

A Presentation Skills Company

Seeking Similarity

In any *one-to-one* interaction, appealing to *diversity* is important. In other words, when speaking to just *one* other person, you try to meet 100% of that person's communication *needs*. To the extent that you meet less than 100%, you risk losing that much of the full attention the other person gives to you.

However, if another person enters the interaction, your challenge will be to meet 100% of the needs of *two* people. This is impossible, since each person is diverse. To meet 100% of one's needs, you meet 0% of the other. Even if you were to balance 50% for each, you would still fall far short of complete satisfaction for both.

The communication dilemma increases with each additional person in the mix. How, then, does a presenter meet the needs of more than one person, especially in a group, where diversity abounds?

To achieve a lasting impression with a message, presenters must appeal to the *similarity*, rather than to the diversity within a group. From a delivery perspective, diversity disappears when the audience is greater than one. It has to disappear if the presenter wishes to treat the group as a *collective*; namely, as "one" person. In this case, the real diversity is in the way each person shares a similarity.

This is why three hundred people from diverse backgrounds can all laugh at the same moment, when something is funny. The group reaction is in unison, as if one person laughed. The emotion of laughter is a shared similarity among all people.

All forms of public expression are meant for the masses. The message is targeted to the common elements within the group. Since these elements or internal *patterns* are invisible, the approach can only be general (similar).

FRICTION AND FAMILY

To define the audience and play to similarities, you would have to know something that is *common* to everyone in the group. The good news is there are at least two elements that exist in *all* people, across *all* cultures, throughout *all* periods in history. These issues are *friction* and *family*. Everyone shares dissent and descent!

In business, we use the terms *conflict* and *relationship* in place of the words "friction" and "family". Regardless of semantics, these two attributes affect how audiences share, filter and process messages.

A LESSON IN FRICTION --- THE YES/NO PEOPLE

One method of seeking similarity among people is to examine the essence of friction. Therefore, it helps to understand the YES-NO matrix. This array represents how all people “react” to messages. You can always expect one of four responses:

- “No, and...”
- “No, but...”
- “Yes, and...”
- “Yes, but...”

The “*No, and...*” (sometimes called “no way!”) response represents *control* while the “*no, but...*” reply indicates *compromise*. The “*yes, and...*” answer is pure *commitment* while the “*yes, but...*” retort indicates *conflict*.

Given the choice to either avoid or embrace conflict, most people would choose to avoid any friction. However, this avoidance is inconsistent with the human condition. Conflict is a staple of the human diet. We hunger for friction. Struggle is our motivator.

Challenges and obstacles are tangible reasons for action. Action is the driving force of life. When you *embrace* conflict, you stand a better chance of relating to the shared needs of a diverse group of people, since all people have conflict.

When you examine the four responses to messages, noted above, you will find that most of us operate using the “*yes, but*” lead-in, especially to new ideas and new ways of thinking. In other words, we are skeptical, at first, when something is presented that may alter our thinking.

When you build a message, assume that audience members are likely to *share* the “*yes, but*” attitude. Imagine that there is a silent agreement among them that some disagreement (conflict) will exist with your message. If you the “*yes, but*” perspective, you have a good chance of building a message that meets the needs of a diverse audience that all share a need to have some conflict resolved.

Since the “*yes, but...*” attitude represents *universal* conflict, the presenter can use any of the other remaining responses of “*Yes, and*”, “*No, but*” and “*No, and*” to address *any specific* type of audience conflict.

For example, if a presenter wishes to establish “control” over an audience, the “No, and...” response to suggestions or ideas would be the strategy. Conversely, in an attempt to build toward a commitment with an audience, the “yes, and...” phrase would be used more often. Depending on the focus of the message, *control* may be just as valid as *commitment* or even *compromise* as an approach to a given audience.

USING CONFLICT WITHIN A MESSAGE

A message has the most impact on the greatest number of people when the problem itself is most *basic* to those people. One of the most basic staples of the human diet is *conflict*. Without conflict, life isn't really happening. Conflicts or obstacles drive us from one day to the next.

When we use conflict to build messages, we operate from one of three “perspectives” of conflict --- *global, local* or *inner*. In classic drama, the perspective is man against nature (global), or man against man (local), or man against himself (inner). Of course, there is only ONE main type of conflict in EACH story. The conflict is always on the part of the audience, since it is *their* conflict that your message needs to address.

Business, however, is a bunch of little stories, so one of the three levels of conflict is likely to emerge, depending on the given circumstances of the given story. The good news is that once you know the type of conflict, you can target your message accordingly and remain focused on the objective behind the message.

For example, a message targeting an *industry* practice is an example of global conflict. Competition in a specific market is typically local conflict. A message focusing on abuse in the workplace can be “inner” conflict (to the company) or can be shaped as local conflict between the people involved in the situation, such as a boss and a subordinate. Know the conflict and you'll know the course of action for the message.

