

# WHAT'S YOUR HOOK?



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# THANK YOU

It takes a lot more patience, skill and smarts to listen than it does to talk. While I may be pretty good at talking, my wife, Mary, is superb at listening. Thanks, Hon, for all your support.

To my brother, Mike, who has always been willing to provide his astute editing skills to each one of my manuscripts; I appreciate all your help. Someday you may even be compensated.

To my terrific clients, for being open-minded, willing to take smart risk and finding creative ways to add “hooks” to their presentations, meetings and sales calls. You’re a pleasure to work with.



# PREFACE

The ability to persuade is an essential stepping stone on the path to success. And common sense tells us that anyone who knows how to grab and keep the attention of an audience has the potential to be a powerful persuader. This book will provide you with a variety of creative ways to grab the attention of anyone, anywhere, anytime.

What's Your Hook? is not just for presenters and salespeople. It's for anyone who wants to ensure that their message sticks with their listener. So whether you're a manager running a meeting, an entrepreneur putting together a marketing brochure, a teacher in front of a class, or a coach motivating a team, you'll find ideas in here that you can use over and over.

I use the word "presentation" as a catchall term. Not only does it mean the typical stand in front of the room type of presentation, but it also can mean running a meeting, hosting a conference call, facilitating a workshop, or having a one-on-one conversation as you would in a job interview. In this book, a "presentation" is anytime you're in front of one or more people for the purpose of delivering a message that you want them to remember.

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***“There are no boring topics,  
there are only boring speakers.”***

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Kevin Carroll

# INTRODUCTION

I'll never forget the time my oceanography professor said, "If you're ever swimming in shark-infested waters, always swim with a partner. That way if the shark attacks, you'll at least have a 50/50 chance of surviving." That was over thirty years ago and I still remember his wry piece of advice. He knew how to hook his students.

Take a minute to recall one or two of the most memorable presentations or speeches you have ever seen. Who gave the presentation? Why was it so memorable? What did the presenter say or do that made his or her message stick in your mind? What did they do that hooked you?



Advertising (the industry that I worked in for 17 years) is all about finding "The Hook." Well I shouldn't say that exactly. It's also about knowing who you're trying to reach (your target audience) and having a clear message with a specific benefit. The best advertising is advertising where the creative hook is tied directly to the product rather than having the hook be just an attention grabber and nothing more. As

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a communicator, if you can successfully connect your hook to your main message, then your audience will be much more likely to remember your key point.

Today I make my living as a professional speaker, corporate trainer and presentation consultant. My job is to help my clients prepare for important meetings and come out as winners. I use hooks all the time both on my sales calls and in my workshops because they work. Every time I use a hook, I can see that it captures the other person's attention and gives my point impact. That's why you should be using them, too.

As I see it, there are two reasons why so many people don't use hooks:

1. They've never been taught how.
2. They're worried that the hook won't work and that they'll end up looking silly.

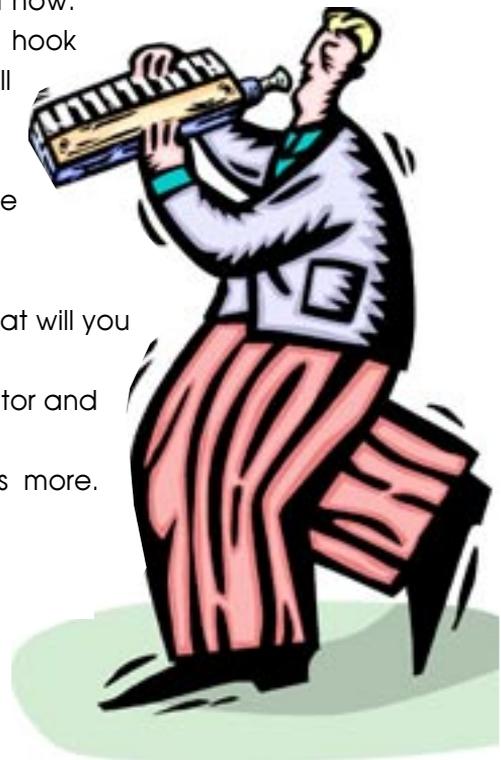
This book will help solve those two issues.

