



## TRANSCRIPT

### **Episode # 26: 4 Ways to Intrigue And Guide Your Audience**

You are listening to episode 26 of *Mastering The Power Skills*. Wouldn't it be nice if every time you make a presentation or a pitch, you had the audience eating out of your hand? Not just listening but nodding their heads and wanting to hear more. Well, join us in this episode, and you'll learn some fun and easy-to-implement tips for doing just that.

How much more could you accomplish if you were 25% or even 50% more influential and persuasive? Welcome to *Mastering The Power Skills*, the podcast that provides you with the tips, strategies, and the inspiration to grow your own power and win support for your ideas. And now here's your host, C-suite leadership coach Kathy Dockry.

Hi, everyone. So let's kick off this episode by imagining an experience we've all had. We're listening to the CEO make a speech, or we're listening to the teacher

in an online course, or perhaps you're listening to a colleague pitch an idea to you. The point is, whatever the experience you're imagining, the speaker is actually doing a great job this time.

You're actually happy to be listening to him or her. Perhaps you're even a little energized as well. We've all had that experience, right? There's that feeling you get of suddenly seeing a current issue in a new way, that feeling of Eureka, that's a good insight. And there's also that feeling that you're in a safe pair of hands, being led along a clear path to a clear outcome. And all you have to do is go along for the ride. You don't have to work hard to analyze what's being said.

In fact, when you have that feeling, you seldom stop to think about why you have that feeling. You just know that you're enjoying listening to an interesting speaker with what possibly is an exceptionally good idea. You're on board. You get exactly what the speaker is trying to show you.

But, although you didn't necessarily stop to analyze why you felt that way, chances are the speaker was doing at least two things that helped to create that feeling in you. The first was that they were using some imagery to reel you in and intrigue you so you would have an overall feeling of discovery, insight, and clarity.

And the second was that the speaker was probably using some sort of structure for the presentation, the training, or the pitch to help guide you through the case that's being made. And when I talk about being guided, I'm referring to that sensation that we have, almost being a participant in the same journey that the speaker is on. That feeling of alignment.

So here's the great thing, you can do that too. It isn't hard at all to sprinkle into your own presentations or pitches a little imagery or structure that will power up your persuasiveness. And when you do that, you too will be intriguing and guiding your listener and making it easier for him or her to come along with you on your journey.

In today's podcast episode, I'm going to share with you two tips for each of these categories; imagery and structure. There are bound to be at least several of them that you can add right away to your next presentation or pitch.

First, let's talk about how you intrigue and clarify things to your audience. One of the best ways to do that is to use comparisons. So I'm sure at least some of you remember that line from the movie Forrest Gump, right? That line where he goes, "Life is like a box of chocolates." He then goes on to describe how life is like this familiar object, a box of chocolates.

Or I'm sure you've heard people in the workplace describe situations as being like a sport, say football. Or like a game, for example, chess. Or even a TV series, Game of Thrones, anyone? If you were an English major like me, you'd call these sorts of comparisons simile and analogy. But really, there's no need for us to define those terms here.

All you need to know is that when you're designing your pitch, it can help you a lot to take one of the points that you're making, maybe it's the issue that you're trying to solve, or maybe it's a particular solution or situation that everyone's in. In any event, you take that point, and you show how that thing is like another thing, a thing that everyone already knows something about.

So why would you want to do that? First, when you're making a comparison, you're creating a little mystery that captures attention. Instead of passively listening, your audience starts to perk up. They now want to know the answer to that implicit question. That question in their minds is, well, what do you mean? Just exactly how is life like that box of chocolates anyhow?

And secondly, if you're making a very good comparison, you're shining a clear light on a situation that others may not be looking at correctly. When you've clarified things in that way for them, they get more aligned with your perspective versus

their own. In other words, they see things through your lens and not necessarily through their original lens.

So let me give you an example of this. Here's an analogy I often use to help clarify things for people. You know how a new leader in an organization can often be pressured to take positions quickly on various issues? When I see clients being pressured like that, I remind them that being a new leader is like being an ex-pat, a new worker in a new country.

So if you're an ex-pat and you're in the Singapore office for the first time, you don't want to get to weigh in too quickly on things because you're going to turn people off if you do. You're better off watching, listening, and noticing the cultural norms. Then, once you have a better feel for that workplace and its dynamics, you're in a better position to start providing your opinions and assessments. better off watching, listening and noticing the cultural norms.

