



# Presenting Data- Driven **Messages**

4 Messaging Models for Presenting  
Business Intelligence



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# Welcome

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According to Forbes Magazine, over 90% of the world's data has been created in the last two years. But collections of data are not helpful until we can wrangle the data and analyze it. Welcome to the world of Data Science. Today we use data to describe, diagnose, predict, and prescribe solutions in our businesses.

But in many cases, sharing a concise message to properly articulate the essence of your data-driven research can be a real challenge. Without a messaging tool to help, we end up providing a word salad full of data to the audience. This form of data dump is jokingly called by some the “Show-up-and-throw-up” method of delivering a presentation.

Your audiences don't want the data. They want the answer, and they want to know how it affects them... and if you could do it in less time too, that'd be great. **If you've been looking for simple tools and answers to build better data messages, this eBook is for you.**

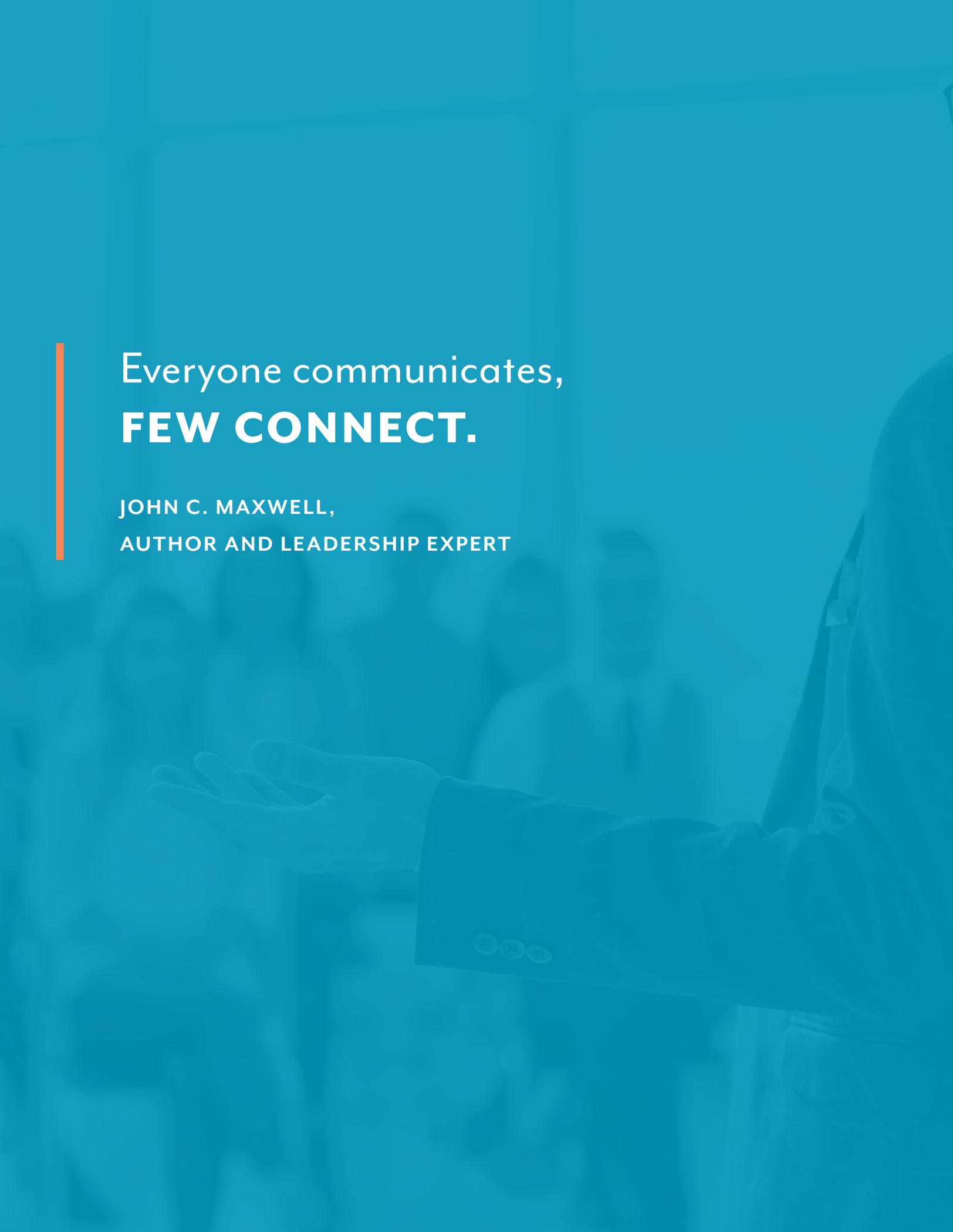
We've been helping people in technical roles create simple, powerful, and influential messages that both enable and promote change for over 20 years now. We know these can help you too. If you have any questions as you learn and use these tools, [please reach out to our team](#) and follow us on [LinkedIn](#).

