



Four Simple Steps to Make Messages Memorable

A Gwen Parks Group Quick Reference Guide

Ever wonder why people don't understand what you say even when you feel you've been perfectly clear?

There's more to communication than the words being presented. Every listener or reader has a different way of perceiving the world.

If you **really** want to grab someone's attention and inspire action, it's helpful to keep in mind that each person in your audience has different needs.

These needs can be summarized in four different categories: **Purpose, Picture, Plan** and **Possibility**.

Keeping the 4P's in mind every time you prepare an important message will help ensure that each recipient takes away a clear action and understanding. Clarity and commitment of others will reduce your frustration, save you time and help you and your team achieve your goals faster.

This quick reference guide includes information about each area along with some practical examples of communication that follows this pattern.

I've seen how effective this method can be, and I know it will help you, too!



Gwen Parks

PURPOSE

Is the purpose of your message clear?

Some people need to know the “why” behind every message and request for action, so start by providing the context for your communication.

A little history or background goes a long way in getting this group of people receiving your message. Think of someone sitting in front of you asking “Why?” as you formulate your message.

Why should I read this?

Why should I care about this?

Why is this important?

Be prepared to provide examples and data to make the essence of your message stick. Also be prepared to field questions and answer those questions succinctly.

Here are some questions to ask yourself when reviewing your message for purpose:

- Is there a context sentence up front?
- Are there pertinent examples or data?
- Is the message important to my audience?
- Is the reason for the message clear?
- Am I prepared for additional feedback or discussion about the topic?

PICTURE

Is there a picture of what to do as a result of your message?

Some people don't need to know the purpose behind the conversation. They do, however, need to walk away with a clear picture of the end result OR what they should be doing as a result of your message or conversation.

What is obvious to you, might not be obvious to others. Read your message from the literal point of view. Fluffy, feel good marketing language might be your natural style, but you might be confusing recipients who interpret language literally. When communicating face to face, look for signs of confusion on the face of your recipient. Follow up with your recipient to check in on what action he or she plans to take after your communication.

In other words, what is the call to action and what do you want someone to **do** or **not do** as a result of the message?

Questions to ask yourself when reviewing for **PICTURE** are:

- If I read this literally, what is missing or what might be unclear?
- Am I expecting the recipients of this message to fill in the blanks?
- Am I expecting people to supply collateral information or understanding in order to know what my message is conveying?
- Would all recipients of the message have a clear picture of what I am asking them to do or refrain from doing?
- If we were sketching out this idea on a white board or on a napkin, what would it look like?
- Is the subject matter in the email crystal clear?

PLAN

How does this relate to the bigger picture?

While some people dive in to conversations, interrupting each other with new ideas, others have a need to know how each bit of communication fits with prior messages and with their overarching plan for the project, day or week. Importantly, DO NOT interrupt people with this need when in conversation!

For people who link message to the overarching plan, a single discussion that is not linked to other discussions will give the person a feeling of disconnection and can be a barrier to buy-in. If your message is important, you can unintentionally dilute or confuse your message by trying to add clarity through unconnected conversations, including “drive-by” comments that might be intended to generate enthusiasm.

For people who need to know the **PLAN**, review the message and ask yourself:

- Am I giving the recipient enough notice to incorporate the new information into their plans at their preferred pace?
- Will the recipient of this message know how it fits into the overall strategy and plan?
- What does this person need to fit this information into plan now and in the future?
- Is this idea disruptive? If so, how will recipients receive additional information needed to produce a result?
- Have I provided the beginning, middle and end of the larger conversation?

POSSIBILITY

Sharing the excitement of things to come.

Some people need a bottom line message that grabs their attention.

They want to feel the excitement of joining you to meet a challenge and create a positive future.

Watch for excitement and positive language in response of your message. Welcome interruptions of brainstorming from this type of recipient of your message...it's a sign they are engaged! Blank stares, changing the topic or what appears to be disregard from this person will be signs that you missed the mark with your opening message.

People who respond well to your crisp, upbeat message want to know how they can make a positive impact on the outcome. They will connect with your genuine passion and enthusiasm. Invite them to play a positive role in action going forward.

Questions to ask yourself are:

- Did I get to the point quickly?
- Am I positive or could the tone of my message be perceived as negative?
- Will the recipient of my message be excited about an opportunity to become part of something fun or impactful?
- Am I open to brainstorming while I deliver the message to this recipient?

SUMMARY

People are wired many different ways. Your natural style will not always fit the needs of your audience.

Get to know the needs of your inner circle – be it family, friends, team members or key stakeholders. Once you start watching, the applicable “P” that works for another person might become quickly apparent. Or, better yet, ask someone what type of communication works best for them. The dialogue from that question can build strong relationships as well as

While you might need only one “P”, make sure all four are covered in any important message you share with a group. This increases the opportunity for early adoption and continued engagement. Early engagement and rapid alignment can translate into acceleration of execution.

And as a little bonus, here is another **P: PERSISTENCE.**

Today's over-messaged environment is a reality for the foreseeable future. Don't take it personally if people don't immediately understand the intent and meaning behind your message on your first communication.

