

TRANSFORMATIVE COMMUNICATION



CREATING IMPACT BY ALIGNING

INTENTION,
STORY, AND
PRESENCE



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Overview

An imperative exists across corporations both large and small to develop effective communication skills in leaders as well as their professional workforces. Indeed, communication has been identified as one of the top three skills needed in the workplace of the future . A 2018 study conducted by LinkedIn revealed that the top focus of talent developers is how to train for critical thinking, communication, and leadership skills.

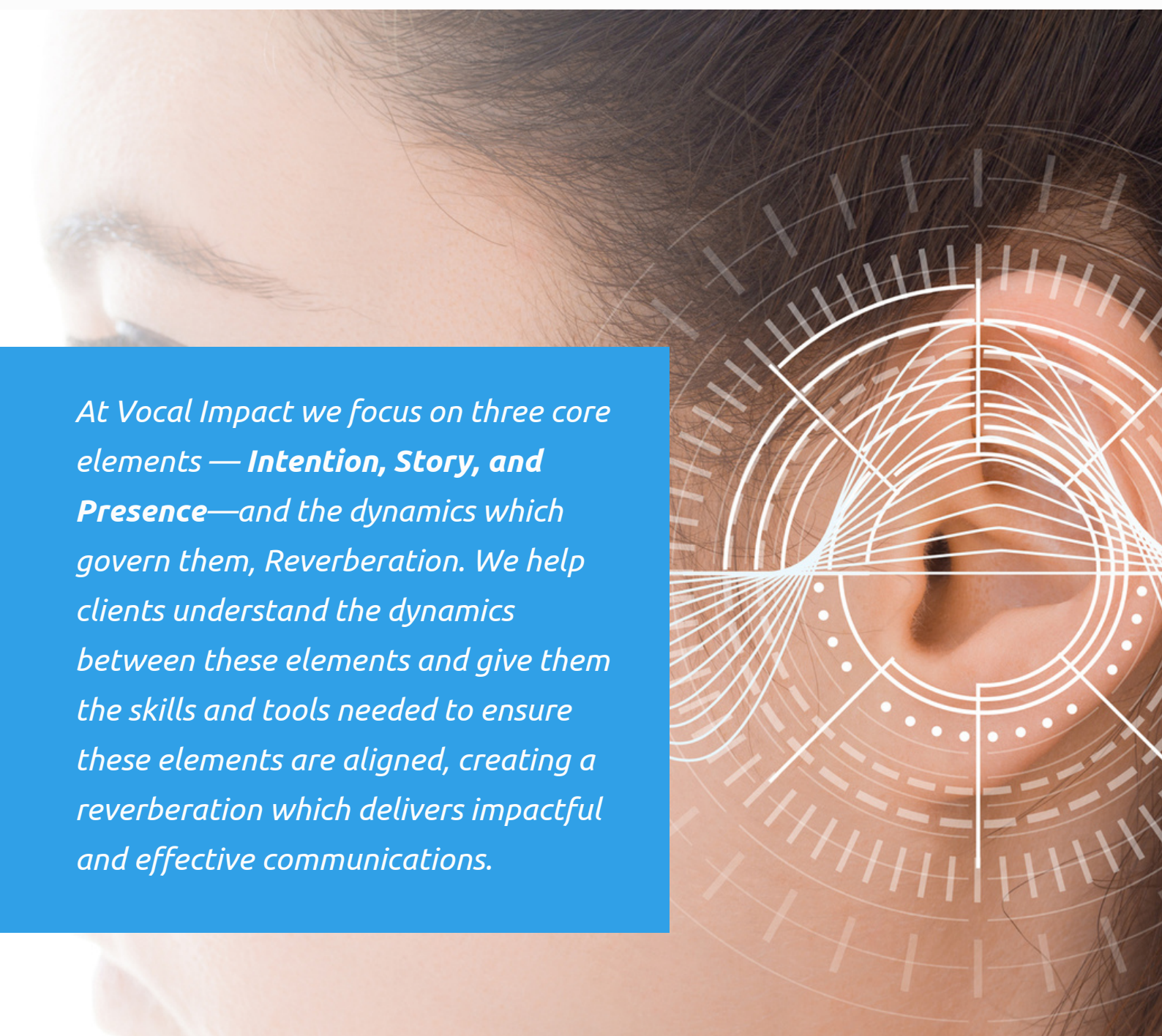
In what is being called the Fourth Industrial Revolution, sophisticated AI and ubiquitous technology is rapidly expanding. What cannot be replicated in these advances, however, are human skills such as compassion, empathy, and communication. These will define the competitive edge of workers and entire organizations. The fact is, in the brave new world of high-tech innovation, communication will maintain a prominent position.