**All the best!**

*Russ Peterson Jr.*

**Russ Peterson Jr.**

Co-Founder of iSpeak, Inc.



Everyone communicates,  
**FEW CONNECT.**

JOHN C. MAXWELL,  
AUTHOR AND LEADERSHIP EXPERT

## 3 Elements to Prepare a Data Message

### WHAT PLANET ARE YOU FROM?

As a child of the 70's and 80's I'm willing to admit... I'm a Star Wars fan. But I'm even more of a Boba Fett fan. Recently, while watching an episode of the streaming series [The Book of Boba Fett](#), I noticed one of the aliens (*I don't know which alien species... I'm a fan, but not that big of a fan!*) had an electronic device attached to his neck.

When he spoke, his alien language would automatically be interpreted into English or whatever language the audience needed to hear. How anyone actually understands R2-D2 is still a mystery to me. ;-)



That scene made me think about how we each communicate with our audiences. While we may all be speaking the same language (English, Spanish, Mandarin, Italian, German, etc.) we don't always speak the same way. Our departments are like different planets. For example, I've seen plenty of **software engineers speak to frustrated senior business leaders**. I've also seen **senior leaders speak to disengaged team members**.

If you and your audience are not from the same planet, **make sure you're speaking the same language** to be heard and understood.

## WHY DOES THIS HAPPEN?

In one sense, it's hard to say exactly what causes us to develop messages more in tune with ourselves than in line with our audience. But then again, we don't have to look very far to see that we are all a bit selfish. What do I mean by that? By nature, we tend to think of ourselves first and others second.

What does a misaligned message from a speaker sound like? I'm sure you've seen it before in simple statements like:

*"What I want to talk about is..."*

*"I want to take some time today and..."*

What are the reasons I've seen for speakers creating messages out of tune with their audience? Either they've **never been made aware of this issue**, they **don't think they have time** to tailor a message to the audience, or they've **never been given a simple tool to fix it**.

Well, that changes today. [Here's your tool](#).

## HOW CAN WE FIX IT?

We teach a simple tool in our [Message Builder workshop](#) to help you build a bridge from your planet to the audience's planet.





## 1. KNOW YOUR PLANET

We call this tool **the 6 questions**. You start with the end in mind. Describe your planet. If you're going to invite your audience to a new planet, make sure you know how to describe it in your brochure! What is your goal for speaking? In other words, at the end of your presentation, what do you want your audience **to know**? How do you want them **to feel**? What do you want them **to do**? **These three questions** make up the destination or goal for speaking. It's your planet.