When it's all said and done, what will you get out of reading this book?

You'll be a clearer communicator and more persuasive.

You'll enjoy giving presentations more.

You'll live happily ever after.



**Before you read any further...**

**1. What is a hook anyway?** A hook is any creative device that grabs someone's attention. A hook could be: a catchy phrase, a humorous story, an amazing statistic, a memorable demonstration or a thought-provoking question. Here's my rule of thumb: If you find something interesting, it has the potential to be a hook. The key to using a hook is that you'll want to directly tie your hook (your attention grabber) to the message that you're trying to make stick with your audience.

**2. What are the benefits of using hooks?**

- a. They grab your listener's attention.
- b. They make your message easier to understand. (This is great when you need to talk about intangible concepts like insurance, consulting services, software or the theory of relativity.)
- c. They make your message more memorable.
- d. They make your message more persuasive.

**3. What makes a hook work?** Given the fact that humans are highly emotional, inquisitive, creative beings, anything that's different, intriguing and that a person can identify with on a gut level, has the potential to grab their attention.

**4. How to make it stick.** In order to get your point to stick, it all starts with knowing *exactly* what your point is. If you can't concisely state your key message in one sentence or less,

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then you're not ready to develop your hook. Remember, the listener shouldn't have to *decipher* your information; their job should be to *absorb* it. That's not to say that they have to agree with you, but they shouldn't sit there wondering what it is you're trying to say.

Here're some examples of focused key points:

- Our goal is to lower our turnover rate from 15% to 8%.
- We want to start a diversity training program.
- We will be moving our operations facility to Peoria.
- We should strive to have 95% of our students graduate.
- We need to increase membership by 5% a year.
- We must increase customer satisfaction ratings from 4.3 to 4.7 in three months.

**5. Determine what's in it for them?** Not only do you need to be crystal clear on your points, you also need to answer this question: "Why should my audience care?" (What's in it for them?) If the point you're trying to make doesn't affect them directly, or doesn't provide any value to them, then they'll filter you out. You need to show them exactly how you are going to either increase their pleasure or decrease their pain. (This is your *value proposition*.) Here are some samples:

- Make more money
- Have less stress
- Gain more respect
- Have less homework

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- Increase visibility
- Save on repairs
- Improve productivity

**6. Your message needs to be clear, concise and well organized.** To that end, if you need help with how to plan your presentation or your message, I suggest you read my first book: *Make Your Point!*. That book is an excellent complement to this book. It delves into the important strategic questions you should ask yourself such as: Who's my audience? What's my objective? What's in it for them? It also provides the reader with a template I call *The Diamond* which provides the reader with a tool for organizing almost any presentation. *Make Your Point!* is the steak and *What's Your Hook?* is the sizzle. Both are important.



**7. Start a Keeper Folder.** A keeper folder is simply a manila folder marked with the word "KEEPERS" big and bold on the outside. Anytime you come across something that grabs your attention and that you find interesting (it could be a newspaper or magazine article, a photo, a quote, an amazing statistic, or whatever) put it in your keeper folder. That way, the next time you have to communicate an important message and you're looking for some hooks, you'll already have some in your keeper folder. Along the same lines, when someone tells you to check out an amazing website (like [coolsiteoftheday.com](http://coolsiteoftheday.com)) or they email you something funny, save it in an electronic version of your keeper folder. That will give you another handy resource when it comes time to find a hook.

**8. Create a story file.** Start writing down your great stories and anecdotes; both the ones from your past as well as the ones that are yet to come. A story could be about the time you backed your dad's car into your mom's car. It could be about a stranger who said a kind word to you when you needed it most, or when you got a hole in one. As you'll see in the chapter called *Personal Stories*, a story is nothing more than an incident that happened to you that's funny, frightening, inspiring or unusual. Let me repeat that since I hear people sometimes moan, "But I don't have any stories." A story is nothing more than an incident that happened to you that's funny, frightening, inspiring or unusual. Stories can be as brief as 10 seconds or as long as 5 minutes

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(although it better be a real good one if it's 5 minutes). Start writing down your stories now so that when you need them, you have them.

