

8 Steps to Writing the Workplace Safety Speech

A Guide for CEO's, senior executives and safety professionals.



Let's face it, if you're reading this document you want to create a safety speech that will inspire and motivate your workforce to keep safe. You know any old speech won't do. Instead, you want a speech that would make Martin Luther King proud, or at least, staff to remember it for months (or years) to come.

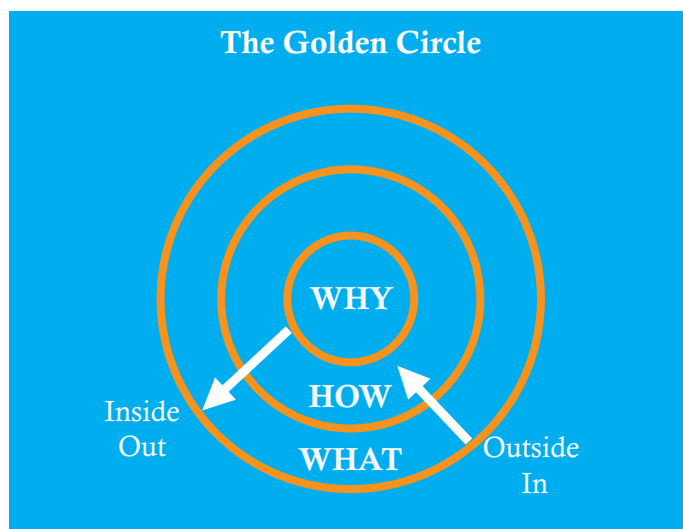
This paper will give you the tips to do this, but it involves thinking differently about how you produce a speech. If you want a short cut on how to write a safety speech, refer to the Safety Speech Checklist.

Are you ready?

It All Starts with Why

How did Martin Luther King create such a motivational speech? And how do some amazing speakers make you feel that the world can be a better place?

According to Simon Sinek author of **Start with Why**, the answer can be found in "The Golden Circle".



A lot of average companies communicate from the "outside in".

They start talking about what they do (we make cars) and how they do it (by improving fuel efficiency, our vehicles get you from A to B in comfort and style).

But they omit the "why". And "why" is a biggie. "Why" relates to your core purpose and it's what makes customers interested enough to listen and then, buy. It's also what motivates your staff to keep working with you.

Successful companies and leaders communicate from the "inside out". They talk from their heart.

Apple is a great example. They start their communication with "why" – "everything we do challenges the status quo (why), the way we challenge the status quo is by making beautifully designed products that are easy to use (how). We just happen to make great computers (what)".

People don't buy what you do, they buy why you do it.

While we might be talking about products, the same holds true with safety.

On a spiritual level, we all want to be part of something bigger than ourselves. Humans crave purpose in their life and to believe that their lives have meaning.

If you want to inspire staff to take action, explain why the company exists, why their job is important and how safety is a vital part of being a successful company.

As a leader you need to stand for something. Talk about what you believe. To get people to "buy in" to what you're saying, you need to produce an emotional connection to what you're trying to achieve.



The Act of Will – Roberto Assagioli

“Once there were three stonecutters engaged in the building of a cathedral in medieval times. A man came up to the first stonecutter, in the exhausting midday heat of a dying Italian summer, and asked him what he was doing. The stonecutter barely looked up, “As you can see”, he said bitterly, “I am cutting stones”. The man waited a while. Then, he went up to a second stonecutter and asked him the same question. This stonecutter didn’t hesitate. “I’m providing a living for my family”, he replied. Some time later, the man went up to the third stonecutter. Again, he asked the question. “what are you doing?” This stonecutter put down his tools, looked up at the man asking him the question, wiped his brow and smiled “I am building a great cathedral”.

How do you want your workforce to answer the question “What are you doing?”

Walk the Talk

But that’s not all.

For senior leaders to be able to communicate effectively with workers, they really have to “walk in their shoes”.

Great leaders manage by walking around and talking to people, no matter what their level.

Richard Pratt, the former CEO of Visy Industries, would always walk around the factory floor each morning talking to staff and asking how they were. But great leaders do not ask superficial questions. While it’s important to be interested in the personal life of staff, exemplary staff members expect to be asked the tough questions.

