

# communicating a message powerfully

Whether you are speaking with a decision-maker, writing a letter, or convincing a friend to join, Results uses two key strategies in order to communicate powerful messages.

First, you must structure your message so that it is set up to be persuasive and make a call to action. Second, you must speak from the heart and tell a story that is compelling in order to motivate others.

Once you have mastered these two strategies, and are able to combine them, you will be more convincing and persuasive and as a result you will have more power to create change.

## structuring a powerful message with laser talk (the epic model)

Laser Talk is a short and compelling speech that gets the listener's attention, then presents a problem, a solution, and a specific request. The laser talk is one of the tools we use to become supremely effective advocates.

When approaching a Member of Parliament (MP), decision-maker, or member of the media, you will typically only have one or two minutes to get your point across before they lose attention. Learning the "laser" format and a handful of laser talks will help you make the most of these opportunities to advance our issues.

A Results laser talk has four sections, using the anagram EPIC— **E**ngage, **P**roblem, **I**nform, and **C**all to Action.

## engage

Get your listener's attention with a dramatic fact or short statement.

You can begin with an observation or a point of reasoning to capture your listener's attention.

For example:

"Over 1 billion people live on less than \$1.25 a day, yet Canadian foreign assistance is still well below the 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI) target that Canada made a commitment to decades ago."

## problem

Explain or elaborate on what the problem is. You can find some useful facts on [our website](#).

Try to connect the problem to an issue that the listener is likely to care about (i.e. personal security or children). For example:

"Although the House of Commons unanimously passed a groundbreaking resolution in 2005 to set a plan to give 0.7% of GNI in aid annually by 2015, no plan has yet been made. At the same time, poverty increases in the Global South, aggravated by the economic crisis and climate change."

## inform

Provide the listener with a solution to the problem. Give examples of how/where the solution has worked to benefit people living in poor conditions, and how it has proven to be a cost-effective solution. You could do this by providing information found on our [action sheet](#) or on [our website](#), or by painting a picture of the impact of the proposed solutions. For example:

"Some G7/G20 countries have met this international target. Delivering on our promise to give 0.7% would greatly increase Canada's leadership credibility. More importantly, by investing in cost-effective, proven solutions to poverty – like maternal and child health, education, sanitation and hygiene – lives will be saved and countries will be strengthened."

## call to action

After presenting the problem and proposing a solution, you ask the listener to take action. Here are some tips for structuring your call to action:

1. Make your action concrete and specific. This makes it easy for you to follow up and determine whether he or she has taken the action.
2. Present the action in the form of a yes-or-no question.
3. State the call to action in one sentence.

“Please sign this letter template asking the government to increase its promised Canadian budget aid and forward it to the Minister of Finance. Please inform me of the outcomes by writing at the following email address. Thank you”

Often, you will use a laser talk to “hook” your listener and then tell them a story to draw them in further into the issue. For the greatest success, you should practice it aloud until you feel comfortable. Learning a good repertoire of laser talks that you can use when the time is right will help make you a powerful, opportunistic speaker. Remember, you don’t have to say the speech verbatim; you can adjust it based on the flow of your conversation.

## storytelling

Embedding stories and speaking from the heart while using this structure is incredibly effective in communicating a powerful message. Moving stories captivate us and reach us at the core of our being. They can make us laugh and make us cry. They are the key to changing hearts and minds. Compare these two stories to see why they are so powerful:

1. “UNICEF recently reported that, for the first time in history, the number of children dying each year of largely preventable causes fell below 9 million in 2008. However that still means over 24,000 children die each day from preventable illnesses like diarrhea, pneumonia, measles, and malaria.”
2. “While I was a CUSO volunteer in Niger, I came to realize that the pain of needlessly losing a child is not equally shared around the globe. While I was there, Issa, a blacksmith friend of mine lost his newborn daughter. He came to me for help, knowing there wasn’t a doctor or medical center for miles. When I arrived, the beautiful baby was listless, but breathing. As I watched Issa stroke her black hair as her breathing

slowed to a stop. I immediately crouched on the floor, put two fingers on her sternum and tried frantically to revive her, but it was too late. Biba wailed and collapsed into Issa's arms. I never found out why she died, but I know that she never really had the same chance to live a full life as those who have access to vaccinations, clean water, and medical facilities. She was one of the 10 million preventable child deaths that year."

Both examples are powerful, but the second one puts a face on the problem in a way that is gut-wrenching and elicits an emotional reaction. This is what moving stories do; they take something that could seem abstract and impersonal, like a statistic, and turn it into something very personal and emotional. A moving story softens the listener and appeals to their humanity in a way that facts alone cannot.

We use moving stories to help community members, the media and MPs to be touched by both the problems of poverty and their solutions. Your MPs, like most people, remember stories that move them.

The story doesn't have to be your own experience; you can share other stories (such as news article, books, or other's experiences) that have personally touched you. Stories can be memorized, like laser talks or, if they are longer, we can read them to our audience. The best ones illustrate the problem and the solution, providing both numbers and a human element to which we can all relate.

Here are some key principles to keep in mind when you are telling your story:

- **Stories are about people!** Make sure there is a person at the centre of your story, not a number or statistic but an individual with a name and character traits.
- **Stories speak the audience's language:** if you are speaking with a friend make sure you are using language that they can understand and relate to. Using jargon or big words will not be helpful in communicating your message, plain and straightforward language is always best.
- **Stories don't tell, they show:** rather than listing or explaining the facts, why not show the challenges a child faces in accessing the proper nutrition or education in the Global South.
- **Stories stir up emotions:** stories touch the heart of the listener and help them relate to and feel connected to someone that would otherwise be distant from their daily life. They remind us of the universality of our humanity.

- **Stories have a moment of truth/clear meaning:** there is always a moment during a story where the meaning becomes clear, this is the powerful moment of the story where we are able to communicate our message and connect the story to our call to action.

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