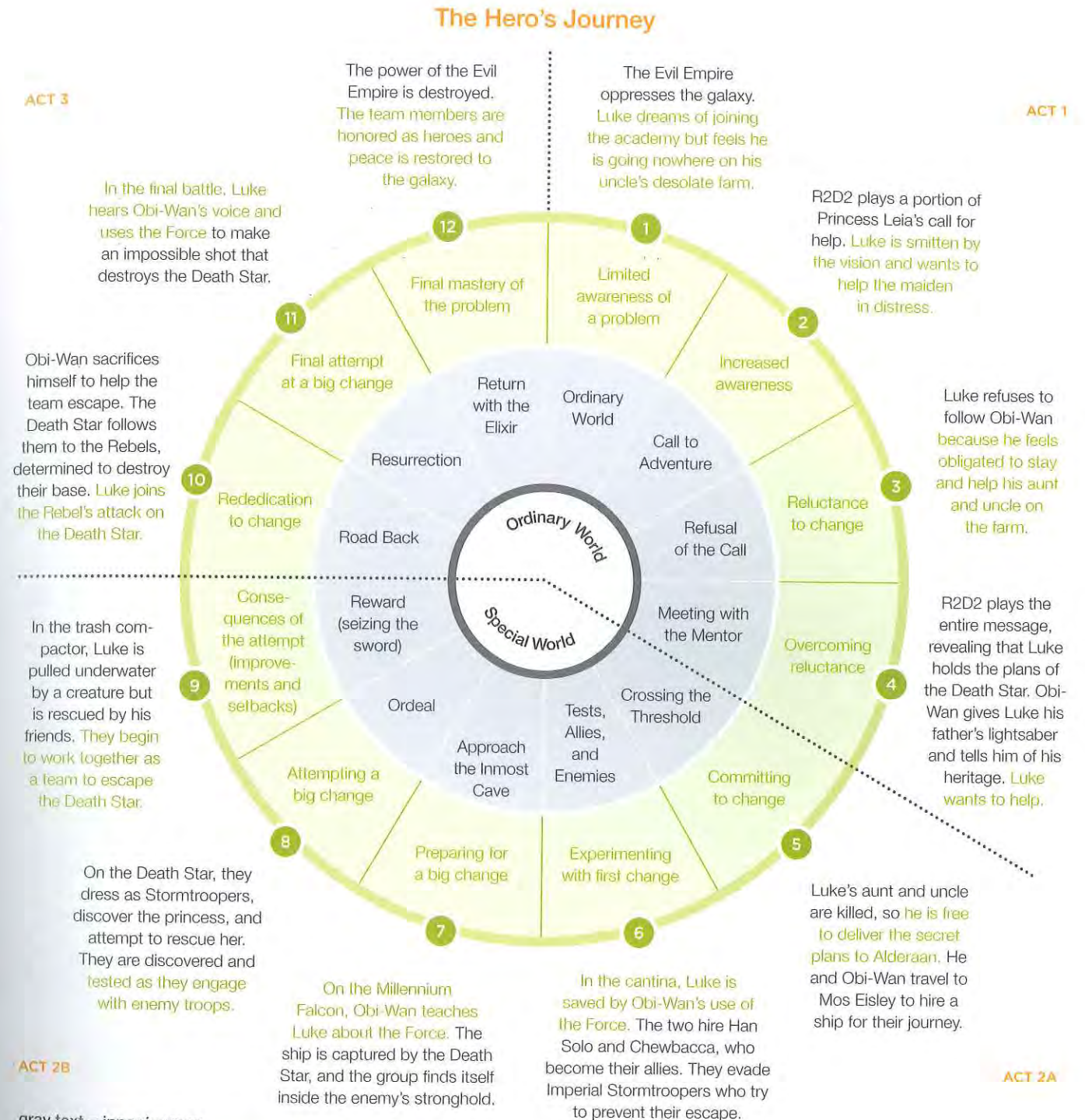
*world* (signified by the gray dotted line). **There is a moment in every story where the character overcomes reluctance to change, leaves the ordinary world, and crosses the threshold into an adventure in a special world.** In the special world, the hero gains skills and insights—and then brings them back to the ordinary world as the story resolves.

A good presentation is a satisfying, complete experience. You might cry, laugh, or do both, but you'll also feel you've learned something about yourself.

**Presentations use insights from myths and movies in several ways:**

- There's a likable yet flawed hero attending your presentation.
- A presentation should take the audience on a journey from their ordinary world into your special world, gaining new insights and skills from your special world.
- The audience makes a conscious decision to cross the threshold into your world; they are not forced.
- The audience will resist adopting your point of view and will point out obstacles and roadblocks.
- The audience needs to change on the inside before they'll change on the outside. In other words, they need to alter their perception internally before they change the way they act.

Crossing the threshold is an important moment because it signals that the hero is making a commitment. Let's look more closely at that turning point.



gray text = inner journey

green text = outer journey (character transformation)

Factoid: When George Lucas came across Joseph Campbell's work, he modified *Star Wars: Episode IV* to map more closely to this model.



# Crossing the Threshold

If the audience is the hero in your story, then the objective during your presentation is to get them past the fourth step in the wheel. Your presentation takes them to the threshold, but it's their choice whether to cross it or not.

Your presentation proposes an idea, and you're asking the audience to adopt and shepherd that idea to positive outcomes. Your idea might be to reshape an organization for the future or to show customers how your product will fill a need they have. It might even be to have students test well and internalize the subject matter. Whatever it is, the decisions the audience might make require them to consciously step into something new.

