

THE ART OF PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION

Four simple storytelling frameworks to help you influence with clarity, credibility, and impact

WHAT THIS IS

This short guide gives you four powerful, research-backed frameworks you can use to make your communication more engaging, memorable, and persuasive.

Each one can be used to **structure a presentation, pitch, conversation, or written message** depending on your goal.

It builds on the ideas in *Be More Strategic, Chapter 11: Be Persuasive, Be an Influencer*, where Charlie explores how persuasion is not manipulation, but the ability to *connect, clarify, and compel*.

“Influence is what happens when people feel seen, understand your message, and choose to act on it.”

WHY IT MATTERS

No matter how strong your ideas are, they live or die on how well you communicate them. The best communicators don't rely on charisma, they rely on structure.

A clear framework helps you:

- Turn information into a story people remember
- Build emotional and logical connection
- Focus your message on what your audience cares about most
- Move people from agreement to action



FRAMEWORK 1 – THE “WHAT IS / WHAT COULD BE” STORY ARC (NANCY DUARTE)

Nancy Duarte’s research into thousands of TED Talks and famous speeches found that powerful communicators move audiences by **oscillating between present reality and future possibility**.

How to Use It

Structure your message like this:

1. **What Is:** Describe the current reality. Make it relatable and honest.
“Right now, our processes are slow and disconnected.”
2. **What Could Be:** Paint the picture of a better future. Make it vivid.
“Imagine a system that connects every function in real time.”
3. **Back and Forth:** Move between the two states a few times to build contrast and emotion.
4. **New Bliss:** End by showing what happens when the audience chooses to act.

Why it works: Contrast is emotion. The gap between “what is” and “what could be” creates energy and momentum.

FRAMEWORK 2 – THE “FOUR CS” MODEL (JEREMY CONNELL-WAITE, IBM STORYTELLER)

Jeremy Connell-Waite’s storytelling work focuses on clarity and human connection in complex communication. His model helps you make ideas simple, personal, and memorable.

How to Use It

Every persuasive message should include these four elements:

1. **Context:** Set the scene. Why this matters now.
“Our industry is changing faster than ever.”
2. **Conflict:** Name the challenge or tension.



“We’re working harder but not faster.”

3. **Conclusion:** Reveal your insight or key idea.

“We need to simplify, not add more complexity.”

4. **Call to Action:** Tell them what you want them to do next.

“Here’s how we start. One process, one team.”

Why it works: It follows how the human brain processes narrative, context builds safety, conflict creates curiosity, conclusion provides clarity, and a call to action gives closure.

FRAMEWORK 3 – THE “GOLDEN CIRCLE” (SIMON SINEK)

Simon Sinek’s **Why > How > What** model is simple but enduring because it flips the order most leaders use when communicating.

How to Use It

1. **Why:** Start with purpose. Why does this matter? Why should they care?

“We believe collaboration drives innovation.”

2. **How:** Explain the process or approach.

“We’re redesigning how teams work together to share insights faster.”

3. **What:** End with the tangible action or offer.

“Starting next month, we’ll run cross-team innovation sprints.”

Why it works: People don’t buy what you do. They buy *why* you do it. Emotion drives attention; logic sustains it.

FRAMEWORK 4 – THE SCQA METHOD (BARBARA MINTO, MCKINSEY)

The Situation-Complication-Question-Answer structure is widely used in consulting and strategy storytelling. It’s perfect for written communication or presentations where clarity is critical.

How to Use It



1. **Situation:** Establish the context.

“Customer satisfaction scores have fallen for three quarters.”

2. **Complication:** Introduce the problem or tension.

“Our service model hasn’t adapted to new customer expectations.”

3. **Question:** Pose the key question your analysis will answer.

“How do we deliver better experiences without increasing cost?”

4. **Answer:** Present your main message or recommendation.

“By redesigning our onboarding journey around self-service.”

Why it works: It aligns with how analytical audiences process information, problem, logic, solution. Ideal for strategy papers or executive summaries.

CHOOSING THE RIGHT FRAMEWORK

SITUATION	TRY THIS FRAMEWORK
Inspiring a team or audience to act	Duarte’s <i>What Is / What Could Be</i>
Simplifying a complex idea	Connell-Waite’s <i>Four Cs</i>
Communicating vision or purpose	Sinek’s <i>Golden Circle</i>
Presenting analysis or recommendation	Minto’s <i>SCQA</i>

Tip: Mix and adapt them — start with Sinek’s “Why”, then use Duarte’s contrast to make the story compelling.



WHAT TO DO NEXT

Choose an upcoming presentation, meeting or update.

1. Pick one framework.
2. Draft your message using its structure.
3. Rehearse aloud. Check for flow and energy.
4. Ask a colleague: “*What did you take away?*”
If they can recall both the *message* and the *meaning*, you’ve done it right.

TAKING IT FURTHER

You can combine this guide with the Stakeholder Mapping tool to tailor messages to specific audiences, focusing on what motivates, worries, or inspires them.

If you’d like to develop these skills further, Charlie runs Strategic Storytelling Workshops for leadership teams and communicators.

REMEMBER:

Facts tell. Stories move.

The most persuasive communicators don’t just share information — they build understanding, emotion, and trust. That’s influence.

