

How to Brief -- My Thoughts

Phil Walter, Founder, www.DivergentOptions.org @ #NatSecGirlSquad Conference / December 11-12, 2019

1. Establish the context of the communication.

- Informing vs Influencing vs Asking ("It is raining. / I suggest you grab an umbrella. / Can I borrow your umbrella?")

2. Understand the values and incentive structures within the organization that you are briefing.

- Compelling Documents (Strategies / Budget Statements etc) / Trends at the Organizational Level (Growing / Shrinking)
- What gets people promoted or demoted? / WIIFM (What's In It For Me with "Me" being the audience)
- Executive Branch: Getting Stuff Done at the Tactical Level vs Considering Larger Impacts at the Policy Level
- Legislative Branch: Re-Election / Create Jobs / Save Money / Demonstrating Oversight / Make Deals
- Private Sector: Make Money / Protect a Brand or Product / Expand Your Market

3. Try to find out how the most important person in your target audience learns. Sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste?

- Use of senses may differ as you go up to higher levels of your organization -- first level primarily auditory / second level primarily sight etc.
- Importance of person in the room may not mean rank -- it may mean influence -- who is the Special Advisor to the decisionmaker?

4. Before briefing, assess what the impact of your communication will be based upon the day of the week, time of day, and other current / possible familial events. Room setup?

- First thing in the morning after coffee vs falling asleep after lunch / Monday vs Friday before a holiday weekend / August recess on the Hill vs February-ish when budget madness starts / Following an organizational scandal / What happened before your briefing time? / Significant family events / Use comedy and levity when appropriate
- How is the room setup? Standing? Sitting? Gatekeeping? Bring snacks?

5. Do not assume common knowledge.

- Don't talk in the acronym-based expert way that you like, talk in a simple way that the audience can understand. This isn't about your preferences, this is about Informing, Influencing, or Asking.

6. Assume *some* common life experiences.

- Factors / concerns that drive buying a car or a house as a person compared to a factors driving an organization pursuing a major acquisition etc.

7. Tell a story.

- Few remember specific policy references -- "According to X and therefore Y etc."
- Your audience might have wanted to be you at one point in their life -- make them feel like they are a part of your team / bring them into your world / make them feel like they belong and are valued / tell them their role in your profession
- Be as genuine as possible and bring the bad news in the big room full of people if necessary / bring solutions too!

8. Don't discount your audience's concerns / questions.

- Your audience may think you know more or less than you know
- Be tactful, even if the questions are challenging
- End on a high note / your audience should walk out of the room wanting to invite you back