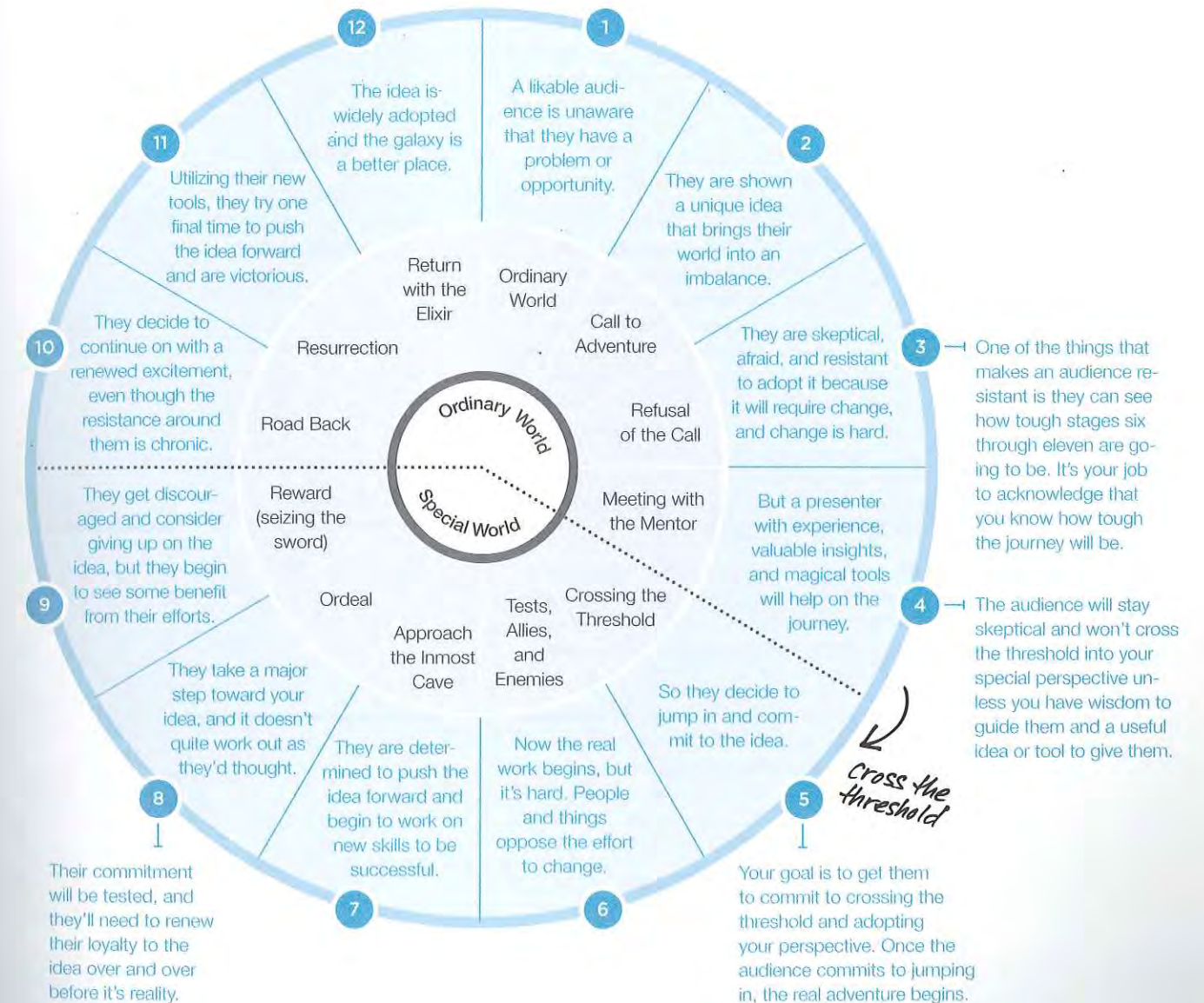
The change you're requesting will not come without a struggle for your heroes—and you need to acknowledge that. Change is hard. Getting people to commit to change is probably an organization's greatest challenge. Notice how the hero meets the mentor *just* when he or she needs to decide whether to cross the threshold—and enter the special world. It's a lovely parallel to presenting. As their mentor, your insights will help the audience make a decision to change. But you can't force them. If you present well, they'll cross the threshold voluntarily and jump in.

If the audience has decided to cross the threshold and adopt your perspective, they begin the rest of The Hero's Journey (stages five through twelve) when they leave your presentation. As their mentor, your presentation should prepare them as much as possible for what they can expect on the rest of the journey and set them up to be successful along the way. Usually, the stages of The Hero's Journey in movies take place in sequential, chronological order. But when developing a presentation, you aren't bound to keep to the constraints of a place and time. The presentation medium allows you to bounce around out of sequence as you address insights into how steps five to twelve will be accomplished.

Let's remember that there is one indisputable attribute of a good story: **there must be some kind of conflict or imbalance perceived by the audience that your presentation resolves.** This sense of discord is what persuades them to care enough to jump in. In a presentation, you create imbalance by consciously juxtaposing *what is* with *what could be*.

**Clearly contrast who the audience is when they walk into the room (in their ordinary world) with whom they could be when they leave the room (crossing the threshold into a special world).** *What is* versus *what could be*. Drawing attention to that gap forces the audience to contend with the imbalance until a new balance is achieved.

