



## Push's Quick Guide to... The Power of Speaking

*“Face to face conversation is the most human – and humanizing thing we can do. Fully present to one another, we learn to listen. It’s where we develop the capacity for empathy. It’s where we experience the joy of being heard.”*

– Sherry Turkle, MIT leading researcher on the subjective experience of technology

### Why Storytelling matters...

*We’ve been telling stories and conversing face to face (without distraction), for around 12,000 years.*

40,000 years ago our brains began to develop the ability to dream. Before this, our brains were primarily focused on navigating the environment around us – the food, water and shelter it could provide, and the dangers associated with it. This ability to start imagining means we began to form stories in our minds of our future possible selves and the future possible happiness of our community, via our integral roles within them. Owen Eastwood is a performance psychologist who has worked with some of the most elite sports teams in the world, helping them find their origin story and their 'why'. He says in his book *Belonging* how our survival has been based on prioritising "collective over individual purpose" which is "captured in our biology". Stories help us **write and understand the narrative behind our 'tribes'**. Those can be our relationships with friends, family and partners, but also our understanding of a company, and our role within them, to help the wider cause. In stories, we might call this the 'through arc'.

### Storytelling structure

Every good story has 3Cs: **CHARACTER**, **CONFLICT** and **CHANGE**. The main character must be relatable and connect to our own narratives in some way. Stories need structure, too. They need to have:

1. **A beginning** sets the scene and introduces the main character, and might hint at the challenge(s) to come.
2. **A middle** often includes detailed description of the main character navigating the challenge.
3. **An ending** explains whether the main character manages to overcome the challenge or not, and what they have learned through their experiences.

**Your life is going to follow this structure in endless chapters:** we spend most of life in the middle part. We have mini-endings each time we try something new that takes us out of our comfort zone (an exam, a job interview), and we analyse the results and figure out how to improve on them, for the next challenge(s).



**When telling a story, you need to think about pace, variation, and movement (PVM)**

- **PACE** helps build **suspense** (by speaking quicker) or create **dramatic moments** (by speaking incredibly slowly). Pace also helps keep the audience engaged with what you're saying.
- **VARIATION** is important because, when we go up (**upwards inflection**) at the end of a sentence, it tells the audience we haven't finished our point – we hold them in suspense of what's next. When we go down (**downwards inflection**) at the end of sentence, we tell an audience we are finishing what we want to say.
- **MOVEMENT** is essential because the human brain's visual and auditory senses get bored quickly. If someone is fixed on a spot for too long, speaking in the same tone and speed, with little vocal variation, the audience will get bored and stop listening. You could **walk from one side of the stage to the other, shift your weight, step to one side, rest your arm against your body** etc.

### The face is a window to the soul

Maintaining **eye contact** is really important. Try looking a third of the way back, along the row, to different people's eyes. This makes it appear like you are addressing the whole room, instead of just the front or middle rows – if you can glance now and then at the front and back rows, even better.

Being **expressive with your face** is important. We have 42 individual facial muscles and the body has evolved through 1,000s of years to give off subtle cues (safety or danger, humour or stress, happiness or fear) that an individual or crowd in front of us can read. By exercising your facial muscles they become more flexible, meaning you can get emotion across more effortlessly to an audience, when you speak.

Having **good diction** is important. This is about how you use your tongue and lips. Your tongue is made up of 8 different muscles (although it feels like one) and the combination of these is incredibly strong.

Give yourself some 'tongue twisters' and tongue exercises to build the muscle's strength  
**Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers    Who-Would-Know-Ought-Of-Art**  
**Red lorry, yellow lorry    Must-Learn-And-Then-Take-His-Ease    The Vulgar Volgar Boatman**