

Skills 360 – Making your Ideas Stick (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. What do good speakers do to help you remember their ideas?
2. Can you think of any abstract or general nouns that people use too much that have lost their meaning?
3. How do you feel when people talk too much about their own lives?

Vocabulary

Killer: great or excellent; "You should really check out the killer new website that Ronaldo just designed."

Productivity: being efficient in activity, not wasting time; "Productivity has really improved since we reorganized the production line."

To face it: to accept the truth of a situation; "Let's face it everyone, we've been talking about these same problems for years without finding a solution."

A dime a dozen: not impressive because it is common; "You really think it matters that he has an MBA? MBA grads are a dime a dozen these days."

Tip: suggestions or pieces of advice; "Hey Charlie, would you mind reading over my report and just giving me some tips about grammar and style?"

To pitch: to try to persuade someone to buy or support something; "We think you pitched the idea really well, but I just don't think the numbers justify our investment."

To keep it real: to remain honest, clear, and based on facts or reality; "Honestly Dave, I'm not sure what you're talking about. Can we just keep it real?"

Abstract: existing as thoughts or ideas in the mind, not directly related to real actions or things; "Can we stop talking about abstract ideas like 'excellence' and start talking about some real operational improvements?"

Zip: nothing; "How can you possibly open your own business when you have basically zip for money and investors?"

To awe someone: to shock or impress someone; "Brandy's resume didn't look that great, but she sure awed us in her interview."

For Pete's sake: when we want to express surprise or emphasis, we can add "for Pete's sake" to a sentence; "For Pete's sake, can everyone stop tossing their garbage all over the copy room floor?"

Destruction: severe damage that eliminates something; "The hurricane caused the destruction of hundreds of homes and businesses, and brought the local economy to a standstill."

To pile on something: to keep adding many of something; "Geez, Tom just keeps piling on new files for me to work on and I really can't keep up."

To glaze over: to become shiny; if someone's eyes glaze over, they look bored or tired; "When Tanis saw her listeners' eyes start to glaze over, she knew she had to wrap up her talk pretty quickly."

To provoke: to cause a particular reaction; "Management's decision to lay off 30 employees provoked a lot of anger in the union."

Forgettable: easy to forget because it is not new or impressive; "We talked to a dozen totally forgettable applicants and only three people who really seemed qualified."

It turns out: you can say "it turns out" to introduce a statement about a situation, when that situation could have happened differently; "I didn't think he'd do it, but it turns out Xavier took that job in Barcelona."

Hocus-pocus: a trick or action meant to fool or impress people; "Do you really believe all that hocus-pocus that Whole Health Inc's marketing team is coming up with?"

To transmit: to send out or transfer from one place or person to another; "Once we've crafted a new company vision, we need to transmit it to every department."

To hang out: to spend time casually in a place; "Our new ad campaign targets teenagers in the places they like to hang out, like shopping malls."

Lobby: the entrance/reception area of a hotel or building; "Let's meet up in 30 minutes in the lobby."

Eager: excited to do something; "In an interview, you should assess not only whether candidates have the right training and experience, but also whether they're eager to work."

To wrap one's head around: to understand something, especially something complex; "Help me out here Wendy, I really can't wrap my head around this new budget model."

To lose someone: to confuse someone during an explanation or story; "I'm sorry Stu, but you lost me on that last slide. Could you explain those figures again?"

Analogy: a comparison between two situations or processes that helps people understand; "It may be interesting to draw an analogy between a business and a family."

Needless to say: to introduce an idea or fact that is obvious but important, you can say "needless to say;" "Needless to say George, we need to roll out these new products before the busy season."

Significant: large, important, or meaningful; "A good presenter starts with a personal story that shows how his topic is significant to his listeners."

Metaphor: a word or phrase for a thing that is used instead of another thing to show how the two things are similar; "Money makes the world go round is a metaphor that emphasizes how important money is."

To relate to: to be able to understand a person or situation because it is familiar; "When we tested the ads, viewers said they could really relate to the frustrated mother character."

To pull out: to suddenly use or refer to; "Every time someone disagrees with Tom he pulls out his Master's degree as proof of his expertise."

To bounce off: to hit something or reach someone but not stick to it; "I'm afraid the whole message will just bounce off the audience unless we use some visuals."

Concrete language: words referring to real things in the world, rather than ideas; "Let's take out words like 'innovation' and use more concrete language like 'new product lines.'"

To give someone a leg up: to give someone an advantage; "In the world of international business, knowing a second, or even third or fourth language can really give you a leg up."

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at how you can make your ideas stick.

Just the other day one of my co-workers came to me and said: "I've got a *killer* idea for a new app." Then he went on to say that... well, I don't remember exactly what he said. There was something about *productivity* and something about scheduling... I think. To be honest, I probably hear a couple dozen new ideas every week.

Let's *face it*: ideas are *a dime a dozen*. And just having a great idea doesn't mean a thing if you can't get other people to believe in it. And before you can get anyone to believe in it, you need to help them remember it. You need to make it *stick*.