## The Audience's Journey





# The Contour of Communication

## The Presentation Form

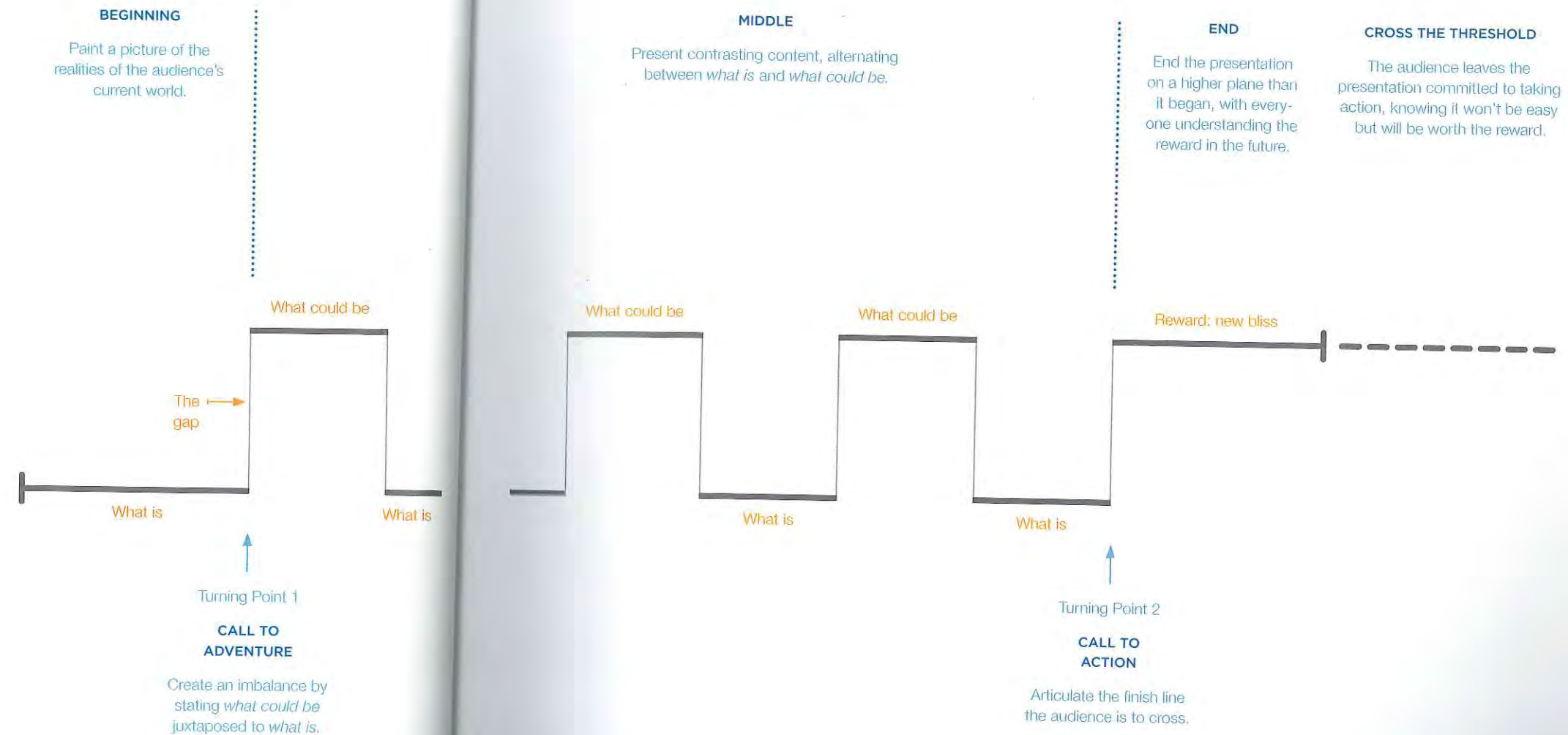
Drawing insights from mythological, literary, and cinematic structures, a *presentation form* emerged. Most great presentations unknowingly follow this form.

Presentations should have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Two clear turning points in a presentation's structure guide the audience through the content and distinctively separate the beginning from the middle and the middle from the end. The first is the *call to adventure*—this should show the audience a gap between *what is* and *what could be*—jolting the audience from complacency. When effectively constructed—an imbalance is created—the audience will want your presentation to resolve this imbalance. The second turning point is the *call to action*, which identifies what the audience needs to do or how they need to change. This second turning point signifies that you're coming to the presentation's conclusion.

Notice how the middle moves up and down as if something new is happening continually. This back and forth structural motion pushes and pulls the audience to feel as if events are constantly unfolding. An audience will stay engaged as you unwrap ideas and perspectives frequently.

Each presentation concludes with a vivid description of the *new bliss* that's created when your audience adopts your proposed idea. But notice that the presentation form doesn't stop at the end of the presentation. Presentations are meant to persuade, so there is also a subsequent action (or crossing the threshold) the audience is to do once they leave the presentation.

Let's look at the form in more detail on the following pages.





## The Beginning and Call to Adventure

The Hero's Journey begins when "a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder."<sup>7</sup> Your presentation may not offer "supernatural wonder," but you are asking the audience to leave their comfort zone and venture to a new place that is closer to where you think they should be.

The beginning of the presentation form is everything that comes before the first turning point, the *call to adventure*. The first flat line of the form represents the beginning of your presentation. This is where you describe the audience's ordinary world and set the baseline of *what is*. You can use historical information about what has been or the current state of *what is*, which often includes the problem you're currently facing.

You should deliver a concise formulation of what everyone agrees is true. Accurately capturing the current reality and sentiments of the audience's world demonstrates that you have experience and insights on their situation and that you understand their perspective, context, and values.