The ability to effectively communicate is an acquired skill . . . and effectiveness is measured on a sliding scale. Some people seem to have a natural talent, but even natural talent has its limits. It is also rare and difficult to identify, no less locate. Imagine developing a workforce strategy based on the premise of “finding natural talent.” It is neither feasible nor sustainable.



The good news is that with guidance and practice anyone can become a better communicator and increase their ability to influence others. And while this has been widely recognized, it has been poorly executed. Reviewing training and development offerings will reveal a plethora of courses covering presentation and writing skills. You may even find leadership courses

devoted to topics such as presenting with impact, the psychology of persuasion, and executive presence. The problem is many of these have a limited scope and tend to compartmentalize communications between specific tactics (typically presentation and writing) to vague theories (typically emotional intelligence and situational leadership). While these are good, they do not provide a holistic and actionable approach.



*At Vocal Impact we focus on three core elements — **Intention, Story, and Presence**—and the dynamics which govern them, *Reverberation*. We help clients understand the dynamics between these elements and give them the skills and tools needed to ensure these elements are aligned, creating a reverberation which delivers impactful and effective communications.*

Intention

Purpose in Life (PIL) is a popular focus for research, but in truth it has been of interest to philosophers, physicians, and scientists for hundreds of years. The brain has a relentless obsession with extracting meaning from everything. Psychiatrist Viktor Frankl, who spent three years as a prisoner in Nazi concentration camps, observed in his seminal book, [Man's Search for Meaning](#).



Using techniques such as brain imaging and EEG, scientists and researchers have discovered that this quest for meaning can be found in all kinds of people regardless of status, education, or geography. In our work at Vocal Impact, we have found that purpose, or Intention, is paramount in creating powerful communication -- that "the why" makes a difference for both the communicator and the audience.

Intention is often defined as an "aim that guides action." With aim, there is an effort directed toward attaining something. This is why Intention has the power to change our communication - it's like a plan to achieve our purpose and when executed against it produces results. We have found that when people become clear on their Intention, their communication improves. One of our clients, a tech executive, said it simply enough: "Visualizing and internalizing my intent before a presentation has had a significant impact on the delivery of the material, and how engaged I am with the audience."

From theatre to yoga to modern psychology to neuroplasticity, practitioners and researchers are learning that Intention has a direct impact on our neurological capacity for forming beliefs, but also our short-term behaviors and long-term habits.

Many studies have documented the impact of intention as well as identifying exactly how it operates. One key factor seems to be trust as demonstrated in a study by neuroscientists, Krueger and colleagues. As published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences: “. . . there was a central network of brain regions that was involved in decisions about whether or not to trust, and these brain regions are those that are typically involved in what is called ‘mentalizing,’ or thinking about the mind of another person, thinking about the intentions of another person.”*

We work closely with our clients to understand and articulate their Intention in clear, precise statements. These statements then become guideposts for how they show up, act and speak, even what words they choose. Clients typically find this practice to be one of the most memorable and galvanizing aspects of their coaching experience. In part this is because of its function in creating Reverberation with their Presence, or how they choose to show up, and in determining the shape of the content, or Story, which they share.

