

**Public Speaking Lessons from TED Talks:
The Good and the Bad from the 10 Most-Viewed TED Talks
By Diane Windingland**

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Introduction

Imagine standing on a TED stage, sharing your passion with the world.

Maybe that's not your dream, but wouldn't you like to have a powerful, TED-like presentation? TED-style presentations aren't just for TED events. Short talks are becoming more popular at conferences, too.

In case you didn't know, TED is an acronym for Technology, Entertainment and Design. TED Talks, although typically fewer than 18 minutes long, pack a punch: unique ideas presented with passion.

The most popular talks garner online views in the millions. The number one most-viewed talk has more than 25 million views at this time. That's a few more million than the entire New York City metro area population.

Wouldn't you like to have a presentation worthy of an audience of millions?

While there are no short cuts to captivating content and dynamic delivery, you can learn a lot by studying TED talks. You can learn both what to do (and there are plenty of lessons) and what not to do (even the best TED talk isn't perfect).

In November of 2013, I set out to learn from the top ten most-viewed TED talks by watching and analyzing one a week for ten weeks. The top ten list has changed somewhat since then, but eight of the ten talks analyzed in this book are still in the top ten as of publication. Click [here](#) for the current list of the most-viewed talks on TED.com.

The talks are presented in this book in reverse order, from the tenth most-viewed to the most-viewed.

You can read this short book straight through or you can challenge yourself to study the videos, coming to your own conclusions before reading my brief analysis of each talk. Links to each video are provided at the start of each section. If you want to read the transcripts of presentations, you can click on "Show transcript" below most of the videos when you play them.

Take the lessons from these popular talks and incorporate them into your own presentations to present your unique ideas with passion!

TEDTalk #10: The Puzzle of Motivation (Dan Pink)



[video and transcript](#)

The Big Idea: Science has proven what business is only slowly realizing: Using incentives as rewards in business doesn't work well for most tasks. In fact, they can destroy creativity.

The overall construct of the speech: A persuasive speech using the construct of a lawyer (the speaker) presenting a case to a jury (the audience).

Not perfect: He used um as a filler word fairly often, about six times in just the first minute (and not so much after that). He also sometimes spoke using a pointing finger gesture, which can make some people feel like they are being scolded or talked down to. Sometimes he spoke so quickly that he seemed to get out of breath momentarily.

Conversational style of speaking: "Then they present all of the stuff that they've developed to their teammates . . ." "Stuff" may not be the most elegant word, but it's how we talk.

Natural gestures: His gestures fit his emphatic personality, with his hands moving in rhythm to the cadence of his speech. He also used descriptive gestures (e.g. when he talked about having a narrow focus, he held up his hands like blinders on either side of his face). Some of his gestures were repetitive, but I didn't find them distracting.

Attention-getting opening: “I need to make a confession . . .”

Humor at the start: Four lines—all self-deprecating humor—got laughs in the first minute. One example: “I, in fact, graduated in the part of my law school class that made the top 90 percent possible.”

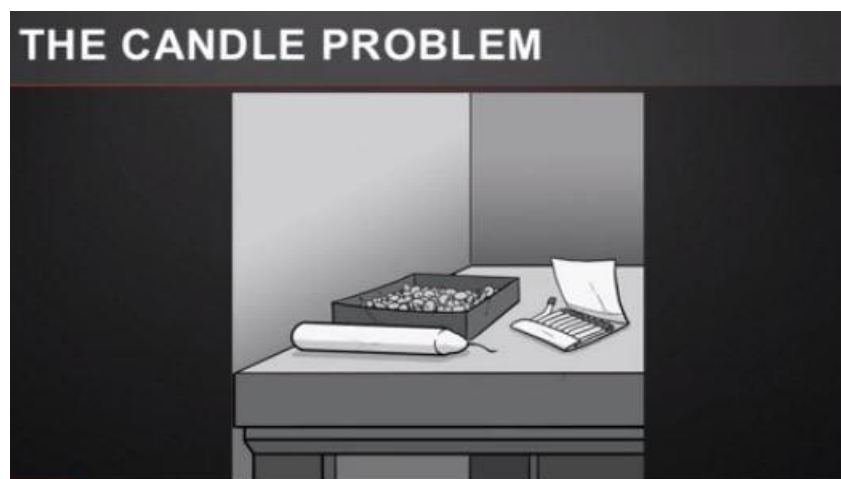
Global dexterity: He clarified meaning for the audience in Oxford, England: “Now, in America, law is a professional degree: you get your university degree, then you go on to law school.” He also used a “local” example: “Let’s go across the pond to the London School of Economics.”

Set the stage for persuasion: “I want to make a hard-headed, evidence-based, dare I say, lawyerly case, for rethinking how we run our businesses.”

Gave the audience a role: “So, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, take a look at this.”

Engaged the audience intellectually and personally (by using “you” language): “Suppose I’m the experimenter. I bring you into a room. I give you a candle, some thumbtacks and some matches. And I say to you, ‘Your job is to attach the candle to the wall so the wax doesn’t drip onto the table.’ Now what would you do?”

Used visuals to enhance the audience’s imagination. The experiment is easier to imagine with a visual.



Acknowledged his expertise, without tooting his own horn: “I spent the last couple of years looking at the science of human motivation, particularly the dynamics of extrinsic motivators and intrinsic motivators.”

Sign-posted important points: “Let me tell you why this is so important.” Statements like this, if not overdone, get the listener to pay closer attention. He also said some things twice for emphasis. “Think about your own work. Think about your own work.” And, “And here’s the best part. Here’s the best part.” At the end, he was a bit obvious with “Let me wrap up” but it did frame the summary that followed as a summary.

Appealed to the audience’s own experience for validation of the concept: “Think about your own work. Are the problems that you face . . .”

