

NANO TOOLS FOR LEADERS®

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION: MAKING YOUR POINT

Nano Tools for Leaders® are fast, effective leadership tools that you can learn and start using in less than 15 minutes — with the potential to significantly impact your success as a leader and the engagement and productivity of the people you lead.

Contributors: G. Richard Shell, Professor of Legal Studies, and Mario Moussa, President, Moussa Consulting. Co-authors of *The Art of Woo: Using Strategic Persuasion to Sell Your Ideas* (Portfolio/Penguin, 2007) and Co-Directors of the Wharton [*Strategic Persuasion Workshop: The Art and Science of Selling Ideas*](#).

THE GOAL:

Communicate your ideas so that others understand your most important strategic priorities.

NANO TOOL:

Management theorist Nitin Nohria famously identified communication as “the real work of leadership.” Yet Professors Shell and Moussa’s research shows that communication at work is surprisingly difficult — and mistakes are expensive. One study found that misunderstandings cost companies nearly \$40B annually (the actual figure is probably much greater).

Shell and Moussa identified key psychological barriers, including belief bias and self-interest, that distort communication and stand between your ideas and your co-workers, superiors, and subordinates. They found that effective communicators avoid these barriers while making their intentions clearly understood. Specifically, they:

- communicate ideas in simple terms,
- support them with the right kind of evidence, and
- make them memorable.

HOW IT WORKS:

- Apple CEO Steve Jobs treated his presentations at industry conferences as theatrical performances. He used hands-on demonstrations to bring new products to life and often made surprise announcements to grab the attention of his listeners.
- Social activist and rock star Bono communicates on multiple “channels” to ensure that he is reaching his varied constituencies. With CFOs, he speaks the language of numbers. With religious figures, he draws on his experience as a born-again Christian. When he needs to shake up politicians, he can be blunt and challenging.



- At electronics retailer Best Buy, HR managers Jodi Thompson and Cali Ressler built support for the idea of using social media tools to support more flexible working arrangements. Rather than give PowerPoint presentations about how the tools would make possible variable schedules, virtual collaboration, and meeting-free zones, Thompson and Ressler used small-scale pilots to demonstrate their effectiveness.

ACTION STEPS:

- 1. Use the PCAN tool.** Simplify your idea by asking: What is the Problem am I trying to solve? What is the Cause of the problem? What is my Answer to the problem? What is the Net benefit of my answer?
- 2. Choose the right language.** Your idea should be supported with evidence expressed in the language (for example: formal authority, numbers, vision, self-interest) of the people with whom you are communicating.
- 3. Make it memorable.** Expressing your idea through hands-on demonstrations, stories, puzzles, and other ways to create “stickiness.”

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- *The Art of Woo: Using Strategic Persuasion to Sell Your Ideas*, G. Richard Shell and Mario Moussa (Penguin Books, 2008). Presents a practical guide to Winning Others Over (“woo”) by using relationship-based persuasion.
- *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Thrive and Others Die*, Chip and Dan Heath (Random House, 2007). Explains how to communicate ideas simply and more memorably.
- Richard Shell and Mario Moussa teach strategic communication in Wharton’s [Strategic Persuasion Workshop](#).

ABOUT NANO TOOLS:

Nano Tools for Leaders® was conceived and developed by Deb Giffen, MCC, Director of Innovative Learning Solutions at Wharton Executive Education. It is jointly sponsored by Wharton Executive Education and Wharton’s Center for Leadership and Change Management, Wharton Professor of Management Michael Useem, Director. Nano Tools Academic Director is Professor John Paul MacDuffie, Professor of Management at the Wharton School and Director of the Program on Vehicle and Mobility Innovation (PVMII) at Wharton’s Mack Institute for Innovation Management.