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## Focus Preparation On Outcomes, Not Content

Outcomes are close allies with purpose. Many leaders fall into the trap of focusing on the content of their agenda item but ignoring purpose and the desired outcomes. Naturally, this causes listeners to delve into both the detail of the content and the process of delivery. Recipients aren't able to retain a high level of details and facts given to them by executives who can easily be dismissed as boring and irrelevant. They fail to generate any sense of urgency, engagement, or result. These leaders fall into the knowledge and expertise trap. Their *modus operandi* is to describe, explain, and rely on the volume of information. Those around them are forced to try to remember unnecessary details and their vitality promptly withers away into boredom. The leaders forget to relate the work at hand to the outcomes they want to achieve to improve their organization's condition.

Yet volumes of papers habitually delivered at short notice remain the *modus operandi* of many business and government organizations. These signify two great failures for executives: either to purposefully commission papers or to wholeheartedly stand in the shoes of those for whom they prepare papers and perceive what they need to make wise decisions.

Successful leaders approach this quite differently. The most successful leaders I've ever seen do the following:

- They focus ruthlessly on the outcome they want for the organization and go backward from there
- They focus on futures and know the precise action they want their audience to take
- They arbitrarily choose three key priorities as messages
- They define results and don't worry about inputs
- They craft the question that mines their audience's experience and expertise

Make no mistake, this approach to preparation is hard work. But with practice, the investment of only a few minutes prior to any interaction results in high-quality conversations and decisions (refer to Figure 4.1).

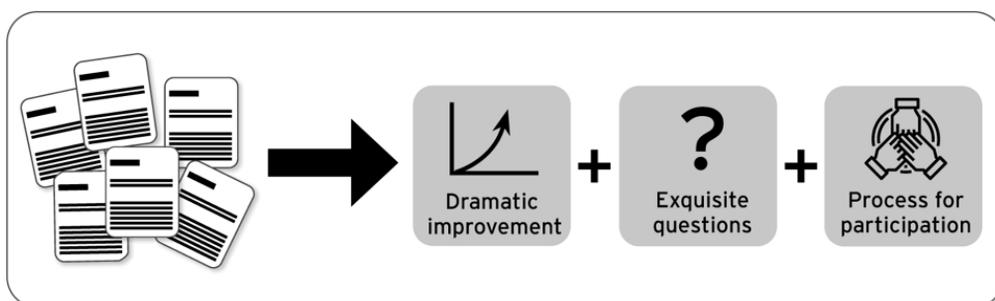
This preparation is critical for any leader who wants to draw people together to create change and alignment in their organization. It results directly in bosses, staff, and peers drawing closer to the executive. It increases trust and it helps with implementing decisions, since executives are not weighed down by endless descriptions and explanations. They focus on implementing knowing their purpose, and the outcomes they want.

## From Chugging Along To Overdrive: Presentations And Decisions

### 1. Focus on People

Focus your personal communication directly on the people who will influence the decision, not on how you might increase their understanding of your specialized content. Direct succinct personal language works best.

FIGURE 4.1 Shift in preparation emphasis



Most people in groups and meetings want their skills, experience, and expertise to add value, yet rarely are they invited to apply this in meetings. Unwittingly, forcing executives to take in more content puts them in a one-down position. This releases an act-hunger in them. Their unsatiated longing to influence activates haphazard contributions and questions on detail that are either competitive or aggressive in their desire to regain equality in their relationships.

## 2. Purpose and Outcome Are King

The big shift is to identify the purpose of the presentation, the outcome you want, and the outcome your audience is likely to want.

The latter, pinning the audience outcome, is the most demanding work of preparation. Once your purpose or outcome is clear, you'll know which three to four dramatic improvements to emphasize:

- The condition of your organization
- The condition of your customers and/or stakeholders
- Bottom-line value

## 3. Express Your Appreciation

Staff who know they are appreciated are more motivated, more productive, and go the extra mile. Leaders can ensure everyone brings their best to group interactions and decisions by their simple expression of appreciation.