So that's one of my go-to analogies. It helps people understand that sometimes, taking a position quickly on various issues, even when people are asking you to, is not always the best idea.

But enough of my analogies. How do you come up with good similes and analogies? Well, first, you can do what I do. I cheat, or at least I cheat some of the time. I keep my ears open to what other colleagues are saying. There's always that one guy, you know, the one who has the best one-liners or comparisons.

Or I keep an eye on what I'm reading in business columns and articles.

Professional writers and journalists often add good imagery to their analyses. So whenever I see or hear a good comparison, I actually note it down and stick it in a file for when I may need it in the future.

I also generate good comparisons by asking myself a few questions to prompt some of my thinking. For example, in what way does this thing I'm trying to describe mirror a typical family situation, for example? Or does it mirror or resemble a historical event, sport, game, or even a well-known movie? The list, of course, is endless.

But my point is that these are all things that tend to be commonly known. And if you're comparing your situation to a situation that is common for your listeners, they're going to get what you're saying quickly and clearly.

So here's another way to use imagery. Nothing perks up decision-makers more than when you can give them a real-life story that illustrates the issue you're talking about or the solution. It brings your pitch to life, and it makes it feel real versus just conceptual.

In fact, there's really no excuse for not being able to add a little workplace story as an example to every pitch you're making. You can almost always find one without looking too hard. Just tell them about what the impact of the situation was on a particular individual.

I do just want to give you a little warning and guidance about using workplace stories, though. Whenever you take this approach, be very explicit that you're using the story merely as an illustration. So why is that necessary? Well, decision-makers love to make decisions. I have often seen them start treating an example, that illustration, as the specific issue that needs to be solved. And then they start chasing off on that tangent instead of staying with you and hearing the rest of your pitch.

Being explicit that this story that you're giving them is merely an illustration of a larger point that you're making is a good way of avoiding having your pitch interrupted as decision-makers go down a rabbit hole.

So, now that I've given you two imagery tips, let's turn our attention to things you can do when you want to guide the decision-makers you're aiming your pitch to. First up are rhetorical questions. Using rhetorical questions is such an easy and also effective approach.

Normally, most informal and formal presentations in the workplace are entirely made up of statements. In other words, people are telling you facts or making assertions. Think about that for a moment. How does it make you feel if someone is standing in front of you and doing nothing but making firm statements about what should be done about something?

So, in my opinion, the speaker believes he or she is demonstrating a reassuring confidence. But from the point of view of the listener, it kind of feels more like the speaker is staking out his or her territory or position. And that, in turn, feels to me as the listener, like the start of a debate, not an invitation to consider a great new idea.

When speakers talk that way, they miss a wonderful opportunity to draw the listener in and guide him or her along the path. So what instead is oh so easy to do? Simply turn some of those statements into questions that don't require an answer. In other words, turn some of those statements into rhetorical questions.

And why is that so much more effective? As human beings, we're wired to have a reflexive mental response to questions. Even when we already know the answers. Questions hook our interest, despite ourselves, and make us pay closer attention. We're more interested. We're more focused. And we're less distracted when we hear a question. And isn't that what you want people to be when they're listening to your pitch or presentation?

So here are a few examples of very simple rhetorical questions that are easy for you to add to your presentation. And that, in fact, hook your listeners to pay closer attention. So here's one, we did X, and what do you think happened next? Or here's another example, or if we do X, what will happen next? Here's another question, who is most affected by the decision we're going to make today? And then you go on and just answer that question.

Or here's another question, when we did the analysis, what do you think we found out? Then you go on and answer, right? And here's another one where you sort of invite people into your thinking process; as we thought about this issue, we asked ourselves, what outcomes do we want to achieve?

Now, all of these questions are ones that you immediately answer, of course. You ask the question to introduce a subtle sense of tension or curiosity in the listener. And then you almost immediately resolve that tension by providing an

interesting or satisfying resolution, i.e., the answer. And when you do that, you actually give the listener a little hit of dopamine. We all get that hit of dopamine when something is not left dangling, and we have a sense of completion.

By the way, I highly recommend that you always weave in this approach when you're creating titles for your PowerPoint slides. Or at least that's what you should do if you want your listeners to be even more attentive and focused. Our normal approach is to simply title the slide with the material that's on the slide, but I know whenever I do that, I'm actually being a little lazy because I've wasted the opportunity to create interest at the very first place that a reader goes to when they're looking at my deck.

