

Get Your Message into the Mind



**An Essential Leadership Skill:
How to Talk So Your Client, Boss and Team Will “Get It”**

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One of the Toughest Challenges

One of the toughest challenges in leading any project is getting all the players on the same page. The more complex the project, the bigger the challenge.

Why is it so difficult to create a shared vision of new technology and business processes? Why do so many messages seem to land on deaf ears and fail to enter the mind?

Because typical presentations are too much about the project, the technology and the business process, and not enough about the mind.

Technical details don't grab attention. If important information is presented in complex or abstract terms it won't be retained. But it doesn't have to be that way.

What Kind of Messages Get into the Mind?

A presentation infused with mind-friendly language will engage your audience. You'll command the attention of executives, clients, users and the project team. You'll have a new sense of ease in building understanding and driving your points home. But you must use mind-friendly language. What kind of messages are mind-friendly?

Our Minds Welcome Messages that Are:

- Just the Right Size
- Just the Right Shape
- Come in at Just the Right Angle

More details on right size, right shape and right angle messaging will follow. First we need to think about how the brain works.



What We Need to Know About the Brain

Learning Is Hard on the Brain

- Research from MIT shows that learning new information, a new environment or a new procedure consumes a great deal of mental energy
- When the brain is consuming large amounts of energy, outside activity is very slow or grinds to a halt

Overloaded Brains Shut Down

- Research from Temple University shows that as the volume and complexity of information increases, brains often move into an overloaded state
- Decision making slows down
- The quality of decisions goes down – mistakes are made
- Eventually the prefrontal cortex, the part of our brain responsible for executive function, decision making and regulation of emotions, shuts down completely

Presentations Need to Be Easy on the Brain

- When messages are unclear, too technical or too complicated, the audience has to devote large amounts of time and energy to figuring out the message. Energy spent on deciphering meaning is energy not available to getting the project done.
- Car drivers who want to go the furthest on a tank of gas pay close attention to fuel efficiency. They adapt their driving habits to get to the destination using as little gas as possible.
- Anyone presenting a technical or complicated message in a meeting, report or email would do well to adopt a fuel efficiency perspective. To advance understanding the furthest in person or in print, it is vital to choose words that consume the least amount of mental energy.

What's the Right Size of Message?

Less Is More

What words are most brain-friendly and the easiest to take in?

- Elongated polysyllabic vocabulary consumes inordinate amounts of cranial concentration to communicate meaning.
- The best words to drive a point home are short and sweet. The words our brains like best have just one beat. (Beat is a single syllable synonym for syllable)



One Beat Words

For centuries, famous authors, world leaders and advertisers have used one beat words to drive thoughts into our brains. Here are a few examples:

- **“To be or not to be?”**– the most famous line in Hamlet by William Shakespeare
- **“Blood, sweat, toil and tears”** – powerful one beat words in Winston Churchill’s address to the United Kingdom in the darkest days of WW2
- **“I have a dream”**– the defining idea from one of the most important and famous speeches of the 20th Century by Martin Luther King
- **“Tear down this wall!”**– the key phrase from Ronald Reagan’s speech in front of the Berlin Wall in June 1987. It was perhaps the most important speech of Reagan’s presidency
- **“Good to the last drop”** – the claim made on every can of Maxwell House coffee for more than a century
- **“You can do it. We can help.”** – Empowering slogan from Home Depot
- **“Blood. It’s in you to give.”** – The one beat tagline for Canadian Blood Services

One beat words help folks grasp your thoughts right now, with no need to pause, stop or think for a long time.

One Beat Words for Project Managers

At first glance one beat words seem too basic and simplistic for the complexities of project management. But a deeper look reveals that one beat words can immediately bring clarity and focus through the entire project life cycle. Consider these examples:

Visioning & Planning

- Why should we take this on?
- How much will it cost?
- What skills do we have in house?
- Who will we need to hire?

Scheduling

- We need more speed
- We get paid less if we’re late
- Can we cut the time in half?

Setting Realistic Expectations

- Let’s be clear
- Here’s what we can get done in six months



Regular Project Meetings

- Where are we now?
- Are we still on time?
- What do we need to do next?
- What do we need to fix?

What Message Shapes Please the Mind?