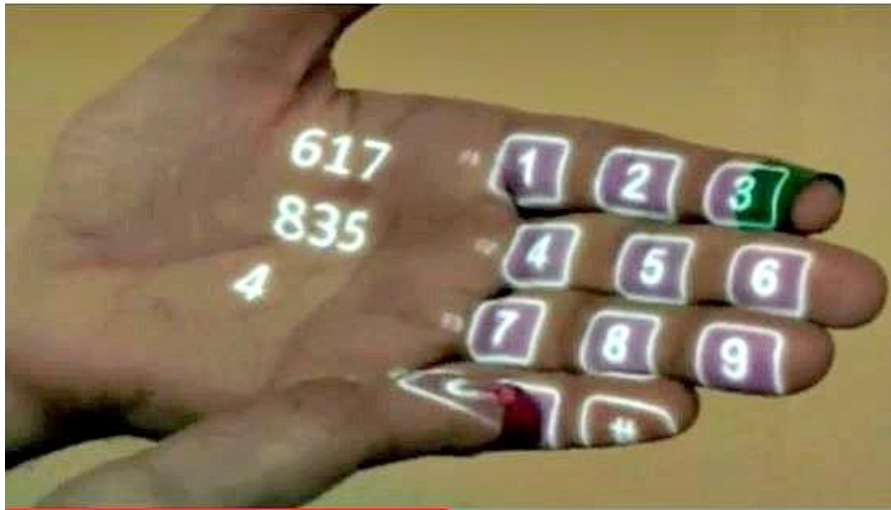
Left us wanting more: In talking about a new “operating system for our businesses” he mentions three elements: autonomy, mastery and purpose. He then states “I want to talk today only about autonomy.” That’s a very smart move if he has a book out with the other points, or wants to have people hire him to speak on the other points.

Supported his points with examples: “Let me give you some examples of some radical notions of self-direction.”

A line you can use when hardly anyone raises their hands: “Looks like less than half of you.” This is a funny line because even “less than half” is a gross exaggeration.

The Big Take Away: Use “you” language and bring your audience into a scene.

TEDTalk #9: The SixthSense Interaction (Patti Maes)



[Video and transcript here](#)

The Big Idea: An inexpensive, wearable device (SixthSense) can interact with our environment to give us easy access to relevant information to help us make better decisions.

The overall construct of the speech: A demonstration, mostly via video. The demonstration was of a device that functioned somewhat like Google Glass, but which was worn like a necklace, made of off-the-shelf components: a webcam, a portable, battery-powered projection system and a mirror. The components communicated with a person's cell phone, which acted as the communication and computation device.

Not perfect: This speech lacked many of the polished presentation aspects you might expect from a TED Talk.

This was apparent in the very first sentence, a long, somewhat confusing opening sentence:

“I've been intrigued by this question of whether we could evolve or develop a sixth sense -- a sense that would give us seamless access and easy access to meta-information or

information that may exist somewhere that may be relevant to help us make the right decision about whatever it is that we're coming across.”

Yikes. “Meta-information.” Pattie Maes tried to explain that term, which was helpful, but I found myself distracted by such academic jargon.

Her attempts at humor also fell a bit flat. For example:

“When you meet someone here at TED -- and this is the top networking place, of course, of the year -- you don't shake somebody's hand and then say, ‘Can you hold on for a moment while I take out my phone and Google you?’”

It's a funny idea to imagine, but she didn't play it up. She acted it out quite quickly, without any exaggeration of movement or facial expression (which would have made it funnier), and then she didn't pause for people to imagine the silliness of it.

The ending was also quite abrupt. She again credited the PhD student, Pranav Mistry, who “was the genius” behind the device (and I kept wondering, “*Well, then why isn't he up there?*”). But, on the positive side, she did end with stretching our imaginations even more “. . . maybe in another 10 years we'll be here with the ultimate sixth sense brain implant.”

Clothing: Yeah, I'm going to mention what she was wearing. All black. Boring, especially with a dark blue background, with dark shadows and a black stage. Also since she was wearing the device, her black shirt made it harder to see.



What the speaker nailed: Not talking too much! This talk is only about 8.5 minutes long, and much of it is a video demonstration of what was a fascinating idea in 2009, when the talk was presented.

Some of the demonstrations:

- Telling time by drawing a watch on your arm.
- Taking pictures by making a rectangle with your fingers.
- Getting a word cloud on someone you just met with words from their blog and personal web pages.



With the example of the device creating a word cloud when you meet someone, she effectively circled back to her opening example of meeting someone and the awkwardness of asking them to wait while you googled them to get some information on

them. Instead of that awkward exchange, the SixthSense device would project a word cloud about them.

Clearly the reason this speech was the ninth-most watched TED video is that it was a captivating idea, demonstrated clearly.

The biggest take-away: A unique idea, well-described or demonstrated, will captivate an audience.

TEDTalk #8: Underwater Astonishments (David Gallo)



[video and transcript](#)

For five and a half minutes, I was transported to the wonder years of my childhood. Mesmerized by the biodiversity of undersea life just as I was as a child when I watched episodes of The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau, I almost forgot I was supposed to be analyzing the talk.

David Gallo's "Underwater Astonishments" is one of the "Talks in Less than 6 minutes" TED talks. A good talk doesn't have to be long. In fact, the speaker doesn't even need to be the star of the talk.

The overall construct of the speech: Narrated video. In this talk, David Gallo essentially narrated video showing some of the fascinating biodiversity of the ocean, primarily focusing on bioluminescence and cephalopods (octopus, squid, cuttlefish). Gallo was visible for a total of less than a minute, only about 16 percent of the total time. The longest stretch was about 28 seconds.

Not perfect. My only major quibble was that I didn't know exactly what his main point was or where he was going. He just started with his first point:

"We're going to go on a dive to the deep sea, and anyone that's had that lovely opportunity knows that for about two and half hours on the way down, it's a perfectly positively pitch-black world. And we used to see the most mysterious animals out the window that you couldn't describe: these blinking lights -- a world of bioluminescence, like fireflies."

