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This April newsletter is all about specifics. We often read so much content telling us "be a better leader!" or "grab the attention of your audience!" without real actionable items to practice. This month's articles can help you take very specific steps towards your goal and "Spring" you forward into action.

Kristin

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#### 12 EASY AND SPECIFIC ACTIONS TO BUILD YOUR TEAM

I'm an absolute, huge fan of using flipcharts in meetings with less than fifty people. Why? Because writing down team members' thoughts help the team to recognize and remember the idea. It also helps each team member to be visually reminded about they contributed to the team's work.

Many years ago, my colleague in facilitation, Ned Reute, shared his top ten list of things a facilitator should do – and they all end with "write it down and hang it on the wall."

1. When someone offers an idea, *write it down and hang it on the wall.*
2. Work on one issue at a time. Let the group choose and word the issue. *Write it down and hang it on the wall.*
3. Agree on how to work on that issue. Tap the group wisdom for how to work before offering your own process. *Write it down and hang it on the wall.*
4. If they offer the same idea repeatedly, point to where it is, *written down and hanging on the wall.*
5. If someone attacks a person for a "dumb" idea, ask them where the idea is *written down and hanging on a wall.* Move to it. Move the discussion to the idea, away from the person who offered it. If additions, qualifications, clarifications, or pros and cons are offered, *write it down and hang it on the wall.*
6. When the group is discussing, voting on, or coming to consensus around a solution, *write it down and hang it on the wall.*
7. When the group moves away from the agreed-to issue, go to where you *wrote it down and hung it on the wall*, call their attention to it, and give them the choice to change the issue, go back to the one they agreed to, show how this one affects the one they agreed to, or put a time limit on the digression. Whatever they decide, *write it down and hang it on the wall.*

8. When the group moves away from the agreed-to process, go to where you *wrote it down and hung it on the wall*, call their attention to it, and give them the choice to change the process, go back to the one they agreed to, show how this one affects the one they agreed to, or put a time limit on the digression. Whatever they decide, *write it down and hang it on the wall*.
9. When someone says, "We ought to \_\_\_\_\_," find out who will. Then *write it down and hang it on the wall*.
10. Before breaking up, find out when the group will get back together. *Write it down and hang it on the wall*.

#### 4 TYPES OF STORIES TO TELL TO SPARK AUDIENCE INTEREST

Once upon a time....

What happened to you physically as you read those words? If you are like most people, you exhaled; you released the tension in your shoulders as you prepared to listen to the story.

Stories create the quintessential bonding experience between the moderator, panelists, and the audience. Next time you are at a panel or a presentation, watch how a simple story can bring an audience to life.

You can actually see a visible change in the audience when you (or the panelists) tell a story that humanizes and personalizes your topic. Most participants will lean forward, smile, and either nod their heads to agree or shake their heads to disagree.

When listeners hear a well-told story, they take a journey with you, correlating their own experiences with yours. Your story becomes their story - or it reminds them of a very similar story from their own lives. Think of it this way: We all have a figurative file drawer that contains all of the information we know. And it is easier to take in new information when we can relate it to something that resides in that file drawer.

At the very onset of the panel, consider sharing a story (personal or otherwise) that connects to the topic and sparks interest in the audience. Share the impact (benefits as well as unfavorable consequences) of your topic on the reality of their lives if the present situation is/is not resolved. Don't forget to choose descriptive words using the names of actual persons, places, or events - and give your story an ample sprinkling of color and life.

My favorite types of stories for panels are comparisons, contrasts, allusions and analogies:

Comparisons show similarities whereas contrasts show differences. Use comparisons when you want to reveal similar characteristics, features, and qualities; use contrasts when you want to present how one set of conditions differs from another.

Some common comparisons and contrasts are

- Is/is not—"This is what it is; this is what it is not."
- Retrospective/prospective—"That was then; this is now."
- Point/counterpoint—"Issues for; issues against."
- Review/preview—"Here's where we have been, and here's where we are going."

When you allude to something, you are making brief, indirect references to a person, place, or event that everybody can identify. An allusion evokes a connection among three parties—you, the audience, and the image you are referencing— without saying who, what, or where it is.

Let's look at a few categories you can allude to in order to get your audience exploring rather than snoring:

- **Politicians.** Politicians are famous for serving up some phrases that stick. By

mentioning the well-known phrase, there is a connection to that time and place in history. For example, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country” evokes the memory of John F. Kennedy.

- **Current events.** You can allude to a current event at a local, regional, or national level. You can also tap into what is happening among the participants’ organizations if that information is widely known.
- **Celebrities.** Some celebrities have enduring personalities. They may not be endearing, but they are well-known and thus worthy targets of allusion, even after they are long gone. When I am introduced, my “princess wave” to wordlessly say “hello” to the audience is an allusion to Princess Diana.
- **Flashback.** Refer, or call back, to something that was said earlier in the presentation, a question that was asked, or anything that might have occurred from the moment the audience entered the room.