## 2. KNOW THE AUDIENCE'S PLANET

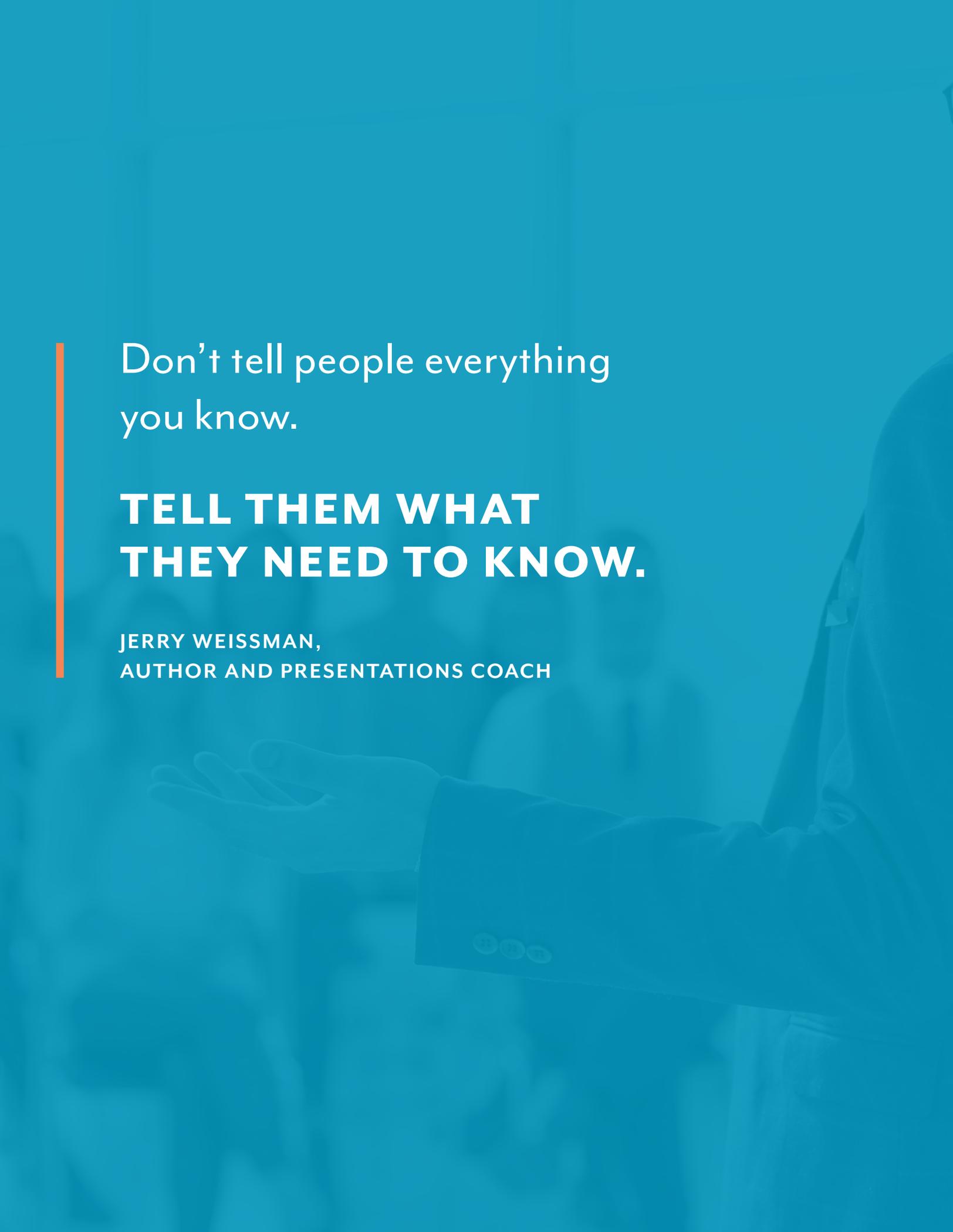
Now, turn to your audience. There are three questions to answer here also. **First, Who are these people?** Are they executives, accountants, salespeople, new hires, 5th graders, engineers, etc.? Start thinking like them. **Second, What do they currently think about your topic?** What do they know or think they know? **Third, How much do they really care about this topic or how do they feel about your topic?** This is the planet they live on.

## 3. CONNECT THE TWO WORLDS

Once you've answered the three audience questions, your head is in a much better place to start constructing a message to connect these two worlds. Your objective with your message is to build a bridge from where they are today (their planet) to where you'd like them to be tomorrow... on your planet.

In the Star Wars universe, language never seems to be a problem because the aliens either understand each other inherently or they have a C3-PO protocol droid. For us here on planet earth, even when we speak the same language, **we still need to understand how the audience's world differs from our own** before we construct a message for them. They may be very different from each other. As your data messaging adventures begin... May the force be with you... This is the way.