He also ended very abruptly (although it didn't seem that odd for this talk) He made a smooth transition from the video of an octopus exhibiting camouflage:

"Just an amazing animal, it can change color and texture to match the surroundings. Watch him blend right into this algae. One, two, three. (Applause) And now he's gone, and so am I. Thank you very much."

What the speaker nailed:

Engaging the audience's imagination. Right from the get-go, with "We're going to go on a dive to the deep sea . . ." he made the audience fellow explorers. He then

fascinated the audience with video of bioluminescent creatures and cephalopod coloration. The audience oohed and ahed when he replayed, in reverse, the amazing camouflage sequence with an octopus (shown in the picture sequence at the start of this chapter).

Conversational style. I almost felt like the speaker and I were in his living room and he was sharing his passion with me. He used short sentences. He didn't use complicated jargon (he even briefly defined "cephalopod" as "head-foot"). His language was colorful. "Bouncing butts." "Bingo."

Humor. Some examples:

"Flying Turkey."

"Cephalopods -- head-foots. As a kid I knew them as calamari, mostly."

". . . the male has managed to split his coloration so the female only always sees the kinder gentler squid in him . . . Now I'm told that's not just a squid phenomenon with males, but I don't know."



The Big Take Away: If you have fascinating visuals, you can let them be the star.

TEDTalk #7: Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are (Amy Cuddy)



[Video and transcript here](#)

The Big Idea: Amy Cuddy shares how "power posing," standing or sitting in a posture of confidence, even when you don't feel confident, can affect testosterone (dominance hormone) and cortisol (stress hormone) levels in the body, causing you to feel and be perceived as more confident. It's not "fake it till you make it." It's "fake it till you become it."

The overall construct of the speech: A persuasive, informative speech, supported by research.

Not perfect: Amy Cuddy's talk was so inherently interesting and her style so authentic, that it was easy to overlook imperfections on the first viewing. On the second viewing, I took notes.

Most noticeable, given the subject of her talk, were indications of insecurity:

1. Filler words: uh, um. She had a couple dozen of these. Noticeable, but generally not distracting in a 21 minute talk. She also used quite a few "so" and "and" connecting words.

2. Touching her face/chin. She touched her lower face/chin a half-dozen times. The reasons for this seemed to be that she needed a moment to compose herself (in an emotional part of her speech), or she used the gesture to gather her thoughts, or, possibly, she might have had a slightly dry mouth.

Emotional control:



composing thoughts:



3. Hair in face. Her hair style, which may have simply been a style choice, hid part of her face. When I see women (or men) with hair over part of their faces, I wonder if they are trying to hide themselves. Plus, when the audience can't see your face, you've lost some connection.



4. Fast-paced, with sniffing breaths. Her overall pace was rather fast and often punctuated by quick breath intakes through her nose. On one hand, it was good for her vocal cords to breathe through her nose rather than her mouth (breathing through your mouth can dry out your vocal cords), but on the other hand it did make her quick breaths more noticeable. She could have slowed down and have taken longer breaths.

5. Slightly hunched posture. Her posture was slightly hunched at the shoulders, giving her a somewhat defensive appearance. Related to this was her overall tucked-elbow gesturing. She rarely was expansive with her gestures.

And now, I will reveal a bias, which I'm pretty sure most people share: I am more critical of a woman's appearance than a man's. Amy Cuddy is a beautiful woman. More than once I thought, "She has flawlessly beautiful skin." But, I also found myself critiquing her classy outfit. "That black makes her fade into the background . . . her wide necklace cuts her off at the throat . . . that lipstick is too purple."

I took away a personal lesson from my realization of my bias: As a woman, I really do need to pay closer attention to my appearance than a man! It might not be fair, but that's how it is.

Enough of the trivial critique. Amy Cuddy really did hit it out of the ball park with this talk.

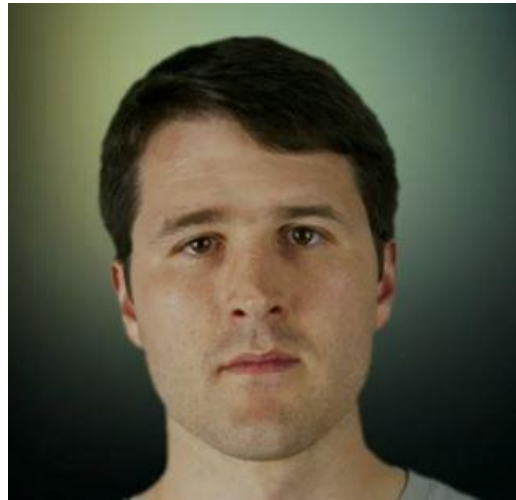
What the speaker nailed:

Gave a practical take-away from research. After supporting her point that your body language not only affects what people think about you, but what you think about yourself (and that you can change your thoughts by changing your pose), she gave a call

to action: Try a power pose and share the science. She proved that this was practical advice with her research results on power posing before job interviews.

Engaged the audience's imagination.

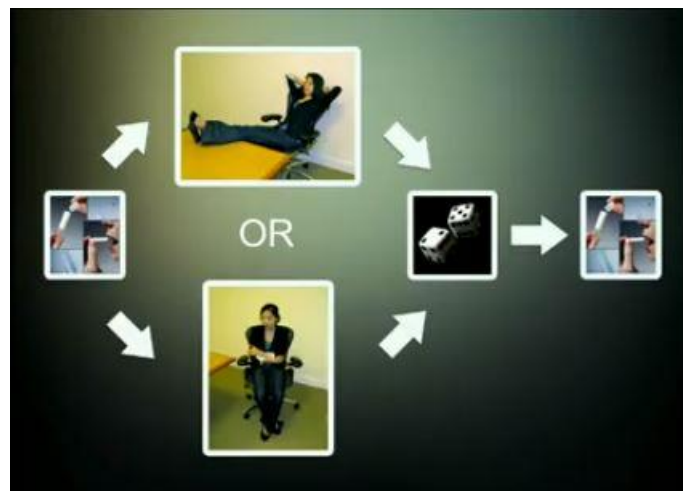
"Imagine this was the person interviewing you" she said as she and showed a picture of an expressionless interviewer.