**9. Consider this book a reference tool.** Take what you need and leave the rest. Even if you only take away three or four ideas, the key is to PUT THEM TO USE! Test the waters; discover which hooks work best for you. Focus on the ones you believe will give you the best return. Once you've tried using a few, come back and read the book again. You'll have a different perspective on it the second time around.

### So to recap...

- First, be absolutely clear on your point(s).
- Second, know what's in it for your audience.
- Third, find a hook(s) that will help make your point(s) stick.







***“It usually takes more than  
three weeks to prepare a  
good impromptu speech.”***

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Mark Twain





The  
**HOO**KS

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# PERSONAL STORIES

Of all the different, creative ways to hook an audience, personal stories are my favorite. A personal story is where you take an incident from your own life and you *draw a parallel* between that incident and the point you're trying to make in your presentation. Personal stories are an emotional hook and, when done right, are magic. Audiences understand them, they relate to them and they remember them. This, in turn, helps them remember your point.

Stories, when used in presentations, meetings and conversations, are most effective when you apply this three-step process:

- 1. Tell your story.** The best stories are *specific moments* in time where something happened that was either funny, frightening, inspiring or unusual.
- 2. Make just *one* point.** For example, you might say: "What I discovered that day was that it's really important to get outside your comfort zone. Or "That experience helped me realize that there are different ways to accomplish the same objective." Don't make more than *one* point, otherwise it will dilute your message.
- 3. Make the point relevant to your listeners.** This is where

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you make a connection between the point you just made and how it relates to your audience.

A few years ago I was running a workshop with a team of financial advisors and I was teaching them my three-part storytelling process. One of the participants then volunteered to give it a try. Here's the story he told to his fellow advisors:

*I moved to Colorado from Brazil when I was 16 years old and I didn't speak a word of English. (Great stories have conflict or difficulty at their core.) Well the good news was that I started dating a girl in my high school soon after I moved to the United States. As it turned out, this girl happened to live on a ranch. One day I called her at her home and I meant to ask her, "Do you have any horses?" But what I said was, "You remind me of a horse." He then shook his head and said, "Well that was the end of that relationship."*



*With that, all the financial advisors laughed. The presenter went on to say, "What I realized that day was that it's really important to speak the same language as the people you're with. In our jobs as financial advisors, we often talk about things like return on investment, portfolio analysis and debt/equity ratios, but our clients speak*

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*a different language than we do. They want to know: Can I retire in 10 years? Can I pay for college for my kid? Can I afford to take a vacation? So it's critical that we speak our client's language and not our language. And if we do, we'll be a lot more successful.*

That's a perfect execution of how to use personal stories in a business presentation.

This next story was told to me by a beverage salesman in one of my seminars. He uses it to teach other salespeople how to be more successful:

*When I went to buy my first car, I didn't have very much money, so I asked the sales person to show me his least expensive model. I took one look at the price and I knew I couldn't afford it. I then asked him if he had the same car, but with no extra features. Well the second car he showed me had a lower sticker price, but I still couldn't afford it. So I asked if he had anything that was even cheaper. We then went out back and he showed me a car I could actually afford. I asked him why it was less expensive than the car we had just seen in the showroom and he told me that the other car was an automatic and that this one was a standard. I said that I didn't know how to drive a standard so I couldn't buy the car. He then responded, "Why don't you get in the passenger seat and we'll take it for a drive just so you can*

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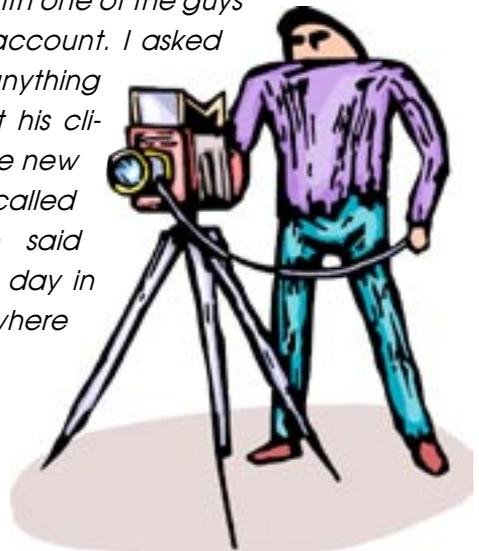
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*see how it feels." Two minutes into the test drive the salesperson drove the car up a steep hill, stopped it half way, put the parking break on and got out of the car. He walked around to my side and said, "I'm going to teach you how to drive it." He then spent over an hour with me until I mastered it. When we got back to the showroom, I bought the car. That day I saw firsthand what it really meant to go above and beyond a customer's expectations. It was one of the best sales lessons I've ever learned and I encourage you, as salespeople, to look at customer resistance as an opportunity to help them out.*

