



# The Beacon

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YOUR GUIDE TO SECURING THE  
POWER OF PERSUASION

COACHING AND TRAINING SERVICES  
TO DEVELOP POWERFUL AND PERSUASIVE  
COMMUNICATION SKILLS

#### IN THIS ISSUE

Make your message clear and memorable  
with a strong opening and powerful closing.

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**Bea-con** (bē/kən), *noun* 1. a guiding light.  
2. a lighthouse or signal buoy to warn or guide  
vessels at sea. 3. a person, act or thing that  
warns or guides.

## Attention and Retention: The Art of Making Your Message Memorable

*“Grasp the subject. The words will follow.”*

• *Cato the Elder*

The constant flow of communication and data has made it more difficult than ever to have your message stand out. How do you engage your audience while you are speaking? How do you keep them from checking their BlackBerries during your presentation or while you are making your point during an important meeting? The truth is, we live in the “Crackberry Culture,” and we don’t just mean the term commonly associated with our fill-in-the-blank-PDA addiction.

It’s deeper than a mere preoccupation with email. We have constant access – in the car, on the plane, in an elevator – to everyone and every morsel of information. Important messages often blend into the background and become white noise. There is simply too much competition for the mindshare of the people we need to be communicating with.

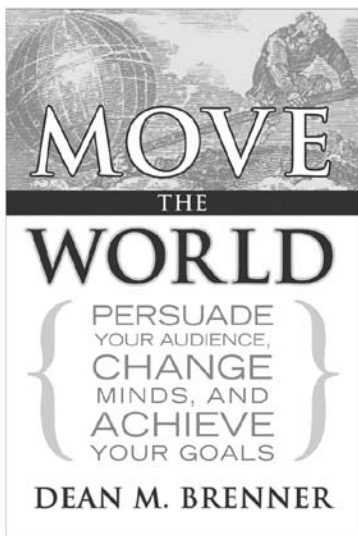
This reality poses a simple but significant challenge for anyone who wants to make their message memorable. What can you do to make yourself a persuasive communicator? What can you do to make your message stand out amidst the white noise of the modern American culture?



To begin crafting a memorable message, you first need to think about your communication goals and what you want to achieve. You must know and understand your audience’s needs and expectations. And you need to organize your message into a story that will be both on-point and to-the-point.

Amidst all of the things that contribute to a successful presentation or a powerful message, one of the most effective methods for being memorable is “**message framing**.” Given the current state of our information culture, this concept has never been more important than it is today.

*Frame your story with a strong, compelling opening and a powerful closing that will both capture your audience's attention and make it easy for your message to be remembered.*



The centerpiece of The Latimer Group's value to clients is our Move the World System, which is detailed in Dean M. Brenner's book, available online and in stores.

Visit [MoveTheWorld.com](http://MoveTheWorld.com) to learn more.

The basic concept is simple to understand. Once you have gone through the process of organizing the detail and the flow of the story you want to tell or the message you want to share, that story or message needs to be framed with an opening that introduces the critical elements of your message, and a closing that returns to the highlights of the message.

Some of you may recognize this idea as the “Tell ’em what you’re going to tell ’em... Tell ’em... Tell ’em what you told ’em” method. But that age-old mantra doesn’t go nearly far enough to be valuable in today’s environment. You need to first capture your audience’s attention and then reiterate your key points so that your message is memorable.

### **Capture Their Attention**

Whether we want to admit it to ourselves or not, we have one primary objective in the first few moments when we speak and deliver our message. Our goal is simply to capture the attention of the people we are speaking to and make sure they are listening to us. Whether we realize it or not, our audience is deciding if we are worth putting down the BlackBerry for, or if, on the other hand, we will be part of *their* white noise. In other words, they’re deciding whether they will give us their attention – and really *listen* to our message.

How do you capture attention? The essence of a powerful opening always comes down to two things:

- 1. Clearly state the point.** One of the fundamental mistakes many people make is that they don’t clearly state the *point* of the presentation or the message right away. Many people often treat their business communication as if it were a movie, with a steady build towards the big conclusion. This is a major flaw in the way many people communicate. There should be no suspense: the quicker you can get to the point, the more likely your audience will be engaged. When you make your point early, you give the audience context for the rest of your presentation or message. It will be easier for them to be engaged for the remainder of your time with them.
- 2. Clearly state the benefit.** Once you have captured your audience’s attention, you need to keep them engaged. You must identify how your point or recommendation clearly benefits the people you are trying to persuade. Far too often we make the mistake of speaking from an egocentric point of view. Far too often we spend our time speaking and communicating merely from our own perspective. Like delaying the statement of your key point, this, too, is a flawed strategy. If you want to persuade someone of something, it is critical that you speak in ways they can understand. It is critical that you speak to their interests and make it clear how your point connects to things they care about.