According to Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan in the book, Execution, excellent workers know more about the business than the leader. Good leaders ask questions like “What do you like about working here and what do you dislike?” They get down to the real nitty

-gritty of the business operations.

Leaders who build personal connections with staff develop more of an intuitive feel for the business, while also fostering commitment and passion in staff that makes them more likely to run with the new mission that you are expecting them to perform.

Armed with this knowledge, leaders are able to give more truthful and believable presentations to their staff with relevant information. This includes tailoring their speech with appropriate information per site to get more traction, rather than a generic company wide speech.

If you belong to a large company and still want to connect with your audience, but cannot know everyone on the floor, there is another way to connect with your staff members.

In Conversations for Change, by Shawn Kent Hayashi, she recommends organizing an informal meeting with around 5-10 staff members before your speech. This is so you can ask questions about the specific needs of the audience, what information they require and any specific site examples.

During your speech, you can add extra information for that site and weave into your conversation that you’ve spoken to several members of the audience pre-speech. This will show that you cared enough to learn more about the audience and build rapport.

Left Brain, Right Brain or Whole Brain



There are three ways to communicate your safety speech – by communicating to the left brain, the right brain or the whole brain.

Our left brain is rational and analytical, it loves logic.

While our right brain is instinctive, empathetic, understands context (the left brain handles what is said, while the right focuses on how it's said), non verbal and emotional cues. It sees the big picture.

Left Brain

A left brain speech focuses on accident/incident statistics. It tries to get people to agree to change by looking at figures and discussing a rational argument for change.

Right Brain

While a right brain speech would start with a story about an employee being injured and show relevant pictures (not so much the injury – but related to the story). It would talk about what happened and how that person's life was affected. It would build an emotional connection to the information.

To get your workforce to see the big picture, you need to communicate to the right side of the brain.

Knowing something doesn't necessarily translate into changing our behavior. You need to make people *feel* something.

Both brains

According to "In the Heart of Change" by John Kotter and Dan Cohen, the sequence of change is SEE-FEEL-CHANGE, not ANALYZE-THINK-CHANGE. Highly successful change efforts involve helping people seeing the problem or solution by feeling the emotions.

Trying to get staff to improve safety behavior through analytical argument is like stepping through a maths equation to show workers the benefits they will get. It just misses the whole human element and what drives people.

An effective safety speech appeals to both sides of the brain. Later, in this document we'll go through how to do this.

Safety Speech Structure

Now, that we've got that out of the way, you're ready to structure the content of your script. There are three ways (remember, communicate from the 'inside out'):

1. Explain Why

Explain why your company exists. What is the big picture? Explain why your role in the universe is important. How do your customers' lives benefit from your products/services? What makes you different from your competitors?

Why is safety important? How does safety fit into the company big picture?

Explain why safety is vital to reaching the company goals. How does this affect each staff member?

Refer to the company vision, your company values, your safety goals and what you are hoping to achieve.

Explain why every worker is important. How does their job fit into the big picture? Give meaning to their job and stress the importance of their lives.

2. Explain the Situation (What)

Explain what has been happening and that it can no longer continue.

By explaining the current situation, people will understand why change is needed.



3. Provide Clear Expectations (How)



“Great leaders do not define their vision by what it is not. Great leaders define their vision by what it is; they tell us where we are going. Kennedy didn’t tell us we’re not going to stay on the Earth, he told us we’re going to the moon.”

Simon Sinek

Once you have explained what is going on, it’s time to bring out the solution. Outline a clear destination. According to Chip and Dan Heath from the book, *Switch*, change is easier when you know where you’re going and why it will be worth it. Provide a destination postcard that paints a vivid picture of what the future can look like.

Then, mention the new rules of the game. Specify the clear goals and achievable timelines. An example is “All staff wear safety glasses at all times by Dec 31”.

According to W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne from *Blue Ocean Strategy*, the solution must also highlight the thinking underlying the new decision. This is to build trust in regard to management decisions. Lay out clear guidelines on how staff can achieve the new safety goal.

