



ARE YOUR MESSAGES Repeatable & Retweetable?

The right phrase makes all the difference.

By Sam Horn

Are you preparing an important communication? Whether it's a report to your board, a fundraising appeal to donors, or an annual report, its success depends on whether people can remember what you said.

If they can't, all the hours (weeks?) you spent collecting your research, organizing your thoughts, preparing your copy or video, just went down the drain.

The good news is: There's a step-by-step process for crafting a repeatable, retweetable phrase-that-pays. Here it is:

Step 1: Condense Your Point into 10 Words or Less

What's the change you want people to make? The action you want them to take? Condense that into a single sentence *with a verb* to prompt people to take the desired action. (See "Use Action Verbs That Persuade" on page 12).

Follow Elmore Leonard's advice and "leave out the parts people skip." You know it's perfect when you wouldn't change a word.

“If they can't repeat it, they didn't get it.”

Step 2: Use Word-Play to Turn That Sentence into a Phrase-That-Pays

What's a phrase-that-pays? It's a crafted one-liner that's repeatable and retweetable. You want it to resonate. You want people to be able to repeat it after hearing it once.

If they can't repeat it, they didn't get it. And if they didn't get it, you won't get their green light or go-ahead.

Step 3: Put Your Rally Cry Into a Rhythm

In one sentence, *what do you want people to do differently?* Write it down even if it doesn't sing. See those words as a jigsaw puzzle. Right now, the words probably don't fit. They may feel awkward or sound clunky.

Start talking out loud and experimenting with synonyms. Try different word combinations. Keep playing with variations until the words fall into place. Your ears will tell you when you've found the perfect mix because there will be a rhythm – a cadence – that sounds right.

Consider these phrases:

- If you see something, say something.
- I can't believe I ate the whole thing.

Feel how easily those words roll off the tongue?

When a phrase is fun to say, people share it, which takes it viral. "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas" is "one of the most recognized ad campaigns in any industry and

“Your ears will tell you when you’ve found the perfect mix.”

has generated billions of dollars in additional revenue,” according to *This Week Magazine*. That’s just one example of why crafting a rhythmic rally cry isn’t petty word-play, it’s a bottom-line pay-off.

Step 4: Use Words That Start with the Same Sound

Have you ever put one of those cardboard sleeves around a hot cup of coffee to keep from burning your fingers? Entrepreneur Jay Sorenson saw an opportunity. But he knew that, even with a great idea, it would be hard to build a business around an unpronounceable name. So, he played with alliteration, came up with “java jacket,” and cornered the market.

In fact, Jay says, “Customers who meant to call our competitor call us because they can’t remember our competitor’s name.” Wouldn’t it be nice to have people calling you because they so vividly remember what you said? Increase the likelihood of that happening by using alliteration to craft a tagline that’s music to our ears.

Step 5: Use Rhyme So You’re Remembered Over Time

The U.S. government was concerned about the number of injuries from car accidents. So, they launched a public service campaign to convince people to wear their safety belts.

The original tagline? “Buckle Up for Safety.” Yawn. No one noticed. No one cared. No one changed their behavior.

Back to the drawing board. Second time around, they incorporated rhyme and rhythm and came up with “Click It or Ticket.” That intriguing phrase got people’s attention. Compliance went up and injuries went down.

What does that prove? That a well-crafted phrase-that-pays can change behavior. It might even save lives.

Step 6: Pause & Punch Your Phrase-That-Pays So It POPS

When people need to convey high-stakes, high-pressure material, they tend to race through the presentation. They’re so nervous that they subconsciously try to get the whole thing over with.

The problem? People can’t remember our content if our words are a blur.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

Don’t Tell, Show

In her books *POP!* and *Got Your Attention?* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, bkconnection.com), Sam Horn stresses the value of real-life examples. Whether you’re preparing a blog post, a speech, a pep talk with your staff, or a pitch to a funder, she says you’re not finished till you’ve

illustrated your main idea with a true story. People will turn away if you explain why your cause is so important or how dire the situation is. They don’t care about statistics or logic. They care about people. Horn describes a process that will elicit empathy for your cause:

Think of a walking-talking example of someone who proves your point. Ask yourself: Who is the poster child of what I want to get across? What did the person say and do that exemplifies my message?