Are there other things to think about when crafting your opening? At times, yes, there are. But in the current, information-intensive environment, no goal is more important than capturing attention. And the way you capture attention is by clearly stating your topic (*what* you are about to discuss), and then the benefits (*why* your audience should care). If you are not immediately successful in capturing the attention of the people you are speaking to, you have little hope of achieving any other goals for the communication opportunity. If the audience is not listening, it doesn't matter what else you say or how you say it.

### Maximize Their Retention of Your Message

If the goal of the first few moments of your speech, presentation or message is to capture attention, then the goal of the last few moments is to increase the likelihood that your audience will remember your key points. What your audience hears last is what they are likely to remember the longest. So as you wrap up your speech, lecture or presentation, it is critical to return to the basics and summarize the most important components of your message. Once you are finished telling your story, you cannot just stop speaking. You must exit the story, and as you exit, remind the audience of the key points you want and need them to remember.

We continually coach our clients to close in two ways:

- 1. Repeat the key points from your opening.** Bring your audience back to the topic of the presentation or the message – the *what*, as we call it – and then repeat the benefits or *why* they should care.
- 2. Introduce nothing new in the close.** We believe that if there is an important aspect to your message, then it deserves to be mentioned prior to the close. The close should be reserved for repeating your key messages, and nothing more. Think of your story as a full circle – you must end back where you began.



In our current Crackberry Culture, it is difficult to stand out and make an impact. White noise is ubiquitous and permeating, and attention spans are short. You need to frame your story with a strong, compelling opening that will capture the audience's attention, and a powerful closing – both of which will make it easier for your message to be remembered.

So whether you read this on paper at your desk, or on your own BlackBerry while commuting to work, we ask you to think about the way you frame and present your message. Are you cutting through the white noise and really reaching people? Is your message being heard and remembered? Don't make it easy for your audience to decide to delete you or your message. Capture their attention at the beginning and help them remember you and your message at the end.

Thank you for sharing this issue of *The Beacon* with colleagues or friends who will benefit from our advice. If you know of anyone who should receive *The Beacon* directly, please email [Subscriptions@TheLatimerGroup.com](mailto:Subscriptions@TheLatimerGroup.com)



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# IN THE SPOTLIGHT

*Practical Lessons in Leadership and Communication*

## On the Olympic Games, and the Intersection of Politics and Sports

Regular readers of *The Beacon* may be aware of my role as the volunteer Chairman of the US Olympic Sailing program. In addition, I will serve as Team Leader for our Olympic Sailing Team at the Olympic Games in August. This means I will attend the Games with our athletes, march with them in both the Opening and Closing Ceremonies, and be on hand every day during the competition to serve as a combination of administrator, cheerleader, friend and water boy.

Over the last several months, there has been much debate about whether certain countries, the US included, should boycott some part of the Games such as the Opening Ceremony or, more severely, boycott the Games entirely. I have spent a great deal of time considering the recent debates on China's Tibet policy as well as their other economic and social policies, and I believe that boycotting the Games, whether partially or completely, is a terrible idea. I believe human rights matter, in China and everywhere else. I believe that the Chinese government should be pushed and prodded by the world to improve their record on a variety of issues. However, I also believe that the Olympic Games are exactly the wrong forum in which to effect political change.

History has shown that boycotts have had meaningful impact on one and only one group: the athletes who are not allowed to participate.

Consider these two Olympic events from 1980: President Carter's decision to boycott the Summer Games in the former USSR due to, among other things, that country's aggression in Afghanistan; and the US hockey team's victory over the USSR at the Winter Games in Lake Placid. Which do you think had a greater impact on the

way the Americans viewed themselves and their role in the world, and the way the rest of the world viewed the Soviet Union? I'll take the hockey game. That game gave Americans confidence in themselves, and the Soviets' veil of invincibility was pierced. The boycott achieved neither of those things... but it did cause a return-the-favor boycott by the Soviets in 1984, doing further harm to the Olympic Games and the athletes who were competing.

Is it important to make it clear to China that most of the civilized world does not endorse their conduct? Of course it is. But such communication should be sent through other channels. Change China's favored-nation status. Reconsider their presence in the World Trade Organization. Force debate at the United Nations. There are plenty of opportunities to apply real pressure to any government whose policies are in conflict with the rest of the civilized world.

The Olympic Games will begin 94 days from the date of this writing. As we count down the days, let's keep the focus where it belongs: on the athletes. We have legitimate issues to protest in China, and concerned governments and individuals should make their feelings known. But such opinions should be shared in a way that will not interfere with the greatest of sporting events. Instead, we should allow these world-class athletes to experience something they have sacrificed for and earned, and which many of us, myself included, have dreamed about for ourselves.

*(If you would like to meet the athletes on the 2008 US Olympic and Paralympic Sailing Teams, please visit [www.ussailing.org/olympics](http://www.ussailing.org/olympics).)*

- *Dean M. Brenner*  
*Wallingford, CT (May 6, 2008)*