Done effectively, this description of where your audience currently *is* will create a common bond between you and them and will open them up to hear your

unique perspective more readily. Audiences are grateful when their contribution, intelligence, and experience are acknowledged.

Additionally, describing their existing world gives you the opportunity to create a dramatic dichotomy between *what is* and *what could be*. Proposing *what could be* should throw the audience's current reality out of balance. Without first setting up *what is*, the dramatic effect of your new idea will be lost.

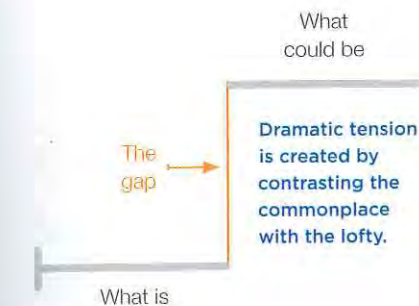
The beginning doesn't have to be long. It might be as simple as a short statement or phrase that sets the baseline of *what is*. While it can be longer, it should not take up more than 10 percent of your total time. The audience will be anxious to know why they came and what you are proposing. So, although the beginning is important, it shouldn't be long-winded.

The first turning point to occur in a presentation is the call to adventure, which triggers a significant shift in the content. The call to adventure asks the audience to jump into a situation that, unbeknownst to them, requires their attention and action. This moment sets the presentation in motion.

**"A bad beginning makes a bad ending."**

Euripides<sup>8</sup>

To create the call to adventure, put forth a memorable big idea that conveys *what could be*. This is the moment when the audience will see the stark contrast between *what is* and *what could be* for the first time—and it's crucial that the gap is clear.



The call to adventure in a presentation plays a role similar to the *inciting incident* in a movie. *Story* author Robert McKee says, "The inciting incident first throws the protagonist's life out of balance, then arouses in him the desire to restore that balance."<sup>9</sup> That imbalance is what elicits the audience's desire for a reality different from the current one. Pose an intriguing insight that your audience will want the presentation to address. It should stir them up enough (positively or negatively) so that they want to listen intently as you explain what is at stake and what it takes to resolve the gap.

This turning point should be explicit, not muddled or vague. The remainder of the presentation should be about filling that gap and drawing the audience toward your unique perspective of *what could be*.

**"Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are and what they ought to be."**

William Hazlitt<sup>10</sup>

### BELOW IS AN EXAMPLE OF A CALL TO ADVENTURE FOR A PRODUCT LAUNCH

**What is:** Analysts have been placing our products in the top spot in three out of five categories. Our competitor just shook up the industry with the launch of their T3xR. It has been heralded as the most innovative product in our space for the last four years. The predictions are that firms like ours will have no future unless we license the T3xR from our competitor.

**What could be:** But we will not concede! In fact, today we will retain our lead! I'm pleased to tell you that five years ago we had the same product idea as the T3xR. But after rapid prototyping we discovered a way to leapfrog that generation of technology. So today, we're launching a product so revolutionary that we'll gain a ten-year lead over our competitors. Ladies and gentlemen, introducing the e-Widget. Isn't it beautiful?



## The Middle: Contrast

The middle of a presentation is made up of various types of contrast. People are naturally drawn to contrast because life is surrounded by it. Day and night. Male and female. Up and down. Good and evil. Love and hate.

**Your job as a communicator is to create and resolve tension through contrast.**

Building highly contrasting elements into a presentation holds the audience's attention. Audiences enjoy experiencing a dilemma and its resolution—even if that dilemma is caused by a viewpoint that's opposed to their own. It keeps them interested.

**The audience wants to know if your views are similar to or different from their views.** While listening to a presenter, audience members catalog and classify what they hear. Having come into the room with their own knowledge, and biases, they are constantly evaluating whether what you say fits within their life experiences or falls outside of what they know.

It's important to know your audience so that you can understand how your views are both similar to and different from theirs. There will usually be some disparities. A rather obvious business example would be that you want them to buy your product, and they don't want to spend the money.

But differences aren't a *problem*. The polarity between similar and dissimilar concepts creates a force that can be put to good use. In fact, both extremes are necessary

in a presentation. They allow you to create observable distinctions between your perspectives and your audience's perspectives—this helps keep their attention. Though people are generally more comfortable with what's familiar to them, conveying the opposite creates internal tension. **Oppositional content is stimulating; familiar content is comforting. Together, these two types of content produce forward movement.**

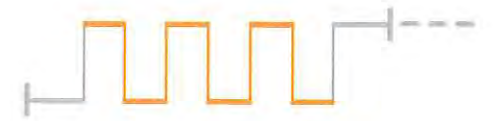
There are three distinct types of contrast you can build into a presentation:

- **Content:** Content contrast moves back and forth to compare *what is* to *what could be*—and your views versus the audience's (pages 104 to 105).
- **Emotion:** Emotional contrast moves back and forth between analytical and emotional content (pages 136 to 137).
- **Delivery:** Delivery contrast moves back and forth between traditional and nontraditional delivery methods (pages 138 to 139).

Contrast is a motif woven throughout this entire book and is at the heart of communication, because people are attracted to things that stand out.

**"As the polarized nature of magnetic fields can be used to generate electrical energy, polarity in a story seems to be an engine that generates tension and movement in the characters and a stirring of emotions in the audience."**

Chris Vogler<sup>11</sup>





# Call to Action

The second turning point, the *call to action*, clearly defines what you're asking the audience to do. Successful persuasion leads to action, and it is important to clearly state exactly how you want the audience to take action. This step in the presentation gives the audience discrete tasks that will help bring the ideas you convey in your presentation to fruition. Once this line is crossed, the audience needs to decide if they are with you or not—so make it clear what needs to be accomplished.