Used simple visuals, mostly pictures.

She started her talk with some humorous visuals of body language, which relaxed the audience (and probably herself, too).

This was one of the more complicated visuals, which explained how the experiment was conducted. Cortisol and testosterone levels were measured before and after either low or high power poses:



As might be expected, some of the research results were shown in graphical form:



Arrows in the colored bars would have more clearly indicated a decrease or increase of cortisol (high power poses decreased the level of cortisol, the stress hormone and low power poses increased it).

Was vulnerable and preemptively addressed a common objection.

The idea of "fake it till you make it" can lead to the objection of "I don't want to feel like an impostor." She addressed that objection head-on with a personal story, that at one point made me tear up, and made the audience break out into applause. If you don't have time to watch the whole video, at least watch this story (from 16:12-19:28).

The Big Take Away (especially applicable to public speaking): Fake it till you become it!

TEDTalk #6: The Thrilling Potential of SixthSense (Pranav Mistry)



[Video and transcript](#)

The Big Idea: We can better enable our physical world to interact with the world of data, which ultimately will help us to stay human.

The Overall Construct of the speech: A demonstration, mostly via video. Some of the demonstration video appears in the [#9 TEDTalk, The SixthSense Interaction](#), which was presented several months prior to this talk in 2009.

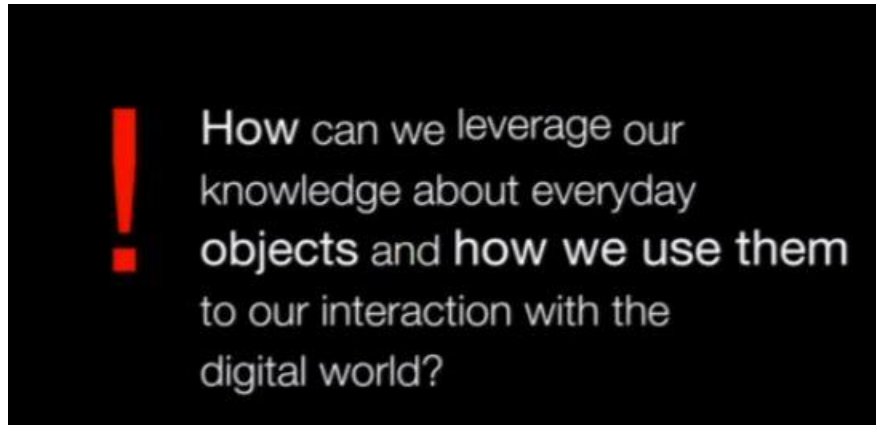
Not perfect:

I was momentarily confused at the beginning with his opening sentence: “We grew up interacting with the physical objects around us.” I thought, does he mean “we” in the inclusive sense of “you and I?” Or, does he mean “we” as a reference to himself and some others (as in “My friends and I”).

He could have enhanced his meaning with gestures, gesturing out to the audience, to indicate the “we” included them, but he didn’t.

In addition to the slight confusion of meaning right off the bat, the next few sentences contained syntax (sentence structure) errors (such as, saying “we everyday use” instead of “we use everyday” and “unlike our most computing devices” instead of “unlike most of our computing devices”).

Next, the first couple of static PowerPoint slides with words distracted me.



I wondered why he put a red exclamation point on the left. I wondered why the word “leverage” was offset. Why were some words bolded? And what did that sentence mean? His verbal description was more to the point.

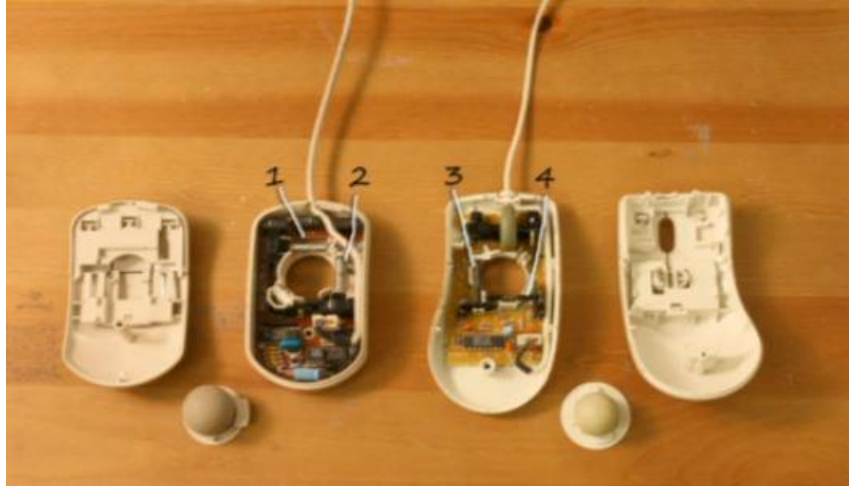
Combine bad PowerPoint, confusion of meaning, syntax errors and then add in Indian-accented English and you have a difficult beginning.

But maybe this beginning wasn’t so difficult for the live audience in India.

Fortunately things got better quickly.