ALL IN THE FAMILY --- IDENTIFY THE RELATIONSHIP

More common to all of us, is the concept of *family*. Everyone, everywhere experiences family relationships on a continual basis. Some of those relationships are natural (blood) others are built (social). In all cases, interaction among people is *relational*.

It follows that *relationship* is an essential component to all communication. We use it to plan our actions in “relation” to others. In messaging, your relationship to a particular audience can be described in terms of the way you would normally relate to a *family* member. The good news is that there are only three types of family relationships:

- Parental (parent-child)
- Fraternal (brother-sister)
- Marital (husband-wife)

You only use *one* of these types at any given time. If you know the relationship-type and you know your “role” within that relationship, you can plan accordingly. The role is really an understanding of the characteristics or expectations associated with the relationship. A parent is expected to *act differently* than a child.

Parent-Child Example

Let's say you are bringing "expertise" to the table (as a consultant might), then the relationship between you (the expert) and the audience (novice) is *parental*. Within that parental relationship, you (expert) are the parent and the audience is the child. As parent, you typically guide, advise, plan, encourage and handhold the child.

Test your script to see places where any of those actions exist. It is at those points that you can add stories, examples and analogies to create impact in your message to match the model of the relationship you know exists. If you play the *characteristics* (expectations) of your role in any relationship, you can usually create solid support for any message and you are more likely to remain consistent throughout your delivery.

If you've emulated your part of the relationship correctly, you should see evidence of the "other" side of the relationship. The audience should become the "child" to your parent. But, what is the role of the *child* in a parent-child relationship? You might think the child should listen, pay attention, agree, learn from your wisdom, etc. But that is not reality. The role of the child is to be argumentative, to disagree, to demand the world, to defy your line of logic, to place obstacles in your path. If you embrace this reality, you will be better able to manage the relationship.

Usually, parental relationships are the most common business scenario since sellers (presenters) tend to have more expertise on the subject than targeted buyers (audiences). This is why, in many consulting situations, the client (child) appears to be complaining all the time and wanting everything possible --- obviously, the perfect child.

Other Relationships

When an audience is faced with "choice", a *fraternal* relationship is brewing. Typically, "choosing among competitors" places an audience in a fraternal relationship with a presenter, as if the group takes one side and expects the presenter to demonstrate the difference. If you are in a situation where comparisons are being made, you should treat the relationship with your audience as "brother-sister". Operate under the assumption that they already favor the competitor and you need to find a way to bring your features to light. You will need to find a delicate *compromise* in order to sway a group to your side. If you bad-mouth the other offering, or try to control the audience's choice, you will fail.

When the need of the audience is "partnership, the marital relationship exists. In this relationship, each team member tends to be *committed* to pooling resources to attain a greater good that would otherwise be unattainable if attempted alone. That greater good is mutually beneficial to all involved.

But examine this type of relationship closely. Is it a true partnership? The test for a marital relationship is based on collaboration. *Excluding money*, does each party bring 50% of the effort to the table. In other words, is each partner allowed to contribute an *equal share* of the advice, guidance, creativity, planning, etc. to the relationship? If so, it's a true partnership. However, if one partner can veto the suggestions of the other, then the relationship is not marital.

If you are a consultant and you claim to partner with your client, ask yourself if you would accept 50% of the client's advice on a particular strategy. If the answer is no, then the true relationship you've established is not marital. It is likely parental, since you have *control* of how much they can contribute.

You can still collaborate and create the atmosphere of a partnership (as a parent might do in allowing a child to learn). But, you will need to recognize the relationship for what it really is, rather than what you want it to become.

Keep in mind that relationships change, depending on the circumstances. You may find all three relationships occurring with the same audience in different situations. Don't be surprised by this, just be aware of which relationship is playing and react accordingly.

CONFLICT AND RELATIONSHIP COMBINED

Usually, the nature of the conflict *matches* a particular relationship between the presenter and the audience. The three kinds of conflict (global, local, inner) support the three types of relationships (parental, fraternal, marital).

This matching principle can be used a guideline for building a messaging strategy. In fact, if you know one (conflict or relationship) you will always know the other one that matches it.

For example, *global* conflict tends to involve the *marital* relationship. Groups that might otherwise be opposed to one another rally together to challenge the global problem. Whether they are auto insurers teaming up to put an end to drunk driving or a group of local businesses banding together to fight city hall, the relationship within the group is marital. The group's resources are pooled in an effort to reach a greater good that will benefit all members of the group.

The scenario might even be a single individual who is proposing an environmental solution (global conflict) to members of a community. The relationship of that individual to the community (audience) is marital since the lone person wants to rally the rest of the community around a cause that benefits all.

In a similar fashion, *local* conflict tends to include the *fraternal* relationship. A message designed to address the audience conflict of choosing one technology over a competing one, puts the presenter into a compromising position. The local conflict for the audience is centered on which product to choose (one against the other).

The relationship between presenter and audience is fraternal, with each trying to live within the confines of a limited market. The audience, on one side, is limited to a narrow list of choices (usually based on budget) and the presenter is forced to differentiate (compromise) in order to be the “choice”. Both co-exist and must compromise in some way in order for the result to be a win-win scenario.