Whether a presentation is political, corporate, or academic, the audience consists of four distinct types of people capable of taking action: doers, suppliers, influencers, and innovators.

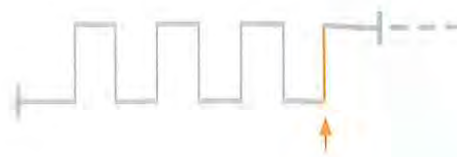
Because of differences in temperaments, every audience member will have a natural preference for one type over another. Providing each type with at least one action that's suited to their temperament allows them to choose the action they're most comfortable performing. When audience members see how they can help, it leads to momentum and quicker results. Most people are equipped with the ability to carry out at least one of the four types of actions effectively. A truly passionate revolutionary for your ideas could embody all four of the action types.

## Sample calls to action that can be requested of an audience:

- The doer can be asked to assemble, decide, gather, respond, or try.
- The supplier can be asked to acquire, fund, provide resources, or provide support.
- The influencer can be asked to activate, adopt, empower, or promote.
- The innovator can be asked to create, discover, invent, or pioneer.

Be sure to identify actions that are simple, straightforward, and easily executed. The audience should be able to mentally connect their actions with a positive outcome for themselves, or for the greater good. Present all the necessary actions and make sure the most critical tasks for success are emphasized.

Many presentations end with the call to action; however, ending a presentation with a to-do list for the audience is not inspirational. So it's important to follow up the call to action with a vivid picture of the potential reward.



### WHO THEY ARE

### WHAT THEY DO FOR YOU

### HOW THEY DO IT



DOERS

Instigate Activities

These audience members are your worker bees. Once they know what has to be done, they'll do the physical tasks. They recruit and motivate other doers to complete important activities.



SUPPLIERS

Get Resources

These audience members are the ones with the resources—financial, human, or material. They have the means to get you what you need to move forward.



INFLUENCERS

Change Perceptions

These audience members can sway individuals and groups, large and small, mobilizing them to adopt and evangelize your idea.



INNOVATORS

Generate Ideas

These audience members think outside the box for new ways to modify and spread your idea. They create strategies, perspectives, and products. They bring their brains to the table.



## The End

Notice that the end of the presentation is on a higher plane in the presentation form than the beginning. The ending should leave the audience with a heightened sense of *what could be* and a willingness to be transformed—to be able to either understand something new or do something differently. Audience transformation is the goal of persuasion. Skillfully defining the future reward compels the audience to get on board with your idea.

The ending should repeat the most important points and deliver inspirational remarks encompassing what the world will look like when your idea is adopted.

The principle of recency states that audiences remember the last content they heard in a presentation more vividly than the points made in the beginning or middle. So you should create an ending that describes an inspirational, blissful world—a world that has adopted your idea. What will the audience members' lives look like? What will humanity look like? What will the planet look like?

In order to get the most out of the audience, describe the possible future outcomes with wonder and awe. Show the audience that the reward will be worth their efforts. The presentation should conclude with the assertion that your idea is not only possible but that it is the right—and better—choice to make.

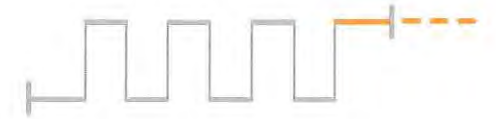
**“Getting the audience to cheer, rise, and vocalize in response to a dramatic, rousing conclusion creates positive emotional contagion, produces a strong emotional takeaway, and fuels the call to action by the business leader. The ending of a great narrative is the first thing the audience remembers.”**

Peter Guber<sup>12</sup>

Let's say you pulled off an incredible presentation. You used the principles in the presentation form with grace and ease to convey your ideas, and the audience made a commitment to transform. Sounds like a huge victory—but it's not over yet. **The end of your presentation marks the next phase of the adventure for the audience.**

The human ability to accept new insights creates room for people to *become* something different. As indicated by the final dashed line at the end of the presentation form, the audience starts becoming something different from what they were at the beginning of the presentation.

But when you are done delivering your presentation, the adoption of your idea is still inconclusive. The audience will determine the outcome. Great presentations end with the audience leaving full of support; bad ones don't. The outcome could end as a comedy or as a tragedy. If they don't adopt your idea, it could end as a *tragedy* in which your once admirable hero makes a personal error by not moving forward with your call to action. Or if they do your call to action, it resolves as a *comedy*, which doesn't necessarily mean “funny”; it means there was a rise in the fortune of a hero who deserved to succeed.



**“What we call the beginning is often the end. And to make an end is to make a beginning. The end is where we start from.”**