Alliteration is Alluring, Rhyme is Sublime

- One of the most pleasing message shapes has to do with word sounds
- Why are a baby's first words Mama, Dada, Goo-goo and Ga-ga?
- Research from UBC conducted on two and three day old infants demonstrates that from birth our minds are attracted to words with repeating sounds
- We like alliteration and rhyme
- Our minds are drawn to alliteration from Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Fred Flintstone, Bob the Builder and Paw Patrol to Coca-Cola, Google, and Lulu Lemon
- Our minds are drawn to rhymes from Mother Goose and Dr. Seuss to Obama Drama, Trump Bump, Fitbit and 7-Eleven

Counter Thought

Our minds love the shape of contrasting ideas. We are naturally drawn to phrases that present a thought – counter thought structure

- Our brains are attracted to binary opposites like up, down; smile, frown; black, white; day, night.
- Counter thought is skillfully used in the famous first two sentences of **Charles Dickens'** classic novel, The Tale of Two Cities. **"It was the best of times. It was the worst of times."**
- Counter thought is also used effectively in advertising
 - Lite beer from Miller **"Less filling. Tastes great."**
 - M&Ms candy **"Melts in your mouth, not in your hand"**
 - Canadian Tire **"Give like Santa, Save like Scrooge"**

Brain Twist

It is a daunting task to try and infiltrate minds with an entirely new idea. It is much easier to attach a new concept to something that is already familiar, but give it a new context or present it in a modified form. This strategy is the brain twist.



- Automobiles were a novel invention of the late 1890s and early 1900s. But when they first took to dusty paths and cobblestone streets they were not called cars or even automobiles, they were known as horseless carriages. A carriage being pulled by a horse was a known entity. A slight twist to horseless got the new fangled contraption into the mind.
- In communications we moved from telegraph to telephone to wall phone, to desk phone, to portable phone, to cell phone, to smart phone. Each progression was a slight twist on what the mind already knew.
- The names of many brands are based on a brain twist – taking a known entity and attaching a new meaning to it. Amazon used to be a big river in South America, now it's a dominant online retailer. The primary meaning for Visa used to be an official government travel document, now it's a credit card that's everywhere you want to be.
- Slight twists of the known are very easy for the brain to process

The Mind's Eye

The mind's eye is one of the most effective avenues into the mind. You have a distinct advantage in getting your point across if it creates a visual image.

- **The Iron Curtain** – Winston Churchill gave the world the defining imagery of the Cold War when he proclaimed “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent.”
- **The Ring of Fire** – the visually rich term that describes the long chain of volcanoes that surrounds the Pacific Ocean

The mind's eye can be activated by a brand name

- Apple
- Shell
- Men in Kilts – the window cleaning and commercial services franchise

Audiences are much more likely remember what you say if they can see it.

What's the Right Angle for Messages?

The Audience's Point of View

Countless messages fail to gain any traction with their audience because they come from the wrong angle. They focus on what the project is, or why the project is important to the presenter, and not why the project is important to the audience. To escape this trap, start your presentation with the following questions in mind:

- Why is this important to the audience?
- Why should the audience care?



Steve Jobs & the iPod

Follow the example of Steve Jobs when he introduced the iPod. What was most important about the iPod, that it had impressive technical specs and the largest hard drive in the market segment?

No the most important thing about the iPod was that it put 1,000 songs in your pocket.

The Brand Messaging Every Project Needs

Every project needs a short, powerful name and a benefit-focused tagline

A Short Powerful Name

- The name is the project's highest profile, most repeated message
- The name drives the personality perceptions of the project
- The name needs to be easy to say and be easy to remember
- The name needs to be approachable, especially for complex, technical projects
- Ideal length is 2-3 syllables

A Benefit-Focused Tagline

- The tagline should present the essence of the idea in just a few words
- The tagline should focus on the biggest benefits the project will provide rather than just describe what it is or its scope
- The tagline should employ Message into Mind strategies described above
- Some tagline examples for the South West Calgary Ring Road project
 - A New Fast Way Around Town
 - A Quick Route to the Deep South
 - No More Glenmore Gridlock

About the Presenter

Roger Grant is a veteran branding expert, naming consultant and professional speaker.

For more than 20 years Roger has crafted captivating Brand Names and compelling Brand Stories for a wide range of technology, B2B and niche consumer enterprises. He is President and Chief Brand Strategist of Identacor Marketing, the only firm in western Canada that specializes in naming companies, products, services and technologies.

Roger has dedicated his career to crafting mind-riveting messages. He has an uncanny knack for making complex ideas easy to understand and easy to remember.

Roger is an accomplished and engaging speaker. His presentation style is entertaining, thought-provoking and interactive. He draws powerful lessons from unexpected sources. Every presentation is filled with novel insight and audience fun. Roger holds national standing with CAPS, the Canadian Association of Professional Speakers.