**Now, before we give you the blueprints for some of the most common data messaging bridges, let's start with 5 tips to help you untangle your presentation and deliver your best data message.**



Don't tell people everything  
you know.

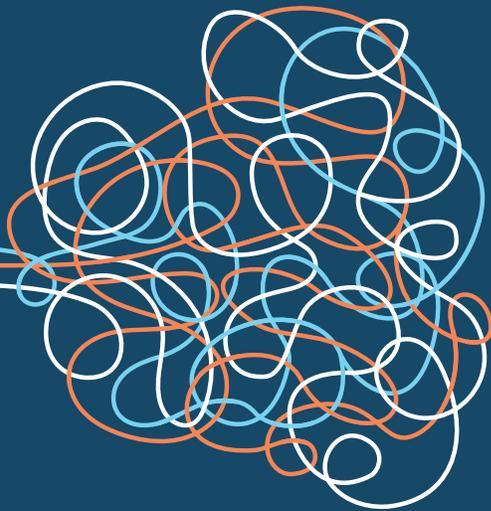
**TELL THEM WHAT  
THEY NEED TO KNOW.**

JERRY WEISSMAN,  
AUTHOR AND PRESENTATIONS COACH

# 5 Tips to Untangle Your Data Presentation

## IS YOUR DATA PRESENTATION A TANGLED MESS?

Computers have brought us to an age where data can be wrangled 8 ways to Sunday in a matter of nanoseconds. Some people call that the “heavy lifting” of data analytics. In my opinion, **the toughest lifting of data analytics is when the data is communicated to an audience to influence a change.** If you can’t communicate the data effectively to your audience, then what value is the data? I’d argue the data is worthless... because nothing changed.



**So how can we untangle our data mess to create a clear message that creates change? Here are 5 tips to help present your best untangled data message.**



## 1. KNOW YOUR GOAL

You've been asked to speak for a reason. Know what that reason is before you build your message. I know you've been in presentations just like me where the speaker dumps a load of data on the audience. The "show-up-and-throw-up" practice of data presentations is not what the audience wants.

There are [4 primary goals for presenting data](#). You are either **informing, interpreting, recommending, or influencing**. Select your primary mission for speaking to this audience and use it as your guiding light when deciding how much data or which kinds of data to include in your message.

## 2. CONNECT THE DATA TO YOUR AUDIENCE

People don't care about data or even what it means... **but they do care about how the data affects them**. In other words, how does this information affect them personally? their group? their organization? I'm reminded of the movie Jerry Maguire when Ray, Dorothy's scene-stealing son, tells Jerry the human head weighs 8 pounds. It's just useless data, unless that noggin weight affects you directly somehow.

<https://youtu.be/OgBK2sy20IA>

In the same scene, Jerry responds to Ray with sports trivia about [Troy Aikman's NFL passing statistics](#). Again... this is just trivia. It's meaningless to the audience... unless your audience is Troy Aikman, the Dallas Cowboys, or Jerry Maguire (a sports agent), because all of those people have something to gain from those amazing statistics.

It is trivial, until it isn't. **When does trivia become more than trivia? When it affects you directly**. Think about how your data affects the audience and then show them.



### 3. USE A THROUGH LINE

If the audience cares, but they can't follow you, they will check out. When you speak to an audience, they want to see the "through line" for the message. Using Hollywood movie terminology, **the through line is the storyline for the audience.**

While scenes may jump from one time or location to another, we need to see how the dots connect. Think about your message and show how your data supports a message that moves from one dot to the next. Use one of the iSpeak data message models most aligned with your goal for speaking. **We will get into those messaging models in part 4 of this eBook.**

### 4. ENGAGE WITH THE DATA

Logic alone never makes a decision. **There's always a feeling attached to it.** That feeling may be nothing more than "confidence" in the data, but that's still a feeling. For us as humans to engage with numbers, it must be meaningful and relatable. According to [Chip Heath and Karla Starr in their book Making Numbers Count](#), the human species relates best to smaller numbers. That doesn't mean we can't logically understand a large number like 256,000... it just means we don't relate to it like we do with the number 9.