An analogy is a comparison of two things to highlight some strong point or points they have in common. Analogies are often used in technical panel discussions as a way to connect the unknown (what you are presenting) to something the audience already knows. There are basically two ways we express an analogy:

1. A **simile** compares two things that are not the same and are not normally considered together. The key words you’ll use when using a simile are “like” or “as.” For example, our brains are like a computer. As you read this book, your brain is storing information in your “buffer” just as your computer stores data. What happens when your computer crashes before you hit the ‘save’ button? You lose all that data!
2. A **metaphor** is a more direct version of a simile that talks about one thing as if it is the other. Take out the “like” or “as” and your simile becomes a metaphor. To continue the previous example, in order to retain the information in this book, you need to hit the ‘save’ button in your brain frequently or risk having an empty hard drive.

Finding just the right analogy to kick off your panel discussion can be a challenge. My colleague, Betsy Allen shared with me four steps to selecting an analogy:

1. **Clarify the purpose and people.** First, clarify whom the message is for and the outcome you are after. During the late 1990s, when the welfare laws changed, I oversaw the Welfare to Work Training in Lee County, Florida, and helped the boat builders in Fort Myers tap federal funding to put new wage earners to work as fiberglass handlers. My audience was primarily minority females who had probably never been in a boat much less knew anything about building one! Yet, within twenty-five hours, we needed them to know every step of building a boat, and we needed a visual memory hook that would stay top of mind as they became independent workers.
2. **Define the elements, pieces, or parts.** Fiberglass handling is messy work. It is done outdoors in the heat of summer, with hazardous chemicals and challenging conditions. The process uses wet (resin) and dry (reinforcement) ingredients that are temperamental. When used out of sequence or measured inaccurately, the combinations can start fires. In fact, if you do everything right, yet you don’t have the fiberglass rubbed out within thirty minutes, you have to start over.
3. **Brainstorm similes and metaphors.** Analogies are everywhere. After brainstorming metaphors that were visual and could be connected to the audience and purpose, we landed on “building a boat is like baking a cake.”
4. **Narrow the potentials that link back to your purpose.** You bake a cake from the

inside out, just as you build a boat. You have wet and dry ingredients, which must be accurately measured and baked delicately to create a cake. The same holds true for a boat. Finally, the last step of the process is to rub out the fiberglass before it hardens just as you rub on the frosting while it's soft.

Selecting your analogy is more of an art than a science, but it takes a bit of thought to pick just the right one to kick off your panel discussion.

## **FROM THE BOOKSHELF: DO BUSINESS BETTER: TRAITS, HABITS, AND ACTIONS TO HELP YOU SUCCEED**

I was just reading my colleague, Damian Mason's latest book: [\*Do Business Better: Traits, Habits, and Actions to Help You Succeed\*](#). This book is written primarily for entrepreneurs (hopeful, budding, and existing), yet there are gems for ANY person who works in a business as well!

So here's what got me thinking: Mason talks about the difference between a habit and a routine. He says,

"One is intentional, the other mindless. No matter what your picture of success looks like, you won't get there by being mindless."

So here's how he defines these terms:

**Habit:** an acquired behavior pattern regularly followed until it has become almost involuntary.

**Routine:** regular, unvarying habitual, unimaginative, or rote (without thought) procedure. He goes on to explain that "unimaginatively and unvaryingly plodding through life without thought never yields positive results." And this is where Damian and I differ.

Having a routine is a great foundation that you don't have to expend energy to think about. Imagine if every morning, you had to think about whether you were going to brush your teeth, take a shower and comb your hair? I do that automatically, without thinking. It's regular and quite unimaginative. But important to do and allows me to keep good company with others! I am then able to "spend" my energy elsewhere...like on the important things/decisions in my life!

Habits, on the other hand, are much more active and intentional. They typically support something you are trying to attain and/or change. They also have a cumulative effect where the benefits pile up over time. As Mason describes, "The physically fit person isn't fit because she exercised Tuesday. She's fit because she exercises every Tuesday. Several other days of the week too." She has developed a habit of exercising in order *to be* fit.

There is one more term that I'd like to throw into the mix: the "ritual." I'll define the ritual as a series of actions or type of behavior regularly and invariably followed by someone. A ritual is a custom or tradition that defines who they are as a team, reinforces positive team behaviors, and contributes to the team's culture and philosophy. Rituals often celebrate exceptional contributions, additions, promotions and retirements from the team, or the accomplishment of significant team milestones.

For example, one of our rituals here at QPC Inc. is "tea time" at 3 pm, every day. For 10 or 15 minutes, we grab a cup of tea, coffee or soda and gather together to share what's going on with us at work, home, or leisure. When starting my consulting practice, I recognized the importance of our team "connecting" each day—regardless of what's going on in the office—because we are often moving in a million different directions. Tea(m) time allows us to focus on the people side of teams, not just the great work.

So....what routines, habits, and rituals support your team's mission, vision, goals, and objectives - and which are you mindlessly following that might not be supporting the team's work?

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