What the speaker nailed:

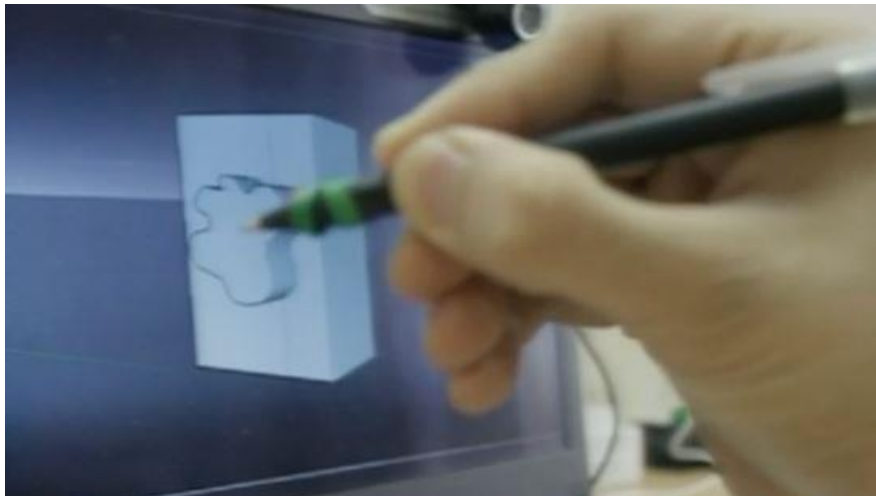
He captured his sense of wonder and conveyed it to the audience. He started out describing how he took apart four computer mice to see how he might use a computer to interact in the physical world.



And then he showed all the clever and inexpensive inventions that his investigations led to.

A few . . .

A pen that can draw in 3-D:



Placing an object on a map (instead of using keywords) to find a location (such as finding an airport coffee shop by placing a mug on the airport map):



Taking a picture using gestures:

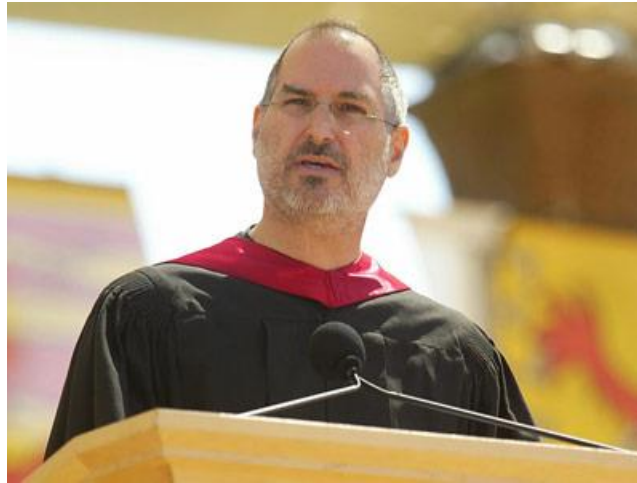


A paper "laptop":



The Big Take Away: Content trumps delivery. What you say (or show) is important.

TEDTalk #5: How to Live Before You Die (Steve Jobs)



Steve Jobs' commencement speech at Stanford University, 2005.

Video. Transcript.

The Big Idea: “Follow your heart.”

The overall construct of the speech: Three stories which each make a point that supported the overall big idea.

Story 1: “Connecting the Dots”

Jobs talks about dropping out of Reed College after attending only the first 6 months, but then staying around as a drop-in for another 18 months. He asks the question the audience is thinking, “So why did I drop out?” Rewinding to before his birth, he tells the story of his adoption by a working class couple and his feeling that he was wasting his parents’ money trying to figure out what he wanted to do with his life in college.

After dropping out, he stuck around taking classes that interested him, while sleeping on the floor in friends’ rooms and returning Coke bottles for the 5 cent deposit to buy food. One of the classes he took was calligraphy, which at the time had no hope of

practical application in his life, but ten years later became instrumental in the design of the Macintosh, the first computer with beautiful typography.

Story 1 point: You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backward. You have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future.

Story 2: "Love and Loss"

In addition to providing another point, this story is an anecdotal proof of his first point. Jobs tells the story of starting Apple in his parents' garage at age 20, growing it and then getting fired at age 30. He was lost for a while, but slowly realized that he still loved what he did. "I'd been rejected, but I was still in love. And so I decided to start over." In the next five years he started a few companies, one of which was bought by Apple. He also fell in love with the woman who would become his wife. He realized that you've got to find what you love—in relationships and in work.

Story 2 point: Love what you do. Don't settle.

Story 3: "Death"

This story is all the more poignant because of Job's death in 2011, although the original audience couldn't have yet "connected the dots" looking forward.

Jobs starts out with a quote that he read at 17: "If you live each day as if it were your last, someday you'll most certainly be right." He then tells the audience that for the past 33 years he has looked in the mirror every morning and asked himself, "If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?" If the answer was "no" too many days in a row, he realized he needed to change something. "Remembering that I'll be dead soon is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life."

He then tells the story of being diagnosed with cancer. His daily question was no longer an intellectual concept. He pointed out that everyone's time is limited.

Story 3 point: Your time is limited. Don't waste it living someone else's life.

Jobs ended with talking about the back cover of the last issue of The Whole Earth Catalog. It was a picture of an early morning country road. Beneath it were the words: "Stay Hungry. Stay Foolish." Jobs repeated those words twice in the closing of his speech, saying it three times in 20 seconds.

Not perfect:

The most noticeable "imperfection" was that Jobs read his speech, which reduced his eye contact with the audience. His speech was very well-written and conversational, so if you didn't watch the speech, but only listened, you might not have realized he was mostly reading it. I would have preferred more eye contact, which could have been achieved if he had used key word notes.

His opening was a little shaky, although that served to make him seem more human.

When he arrived at the lectern, he set his water bottle on top, and then, realizing the slanted surface was a bad idea, moved it. He said three "uhs" in the first 30 seconds. He touched his lips twice also in the first 30 seconds. He may have been wetting his fingers to turn a page on his notes, but touching his lips could have been a nervous gesture.

