



Tie your idea to goals they *personally* care about

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This article was originally printed on Presentations.com in October, 2006 under the title “So What?” **Answer That Question in Your Presentation**

So what?

We've all been there – sitting through that dreadfully long presentation full of facts, figures, and complex analyses only to leave an hour later wondering “so what?” So what do we do now? What was the point of that? What was the conclusion?

We've all heard about “tricks and tips” to engage the audience: use props, tell stories, and use flashy PowerPoint. The list goes on. The problem is, if the audience doesn't “get” your recommendation or *personally* care about it, no number of tricks can help.

Unfortunately as presenters, we often fail to define that key “so what” *before* we create our presentation. This ultimately leaves our audience wondering what our point was.

Fortunately, this problem is easy to avoid. Doing so requires you to identify your “core idea” well in advance of doing any analysis or creating charts. This core idea is the one thought you want your audience to remember. It is the “what should we do and why should we do it?” recommendation that captures their attention and gives them a compelling reason to act.

A core idea: “We should...”

The first part of this approach requires you to boil your idea down to a single “we should...” We should enter Europe. We should raise prices. We should cut costs. Give your audience a straight-forward “to do.” If the recommendation isn't clear and simple, the probability of it being remembered or executed is low. Simplify it to its bare essence so everyone knows, without question, what it is you want to do.

Pushing their “button”

Everyone has great ideas. The challenge is articulating them in a way your audience finds compelling. The best way to get your audience's interest is to clearly relate your idea to an objective they *personally* care a great deal about (their “hot button”).

Imagine you're trying to get a new HR IT platform approved and one of the influential members of the steering committee is the SVP of Sales. What does she care most about? Hiring effective sales reps that can spend as much of their time as possible selling (her “button”).

Crafting a story that states “we should implement the new HR system because it makes recruiting faster and minimizes administrative work for our employees allowing them to focus on sales” is likely to resonate with her. If you add the analyses that prove shortened hiring cycles and reduced administrative time and convert that time into incremental sales potential, she is likely to support the initiative because she sees how it helps her meet her goals. Her button is sales – don't be afraid to push that button to get her support.

Serving many masters

You rarely have only one constituency to satisfy. Understanding how your work drives a metric that everyone cares about greatly enhances your probability of success.

I worked for a large creditor in their collections division. Our overriding goal was to reduce our losses. Yes, many different groups in the division had lower-level metrics (buttons) they each focused on, but in the end, it all came down to reducing our losses.

Almost every recommendation my team made had a direct link to reducing losses.

The benefit of this approach was that every constituency (operations, IT, HR, strategy, marketing, etc.) could easily see why the idea had merit and they usually supported it eagerly (likely because their bonuses were in some way directly or indirectly linked to lower losses). If your personal wealth is directly tied to low credit losses, you're likely to support a project designed to lower those losses further.

If you clearly articulate the recommendation and understand how it supports the goals of your constituents *before* you do a lot of analysis or create a lot of charts, you will be able to focus your efforts on only doing the work that drives toward your recommendation. I'm not saying to ignore facts contrary to your idea – but I am saying to focus on the most important analyses to keep your idea concise, compelling and simple. This helps you eliminate extraneous work that only bores or confuses your audience.

So what's the “So what?”

So what's the “so what?” of this message? Make a plain and simple recommendation and tie it to a goal your audience is passionate about. Directly articulate how your idea furthers their agenda. Why? So they will actually support and act on your recommendations.

Case in point – this article: obviously you *personally* care about making better presentations. My recommendations are directly linked to your personal goal. You know what the button is – go ahead and push it.