5 Communication Tips for writing the Safety Speech

Now that you’ve written your “inside out” structure,

it’s time to include some right and left brain communication techniques.

1. Stories

To help people understand their messages, talk in ‘word pictures’.

Our right brain prefers stories. We remember stories better than if we were just told facts. They provide an emotional connection to information.

To use stories and metaphors effectively, leaders must learn to see the relationships between one thing and another.

Stories can also be used to provide examples of the impact of employees’ actions on others. They are very powerful at changing inappropriate work behaviour. It puts knowledge into a framework that helps staff understand how they are supposed to act.

In addition to using stories to explain consequences, they can also be used for real-life examples of staff who have exhibited the right behaviour. Use stories to align staff with the behaviour that you want. Also, stories can inspire people to improve their performance. Focus on stories that talk about those who have made it against the odds.

2. Use metaphors and analogies

Metaphors are about understanding one thing in terms of something else.

In the book, *A Whole New Mind*, by Daniel Pink, he mentions that in a complex world, creating metaphors is a whole brain approach.

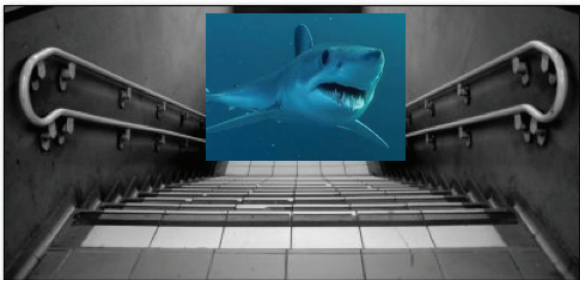
If a colleague tells us “I want to pick your brain about the new concept I’m working on”, the left hemisphere will take the literal meaning and get quite panicky. The right brain will then come to the rescue and explain that “pick your brain” is a metaphor. Your colleague just wants to see what ideas you might have.

Using metaphors, is a powerful way to get people to understand and remember information. In *Made to Stick* by Chip and Dan Heath, they mention that sticky messages are often metaphors in disguise.

Using the example of the Disney corporation, Disney employees are referred to as “cast members”

In all communication to Disney employees, the theatre metaphor is used throughout. Cast members don’t get interviewed for a job, they audition. When they walk around the park, they are on stage.

This useful metaphor helps employees understand how they are expected to behave and perform on their job. Using metaphors to explain data is also an important way to get people to understand and remember.

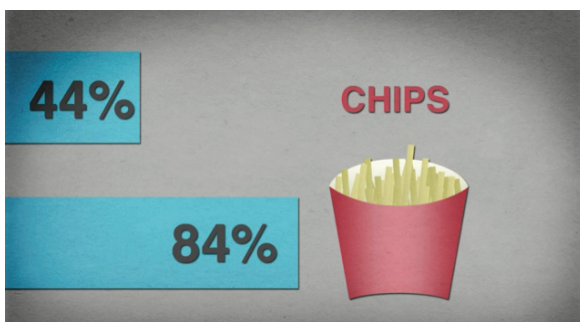


More people die each year from falling down stairs than being attacked by sharks

So rather than tell people that too many people are injuring themselves on stairs and it’s now mandatory to use three points of contact when going up and down stairs, let them know that more people die each year from falling down stairs than being attacked by a shark. This is much more memorable than simply comparing the death statistics between shark attacks and stair injuries. Use a visual to get this point through.

Metaphorical thinking helps us understand others, forge empathic connections and see meaningful relationships among information.

3. Use Visuals



According to Dr John Medina, the author of Brain Rules, we are more likely to recall visual information and we are amazing at remembering pictures. Recognition soars with pictures. In fact, recognition almost doubles for a picture compared to text.

Visually rich presentations keep the eyes busy and therefore, the brain more active and alert to learn information. The right brain prefers visuals and can process pictures hundreds of times faster than the verbal brain can process words.

Use a variety photos, diagrams and video content during your presentation.

According to US author and management consultant, Joseph Grenny, a study found that by showing video footage of a child picking up and eating food that had been spilt on a restaurant floor, lazy fast food employees became motivated to clean up the floor immediately after a spill.