What he nailed:

Using personal stories to make his points.

"Tell a story. Make a point." -- Bill Gove, the first president of the National Speakers Association

Stories grab people's attention and make your points memorable. If they remember your story, they will remember your point. And, because they were his personal stories, they were unique.

Being humble. From the start with his humble thank you, followed by an “I can’t believe I’m here” smile to his admission of dropping out of college, Job’s low-key “it’s not about me” attitude made him very likable. And when people like you, they are more likely to listen to you.

Getting a chuckle in the first 30 seconds. This line, delivered at a Stanford University graduation, was a little self-deprecating humor: "I never graduated from college. Truth be told, this is the closest I've ever gotten to a college graduation."

The Big Take Away: Telling 3 stories can make a great speech.

TEDTalk #4: My Stroke of Insight (Jill Bolte Taylor)



Video and Transcript

The Big Idea: Spend more time choosing to “run the deep inner-peace circuitry of the brain’s right hemisphere.”

The overall construct of the speech: A story of insight arising from tragedy. Jill Bolte Taylor, brain researcher, had the opportunity of a lifetime when she had a massive stroke and watched her brain functions shut down.

Not perfect:

The opening was the biggest problem. She started out saying that she grew up to study the brain because her brother was diagnosed with a brain disorder (schizophrenia) and that she dedicated her career to research severe mental illnesses.

I wondered if her talk was going to be on mental illnesses.

Then she talked about her work mapping the micro circuitry of the brain. She showed a PowerPoint slide with the title “Triple Immunofluorescence.” And she mentioned that she traveled as an advocate for NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental illness.

So, I wondered, again, if her talk was going to be on mental illnesses.

Finally, after about a minute and half, she says “But on the morning of December 10, 1996, I woke up to discover that I had a brain disorder of my own.”

She had my attention, but I still didn’t know where she was going with her talk.

The rest of the talk was about her experience having a stroke and how that experience gave her insight into the feeling of oneness of the right-hemisphere cognition.

To grab her audience more quickly, and also to get to the heart of her presentation, she could have started more like this [author’s rephrasing]:

On the morning of December 10, 1996, I woke up to a pounding pain behind my left eye. A blood vessel had exploded in the left half of my brain and in the course of four hours I watched my brain completely deteriorate . . . and at the same time, I experienced a deep inner peace.

What she nailed:

An amazing, memorable and relevant prop: a real human brain.

An incredible story, told with passion and authenticity: I was completely riveted by her description of trying to call for help, taking 45 minutes to try to get through a stack of business cards and then trying to call a number when she didn’t understand numbers. She told the story in present tense, as though she was reliving it “So I take the phone pad and put it right here.”

Humor for relief: This was a dramatic story, and a little humor relieved the tension.

"And in that moment my right arm went totally paralyzed by my side. Then I realized, "Oh, my gosh! I'm having a stroke! I'm having a stroke!"

And the next thing my brain says to me is, "Wow! This is so cool." (*Laughter*) "This is so cool! How many brain scientists have the opportunity to study their own brain from the inside out?" (*Laughter*)

And then it crosses my mind, "But I'm a very busy woman!" (*Laughter*) "I don't have time for a stroke!"

The Big Takeaway: Turn a tragedy into insight for yourself and for others.

TEDTalk #3: The Power of Vulnerability (Brenè Brown)



Video and Transcript

The Big Idea: To be fully alive is to be vulnerable. Embrace vulnerability.

The overall construct of the speech: A somewhat chronological retelling of events leading to insight.

Not perfect:

Honestly, I was so engaged by this talk that I found it difficult to find fault. The number one thing I noticed was that the opening, although highly engaging was a bit meandering. She didn't clearly state a main point, but did intrigue me with this statement, transitioning from her first story:

"I want to talk to you and tell you some stories about a piece of my research that fundamentally expanded my perception and really actually changed the way that I live and love and work and parent."

Timing of some of her PowerPoint slides. For example, she displayed the following slide while saying "and lay the code out for everyone to see. So, where I started was with connection . . ."



Actually, the slide may have been displayed even earlier, but on the video, that is when it was displayed. Showing this slide while she was saying “and lay the code out for everyone to see” created a distraction as it didn’t match what she was saying. What would have been better would have been for her to pause after saying “and lay the code out for everyone to see.” (Pause) Display the slide (Pause) and then say, “So, where I started was with connection . . .”

What she nailed:

Highly engaging style: She seemed very relaxed, yet animated. She had a friendly demeanor, with a conversational tone, open body language, frequent smiling. In the first minute and a half of her talk, she was smiling for about one minute of that time (she was telling a story and the only time she wasn’t smiling was when she was saying dialogue of another person).

Use of common, authentic language:

(at first meeting with therapist) “And I think I have a problem, and I need some help.” And I said, “But here's the thing: no family stuff, no childhood shit.” (*Laughter*) “I just need some strategies.” (*Laughter*) (*Applause*) Thank you. So she goes like this. (*Laughter due to facial expression*) And then I said, “It's bad, right?” And she said, “It's neither good nor bad.” (*Laughter*) “It just is what it is.” And I said, “Oh my God, this is going to suck.”

Being vulnerable: She practiced what she preached, being vulnerable, when she talked about having a breakdown and seeing a therapist.

Use of stories: She opened with a story and had a few more stories woven into her talk.

- Story 1: (opening) Story of meeting planner not wanting to call her a researcher
- Story 2: Story of her as a young researcher
- Story 3: Story of her research (extended)
- Story 4: Story of her seeing a therapist

Use of humor:

She got her first laugh in fewer than 30 seconds into her talk. And she got her second only about 20 seconds after that. She had several instances of humor throughout the talk. The audience laughed about 20 times during her 20 minute talk. Not bad for a talk on a serious subject!

