

# Don't Get Stuck on the Opening

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Where most people get hung up is the opening. However, that's actually the most important part of a conversation. If those first few minutes aren't rock solid, it is unlikely the audience will listen all the way to the end. People make instantaneous decisions about whether they like or need what you have to say so you need to make it relevant right from the start. A good way to open any presentation is to answer the questions people typically have:

- What's the Problem or Issue you want to discuss?
- What is your Recommendation for handling it?
- What's the Value to me or the company?
- What Actions do I need to take after the meeting?

These four elements comprise your purpose statement and are your guardrails for staying on the right path. To help you remember them, create "stem sentences" that incorporate the key words above. For example, you might say something like, "The problem we are having is.... My recommendation for dealing with this is.... The return on investment is.... The action I need from you is.... Once you can remember keywords, you can drop the stems.

Each element should consist of no more than two to three sentences. The entire Purpose Statement should take two minutes or less to articulate.

## The Problem or Issue

Begin by focusing attention on a problem or issue and why it matters. Remember, listeners, particularly bosses are all about solving problems. The bigger the issue, the more it becomes a priority. You must convince your audience that what's happening right now isn't okay or that there is an opportunity for change.

If you skip defining the problem, you leave people hanging, trying to figure the importance of your information on their own. Boil it down to a couple of sentences only. The details come later- in the middle.

## Your Recommendation

You're the subject matter expert. Don't just re-

port information. Anyone can do that. Your listeners are looking to you to make a recommendation on how to proceed. Again, be brief. No deep dives!

## The Value

No one wants to make a mistake. Jobs could be on the line. People always weigh the consequences of their business decisions. That's why it's important to highlight the value of your ideas and recommendations. Will there be a return on investment, greater efficiency or less downtime? The more you can quantify your conclusions, the more you increase your ability to influence.

## Actions needed

Give people a "heads up" on what you want or need after the meeting right up front. Don't save the big reveal for the end of your meeting. Individuals like to be aware of your "ask" from the beginning so they can evaluate your ideas as you present them. For example, if you will be asking for budget, new equipment or head count, state it directly. Don't hedge.

Putting all four elements of your Purpose Statement together makes a killer impression, but you better check to see if everyone is in agreement or wishes to modify any of your points. The last thing you want is to move forward based on false assumptions. With their validation and in just a few sentences, you can focus attention where it needs to be and be off to a great start.

**Question:** *What is your response to opening a meeting in this fashion? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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