Story

In the late '90's our founder led a story collection project at Hyperion Solutions, a software company. Hyperion had recently undergone a merger which failed to achieve the expected uplifts. Instead, employees were disgruntled and customers dissatisfied which had negative impacts on the company's performance.

To understand the underlying issues, we reached out to employees as well as customers to hear their stories. We wanted to know their experiences with the merger and, more importantly, what they had expected from it. While the experiences were disheartening, it was the expectations that opened our eyes. The expectations (their hopes, aspirations, beliefs) across all stakeholder groups were remarkably similar. We then set out to produce and share stories of other similarities and human experience such as what employees did after work or how the company was helping their customers be successful. When we shared those stories across the employee populations, people recognized commonalities and this set the groundwork for the healing and integration which was to come.

**The Trust Project, Northwestern University*

Stories at Hyperion helped the company not only to survive but to thrive. The company enhanced its internal operations and external value which was duly recognized by the industry and resulted in the company being bought by Oracle. At the heart of this success was the power of Story, not just storytelling. Storytelling is a tactic to deliver information; Story is the authentic narrative of human experience. Storytelling results in the uptake of a message; Story results in the connection of people.



Sharing common experiences is one of the most powerful ways to connect with an audience – it literally lights up our brains. Research done by Uri Hasson and others in 2010 at Princeton University discovered that while storytelling lights up the same part of the brain as story listening, this similarity falls away if the listener does not understand the story. This is one of the reasons for blank stares during many business, technical, academic, and science talks. In his TED talk from 2016, Hasson says, “In order for our brains to be coupled, we need common ground.”

Stories are dynamic. They are a means by which we find common ground and

communicate meaning. Stories are not just facts and figures, they contain an appeal to our senses and consist of metaphors and associations. They enable us to move from knowledge to wisdom because their dynamic nature allows us to transfer that knowledge to other situations. At Vocal Impact we focus on teaching clients to build Stories that are grounded in Intention and which connect with audiences. When thinking of content as Story, we put aside the idea that a presentation is merely informative and embrace the idea that all communication is about our relationship with others. We look for ways to connect and engage, to build those relationships through responses.

Presence

Most business professionals don't know enough about their Presence. One executive client told us that the most unexpected thing she learned from our work together was that how she walked into a room or onto stage created an impression. Her sentiment is not unusual. If I ask a typical businessperson to tell me what a presentation is, they'll say: "It's my slide deck." In contrast if I ask a performer, they will say, "It's me."



Of course, there is a difference between communication that focuses on the "me" (the speaker) and one that involves the "you" (the audience). Ninety-nine percent of us lose influence when we focus entirely on ourselves. The most influential performers today are in conversation with their fans through social media. Businesspeople can learn a lot about how to pitch their ideas by observing what goes on there. The rules of engagement include knowing who your audience is, what they care about, and what problems they face. The same is true in business. Today's leaders need to be transparent, willing to share, and willing to

listen. Authenticity is at the core of this and it is represented in Presence.

Presence is reflected, metaphorically and physically, in our voices, posture, and gestures. In fact, for the first 30 seconds that we speak, people assess who we are and whether they should keep listening. In 1967, Dr. Albert Mehrabian showed that only 7% of what others understand when we communicate is the words we say. The rest comes from the paralinguage, or how we say what we say using body language and tone of voice.

When we facilitate our Vocal Impact workshop on Executive Presence, we begin with a discussion of the characteristics of Executive Presence. Often participants describe it as “charisma,” or that indescribable “certain something” that some people have because “they were just born that way.” However, The Center for Talent Innovation, a research group in New York City, found it is much more tangible than that. It is “an amalgam of qualities that true leaders exude, a presence that telegraphs you’re in charge or deserve to be.”*

Interestingly, after surveying hundreds of executives, they further concluded that Executive Presence can be broken down into specific qualities, with the core being “gravitas” which is commonly defined as “dignity, seriousness, or solemnity of manner.” Every one of these traits that can be learned and developed.