By the way, audiences love it when we poke good-natured fun at ourselves rather than when we are the hero of our own story. Here's a personal story I sometimes tell in my *Breakthrough Thinking* seminar just to loosen up the participants.

*A number of years ago, while working at an advertising agency, I was talking with one of the guys who handled a camera account. I asked him if he was working on anything new and he told me that his client was involved in a whole new type of photography called digital photography. He said that there would come a day in the not too distant future where*



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*people wouldn't even use film in their cameras. Well I didn't know what he was talking about because I couldn't get my head around the concept that cameras wouldn't use film. In fact, I thought that the whole idea sounded like a waste of time. As I walked away I sort of snickered and said "Well good luck with that project."*

This story always gets a laugh and sets the tone that the class will be fun and that no one has all the answers.

If you want to be a great storyteller (and who doesn't?) you have to start writing down your stories. Think back on those incidences in your life that were funny, frightening, inspiring or unusual. It could have been the time you got your first speeding ticket, or the day you witnessed a bank holdup, or the time a glob of roofing tar landed on you right before an important meeting. (Welcome to my world.) If you jot down these past incidences and add new ones as they come along, you'll have instant access to a bunch of rich stories and anecdotes whenever you need one. As I mentioned, it's MUCH easier to have a collection of great stories at the ready then to have to come up with a story the night before a presentation.

When I log my stories, I jot down two or three key ideas within the story. This makes it easy to find the most appropriate stories whether I'm talking about communication, persistence, listening, effective selling techniques, honesty, or whatever.

# ANALOGIES

Analogies are wonderful because listeners can easily identify with them, they help make vague concepts more concrete and they can add some zing to your message. Read the front page of any major newspaper in America and you're sure to find at least one analogy. In fact, the next time you pick up a newspaper or magazine, take a look at a few articles and you'll discover how frequently writers use analogies to help get their point across.

Strong speakers use analogies in many different ways. They can be used as a quick hit to immediately capture a point, or a speaker might even build an entire presentation around one analogy that has many facets. A recent example of a quick-hit is when Representative Barney Frank, who is openly gay, once said during a hearing: "People aren't good at doing things they dislike. It's like asking me to judge the Miss America contest - if your heart's not in it, you don't do a very good job."

A computer engineer once needed to communicate to a non-IT person that having three different software platforms was a bad idea. He used this analogy:

*Having three different platforms is a lot like having three different brands of air conditioners in your*

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*home. Every time you need to replace the filters, you have to go through the hassle of finding three different types. That may even mean going to three different stores. And every time one of your air conditioners has to be repaired, you might have to contact a different manufacturer. It just doesn't make sense.*

When I work with clients I ask them to come up with an interesting analogy for what their job is like. I specifically tell them that they can't use "fireman" as their analogy because there's nothing unique or memorable about saying, "My job's a lot like being a fireman." I also tell them that they can't say, "My job is a lot like being a consultant." Why not? Because "consultant" is vague and doesn't help clarify what your job is. It's also a boring analogy and therefore won't be very memorable. Here are a couple of attention-grabbing analogies I've heard my clients use to describe their jobs:

*My job is a lot like being a **UN weapons inspector**. I have to go into places where I'm not welcomed and find information that no one wants to give me.*

*My job is a lot like being a **gold miner**. I have to find nuggets of valuable*



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*information buried under lots of unimportant data.*

Try this exercise: Come up with an interesting and unique analogy for your own job:

*My job is a lot like being a\_\_\_\_\_.*

*I have to\_\_\_\_\_.*

Is it specific?

Is it unique?

Is it memorable?

Here's a couple more analogies. Can you see how they make otherwise dull concepts come alive?