If there were 256,000 people displaced by an earthquake, I can understand it, but I can't properly relate or engage with it. But if there are 9 baseball players on a team, I can picture that and relate to it.

Using one of the examples [Heath and Starr give in their book](#), they recommend making a scale model of something so we can relate to it better. Instead of telling people that Mt. Everest is over 29,000 feet above sea level, you could say something like this...

If humans were the size of a fire ant then Mt. Everest would be the height of a suburban two-story home with an attic!

## 5. GIVE THEM “THE ASK”

In our messaging workshops, I’m always surprised when learners ask if they can include transitions to label the sections of their message for the audience. My response is always the same, “YES! Please do!” Show them when you move from one section of your message to another and if you need something from the audience, make “your ask” crystal clear!

In North American culture, an inductive approach to messaging is appreciated. Give the audience your answer first (or ask first). Then, provide your data-supported message using a strong through line to support your answer or ask. Include engaging data to connect the feeling to the numbers with all of it pointing to the reason why the audience should care. Finally, give them the ask one more time at the very end.



## You’ve Got This!

Presenting data analytics is about so much more than just the data. It’s about what the data tells us AND how that data affects the humans in the audience. Remember, the more difficult we make it on the audience to follow, the more likely they are to quit. In other words... they stop listening to you and start scrolling on their phones!

Now that we understand the concept of connecting two worlds and you have these tips for improvement, let’s turn to the bridge building. We will start by selecting your data messaging goal, then using an iSpeak Data-Messaging Model to build a presentation to achieve that goal.

## 4 DataMessaging Goals

*“Why are my leaders always questioning my data results?”* This was the question from my data analytics student, and he was frustrated. So, I asked him, *“What do you mean? Can you give me an example?”*

*“Sure. Every time I give them the test results and I tell them what the results mean, they start asking me things like...”*

- *What does this mean for our business units?*
- *What should we do with this information?*
- *Where do we go from here?*

*“How am I supposed to know the answers to all this? Isn’t that their job*

*anyway? I did my data analysis and now it should be up to them. I don’t know why they keep pushing the next steps back on me.”*

*As I smiled back at my student* he was confused by my facial expression. He asked me, *“Why are you smiling?”*

*“You should be flattered. This group of leaders is inviting you into a leadership conversation. They see you as more than just a data messenger or even a data specialist. They see you as a leader and they are inviting you into a future-oriented conversation.”*

Data presentations fall on a spectrum of goals:



## INFORM → INTERPRET → RECOMMEND → INFLUENCE

This student was **interpreting**... but his audience was asking him to also **recommend**. Leaders communicate most often on the right side of this spectrum with recommending and influencing.



### What are the 4 Data Messaging Goals?

In the world of data science, there are 4 types of analytics you can leverage to extract meaning from the data. These four types align with your goals for presenting. They help you construct your message by keeping you focused on your reason for presenting. Start by asking yourself this question...

**What is your goal for speaking to the audience?** Are you trying to **inform** the audience, **interpret** for them, **recommend** a solution, or **influence** them to make a particular choice?

#### DESCRIPTIVE — INFORM

This form of data analysis focuses on reviewing information from the past, aggregating the data, examining, and understanding. Some communication **examples** of this type of messaging goal are project updates or team status reports. You present your update and answer any questions. **You're a messenger** delivering the data.

#### DIAGNOSTIC — INTERPRET

This type of message pursues a slightly deeper look into the data to understand the “why” behind it. **You're an expert** and an interpreter of the data. The audience is relying on your expertise to interpret the data for them. Your focus is to help them understand what led to the results you've observed from the data. What does the data mean to the audience? Examples of this type of presentation are hardware test results, marketing A - B testing, or quarterly business reviews.



## PREDICTIVE — RECOMMEND

On the messaging spectrum, this is the **first type of analytic messaging that leans into influence**. Analyzing the data to not only understand the what and why, but now using that information to predict the future. This form of presentation leads to recommendations from the expert. It answers the question, “Knowing what we know now... where can we go from here?”

The presenter has an opinion based on the data, but also recognizes, it’s not entirely his/her decision. So, the presenter makes a recommendation supported by the evidence of the data. Then, the speaker allows the audience to make their own decision. As the speaker, **you’re the sage offering guidance to the hero (audience)**.