T. S. Eliot<sup>13</sup>



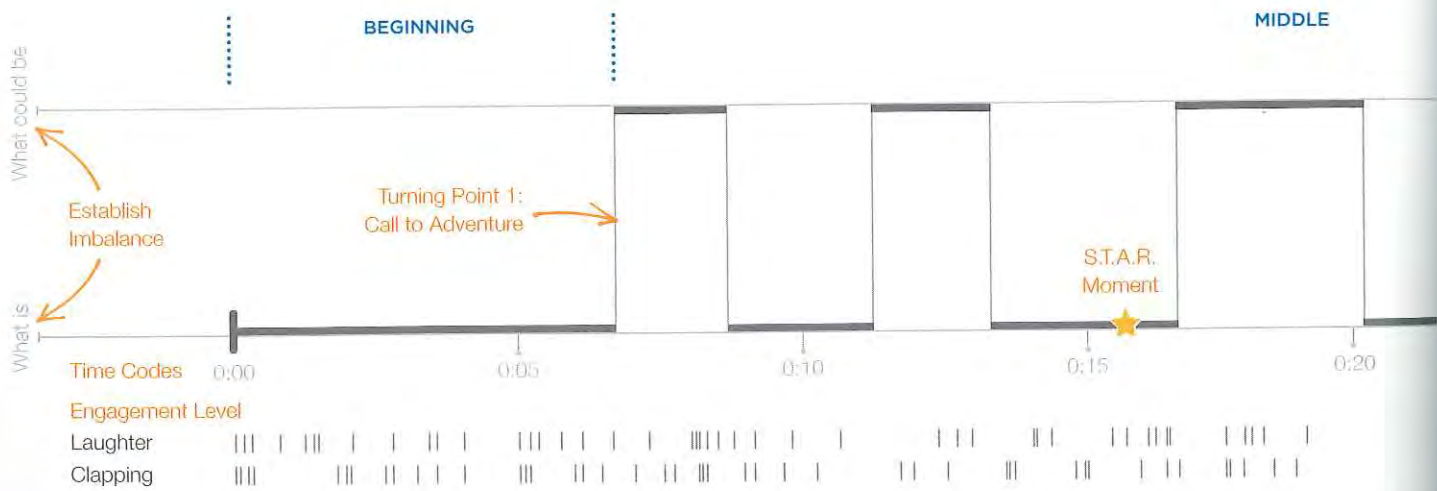
# What Is a Sparkline?

Throughout this book, the presentation form will be used to analyze presentations graphically as a sparkline. This will help you see the contrast in a presentation by visualizing its contour. The line moves up and down between *what is* and *what could be*, but it also changes colors to signify contrasts in emotion and delivery. Each presentation has its own unique pattern. No two sparklines are alike, because no two presentations are alike.

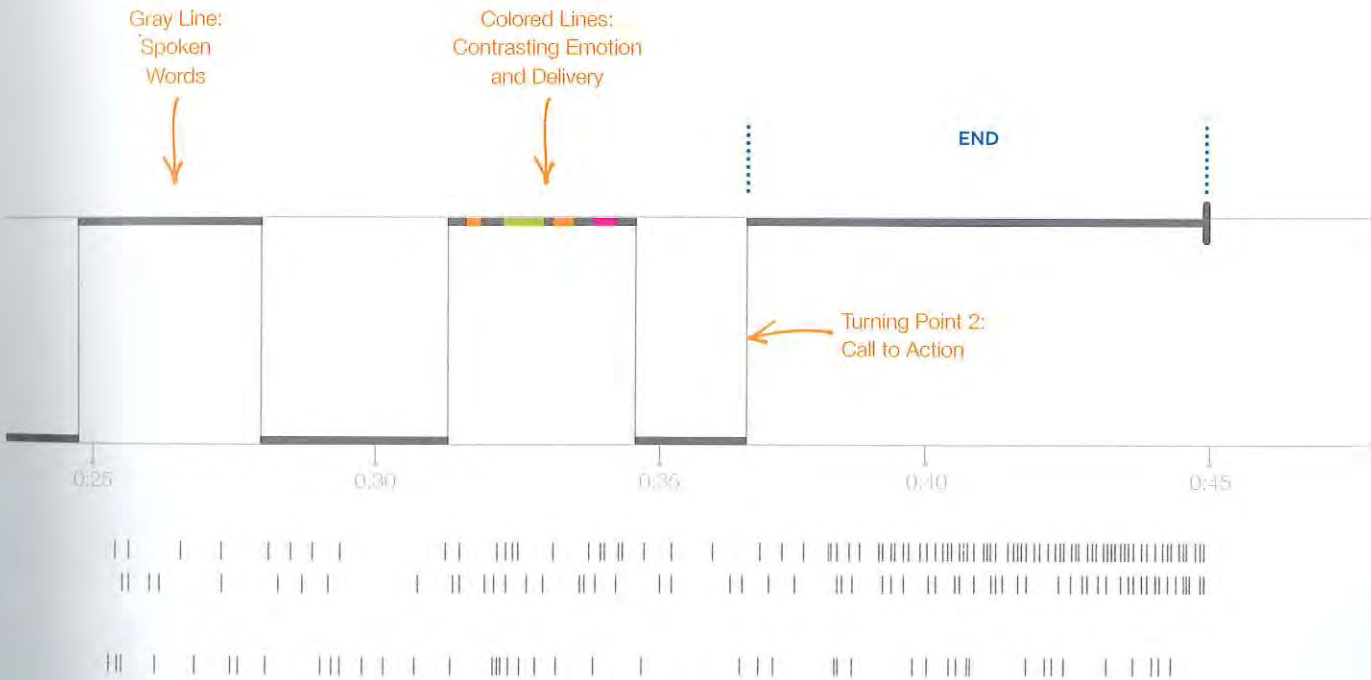
Using a tool like the presentation form to achieve great results isn't new. Movies and myths all have a form, and they yield beautiful and unique results. Similarly,

presentations that follow the presentation form will all be unique. The presentation form isn't a formula, because it has enormous flexibility; rigid adherence to it could make your presentations too predictable. So it's equally important to embrace its versatility.

Below is an annotation of how to read the sparklines in the book. The case study on the following pages will show the first use of the presentation form applied as a sparkline. Videos of all the presentations analyzed are available online along with additional annotations to the transcripts. [www](#)



A few sparklines have a second layer of tick marks to show structural or verbal insights. Look for a second layer of tick marks on Feynman, Jobs, and Ortberg.