- "MTV is to music as KFC is to chicken." (Lewis Black)
- "Pupils are more like oysters than sausages. The job of teaching is not to stuff them and then seal them up, but to help them open and reveal the riches within. There are pearls in each of us, if only we knew how to cultivate them with ardor and persistence." (Sydney J. Harris)

Since we're talking about analogies, I thought you'd get a kick out of some of the *worst* analogies written in a high school essay. (As bad as they are, they're pretty funny.)

- The plan was simple, like my brother-in-law Phil. But unlike Phil, this plan just might work.
- The little boat gently drifted across the pond exactly

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the way a bowling ball wouldn't.

- From the attic came an unearthly howl. The whole scene had an eerie, surreal quality, like when you're on vacation in another city and *Jeopardy* comes on at 7 p.m. instead of 7:30.
- Her eyes were like two brown circles with big black dots in the center.
- His thoughts tumbled in his head, making and breaking alliances like underpants in a dryer without Cling Free.
- He was as tall as a six-foot-three-inch tree.
- The politician was gone but unnoticed, like the period after the Dr. on a Dr Pepper can.
- John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met.





***“Creativity comes from trust.  
Trust your instincts.”***

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Rita Mae Brown

# EXAMPLES

Examples are real world illustrations of ideas or concepts. Examples have tremendous value to presenters and salespeople, because they solidify intangible concepts or ideas. The more specific and concrete your examples are, the more effective they will be in helping you get your points across. Without them, your audience will wonder, "What's he talking about?" Examples are mandatory whether you're giving a presentation or conversing one-on-one as you would in a job interview. Although examples may lack some of the wow factor that other types of hooks have, that doesn't diminish their importance. Examples help listeners "get it."

I remember coaching a woman who had terrific delivery skills and a well-organized message. What was strange about her presentation was that even though she had great skills, I couldn't quite figure out what she was talking about nor could I remember much of what he had just said when she was finished. I then realized what the problem was. She



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had no examples to help illuminate her points. Her ideas stayed on an abstract, conceptual level and were difficult to grasp. Once I helped her find a few examples, then her message had total clarity.

I can say to my kids, "It's important for you to work as a team." But that's vague. Clarity comes when I add, "For example, Claire, if you don't have the time to clear your plate because you have to run off to a softball game, then Collin please clear it for her." Similarly, I can give a pitch to a prospect and tell him "I can help you make your presentations more persuasive and memorable," but unless I tell him about the time I once had a presenter hand out a thousand bags of M&M's in order to get a thousand audience members to remember the words "**M**ind share to **M**arket share" then my prospect won't really understand how I make presentations more memorable. (I'll go in to more detail about this example in the chapter on PROPS.)

So whenever or wherever you're communicating, make certain you lace your message with clear, crisp examples so that those on the receiving end truly understand what you're talking about. You'll find that when you provide your listeners with good examples, that's when you'll see their heads nod indicating that you're getting your point across.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

(Kevin Carroll: A life in bullet points)

- The third of seven kids from an Irish Catholic family.
- Grew up just outside New York City.
- Worked in advertising for 17 years. (Got out on account of good behavior.)
- Once tried stand-up comedy. (His career was described as “short and dubious.”)
- In 1996 started his own corporate training business. His motto: *Think Creatively. Communicate Persuasively.*
- Most memorable assignment: teaching conflict resolution at the US Postal Service. (Seriously.)
- Clients have included: Microsoft, GE, Chubb, Wrigley, Unilever, IBM, and Coleytown Elementary School.
- Written three books: *Make Your Point!*, *Think Outside Your Blocks*, and *What’s Your Hook?*
- In 2008, created a family board game (with the help of his daughter and a friend of his) called *Pickles to Penguins*.
- Married, two kids, one dog, and lives in Connecticut.



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## NEXT STEPS

Enjoyed the book? You're warmly invited to share your comments on Amazon.com. All you have to do is search: *What's Your Hook?* Once you see the book, click on it and then click on "Customer Reviews." There you will be able to "Create your own review." Many thanks.

Would you like 20% off all future purchases of *What's Your Hook*? Go to: [www.createspace.com/3383380](http://www.createspace.com/3383380) and enter this code: J9GRQ7SH

Interested in having Kevin speak at an upcoming event or to have him train your people? Contact him directly:

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