**Examples** of this type of presentation include recommendations based on sales trends and forecasts or technology expected fail/success rates after implementing product enhancements.

## PRESCRIPTIVE — INFLUENCE

Now we’ve reached the level of influence. **This level of data analytics looks for meaning in the past data to not only predict the future but create it**. This type of message helps the team make data-driven decisions to create a new future. The way is clear and the speaker does not leave the next steps open to interpretation.

With this message goal, it’s not only **clear what to do**, but it’s also **clear why we should do it**. The only question that may still be unclear is how to get it done. But that becomes the inspiration for the audience to take the next step. You influence the future destination, then you let them decide how to build the path to that future destination.

When the presenter has done the analysis to understand the results, why the results are happening, how the variables can be adjusted to change outcomes, and which option is the best choice moving forward...you have a compelling message to promote change. **You’re a leader when you positively influence the future**. Examples of these types of presentations include ROI calculations, visionary goals, or business case comparisons.



## How can you construct your messages for each goal type?

Now that you know the four types of data analytic messaging goals, you're ready to construct a message bridge to connect their planet to yours and achieve your desired goal. That's where we'll go next.

If you'd like to have us work directly with your team to help them build stronger data messages, our [Message Builder](#) and [Presenting Data Analytics](#) workshops are a great place to start. Or if you just have a few questions... [please get in touch!](#)

## SECTION 4

# The 4 Data Messaging Models

Have you ever been asked to deliver a **data-driven presentation** and it ends up being a **tangled mess**? You're not alone. You need a messaging model to create a smooth path.

Now that you know the **four goals in the spectrum of data-driven presentations** we can look at messaging models for each goal type. We've learned that depending on your goal with the audience (the reason you're speaking to them) your message structure and approach may change.



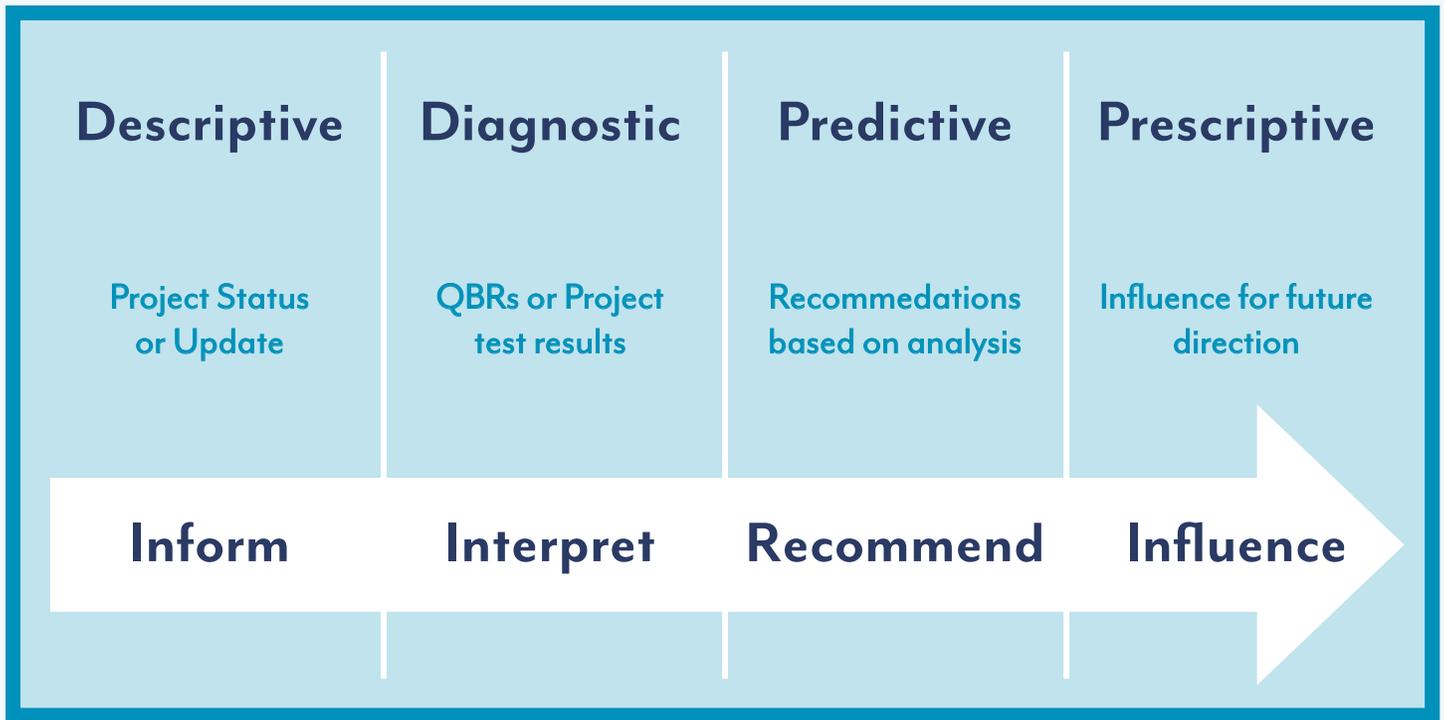
When you look deeper into these four levels along this spectrum, you'll notice there are two major categories for either **enabling change** (inform and interpret) or **promoting change** (recommend and influence).