Leaders' simple sincere appreciations appear as social niceties with peers and are powerful motivators. In leadership team meetings, possibilities include:

- Each of you brings a depth of expertise and experience which helps us tackle what is in front of us
- I know each of you has had ideas and experience we will need to create a breakthrough on this
- I am confident that the talent around our table will land us up where we want to be

## 4. Craft an Exquisite Question

To incite the depth and quality of interaction worthy of executive decisions, pending investment, and disruption, anyone presenting or leading a conversation needs to craft exquisite questions that:

- Tap into the expertise and experience of those present
- Generate purposeful conversations and decisions
- Significantly move everyone toward the outcomes being sought

I worked on meeting protocols with a leadership team. We practiced generating exquisite questions by discussing a board meeting the previous day where several direct reports had made skillful presentations to the board about a significant change management project. Their exquisite question to one another was, *"What do we communicate to our direct reports to show we appreciate their impressive development?"*

The subsequent contributions from each executive generated a list of ten insights and observations from their bosses. The executives also noted four actions they themselves could take to improve their game for future board meetings.

## 5. Create a Process for Participation

Why is it so many meetings go awry? Essentially, levels of meaningful participation are low. Participants tend to replicate default survival behaviors from earlier experience of family mealtimes, their cultural settings, major life events, or their former school days. They:

- Dominate by overtalking and over participating
- Remain silent and watchful
- Wish they were somewhere else

It's no wonder why so many meetings don't work.

By creating and giving simple directions and processes for participation, people can effectively collaborate using the most of their wisdom and experience. The leader's direction can be as simple as the following:

*I'll take five minutes to discuss the major business improvements and how we can navigate roadblocks. Then I want to hear from each of you. Tell us the best contribution you could make that would have the most impact on your area as we implement this initiative (Figure 4.1).*

And there you have it. This is the preparation for leaders who want to have powerful interactions in group settings. For both online and in-person meetings, my best advice for presenters and meeting chairs is to use these five principles.

## About Leadership Levers

There's an epidemic of leadership failure—whether something as small as a meeting, or as large as implementing enterprise wide change. Leaders know that sinking feeling when a gap emerges between themselves and the groups they most need to engage with. Leaders and business schools are looking in the wrong places for the cause.

What holds most leaders back, as if their foot is always on the brake, is their failure to engage, and gain alignment. This book shows the reasons why.

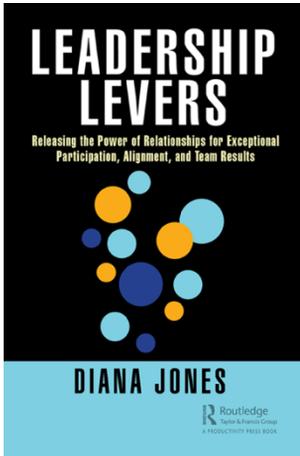
Leaders rarely recognise that:

1. Shaping group behavior is describable as a process, which they can learn. Instead, they unconsciously fall into relationship patterns influenced by early family experiences.
2. Informal relationship patterns have a dramatic effect on results, which is why birds in flight manage to alter course without bumping into each other.

Leadership and collaboration are primarily a matter of principles and process, and not personality and content alone. If leaders master the process, they achieve consistent results.

This book reveals the leadership levers to release the power of relationships for exceptional participation, alignment and results in organizations. It enables leaders to mine the brilliance that often lies dormant and untapped within their organizations. Readers will have the principles and tools to go beyond the agenda, truly engage with those around them, and release untapped capacities within their organizations.

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## About Diana Jones

Diana Jones is a trusted and experienced leadership coach working with senior leaders and their leadership teams within federal agencies, local government, small-to-medium enterprises, non-government organizations, and not-for-profits.

She works across a wide range of sectors including health, business and innovation, transport, primary industries, security, education, and social services.

She has travelled through more than 30 countries and brings both a professional and personal experiential base that supports the wisdom in the book.

She specializes in real work environments where she observes the dynamics and interrelationships in work interconnections, the flow-on behaviors, and implications for business results. She coaches groups of

experienced executives from different organizations exploring live scenarios with not-so-sure responses, then integrating learning from their peers.

A trainer, educator and practitioner with the Australia Aotearoa New Zealand Psychodrama Association, she is one a handful of sociometrists in the world with behavioral change consultants, trainers, coaches, and therapists.

She has a master's degree from Victoria University of Wellington, and is a past treasurer and executive member of an international professional association, and former chair of the Wellington Homeless Women's Trust. She was inducted into the Alan Weiss Million Dollar Consulting Hall of Fame in 2020.