Here is part of her opening story, showing where she got her first two laughs:

So, I'll start with this: a couple years ago, an event planner called me because I was going to do a speaking event. And she called, and she said, "I'm really struggling with how to write about you on the little flier." And I thought, "Well, what's the struggle?" And she said, "Well, I saw you speak, and I'm going to call you a researcher, I think, but I'm afraid if I call you a researcher, no one will come, because they'll think you're boring and irrelevant." (*Laughter*) And I was like, "Okay." And she said, "But the thing I liked about your talk is you're a storyteller. So I think what I'll do is just call you a storyteller." And of course, the academic, insecure part of me was like, "You're going to call me a what?" And she said, "I'm going to call you a storyteller." And I was like, "Why not magic pixie?" (*Laughter*).

Her humor was not only what she said, but how she said it, with facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice which showed her reactions to situations.

The basis of her humor was largely self-deprecation, one of the “safest” forms of humor.

Use of highly quotable phrases:

“Stories are just data with a soul.”

“Life’s messy, clean it up, organize it and put it into a bento box.” The unusual use of “bento box” is what made this memorable for me. As an aside, if you don’t know what a bento box is—it’s a divided meal box, common in Japanese cuisine. Even if you didn’t know what a bento box meant, you would understand from the context that she meant she liked to contain the mess of life. And just the words “bento box” sound funny.

“They believed that what made them vulnerable made them beautiful.”

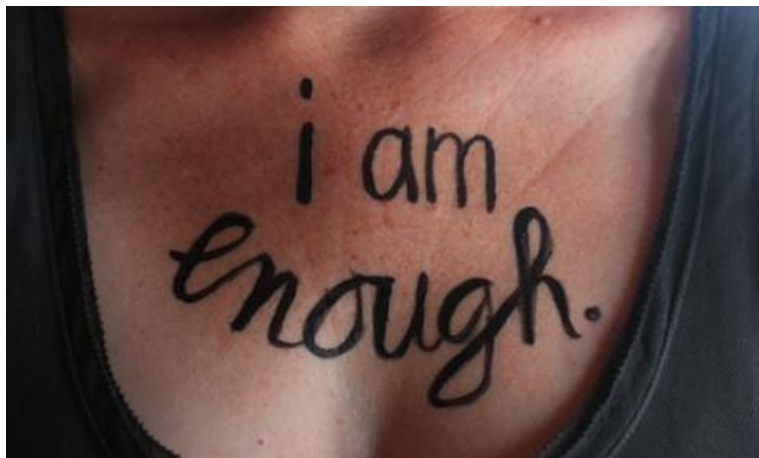
“BS Meter”

“You cannot selectively numb.”

“I’m enough.”

Interpretation of original research: She wasn’t referencing someone else’s material. She spent years researching the topic.

Memorable visual: “I am enough” is stuck in my brain.



The Big Take Away: Be real. Be vulnerable. Connect.

TEDTalk #2: How Great Leaders Inspire Action (Simon Sinek)



Video and Transcript

The Big Idea: People don't buy what you do. They buy why you do it.

The overall construct of the speech: Persuasive, using logic, research and anecdotes

Not perfect:

His opening rhetorical question took me off-track at the start. "How do you explain when things don't go as we assume?"

And, just when I was about to ponder that question, he came in quickly with another question. "Or better, how do you explain when others are able to achieve things that seem to defy all of the assumptions?"

The problem, for me, with the first question was that he just threw it out there, saying it quickly and then not having a pause for me to reflect for a moment. And the question

was not specifically related to the topic of his speech. The second question was more related to his topic. He even tells the audience that in the second question using the phrase, “Or better . . .” Why even bother with that first question?

Perhaps he wanted to build momentum with a series of rhetorical questions. Right after the second question he says, “For example: Why is Apple so innovative?”

Building momentum with three rhetorical questions is an excellent device, but I think he missed the boat with the first question.

What he nailed:

Conversational style: His attire was casual (personally, I thought the jeans were too casual), his style was relaxed and his voice was soothing and resonant.

Persuasive Structure:

- **Got attention with thought-provoking rhetorical questions and statements**

There were seven questions in the first minute. The questions and statements also foreshadowed the examples he would expand on. This made the audience lean-forward mentally, anticipating the answers.

- **Built suspense with “I made a discovery”**
- **Previewed his main point with “there’s a pattern . . . “**
- **Used a sexy title for his concept:** “The Golden Circle”
- **Used stories/examples to illustrate his concept** (Apple, the Wright Brothers, Martin Luther King, Jr.). He also had a pattern to his story telling, contrasting failures and successes (Dell vs. Apple, Samuel Pierpont Langley vs. the Wright Brothers, TiVo vs. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr—well, that last contrast was a bit of a stretch).
- **Had a little bit of humor:** He got a couple of laughs in this speech. My favorite was when he was talking about Dr. King. “And, by the way, he gave the ‘I have a dream’ speech, not the ‘I have a plan’ speech.”

- **Repetition of a foundational phrase:** He said this phrase seven times: “People don’t buy what you do. They buy why you do it.” The repetition of the phrase and its echo structure made it very memorable. He said it so often, that he could have had the audience chime in the last few times by starting the phrase for them “People don’t buy what you do . . . (motion to the audience to complete the phrase) . . . They buy why you do it.”
- **Memorable visual:** He only used a flip chart, and made some fairly quick and messy diagrams to illustrate a couple of concepts. It fit perfectly with his casual style and the physicality of his interacting with the flip chart was more personal than showing slides on a screen.

The Big Take Away: The idea of "start with why" is one speakers should well remember. Build your speech from the why of what you do and why your audience would care. Persuade in your presentations by focusing on the emotional "why" with reason and logic as supports.

TEDTalk #1: How Schools Kill Creativity (Ken Robinson)



Video and Transcript

The Big Idea: “Creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status.”