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The question to ask yourself before constructing your message is “Why am I speaking to this audience on this subject? **Am I enabling** them to make a change, **or do I want to promote** this change?” The answer to these questions will determine how you approach your message structure.

Let’s look at all four levels of data analytic goals again, but this time we’ll give you a message model you can use with each.



## Inform

You've been asked to give an update on the Alpha Project. Of course, you know the Alpha Project like the back of your hand because you've been working on this now for over 3 months. The bi-weekly update meeting is not new to you or your audience. Your audience consists of mid-level managers and Sr. Directors. This group wants you to bring the project status information to them.

In situations like this, you don't have much of an "ask" of your audience. They are the ones who asked you to bring a status report. You're not asking for anything from them. When you don't really need anything from the audience, your job is to **make the update clear, concise, and complete.**

## TOOL: GOOD – BAD – NEW

This model is concise and easy to follow for the audience. We recommend using it for status update presentations because it gives the audience the basic information they want.

**The Good includes what is going well.** What have you accomplished since the last meeting?

**The Bad includes what has gone wrong.** What is not going so well? What are some of the challenges you've faced or are currently facing?

**The New includes your next steps** and what you will do to fix the bad, overcome obstacles, or prevent any of them from occurring again.

**INFORM** → INTERPRET → RECOMMEND → INFLUENCE



## Interpret

The next level of messaging is the interpretation of the data. In other words, you have an expertise on this subject and the audience needs more than just the data from you. **They need an interpretation.** What does all of this data mean? It's the answer to the "So what?" question weighing on their minds.

As you think about this question, remember to think about it through the lens of the audience. What does all this data mean *to the audience*? Is there an "aha" discovery that will affect them directly?

## TOOL: SITUATION – ACTION – RESULTS

This message model is highly flexible and has many messaging uses. We like it for data interpretations because it tells the audience how they are affected by the data discoveries.

**The Situation** section is used to give the status. Situations often answer several questions like Who? What? When? and Where? The situation may also call attention to a gap or deficiency the data suggests.

**The Action** describes the corrective options available. There could be several interpretations of the data which lead to several choices for possible next steps. The action section may also include a walk through the steps of your analysis process.

**The Results** tell the audience the results of your data wrangling, the expected costs, or the benefits of each corrective option you analyzed. Now they have the data with your interpretation of available options and expected impacts. They are informed to make a decision.

INFORM → **INTERPRET** → RECOMMEND → INFLUENCE



## Recommend

As you move further along our messaging spectrum to the recommend category, you've crossed over from simply offering helpful information for a change to **now offering your suggestions** on what the audience should do. **You are now promoting a change.** This messaging goal introduces risk to you because you are now promoting a singular solution. You are stepping into a leadership role with this type of messaging. Leaders envision the future, make a choice to go in that direction, and then help the team move toward that future.