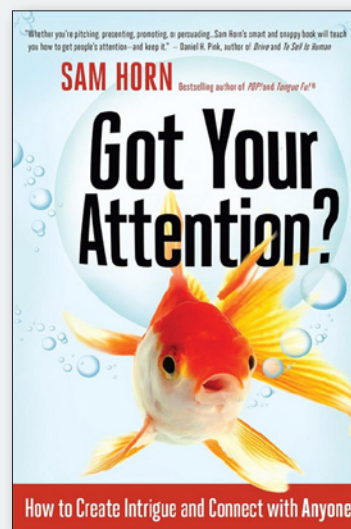
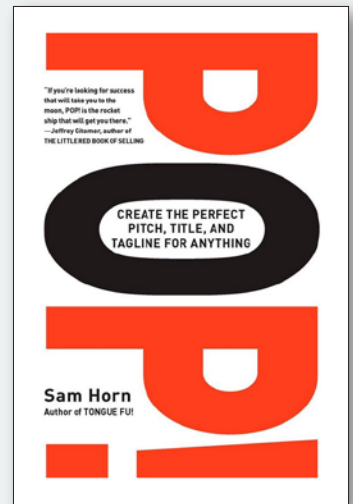
Describe the person and the scene so people can see it in their minds. You want them to instantly imagine and empathize with what you’re saying.

Chart out what the person actually said. Capture the words and underlying emotion. Don’t tell the story as if it happened long ago. Bring it into the present moment as if you and your audience are reliving it right here and now.

Bring it home with the lesson learned, the happy ending, the moral of the story so people understand what it all means and have an emotional aha moment.

Follow up with “you” questions that help people reflect on how the story you’ve shared is relevant to them.

For example: “Does this sound familiar to you?” “Have you ever experienced anything like this?” “Is this true for you, too?” “Your goal is to have people nodding in recognition because what you’re saying is pulled right out of their daily life.



Use Action Verbs That Persuade

Whatever you want people to do, you can find a powerful verb to fire up action. And if you're thinking of a verb with more than two syllables, rethink it.

- Don't ask people to *contribute*. Ask them to *give*.
- Don't ask people to *generate* or *formulate* something. Ask them to *form* it, *shape* it, *create* it, *design* it, or *give birth* to it.
- Don't ask them what they *anticipate*. Ask them what they *foresee*.
- Never ask them to *utilize* something. Ask them to *use* it.
- Don't ask them to *ascertain* or *verify* something. Ask them to *see* it, *view* it, *eye* it, *check* it, *scan* it, *take a look at* it.

All the examples in the following list are one- or two-syllable verbs. The fewer syllables, the more powerful the verb.

act	boost	break	bridge	build	call
capture	change	chop	choose	connect	conquer
create	cut	dare	deepen	drive	embrace
engage	explore	find	focus	foster	gain
gather	grasp	grow	guide	ignite	improve
increase	inspire	jump	keep	launch	lead
leap	learn	master	move	nail	offer
open	pack	pierce	pinpoint	plan	probe
punch	raise	refresh	save	seize	send
share	show	solve	stab	stir	stop
stretch	sway	support	surprise	tap	think
thrust	touch	trust	vote	welcome	win

“Your goal is to have people nodding in recognition.”

When preparing a presentation, craft a repeatable, retweetable call-to-action for your big idea. Then put space around your words. To prevent rushing, practice adding a *three-beat pause before . . . and after . . . important points*. That way, people are more likely to absorb and imprint your message.

Get Started with Your Next Communication

So, what's an important communication you're preparing? What do you want people to remember? What action do you want them to take?

Have you already crafted a pithy, profound one-liner to reinforce that point? If so, good for you.

If not, use this six-step process so you're the one people remember, your organization is the one they talk about, and your words are the ones that make an enduring difference.

Sam Horn (samhorn.com), the Intrigue Expert (intrigueagency.com), is on a mission to help people create quality communications that scale their impact for good. She is the author of Someday Is Not a Day in the Week, POP, and Talking on Eggshells.



Let Your Words Sing

Make sure your organization's name, tagline, and messages make an impact, using the tactics in these articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

Success Starts with Your Name (Vol. 22, No. 2)

How Jargon Undermines Communication (Vol. 27, No. 2)

A Better Brand = More Loyal Supporters (Vol. 38, No. 4)

What are the Three Most Boring Words in Fundraising Appeals? (Vol. 36, No. 2)

Keep the Main Thing Up Front (Vol. 36, No. 1)

Is Your Website Clouding Your Message? (Vol. 36, No. 3)

Beware These Words (Vol. 37, No. 3)

How to Add an Emotional Hook to Your Fundraising Letters (Vol. 37, No. 1)

Thinking Differently about Your Elevator Speech (Vol. 41, No. 3)

The Power of Story: Bring Your Brand to Life (Vol. 34, No. 4)