Consider trying several communication paths at once. Follow up. If you are concerned that you are annoying someone with over-communication, ask them before you simply stop the messages. Continue refining your message until your desired result is evident.

If you want to eliminate the guess work in knowing the specific needs of your audience, we can help!

For more information about how to manage your human assets wisely contact us at info@gwenparksgroup.com and visit our website www.gwenparksgroup.com.

APPLICATION EXERCISE

In order to make this information immediately useful for you, we are including an exercise using a real life example.

We are providing a sample message and we will help you restructure the message using our four Guidelines.

Example:

Imagine a project manager who reports to you has presented the following message. He wants your approval and is going to send the message over your signature to a group of two hundred and fifty people.

“In light of our recent customer survey, to improve our customer retention, we’ve decided to implement a new constituent management system. Please watch for and accept the meeting request for the company-wide training that will take place next month. The new system will help us meet our current business objectives by keeping better track of our current and potential customers, and will move us towards our vision of becoming the premiere service provider in our industry by 2020.”

PURPOSE

Is the purpose of your message clear?

“In light of our recent customer survey, to improve our customer retention, we’ve decided to implement a new constituent management system. Please watch for and accept the meeting request for the company-wide training that will take place next month. The new system will help us meet our current business objectives by keeping better track of our current and potential customers, and will move us towards our vision of becoming the premiere service provider in our industry by 2020.”

Open the message with clear purpose: *“We want you to help us improve our customer retention.”*

- Think about the “Why?” questions.
 - An obvious “why” is why you need to improve customer retention. Consider including real and meaningful data to support your message. “A recent customer survey revealed that we have a 33% customer retention rate. This is well below the industry standard of 57%.” This creates a meaningful and immediate context and purpose to the reader.
 - Another “why” would be “why is this my problem?”. Include an explanation about the importance of participation of the recipient of the message. “Everyone in this organization uses the customer management system. Accordingly, we need everyone to be trained on the system to ensure smooth and accurate transition.”
- Provide as many details as you can, including the actual date and time of the training, where the training will be and the options for compliance if you can.

PICTURE

Is there a picture of what to do as a result of your message?

“In light of our recent customer survey, to improve our customer retention, we’ve decided to implement a new constituent management system. Please watch for and accept the meeting request for the company-wide training that will take place next month. The new system will help us meet our current business objectives by keeping better track of our current and potential customers, and will move us towards our vision of becoming the premiere service provider in our industry by 2020.”

Make sure that by the message, the recipient has a crisp description that paints a visual picture of what the recipient is to do. *“We want to retain more customers and are changing our constituent management system. Here’s how you can help.”*

Read the message through for a clear call to action.

- “Watch for a meeting request for an unspecified time” creates unnecessary ambiguity. Some good approaches would be to provide a immediate contact for questions, and suggesting ways recipients can become involved or prepare for the meeting.
- Identify the benefits of new actions or stopping current actions. For example, “Under the new system, all information will be accessible by any device, not just your desktop” or “we will update customer data daily instead of weekly.”
- Eliminate unnecessary words and ambiguity. While inspirational, the closing sentence also creates ambiguity. How will the system keep better track of current and potential customers? What current business objectives will the new system meet? What does “premiere service provider” look like? Describe what how you will know when you are the “premiere service provider in our industry.”

PLAN

How does this relate to the big picture?

“In light of our recent customer survey, to improve our customer retention, we’ve decided to implement a new constituent management system. Please watch for and accept the meeting request for the company-wide training that will take place next month. The new system will help us meet our current business objectives by keeping better track of our current and potential customers, and will move us towards our vision of becoming the premiere service provider in our industry by 2020.”

Include explicit context about how this training fits into a larger plan for the company. “Our vision for the company is to be the premiere service provider in our industry by 2020. That means we have committed to improving customer retention 5% every year.”

Remind the recipient of prior communications and provide as much detail about next steps as you can.

- For example: “Over the past year we conducted a customer survey. The results showed that customers were leaving us and going with competitors because we weren’t in communication with them. When we conducted an internal audit we discovered many issues with our current CRM system.”
- Provide a timeline for training, review and adoption of the new system.
- Provide details of how participants will be supported throughout the transition process after training.
- Provide reassurance of what won’t change if you can. “You will still have instant access to your data.”

POSSIBILITY

Sharing the excitement of things to come!

“In light of our recent customer survey, to improve our customer retention, we’ve decided to implement a new constituent management system. Please watch for and accept the meeting request for the company-wide training that will take place next month. The new system will help us meet our current business objectives by keeping better track of our current and potential customers, and will move us towards our vision of becoming the premiere service provider in our industry by 2020.”

Think about the subject matter line of your email as an opportunity to provide an upbeat concise invitation and call to action: “Exciting update: we’re starting training on our new CRM system next month.”

Make sure to include:

- Positive language about the bigger vision. “We’re one step closer to becoming the premier service provider in our industry.”
- The benefits of enduring the training. “You’ll be able to contact more clients easier and in a more personalized way.”
- What they can do immediately and simply to be involved. “All you need to do is accept the training invite when you see it.”
- Think about including some fun. “We have a special prize for the first twenty people to accept the training invite.”