## Case Study: Benjamin Zander

### TED Talk

Benjamin Zander has a contagious passion for classical music. Motivational speaker and conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, he's intent on persuading everyone to fall in love with classical music. And during his 2008 TED talk, the audience was visibly moved toward that end.

If you haven't yet seen this presentation, please watch it! Go to TED.com and search for Benjamin Zander to see this master communicator in action. [www](http://www.ted.com) Less than a minute into the presentation, the audience is already responding to its content. They laugh early and often.

**He energetically engrosses the audience several ways:**

- **Structural Contrast:** Zander gracefully shifts between *what is* and *what could be* by establishing a clear gap between those in the audience who already passionately love classical music and those who feel it's simply like second-hand smoke at the airport. He's determined not to leave the room until everyone is in love with classical music.
- **Delivery Contrast:** He contrasts his delivery several ways. He alternates between speaking and playing the piano. He physically involves the audience by having them sing. He moves from the stage into the audience several times, even touching the faces of the audience members! He also uses large gestures and dramatic facial expressions.

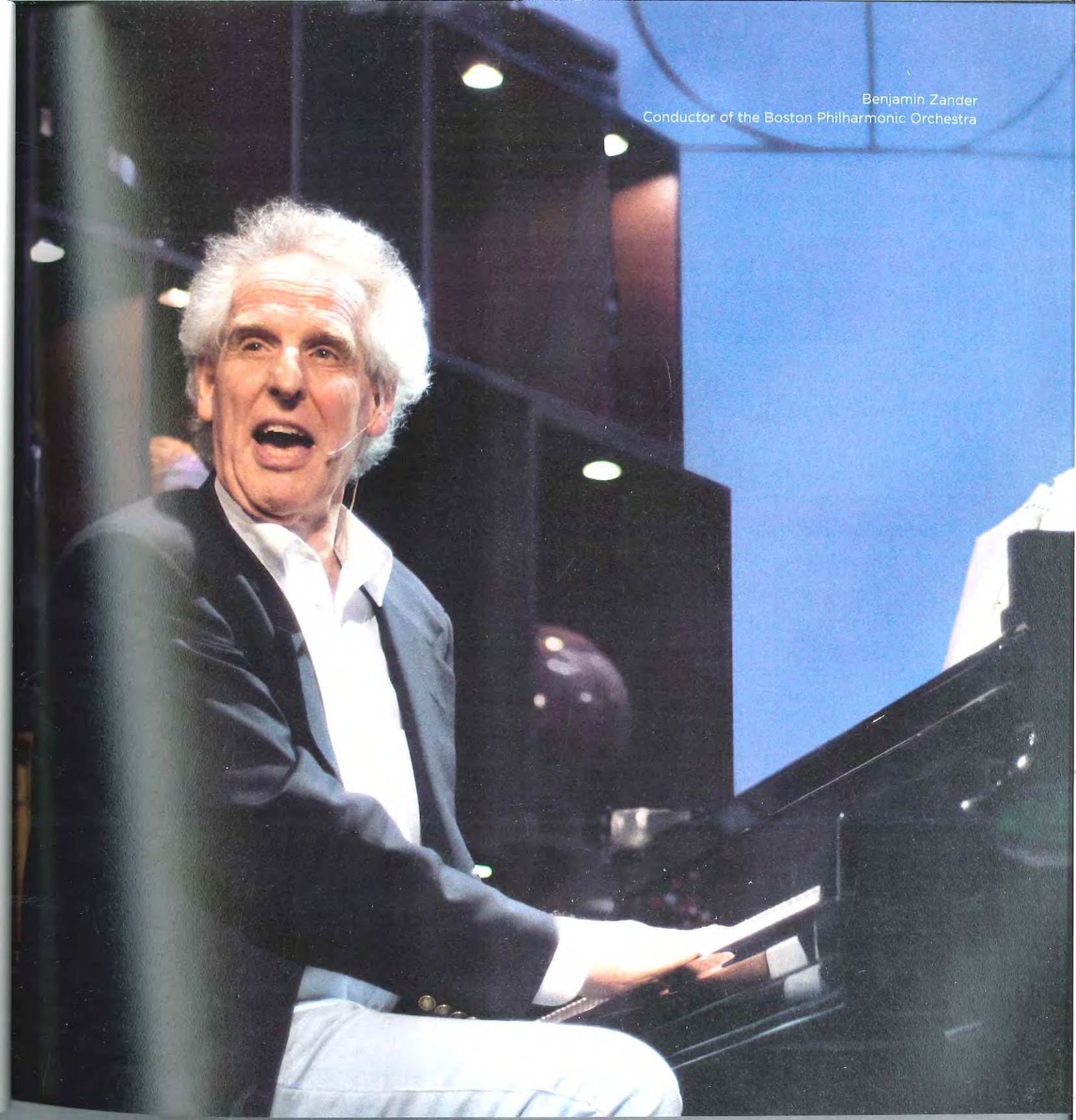
- **Emotional Contrast:** Zander tells several stories; some evoke laughter—some, tears. Though they alternate between funny and touching, each one connects the hearts of the listeners to the material and moves them (emotionally and behaviorally) toward loving classical music.

Like all great mentors, Zander gives the audience members a special tool: he teaches them how to listen to the music. They learn to identify impulses and chord progressions. He trains their ears in music theory. Many in the audience haven't loved classical music because they were unable to hear the layers of beauty within it. Zander unfolds these layers for them.

