

How to Make It Stick

By Judith Filek—President
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We speak to be understood, yet as Robert Greenleaf once said, “Many attempts to communicate are nullified by saying too much.” When asked about information overload in the House of Congress, Representative John Brockmann responded “Most houseplants in the U.S. are killed by over-watering.”

Business Professionals today attend meeting after meeting where they are barraged with information. At the end of their week, they may remember only a small portion of the information they were told. Experts agree that if you want your message to be understood, as well as remembered, it is important to make it simple. In fact, simplicity is the most powerful tool a communicator has.

As speakers, we know a lot about our topics, and our tendency is to want to share everything we have learned. Our assumption is that people will have the same fascination as we do. Dan and Chip Heath in their book, *Made to Stick* call our problem of “over-talking” the curse of the information era.

Too much information overwhelms listeners. Instead of persuading, it creates confusion and often delays decisions. Ideally, a speaker should think in terms of sharing three key points with an audience. Dan and Chip Heath suggest that a speaker focus on his core message and around that, pick the key points that will change the hearts and minds of the particular audience. Information that is interesting to us, but not to the audience, falls on deaf ears. Thus, to make your viewpoint stick, the audience needs to see that it connects to their world on a granular level. For each point that you include, ask yourself “What would this mean to them?” If the answer is “nothing,” it’s a good indication that you should disregard the point.

When you think about expressing your points, remember that we convey ideas through nouns and verbs. Starkly naked points can be riveting. Adjectives and adverbs often add clutter. Demystify your ideas by stating them clearly and simply. Do not bury your points in long sentences or over-connect your ideas with clauses.

As speakers, we are actually rehearsing our audience to spread the “good news.” With a limited number of key points, listeners have a better chance of remembering what we have said, and they can accurately share that information with others who have decision-making power or with those who missed the presentation. They leave energized versus frustrated or bored.

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