

Making it Memorable with Metaphors

–for business presentations

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Do you want your audience to understand your message clearly? Do you want it to stand out?

Do you want them to remember it after they left your presentation? If your answer is yes to these questions, then you must read on to learn how the world's best minds use metaphors to convey their ideas and make them stick in the minds of their audience.

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What is a metaphor?

A metaphor connects seemingly unrelated subjects to provide meaning. It is a figure of speech that connects two or more things. More generally, a metaphor describes a first subject as *being* or *equal* to a second object in some way.

Metaphors have been around a long time. Many literary legends use them to express their ideas. For example, William Shakespeare wrote the following in *As You Like It*:

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances*

In this example, he compared the world to a stage, and people to actors in the play.

Why use metaphors?

Metaphors are very powerful in conveying complex information in a simple way, using things we could relate to in our daily lives. For example, a subject about life truly must be very complex. But Shakespeare likened it to a theatre stage, which allowed people to easily visualise what it means, and reminded us that we have different roles to play in real life, just like the roles different actors and actresses play.

Metaphors are also very memorable. Centuries later, people have continued to use the sound bite version of his metaphor: “the world’s a stage”.

When to use metaphors?

If you want to convey complex information in a succinct, efficient and creative way, think of expressing it using a metaphor.

Examples of metaphors

The Teacher: Benjamin Graham

Benjamin Graham was the teacher of the world's most successful investor and the current second richest man in the world, Warren Buffett. Benjamin Graham was largely attributed as the father of modern investing through his seminal work in fundamental analysis for share investments.

He wrote in his highly popular book, *The Intelligent Investor*, about the impact of market psychology and speculation on stock prices. He said: "In the short run, the market is a voting machine, but in the long run, it is a weighing machine". What he was conveying was that over short periods of time, prices of stocks could over or undershoot their true value due to fear and greed of investors. But over a long period of time, share prices must reflect the company's fundamentals.

Again, he illustrated a highly complex idea, the impact of market psychology on share valuation, using something we could relate in our daily lives: voting machine (people casting votes based on their fears and whimsicals) and weighing machine (based on what is real, substantial and verifiable).

The *Intelligent Investor* was first published in 1950. Till today, the metaphor of "voting machine vs weighing machine" is still being used by the investment community.

The Student: Warren Buffett

Like his teacher, his famed student also dispenses liberal dosages of metaphoric medicine and tonic for consumption by his readers in his well-written and well-read Chairman letters to his shareholders at Berkshire Hathaway.

In his 2008 *Letter to Shareholders*, he likened shareholders who lost money when the stock market plunged by more than 50% to "small birds that strayed into a badminton game", resulting in being "bloodied and confused".

He went on to say that "economic medicine that was previously meted out by the cupful has recently been dispensed by the barrel"—referring to the massive bailout package costing trillions of dollar to save the economy from collapsing.

I am sure you will agree with me the vividness that the imaginary brings when you contrast a "cupful" with a "barrel".

The President: Barack Obama

In a recent speech, President Obama referred to the parable at the end of the Sermon on the Mount that tells the story of two men: one who built his house on a pile of sand, while the other upon a rock (no prizes for guessing whose house remained standing when the storm hit).

After he told the story, he said that "We cannot rebuild this economy on the same pile of sand. We must build our house upon a rock. We must lay a new foundation for growth and prosperity - a foundation that will move us from an era of borrow and spend to one where we save and invest; where we consume less at home and send more exports abroad."

So as you can see, metaphors are definitely delectable ingredients for refined presidential speech material. What's more, you can borrow from an existing source, just like the President, without having to invest lots of time to create something of your own. All you need is to apply the metaphor to your situation to make it purposeful. This is certainly one area where borrowing does not get you into trouble with the banker!

Conclusion

Metaphors are used by business and world leaders alike. Speak the language of leadership. Spread it like marmalade. Spice up your presentations. Make it memorable with metaphors.