So here's an example of what I mean; let's say I have to show last quarter's results on a slide in a presentation. So what should I call that slide? Well, nine out of ten people say, duh, Kathy, just call it last quarter's results, of course. But I could instead title it; how did we do last quarter? Or I could even title it what did we learn last quarter?

See how simply using a question instead of a statement is likely to capture your audience's attention just for a little bit and cause it to focus more completely on what you want to say about the information in that slide. So that was tip number one when it comes to structure.

Tip number two is a very cool way of drawing people in and guiding them along, so they are aligned with the way you see things. The way this strategy works is first, you decide what kind of story you're telling. And then, you weave that into your presentation or pitch as an organizing theme.

Now, I know that sounds kind of vague and conceptual, but let me show you what I'm talking about, and you'll see it's really pretty straightforward and simple. So first, what do I mean about deciding what kind of story you're in? Well, are you in a mystery story? Something that was puzzling everyone, but you now have the key.

Or is it a story about evolution, and growth, the need to build on the foundation of the past in order to be prepared for the challenges of the future? Or maybe it's a story about company heroism, being the David who can take on Goliath. Or perhaps it's a story of exploration, being the trailblazers who go to new frontiers, discover new things, and lead the way.

Now, I'm not saying you have to explicitly tell your audience that your pitch is a story about one of those things. But just like all human beings are wired to have a reflexive response to questions, so too we're wired to have an affinity for stories. One of the things that make us distinctive as human beings is that we make sense

of the world around us by telling ourselves stories about it. You do it. I do it. We all do it.

So if you want your audience to be in the same story as you, it's extremely helpful for you to get clear ahead of time what that story is and what character you're playing in that story. For example, are you the detective asking questions about what happened here so we can get that mystery solved? Are you the bold adventurer who's inspiring us to take voyages to places unknown? Are you the kind and wise parent encouraging others not to be afraid to change and grow?

Once you know your story and your character, you can weave little clues into your pitch and presentation so that everyone else inhabits that story with you. Here's a great example I saw one of my clients use. We can call her Erin. And Erin was a female Senior Vice President of HR who was seeking the approval of the senior management team for a talent development program.

In the past, one of her male peers had disdainfully characterized the initiative as a feel-good program. And he questioned the wisdom of the expenditure because the economic climate at that time was particularly tough. So Erin decided that in her pitch, she was in a war story, rallying the troops to do the tough thing that was required to win the economic war.

And here's a summary of her main message. She said, "I understand why some of us might want to play it safe in this environment." Notice she was signaling that she, herself was tougher and had a greater appetite for risk than some of her peers. That was a good move. Then she went on to say, "However, talent is what gives us a competitive edge in our markets. And quite frankly, we're now in a war for talent against our competitors. This program, this development program, is a power play to win the war. And the money we spend on it is an investment."

Notice that she said investment, not an expense. "It's an investment that will have the following rate of return." So, see how Erin portrayed herself as a general in a worse story versus a touchy-feeling HR person looking only to spend money and make others feel good? It's pretty cool, right? There are all these little phrases that she sprinkled in that were consistent with the story she was telling. Things like competitive edge, war for talent, power play to win that war, and various things like that.

By the way, Erin did, in fact, win approval for the program. And she also scored personal points for projecting strength and authority in the process. It was a very skillful performance. But actually, it wasn't that hard to do, and it's something that any one of us can easily emulate.

So there you have it, some great ways to spice up your pitch, draw people in, and increase your persuasive power. I'm looking forward to hearing some good stories from all of you as you apply these tips to win approval for your own ideas.

Okay, everyone, time to wrap up this episode of *Mastering The Power Skills*. I hope you all have an awesome week ahead. And I'll see you in our next episode.

Hey there, would you like some personal guidance about how to use the power skills of influence, persuasion, or presence on a particular situation in your workplace? Well, if so, we've got your back. Just send us a note explaining your situation to [powerskills@significagroup.com](mailto:powerskills@significagroup.com). We'll drop that email address in the show notes. We'll feature your inquiry in an upcoming episode, keeping your identity anonymous, of course, and make sure you have some tips and strategies to help you navigate your particular situation skillfully.

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