Zander brilliantly uses the music as the message as he elicits and connects with listeners' emotions. Having trained their ears to recognize the sense of longing created by an unresolved chord, he then goes straight for the heart. He asks them to remember a loved one who is no longer with them as he replays a piece by Chopin. This is the S.T.A.R. moment (page 148) in the presentation. Possibly for the first time in their lives, the audience can hear the longing in the music, and they are deeply moved.

Zander demonstrates all the components of a perfect presentation form, which is annotated on page 50.

Benjamin Zander  
Conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra





# Zander's Sparkline

## Establish *What Could Be*

Zander is passionate about showing the audience how to love classical music. He says, "It doesn't work for me to [have] a wide gulf between those who understand, love, and are passionate about classical music, and those who have no relationship to it at all...I'm not going to go until every single person in this room...come[s] to love and understand classical music."

## Engage by Singing

When he describes the Chopin prelude, he plays descending notes of a scale—B, A, G, F#—then withholds the last note (E) and invites the audience to sing it. They're reluctant at first, so he repeats his request. When the audience sings the final note, he remarks, "Oh, the TED choir!" eliciting laughter.

## Emotional Contrast

Zander taught the audience how a chord pulls the music toward the home key like a magnet. As the music moves away from home into other chords, the music feels persistently unresolved. As the music persists in long, unresolved chords, it creates a sense of longing until it finally comes back to the home key. The music wants to resolve and go home. Then he says, "Would you think of somebody who you adore who is no longer there—a beloved grandmother, a lover, somebody in your life who you love with all your heart but that person is no longer with you. Bring that person into your mind and at the same time follow the line all the way from B to E, and you'll hear everything that Chopin had to say."

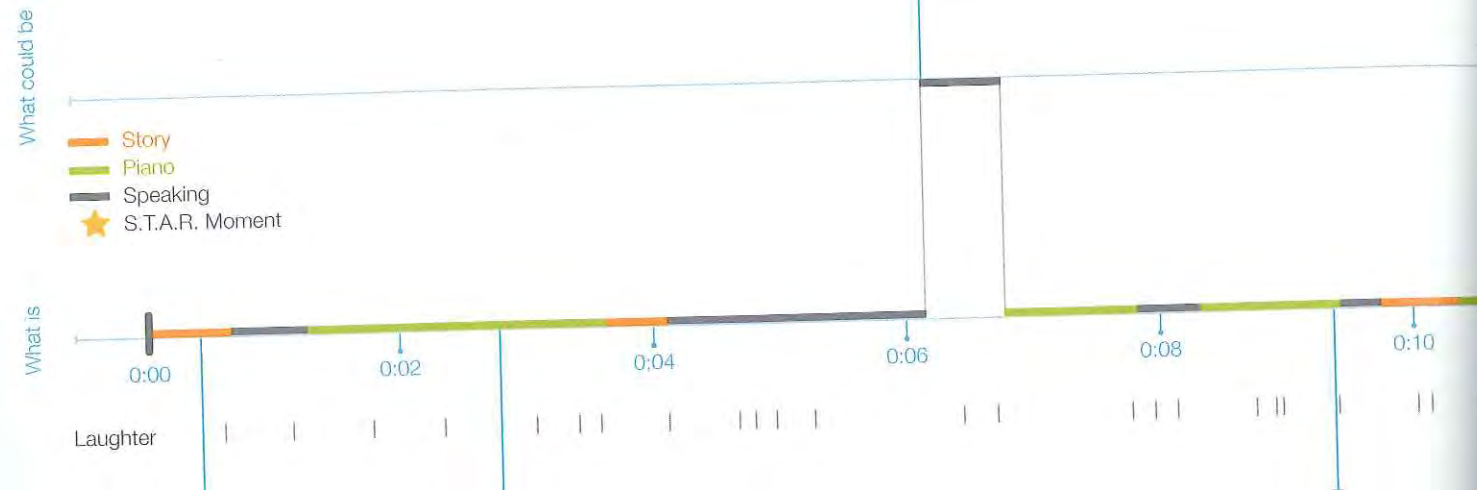
This time when he plays the piece, the beauty of longing and desire that was built into the piece manifests itself in the hearts of the audience. They can feel themselves in the music. People in the audience fall in love with classical music when they can understand it emotionally.

## Call to Action

Zander concludes by sharing a life-changing realization that his job is to awaken the possibility in others. "And do you know how to find out [if you succeeded]? You look at their eyes. If their eyes are shining, you know you're doing it." He challenges the audience to ask the question of themselves: "Who are we being as we go back into the world? It's not about wealth and fame and power. It's about how many shining eyes are around you."

## Engage by Singing

Though not shown in the video, Zander comes back for an encore in which he leads the "TED choir" in a rousing rendition of Beethoven's *Ode to Joy* in German.



## Establish *What Is*

After hooking the audience with a story, Zander states, "There are some people who think that classical music is dying."

## Teach Them to Listen

Zander teaches the audience how to listen for "impulses" in the music and challenges the audience to listen for them in his playing. He educates them about music theory and performance.





Stories have been told for thousands of years in order to transfer cultural lore and values. When a great story is told, we lean forward, and our hearts race as the story unfolds. Can that same power be leveraged for a presentation? Yes.

The timeless structure of a story can contain information that persuades, entertains, and informs. Story serves as a perfect device to help an audience recall the main point and be moved to action. Once a presentation is put into a story form, it has structure, creates an imbalance the audience wants to see resolved, and identifies a clear gap that the audience can fill.



## RULE #2

Incorporating story  
into presentations  
has an exponential  
effect on outcomes.