

# Move Your Audiences with Speeches, Stories, and Ceremonies

A HARVARD BUSINESS REVIEW WEBINAR FEATURING

**Nancy Duarte** and **Patti Sanchez**

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# Move Your Audiences with Speeches, Stories, and Ceremonies

## OVERVIEW

Every leader knows that envisioning the future is one thing, but getting others to go with you there is another. But by harnessing the power of persuasive communication, leaders can turn their ideas into a movement. Leaders who understand the five phases of creating change, and deploy different tools and techniques to inspire others can generate a new level of enthusiasm and investment from their teams.

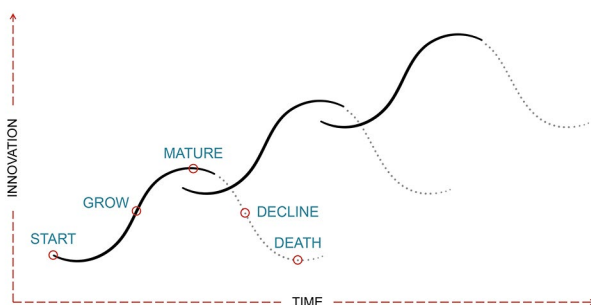
## CONTEXT

Nancy Duarte and Patti Sanchez described how to lead people through transformations by using speeches, stories, ceremonies, and symbols.

## KEY LEARNINGS

**Leaders leverage stories, speeches, and ceremonies to move others along the S-curve of innovation.**

Managers manage what is, while leaders create what could be. Ventures into the future follow the S-curve of innovation. Innovation means reimagining and reinventing what is possible. However, new ideas also bring change, which is frightening and which many people resist.



**Figure 1**  
The S-Curve of Innovation

Throughout the S-curve, leaders must move others along the path of change by communicating well. Great leaders use three persuasive communication tools to move and inspire others: stories, speeches, and ceremonies. They leverage these modes of communication to help others see things from a new perspective.

## CONTRIBUTORS

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“Great leader leverage stories, speeches, and ceremonies to help other see things from a new perspective.”

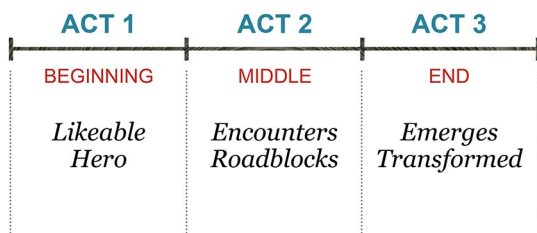
– **NANCY DUARTE**

**Stories use a three-act structure to explain transformation.**

Storytelling is an effective way to move people. Stories:

- **Package information for rapid comprehension.** They engage all levels of the brain and help listeners make sense of information more completely.
- **Align storytellers and listeners.** Spoken narratives make people’s brains work in greater synchronization.
- **Transport.** They move people to feel, resulting in more positive emotions than when information is processed analytically.
- **Motivate.** Research has found that people are more likely to take action after hearing a story. For instance, individuals who heard a moving story about a father and dying son were more likely to donate money to a related cause.

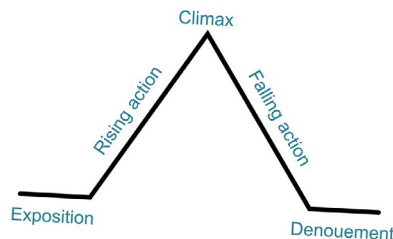
Stories follow a three-act structure. In the first act, the storyteller introduces the hero and then an inciting incident sends the hero on a journey. In the second act, the hero faces obstacles, tests, and trials. In the third act, the hero overcomes and emerges transformed.



**Figure 2**  
The Three-Act Structure of Stories

**Great communicators build tension and release into their speeches.**

The best speeches use story principles to inspire, not just inform. They create a longing for the future. Dramatist Gustav Freytag described the shape of dramatic stories as a pyramid, where all the action happens in the middle, as rising action creates tension and falling action releases it. That contrast keeps people engaged. Researchers at Cornell University’s Computational Story Lab analyzed over 1,700 fiction books from Google’s Project Gutenberg and found that great stories create contrast by alternating between positive and negative emotions.



**Figure 3**  
Freytag's Pyramid

The greatest communicators use a common pattern in their speeches, which builds in the cathartic tension and release of storytelling. They use a structure that creates a cadence and has three acts, like a story. Great speeches follow this pattern:

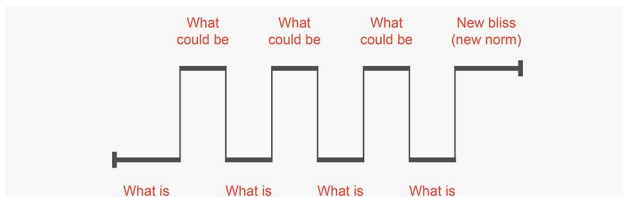
- **They begin by establishing the current reality or “what is.”** The individual speaking defines the status quo, such as the state of the union in a company, industry, or the audience.
- **They contrast the current state with “what could be.”** The speaker defines what could be and describes the expected outcome or what the ideal world will look like if their idea is adopted.

