

3-Step Communication

Rev. A



Three sentences, Three Minutes, then maybe More

"I didn't have time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one instead"
-Mark Twain -

What was your first clue?

As a technical professional there is a good chance that you make decisions based on understanding the full set of facts, data and as much information as you can take in. But your non-technical or technical but leadership audience generally does not work this way. In fact, too much information annoys them, makes them suspicious of your motives or results in them cutting you off. You must quickly get your point across, starting with the answer and giving your audience only the information they desire.

3-Step Communication is a proven method to gain influence.

3-Step Communication

Most executive level leaders want to hear the answer first.

3-Step Communication is a disciplined process to think through in advance and deliver your message in a manner you will customize to your audience. It is effective if you are casually talking to one person or presenting to fifty. The three steps are:

- 1. Three carefully crafted sentences.**
- 2. Three minute follow up, if wanted**
- 3. Third time is the full explanation, only if desired**

After each step you will stop talking and only take the next step if your full audience clearly desires the additional information.

Before you start your three steps, carefully consider your goal in the conversation. In the best cases you will have done this in advance but this preparation step must frequently occur during a meeting before you present your idea.

Do you want a decision? Do you just want a group to hear an idea? Do you need more budget? **You are going to accomplish this goal and then stop talking.**

For many of us, stopping talking is not an easy task. If you achieve your goal you must stop talking. The other times to stop talking are when you are over-delivering or your audience is either not listening or annoyed.

It is virtually impossible to un-annoy someone by talking

With that in mind, let's explore the three steps.

Step 1: Three carefully crafted sentences.

With the goal in mind, think through three carefully crafted sentences that you are going to start with. In a casual situation, meeting in a hallway or at a social event, consider these prior to approaching your audience. If at all possible, develop the first three sentences in advance and write them down.

Don't just *write* these three sentences, craft them. Spend some time even if you are doing this real time in a meeting. Be a literary artist and aim for very concise sentences that exactly deliver your message.

Consider each sentence to have a specific purpose:

sentence 1, the opening sentence, will catch people's attention and immediately answer the question "what am I talking about".

sentence 2 tells them why it is important to them. Why should they care.

sentence 3 is your call to action.

Example:

Sentence 1: *We need to make a decision on the hardware budget today.*

Sentence 2: *If we do not, the launch date will have to move out.*

Sentence 3: *My team has compared the three scenarios you requested and we recommend option A, \$200k for the two-part injected enclosure.*

After your three sentences you stop and go into active listening mode. Does your audience look like they want more information? Do they ask for more? If the key person approves your request, stop and thank them. You are done.

If, on the other hand, you read your audience as wanting more then transition into your three minute follow up. Be concise, don't over provide.

Step 2: Three minute follow up, if wanted

This next step will feel more natural. Your audience asks a question or just looks like they want more. Make sure you have listened to what they have to say and then give them three minutes, at most, of additional detail.

You must not fall into the old habit of endless detail. Instead, this is a short essay with some facts about your research, what the money will be used for or why the customer wanted the new option.

Be especially careful not to provide too much detail. The director has probably not asked you for the physics involved but just how many tests, were they statistically tested, and did you consider a control case. The easy measure here is to talk no more than 3 minutes before you stop, listen and gage reaction.

As you did in the first step, you will cover the additional detail, repeat the call for action and then stop talking. Do they want more detail?

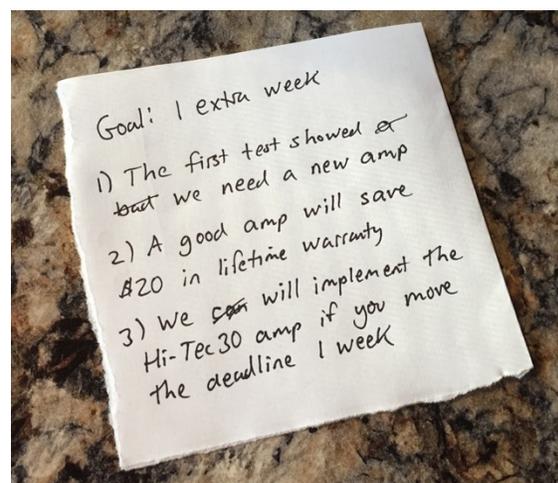
Step 3: Third time is the full explanation, only if desired

Sometimes, but usually not, your audience wants the full explanation. If you observe specific responses to indicate this, then press on, it's geek-time. If you are unsure, ask "Do you want more information?"

Do not go into the full explanation if the key decision maker in your audience is not asking for it. If other members of the audience are asking for detail or especially if a single, junior member of your audience is, ask if you can get with them afterwards to present the whole story.

Your mini communication plan

At AditNW we find for ourselves and our experience with others confirms that writing your approach down makes this process much more effective. In a formal presentation this can be incorporated into your notes. It is very common to use 3-Step Communication in meetings where you can create a little plan on the corner of your notepad or scrap of paper as it becomes clear you will need to communicate and influence.



Plan the race, race the plan

Once you start talking, stick to your plan

- Keep your goal in mind
- Start with the answer
- Stick to the 3-step communication
- Stop talking

But more than anything, just remember the three steps:

- 1. Three carefully crafted sentences.**
- 2. Three minute follow up, if wanted**
- 3. Third time is the full explanation, only if desired**

...and never, ever be afraid to stop talking.

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