The overall construct of the speech: Loosely persuasive, using humor and stories/examples to increase receptivity for his message.

Not perfect:

Some digressions. This was the sort of speech that is much more engaging if you don’t try to outline it. While it all flowed, it sometimes digressed. He was masterful, however, at segueing in and out of his digressions. For example, he talked about moving from Stratford-on-Avon to Los Angeles as a way to segue into two stories, one that somewhat related to his topic, and another that didn’t (but both were funny). In the first story, he had the audience imagine William Shakespeare as a seven year old. In the second story he told about his son’s displeasure with moving to America. He ended that story with “. . . she was the main reason we were leaving the country.” And moved on to making his point. “But something strikes you when you move to America . . . “

Verbal fillers— In the first two minutes alone, he had about 15 short “uhs.” Because they were so short, they were not highly noticeable. However, with a little awareness, it is easy to reduce the quantity of uhs.

Black suit with a dark background (from the front angle). Men have fewer fashion choices than women, but a black suit blends in with a dark background. A dark gray suit might have been a better choice.

What he nailed:

A message that resonates. This talk, as the most-viewed talk on TED, clearly resonates with many people. Viewers likely feel the pang of regret for their own (or a loved one's) education because "the thing they were good at at school wasn't valued, or was actually stigmatized." And, if viewers have children in their lives, or simply care about the future, the message both calls for change and inspires hope.

Humor. Ken Robinson has a natural, somewhat dry humor, one that bubbles up with apparent effortlessness. In his 19.5 minute talk, there were 22 laughs. His first five laughs came from self-deprecation. For me, his British accent enhanced the humor.

Ten seconds in to his talk: "Good morning. How are you? It's been great, hasn't it? I've been blown away by the whole thing. In fact, I'm leaving." (Laughter)

Less than a minute later he gets the next laugh: "If you're at a dinner party, and you say you work in education -- actually, you're not often at dinner parties, frankly, if you work in education. (Laughter) You're not asked. And you're never asked back, curiously. That's strange to me. But if you are, and you say to somebody, you know, they say, 'What do you do?' and you say you work in education, you can see the blood run from their face. They're like, 'Oh my God,' you know, 'Why me? My one night out all week.'" (Laughter)

Started with humor. Ended with heart. Although there were 22 laughs in his talk, there were none for about the last three and a half minutes. The last portion of his talk ended with a moving story about a little girl who couldn't sit still in class and then, after the story, a call for change. The humor relaxed people and made them receptive. The moving story took people out of their heads and moved their hearts. Humor to heart to message—an effective pattern, as long as the humor and the heart-story are relevant to the message.

Use of Stories/visual examples:

- Being an educator at a dinner party
- Little girl drawing God
- Son's Nativity Play
- Shakespeare as a child
- Moving to Los Angeles/teen son
- Aliens view of education
- Disembodied professors
- Wife cooking vs. him cooking
- Story of Gillian Lynne

Use of dialogue:

He didn't just narrate his stories; he had his characters use dialogue, which made the stories come alive. For example, instead of just having the audience imagine a seven year-old William Shakespeare, he acted out how Shakespeare's father might have talked to him: "Go to bed, now,' to William Shakespeare, 'and put the pencil down. And stop speaking like that. It's confusing everybody.'"

Referencing other presenters: While the video audience might not have appreciated his references to other presenters at that particular TED conference, his live audience surely did. By referring to other presentations, he connected his talk with the entire event and created a stronger common bond with his live audience.

Memorable statements:

My favorite: "If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original."

The Big Take Away: Start with humor. End with heart.

Conclusion

While your take away list may be different than mine, here is the “Big Take Away” that I had from each of the talks:

- #10—Use “you” language and bring your audience into a scene. (The Puzzle of Motivation, Dan Pink)
- #9—A unique idea, well-described or demonstrated, will captivate an audience. (The SixthSense Interaction, Patti Maes)
- #8—If you have fascinating visuals, you can let them be the star. (Underwater Astonishments, David Gallo)
- #7— Fake it till you become it! (Your Body Language Shapes Who You Are, Amy Cuddy)
- #6— Content trumps delivery. What you say (or show) is important. (The Thrilling Potential of SixthSense, Pranav Mistry)
- #5—Telling 3 stories can make a great speech. (How to Live Before You Die, Steve Jobs)
- #4— Turn a tragedy into insight for yourself and for others. (My Stroke of Insight, Jill Bolte Taylor)
- #3—Be real. Be vulnerable. Connect. (The Power of Vulnerability, Brenè Brown)
- #2—Start with why. (How Great Leaders Inspire Action--Simon Sinek)
- #1—Start with humor. End with heart. (How Schools Kill Creativity, Ken Robinson)

Most importantly, you don’t have to be perfect. Your authentic self, speaking conversationally, yet with passion awakens the passion in others. Often that passion is related through storytelling. As I think back to the talks, what stands out in my memory, for the talks that did not rely heavily on visuals, was the stories. Facts tell, but stories sell—stories sell your ideas.

The ideas were captivating weren’t they?

If you watched the videos, in addition to reading my analysis, you probably felt as I did, that you gained so much more than just learning about public speaking. The ideas captivated me. What ideas will you captivate the world with?

About the Author



Diane Windingland is an author, professional speaker and a presentation coach.

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Other Books by the Author

Check out Diane's other books on communication skills (available on Amazon.com):

[12 Ways to Be a Confident Speaker](#)

[Cat Got Your Tongue? Powerful Public Speaking Skills & Presentation Strategies for Confident Communication or, How to Create the Purrfect Speech](#)

[Small Talk, Big Results: Chit Chat Your Way to Success!](#)

[Perfect Phrases for Icebreakers: Hundreds of Ready-to-Use Phrases to Set the Stage for Productive Conversations, Meetings, and Events](#)

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