The gap between what is and what could be is like the inciting incident in a story. It catches the audience’s attention. The bigger the gap, the more likely that audiences will be engaged.



**Figure 4**  
The Gap in Great Speeches

Throughout a great speech, the speaker toggles between the two states of “what is” and “what could be.” This maintains engagement and creates longing by making the future more attractive than the present. Great speeches heighten longing by ending on a high note which describes the future reality and the new bliss that awaits.



**Figure 5**  
The Pattern of Great Speeches

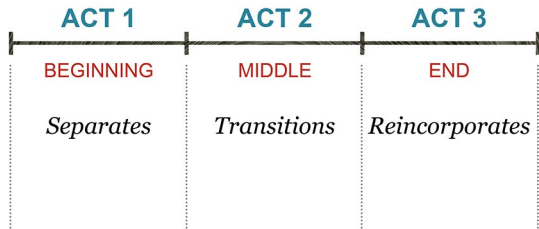
This pattern was used by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in his “I Have a Dream” speech, by Steve Jobs in his iPhone launch, and by other famous speaker in famous speeches.

### **Ceremonies are an effective way to signal the transition to a new organizational reality.**

Great leaders communicate through ceremonies. The most common ceremonies are rites of passage like baptisms, bar mitzvahs, weddings, and graduations. Ceremonies borrow the three-act structure of stories.

- **Act 1: Beginning.** The individual separates from the ordinary world. At a quinceañera (celebration of a girl’s 15th birthday), the girl enters the party with a doll and hands her doll to a younger girl.

- **Act 2: Middle.** The individual transitions symbolically. The girl at her quinceañera takes off her flat shoes and puts on heels and a tiara, symbolizing the transition to womanhood.
- **Act 3: End.** The individual returns to life, but is different. The girl assumes grown-up roles at home.



**Figure 6**  
The Three-Act Structure of Ceremonies

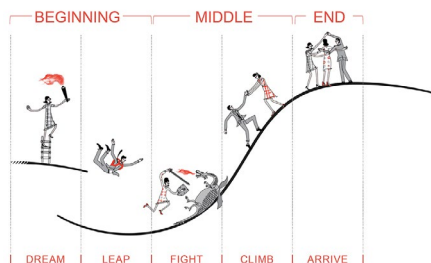
Ceremonies take multiple forms, but often involve some type of ritual. For example, during the company’s turnaround phase Starbucks managers attended an offsite where the venue was set up as a replica of a coffee farm. Attendees raked coffee beans, which helped them reconnect with the company’s purpose.

Ceremonies can also be done on a smaller scale. For example, at Apple, Steve Jobs symbolically “buried” Mac OS9, so developers and customers would focus on Mac OS X.

**At times leaders must act on a larger scale and create a movement.**

Movements have a common “shape,” similar to stories and speeches. The shape of a movement is a “Venture Escape,” which is composed of five stages in three acts, just like a story. At each stage, people have different emotional needs.

- **Act 1: Dream and Leap.** Declare your vision. People will choose to join or not. If you communicate well, they will jump in. In the Dream stage, people experience a moment of inspiration, while in the Leap stage, they face a moment of decision.
- **Act 2: Fight and Climb.** If people do jump in, it is both interesting and hard. The “messy middle” is where transformation occurs. In the Fight stage, people face a moment of bravery, while in the Climb stage, they face a moment of endurance.
- **Act 3: Arrive.** In the end, whether you achieve your dream or fall short, take time to reflect on the journey, celebrate accomplishments, and learn lessons. Gather stories to tell and retell. In the Arrive stage, people experience a moment of reflection.



**Figure 7**  
The Venture Escape

Moving people is hard. Some parts of the journey will seem easy. At these points, great leaders use motivating communication to keep people committed and energized for the next stage. Other parts of the journey will be hard. At those times, use warning communication to move people away from resistance and ease them back toward commitment.

**Leaders are torchbearers who illuminate the path for others through communication.**

In each moment, there are different types of speeches, stories, ceremonies, and symbols that can inspire and activate people. Used together, these communications create galvanizing moments. The Torchbearer’s Toolkit identifies the best tools to use in different situations.

