

Good Leadership Is About Communicating “Why”

by [Nancy Duarte](#) - May 06, 2020

In an ongoing crisis, clear communication is more important and more difficult than when things seem normal. Employees and customers are hungry for information, so we’re tempted to pull together presentations and communicate with urgency instead of with careful planning. But if we present without addressing our audience’s core questions of *what*, *how*, and *why*, we’ll sow more confusion than we bring clarity.

At my company, we rework thousands of talks each year for large brands and high-powered executives. When their communications are high-stakes, most of our clients come to us prepared with *what* needs to happen and *how*, but they’ve rarely answered the question *why*.

Communicators often overlook answering *why* for two key reasons:

- They assume explaining *what* and *how* is the fastest way to influence their audience.
- They think the answer to *why* is so self-evident it doesn’t need unpacking.

Here are three strategies to help you get to the heart of the *why* in your next presentation.

Ask some good *what* questions.

The answers to *why* often hide in our subconscious, and you may have to coax them out. Sometimes, you can get to *why* by asking yourself a few good “*what*” questions such as: What is at stake if we do or do not do this? What will the future look like if we get this done? What would the state of the human condition be if we did or didn’t do this? Another way to get to *why* is to have someone else ask you “so what” until you can’t answer it anymore. That’ll get you to the root of “*why*.”

Follow up with *because*.

Just *considering* the *why* isn’t enough — you have to clearly articulate the *why*. Think about what action you’re asking your audience to take, and then follow it with “*because*.”

For example, “We need to improve our process, because ____.” Whatever reason follows a “we need to _____, because _____.” Whatever that second blank is, will answer the question of “*why*.”

State alternate perspectives.

Address skeptics and resistance by addressing potential perspectives you’ve eliminated. It might sound counterintuitive to reveal anything *other* than the action you’re influencing them to take, but you can better persuade an audience by sharing ideas you abandoned and, you guessed it, “*why*” you’ve eliminated them. By sharing the ideas that you considered, explored, tested, and then abandoned, you’ll demonstrate that you’ve thought through all the possibilities.

Answering *why* is an act of empathy and adds a layer of persuasion to your communications. When people know *why* they’re being asked to do something, they’re much more likely to do it.

In times like these, your customers and your employees need your wisdom and leadership more than ever, and you have a unique opportunity to move them forward in the midst of uncertainty. As you seek to inspire and motivate them to do the next right thing, don’t forget to include the *why*.

Adapted from: https://hbr.org/2020/05/good-leadership-is-about-communicating-why?fbclid=IwAR0Gpjm98DC7J8nNsmBbSAGTgL_QR5tQTXUhtA5TOiaLx2Ye_11MHAqnrY

Good Leadership Is About Communicating “Why”

by [Nancy Duarte](#) - May 06, 2020

In an ongoing crisis, clear communication is more important and more difficult than when things seem normal. Employees and customers are hungry for information, so we’re tempted to pull together presentations and communicate with urgency instead of with careful planning. But if we present without addressing our audience’s core questions of *what*, *how*, and *why*, we’ll sow more confusion than we bring clarity.

At my company, we rework thousands of talks each year for large brands and high-powered executives. When their communications are high-stakes, most of our clients come to us prepared with *what* needs to happen and *how*, but they’ve rarely answered the question *why*.

Communicators often overlook answering *why* for two key reasons:

- They assume explaining *what* and *how* is the fastest way to influence their audience.
- They think the answer to *why* is so self-evident it doesn’t need unpacking.

Here are three strategies to help you get to the heart of the *why* in your next presentation.

Ask some good *what* questions.

The answers to *why* often hide in our subconscious, and you may have to coax them out. Sometimes, you can get to *why* by asking yourself a few good “*what*” questions such as: What is at stake if we do or do not do this? What will the future look like if we get this done? What would the state of the human condition be if we did or didn’t do this? Another way to get to *why* is to have someone else ask you “so what” until you can’t answer it anymore. That’ll get you to the root of “*why*.”

Follow up with *because*.

Just considering the *why* isn’t enough — you have to clearly articulate the *why*. Think about what action you’re asking your audience to take, and then follow it with “*because*.”

For example, “We need to improve our process, because ____.” Whatever reason follows a “we need to _____, because _____.” Whatever that second blank is, will answer the question of “*why*.”

State alternate perspectives.

Address skeptics and resistance by addressing potential perspectives you’ve eliminated. It might sound counterintuitive to reveal anything *other* than the action you’re influencing them to take, but you can better persuade an audience by sharing ideas you abandoned and, you guessed it, “*why*” you’ve eliminated them. By sharing the ideas that you considered, explored, tested, and then abandoned, you’ll demonstrate that you’ve thought through all the possibilities.

Answering *why* is an act of empathy and adds a layer of persuasion to your communications. When people know *why* they’re being asked to do something, they’re much more likely to do it.

In times like these, your customers and your employees need your wisdom and leadership more than ever, and you have a unique opportunity to move them forward in the midst of uncertainty. As you seek to inspire and motivate them to do the next right thing, don’t forget to include the *why*.

General vocabulary

Specific vocabulary

Grammar

Morphology