With this target, you are equipping the audience with helpful information and also providing them with the... *"If I was you... this is what I would do."* To structure a message like this you need to consider how the audience feels about your subject before they hear your message. No change happens with logic alone. A feeling is always attached to it.

## TOOL: WHAT – WHY – HOW

With this model you **put more emphasis on the feeling** before you give your recommendation. That feeling is called out in the "why" section of this message.

**The What** is a description of the current situation. It is the reality the audience is facing, but they may not even be aware of the importance of this current reality. In some of the best messages the audience already knows the current situation, but what they are about to hear in the "why" section is how there is something very important they may be missing.

**The Why** focuses on the cost and the importance of the information. You could offer data on how much this situation will hurt (\$ or time, etc.) if it is not addressed. You could also focus on the positive of how great this will feel once the new goal is accomplished.

**The How** is your suggestion for the recommended steps to avoid the costs or reach the higher goals. You've done your part with the recommendation. You took a courageous step and put your name on a selected future path. Now, the rest is up to them.

INFORM → INTERPRET → **RECOMMEND** → INFLUENCE



## Influence

We've arrived at the most challenging messaging goal. You need to **share the right information** with the audience to move them toward the action you want them to take. When this message is done right, you don't need any formal authority to influence an audience.

Before we go any further, please understand **there is a world of difference between influence and manipulation**. The first is quite noble and used by all great leaders for the good of others. The second is pure evil and used only for selfish reasons, usually at the harm of others. We are talking about influence here.

## TOOL: THE CHANGE NARRATIVE

This message structure is more complex and its success lies in the gray area. In other words, subtle adjustments in the delivery or messaging can lead to success or failure. In a video game, this message model would be an expert level skill learned by your avatar only after reaching level 8 of the game! Proceed with caution.

You'll notice a similarity with this model to the Interpret goal messaging model (Situation – Action – Results) but this model includes a story at both the start and the finish. If you'd like our help implementing this messaging model, please check out our [Presenting Data Analytics](#) or [Corporate Storytelling](#) workshops. You can also just [get in touch](#) if you have questions.

- **Negative Story** – Sets the stage for the situation and why it is compelling
- **Situation** – Relate the negative story to the current situation
- **Action** – Provide the action steps that must be taken to correct this
- **Results** – Give the positive results to be found in the future
- **Inspiring Story** – Leave the audience with the inspiring story

INFORM → INTERPRET → RECOMMEND → **INFLUENCE**



## We never promised easy...

**But, it is manageable.** The next time you are faced with a data-driven presentation, consider which of the four destinations align with your goal for the audience. **Is your goal to Inform, Interpret, Recommend, or Influence?** Then, choose the right messaging template to help you get there.

And remember... we're always [here to help](#) when you need it.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Russ Peterson Jr.** is the co-founder and President of iSpeak, Inc. – An award-winning professional development training company. Russ is a speaker, international trainer, and published author on Professional Sales Communication and Business Communication. He delivers workshops, keynotes, and personal communication coaching services to business professionals in the US and around the world. iSpeak helps people build stronger relationships and achieve more through better communication. You can connect with Russ directly through LinkedIn.



*Russ Peterson Jr.*

**Russ Peterson Jr.**  
Co-Founder of iSpeak, Inc.

Over the past 30 years I've seen many changes with business professionals giving presentations. Most recently with the rise of business intelligence (BI) and the Data Sciences I've noticed more and more data making its way onto the presentations center stage. If they're not handled well, data presentations quickly turn into a tangled mess.

I've seen STEM programs in school help develop the next generation of math and science professionals. The soft skills of data communication are equally important to the success of these data professionals. We need to provide simple and effective tools to help all data presenters achieve more through informing, interpreting, recommending and influencing their audiences.

Our commitment at iSpeak is to continually research both science and communication to consistently bring you new messaging tools to support you in this fast growing field of Business Intelligence and Data Analytics.

If we can help you and your organization with more effective data messages and presentations, please contact us at [hello@iSpeak.com](mailto:hello@iSpeak.com).



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**Presenting Data Analytics** and **Message Builder**

workshops can benefit your organization, please click below to request an email contact from our team.

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