	DREAM Moment of Inspiration	LEAP Moment of Decision	FIGHT Moment of Bravery	CLIMB Moment of Endurance	ARRIVE Moment of Reflection
<b>Speeches</b>					
ⓘ	Vision	Pursuit	Battle	Progress	Victory
⚠	Revolution	Renunciation	Underdog	Crossroads	Surrender
<b>Stories</b>					
ⓘ	Heed the Call	Seek the Reward	Overcome Enemy	Endure Struggle	Savor the Win
⚠	Neglect the Call	Ignore the Reward	Come from Behind	Lose the Way	Learn the Lesson
<b>Ceremonies</b>					
ⓘ	Immerse Deeply	Pledge Commitment	Rally Spirits	Renew Commitment	Honor Heroes
⚠	Mourn Endings	Dismantle Blockages	Demystify Threats	Heal Wounds	Concede Defeat
<b>Symbols</b>					

**Figure 8**  
The Torchbearer’s Toolkit

“As organizations imagine new futures and venture toward them, each leads to another venture. Over time, the ventures link together and move the organization from one era to the next. If you evolve successfully, your business will become an epic tale.”

– PATTI SANCHEZ

**Case Study: Interface**

Ray Anderson, founder and CEO of Interface (the world’s largest supplier of carpet tiles), created a movement focused on environmental sustainability. That’s because when customers asked what the company was doing for the environment, he didn’t have an answer. So, Anderson read *The Ecology of Commerce* by Paul Hawken and realized he had to imagine a new future.

Anderson wanted Interface to become the first industrial company in the world to achieve sustainability. Doing so would take the commitment of all leaders to transform the company. He gave a speech to the environmental task force to express his dream, and expressed it with a visual of a person climbing a mountain.

Company leaders attended a weeklong offsite in Maui. Paul Hawken gave the keynote and Anderson asked every leader to commit to do their part to put the environment back in balance. He asked leaders to sign a personal legacy wall and pin handwritten statements next to photos of themselves. These commitments were published in a newsletter to inspire all employees to make their pledges. After that ceremony, the organization surged forward. Anderson continued to give speeches, tell stories, and hold ceremonies. Twenty years later, Interface is close to achieving its goal.

## Case Study: Hyperloop One

Even small companies can create movements. Hyperloop One is building an ultra-high-speed mode of transport. The team launched its dream at a press event last May. The leaders gave a “vision speech” that described how they will make this future a reality. They gathered company anecdotes and curated them into an interactive timeline to humanize the company and its technology.

On the second day of the event, the Hyperloop One team took the press on a tour of their construction site in the Nevada desert. The press witnessed a first live test of the electric propulsion system. This is an example of an “immerse deeply” ceremony that creates confidence that the dream is becoming real. Leaders also asked potential partners and customers to make the leap to join their movement by launching a contest called the Hyperloop One Global Challenge. This was a pledge commitment ceremony.

Hyperloop One got tremendous press attention and created huge momentum as significant partners and customers jumped aboard. Five months later, they have projects underway in several regions.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- **The Torchbearer’s Toolkit.** The Torchbearer’s Toolkit can be downloaded at the [Duarte website](#).
- **Illuminate.** [Learn more](#) about Duarte’s and Sanchez’s book.

## BIOGRAPHIES



**Nancy Duarte**  
Principal and CEO,  
Duarte, Inc.

Nancy Duarte is a communication expert who has been featured in *Fortune*, *Forbes*, *Fast Company*, *Wired*, *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Huffington Post*, *LA Times* and on CNN. She is the CEO of Duarte, Inc., and her firm is the global leader behind some of the most influential presentations in business and culture, and has created more than a quarter of a million presentations. Nancy has spoken at numerous conferences including TEDx, South by Southwest, Inbound, and World Domination Summit. She speaks at business schools and lectures at Stanford University several times a year.

She is the author of three award-winning books: *Slide:ology*, *Resonate*, the *HBR Guide to Persuasive Presentations*, and co-author of *Illuminate: Ignite Change Through Speeches, Stories, Ceremonies, and Symbols*.



**Patti Sanchez**  
Chief Strategy Officer,  
Duarte, Inc.

Patti Sanchez is a communicator with 25 years of experience leading transformative marketing initiatives for brands and causes, and the co-author of *Illuminate: Ignite Change Through Speeches, Stories, Ceremonies, and Symbols*. As the Chief Strategy Officer for Duarte, Inc., Patti leads an expert team of writers and consultants who help clients create compelling presentations that change beliefs and behavior.

Applying insights from her study of psychology and persuasion, Patti helps leaders understand the inner workings of the human mind and heart and then use that knowledge to craft engaging narratives that cut through the clutter and resonate on a deep level. She has presented hundreds of workshops on communication to marketing and sales leaders around the country and her professional work has been honored by IABC, BMA, and Vital Speeches of the Day. Patti holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Public Relations from San Jose State University with a minor in Psychology.



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Angelia Herrin is the editor for special projects and research at HBR. Her journalism experience spans 25 years, primarily with Knight-Ridder newspapers and *USA TODAY*, where she was the Washington editor. She won the Knight Fellowship in Professional Journalism at Stanford University in 1990. She has taught journalism at the University of Maryland and Harvard University.

Prior to coming to HBR, Angelia was the vice president for content at womenConnect.com, a website focused on women business owners and executives.

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