Visuals engage your audience and help people to instantly understand information faster and more thoroughly.

4. Share the core

Humans can only learn and remember so much information at once. The more information you give people – the more they can get paralyzed by it. It can even make them react irrationally or remain with the status quo. Prioritising information or goals rescues people from having to make a decision as to which goal to follow first.

According to Chip and Dan Heath from “Made to Stick” creating a memorable message is all about stripping an idea down to its core. You need to learn to be a master of exclusion that rejects communication messages that make your core message more complex and less memorable. You have to relentlessly prioritise your information. And it’s not just about saying something short – it has to be simple and profound.

Drill down all your information to the sole objective or intent that you want people to follow.

The more you reduce the information in an idea, the stickier it will be. Core messages help people avoid bad choices by reminding them of what's important.

By giving people the desired destination, you give them to freedom to improvise when the inevitable challenge occurs. Examples include:

- Q Zero hand injuries
- Q 50 reports in 50 days

Regularly specifying your core message throughout your speech can be incredibly powerful in changing behaviour.

5. Cultivating Group Identity



“Since 95% of people are imitators and only 5% initiators, people are persuaded more by the actions of others than by any proof we can offer.

”

Cavett Robert

We see ourselves in terms of other people and groups. Evolution has taught us that it is beneficial to live in tribes, where we can share out the work of daily survival.

In the book, *Switch*, by Chip and Dan Heath, they stated that identities are central to the way people make decisions; any change effort that violates someone's identity is doomed to failure.

It's important to encourage group behaviour when people need to consider the group rather than themselves (safety is a good example). Staff will frame questions to themselves based on a whole range of identities such as gender, race, age and their job title. For example, a scientist will make decisions on how they believe a scientist would make a decision.

The trick in using group identity when wanting staff to change behaviour or embrace a new goal is to word it so they make a decision based on what's best for the group. Businesses can build on this strong need for group identity to build a thriving organisation.

As Jim Collins says in *Good to Great*, great companies have a fervent elitism where staff feel like they belong to something special. Staff that don't embrace the company vision and culture are ejected like a virus. Organisations that have staff aligned with their core values often have a much easier time getting new initiatives through that might need staff to change behaviour (provided that the new initiative is framed in terms of their core values and vision).

For example: rally the troops in a speech using inclusive language. “Come on, guys, we're production people, we're good at doing this fast!” or “Come on, guys, we're production people, we're good at doing this fast!”

The Big Day



When it comes to the day of your speech, make sure that audiovisual equipment is set up and ready to play your presentation (pictures only – limited text) and video content.

Ignore any advice that you need to just talk to people. You want the workforce to remember your information and be engaged. So ensure you have pictures.

If you can't be around on the big day or the speech needs to be given to a nationwide or worldwide audience, get the speech filmed. Ensure you have a professional director who knows the best way to communicate workplace messages who can help you perform the best on camera. And remember, to rehearse, rehearse and rehearse.

Follow up Homework

And once that is done and distributed, the work doesn't stop there.

Senior leaders must publicly announce the results of the new initiative as time progresses and seen to be involved at keeping the initiative on track.

You can learn more about this, in our presentation (mainly visuals, of course!)

"14 Tips to Launching a New Safety Initiative".

Did you know?

Delivering a safety speech has a range of benefits

According to social psychology research when a leader publicly espouses a particular view, they become much more likely to behave consistently with that point of view, even if they did not previously feel that way.

So there are two real benefits obtained from the CEO/executive or safety professional talking about company safety to staff. The first one is that staff will be more persuaded to change their safety behaviour after listening to the CEO and the second one is that the CEO will start to behave more in line with the new safety initiative.

Summary

Delivering a safety speech is more than just throwing some statistics at people and trying to persuade them to change.

Use as many of the techniques as you can in this report to get your message across memorably and easily.

About Digicast Productions

Digicast is a communications agency that specialises in both internal and external communication.

Our communication programs work to change behaviour from aligning staff with your culture, launching new initiatives and training staff to keep them safe and productive.

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