Presence is the result of a desire to bring our unique ideas to the table. It is developed as we learn to trust that we have something to say. Presence is a personification of a commitment to one’s thoughts and ideas with the passion to bring them into reality. In short, Presence is the embodiment of Intention and Story.

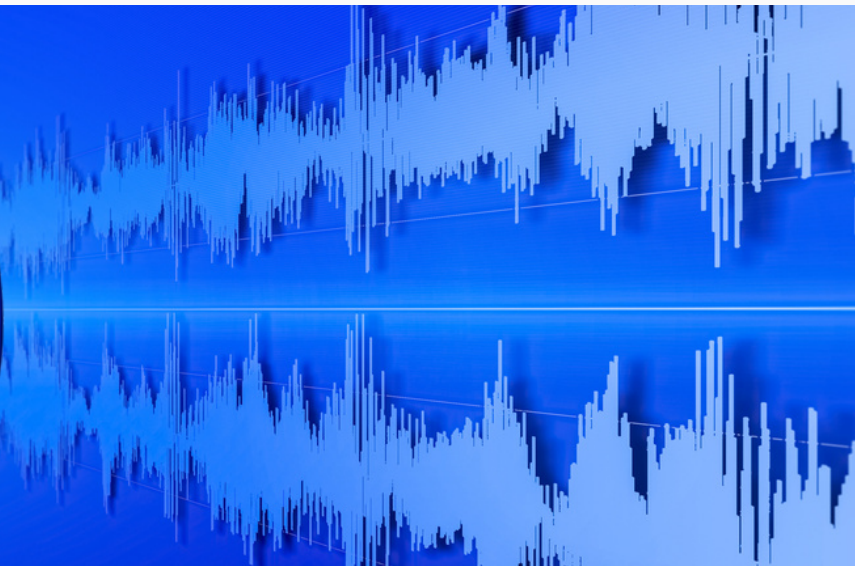
*<http://www.talentinnovation.org/publication.cfm?publication=1450>

Reverberation

At Vocal Impact, we work with clients to discover and align their Intention, Story, and Presence. This alignment occurs when a speaker knows their Intention – that is, why they are taking people’s time to speak to them and what they want the audience to do as a result of having heard them. That Intention, in turn, influences the Story they prepare. Strong alignment helps them eliminate what is unnecessary and focus on the words and message they should convey. Alignment between Intention and Story also enables a speaker to better prepare how they are going to communicate their message, including how they carry themselves, how they use their voice, how they stand, and how they emote to genuinely connect with the audience.

We believe the ability to influence and have impact forms at the intersection of Intention, Story, and Presence. The better aligned these are — the better they reverberate with each other — the more significant the impact.

How Intention, Story, and Presence interface with one another is Reverberation. When sound strikes a surface, it is reflected at varying times and amplitudes, creating an echo which conveys complex information about the sound, the physical space through which it travelled, and the source from which it emanated. This is reverberation as we traditionally understand it. At Vocal Impact we expand the concept of reverberation beyond auditory harmonics and address it in terms of the dynamics that govern effective communication.





Vocal Impact, Inc.

Our intention is to guide and inspire leaders to be real and relevant heroes in their own stories and the stories of their organizations and causes – heroes who transform hearts and minds and create solutions for a vibrant and peaceful world.

Vocal impact is a team of executive coaches, voice specialists, content developers, and others who guide and support the heroes with whom we work. Our work leads people to find both their physical and metaphorical voices using an approach that not only helps individual expression but allows people to connect better with others. Our clients learn vocal health and we help them create clarity out of noise and expression out of flat, meaningless delivery through development of articulation and inflection skills. But moreover, our science-based and performance-proven approach to communicating with impact and influence systematically builds skills and discipline in the communicator.

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