Awareness of this fraternal relationship allows your message to target the competitor with “respect” rather than contempt. This avoids the “mudslinging” techniques found when competitors square off against one another, leaving the potential benefactors (customers) in a no-win situation. In those instances, the audience is placed in an *adverse* marital relationship rather than in a compromising fraternal relationship.

Examining this scenario further shows that the relationship between presenter and the audience can move from a fraternal one to a parental one. A presenter, showing respect for the competitor, compromises in a way and appeals to the local conflict of the audience.

But, when pointing out the key differences of a specific solution to the audience, the expertise and advice address the inner conflict of the audience and shift the relationship into a parental one. A good presenter must know how to “shift gears” during a presentation.

Finally, *inner* conflict usually involves the parental relationship. For example, a management consultant is addressing an internal corporate audience on the specifics of teambuilding. The inner conflict for the audience is finding acceptable (and perhaps new) ways to work effectively as teams on certain projects. The relationship is parental since the consultant plays the role of the parent trying to get the children to “play nice”.

The more “inner” the conflict, the greater the need for the parental relationship. This is especially true, for example, when the motivator of that conflict is fear. If the audience is facing a situation where their security is at risk, even if it’s the comfort needed when learning something new, the “fear” may be in the prospect of failure. This inner conflict requires an expert (parent) to help create a path to success. Education is the best example of an inner conflict (learning) is motivated by fear (of failure). Teachers play the role of parents in order to create a learning path to success.

THE ABC’S OF CONFLICT AND RELATIONSHIP

A *conflict-relationship* GRID can be used to help you position a message against a variety of audiences, sharing a particular similarity. The matrix below summarizes these issues and separates conflict and relationship into three distinct groups. If you look at any column, (A, B, or C) you will notice the *internal* elements associated with that particular audience. Knowing at least one these elements will help you to identify and choose a messaging strategy that targets the similarity within the given group.

For example, if you know the *conflict* for the audience is INNER, look at the items in column A. Your *relationship* is PARENTAL. You would maximize your effectiveness if you take the *approach* of an “expert” or “consultant”.

During the presentation, you can choose responses that allow you to maintain *control* of your own expertise. Perhaps an audience member (the child) decides to push back on your advice by offering his or her own suggestion for completing a project. As the expert, you might react with a statement such as, “*The difficulty in taking that approach will result in a higher cost structure for the project.*” In essence, you use a “no, and...” statement to keep the focus on your advice.

	A	B	C
Yes-No	No, and <i>Control</i>	No, but <i>Compromise</i>	Yes, and <i>Commitment</i>
Yes, but	Conflict		
Friction	Inner	Local	Global
Relationship			
Family	Parental	Fraternal	Marital
Approach	Expert Consultant	Rival Competitor	Partner Collaborator
Result	<i>Control</i>	<i>Compromise</i>	<i>Commitment</i>

If you are facing an audience that is weighing choices, you will realize they have a *local* conflict. Column B suggests a strategy of *compromise* as you take on the role of *competitor*, assuming they have already sided against you.

If you find yourself interacting and agreeing with a suggestion, to which you add more value, you are in “*yes, and...*” mode. At that moment, you are experiencing the *marital* relationship and you take on the role of *collaborator*, with the intent to establish a *commitment* to the shared idea.

LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

Business relationships between organizations can be managed effectively to maximize potential over the long-term. But which of the three relationships (Parental, Fraternal, Marital) do you think will last the longest?

Interestingly, the answer is based on DNA. The *strength* of the bloodline indicates the ease of the bond. You directly carry the bloodline of your parents, you share that lineage with siblings, yet marriages, to endure, require the most effort. In business, parental relationships stand the test of time, because of the loyalty of a lasting bond. Organizations that have a unique expertise in the market tend to build parental relationships and thereby retain “*customers for life*”.

Always remember that your chosen strategy may function for any length of time. That’s the nature of communication. It is boundless and timeless. It is up to you to figure out exactly where you are in the situation, and react according to a consistent pattern. By seeking *similarity* during interaction, you can communicate more consistently, across a wider range of diversity, and ease the delivery of your intended message.

NOTE: The information in this handout supports the MediaNet lecture “Seeking Similarity.”

Additional support for this and other topics can be found in several publications including:

- *Special Edition Using Microsoft PowerPoint 2007* by Patrice-Ann Rutledge and Tom Mucciolo (Copyright 2006, QUE, Pearson Publishing, MediaNet, Inc.).
- *Purpose, Movement, Color* by Tom and Rich Mucciolo (Copyright 1994, 1999, 2003, MediaNet, Inc.)
- *Mechanics-Basic Skills* free online tutorial (Copyright 2002, MediaNet, Inc.)
- *Media-Design Skills* CD (Copyright 2004, MediaNet, Inc.), an interactive design tutorial.
- *A Guide to Better Teaching* by Leila Jahangiri and Tom Mucciolo (Copyright 2012, Rowman & Littlefield).

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