

Preface: Why Every Communicator Needs Ten Arcs

Forty years of consulting leaves you with a long list of things you wish you had known sooner. At the top of mine is this: the quality of an idea does not determine whether it is acted on. The quality of its telling is.

I have watched brilliant analysts lose boardroom arguments to mediocre ones. I have seen technically correct recommendations rejected and technically flawed ones funded. I have sat in rooms where the right answer was on the table, clearly labeled, and watched it be set aside in favor of a story that felt more true. Not because the audience was foolish. Because the better communicator understood something the analyst did not.

Structure is not decoration. It is persuasion.

I came to this conclusion slowly. For most of my career, I believed that the work should speak for itself. Write the analysis clearly, present the data with candor, make the logic airtight, and the recommendation will follow. It took me longer than I care to admit to understand that this belief, however principled, was incorrect. The work does not speak for itself. The communicator speaks for the work. And how you frame an argument determines whether it lands or disappears.

This book is the result of that education. It is organized around ten story arcs: ten structural frameworks that cover the full range of situations a business communicator will face across a career. Each arc has a different logic, a different emotional signature, a different ideal audience. Together, they form a complete toolkit.

This book teaches these arcs through a single case: the five days in November 2023 when OpenAI's board of directors fired CEO Sam Altman on a Friday and reinstated him the following Wednesday. I chose this case not for its fame but for its structural richness. The same events, told through ten different arcs, produce ten different stories. That multiplicity is the lesson.

A few things this book is not. It is not a guide to manipulation. Every arc here works because it is true to the material, not because it obscures it. It is not a formula collection. Formulas produce formulaic communication. These are frameworks: they give you a starting point and a logic, not a template to be filled in. And it is not only a book for beginners. The executives and MBA students I have taught these frameworks to are, almost without exception, already competent communicators. What they lacked was the vocabulary to be deliberate. This book provides that vocabulary.

The ten arcs are not my invention. Homer used the Hero's Journey. Sophocles used Situation / Complication / Resolution. A Chinese minister named Zhuge Liang used What / So What / Now What in a state memorial written in 227 CE. These structures are human universals. Business communicators are practitioners of something very old.

What I have done is name them, sequence them, and teach them through a single case so you can see them in contrast with each other. That contrast is where the learning lives.

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