So today I want to share a couple of *tips* for helping your ideas stick. It doesn't matter if you're giving a presentation, proposing something in a meeting, or *pitching* to investors. The secrets to stickiness are the same.

The first thing you need to do is to *keep it real*. For one thing, that means avoiding *abstract* nouns. Think about the word "solution." It means *zip* if you don't tell people exactly what the problem is and how you're solving it. And don't try to *awe* people with the word "innovation." Impress them by describing what it is that's actually innovative about your idea. And *for Pete's sake* don't say that your tool will "enhance predictive capabilities" when you can say it will help you "predict the future better."

That last example shows you something important: verbs have much more power and clarity than nouns. I mean, why say that the new regulations "led to the *destruction* of" the industry, when you can just say they "destroyed" the industry? Why say "make a decision" when you can just say "decide?" That may seem like a small difference, but when you start *piling on* all those abstract or academic words, people's eyes will *glaze over*. They'll stop listening. And your idea will have no chance of sticking.

To test whether you're keeping it real, ask yourself: am I talking about people? Or about ideas? People are real. The things they do are real. And most people are interested in themselves and other people. For example, think about this statement: "The executive announcement of spending cuts *provoked* a strongly negative reaction." Where are the people in that statement? It's much stickier to say, "When the CEO announced spending cuts, people reacted poorly." Better yet, be more specific and say "people complained angrily." Can you feel the difference?

There's one more part of keeping it real that I want to tell you about. Remember back at the start of this lesson, when I talked about my co-worker with the *forgettable* mobile app idea? Yes, well, *it turns out* that *stories* help ideas stick. Telling stories helps us focus on people, rather than ideas. It forces us into concrete reality, and away from that abstract *hocus-pocus* of "innovation," "efficiency," and "optimization." Stories are an amazing way to *transmit* information. People have been doing it for thousands of years. And as I explained in a previous lesson, stories help you connect with your listeners.

Now, besides keeping it real, I've got another related bit of advice for you: keep it *relevant*. Last week on a business trip I was *hanging out* in the *lobby* of my hotel. And I got to talking with a guy from England. He was really *eager* to tell me about his big idea, and why I should invest in it. And he started out by describing the economic problems in his hometown. Honestly, I couldn't quite *wrap my head around* what he was talking about. Then he really *lost* me when he started using a bunch of soccer *analogies*. I mean *football* analogies, as he would say. I don't know the first thing about soccer.

Needless to say, I didn't invest in the guy's big idea. I mean, what does it have to do with me? I really didn't see how it was relevant to *my* life. And because he didn't make his idea relevant to me, I can't even tell you exactly what his big idea was. It didn't stick. The only thing that was really *significant* to me was his *failure* to connect. I remember him talking about his hometown and about soccer because it amazed me that he thought I might be interested!

So how can you keep it relevant? Talk to people about their own lives and work. Tell them what your idea could mean to them. And use idioms and *metaphors* that they understand or can *relate to*. I talked a lot about metaphors in another lesson. Metaphors can be really powerful, but only if you're connecting with your listeners.

If that guy in the hotel lobby talked about an economic problem that affects *my* hometown. And if he *pulled out* some *baseball* metaphors, things might have been different. His idea might have actually stuck. And I might be able to tell you what his big idea was. But instead, his idea *bounced* right *off* me.

All right, I've gone over two very important ways of making your ideas stick. First of all, keep it real. That means using *concrete language* about the real world and real people. And it means telling stories. Secondly, keep it relevant. Talk about things that your listeners actually know or care about. Doing these two things will *give you a leg up*. And if you tune in next time, I'll give you two more tips that will help make your ideas stick.

That's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the BusinessEnglishPod.com website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review

1. If an idea "sticks," it means people...
 - A love it.
 - B remember it.
 - C understand it.
 - D recognize it.

2. Which of the following are examples of abstract nouns? [choose all that apply]
 - A innovation
 - B enhancement
 - C money
 - D service
 - E factory
 - F computer

3. Which of the following sentences uses the power of good verbs? [choose 2]
 - A The crisis led to the board's removal of the CEO.
 - B The junior engineer impressed the managers with his presentation.
 - C I think we need to make a decision to hire the applicant.
 - D A strong leader will advance the company's goals.

4. To test whether you are keeping it real, you can ask yourself: am I _____
 - A checking whether people understand?
 - B talking about people?
 - C making people smile or laugh?
 - D discussing my personal history?

5. What is one way to help you focus on concrete reality?
 - A Tell stories.
 - B Use the latest buzz words.
 - C Ask people about their interests.
 - D Focus on big ideas.

6. Which of the following are ways to keep it relevant? [choose 2]
 - A Talk about your background.
 - B Discuss your listener's lives and work.
 - C Use metaphors that people can understand.
 - D Use informal language.

Review Answers

1. If an idea "sticks," it means people...
B remember it.
2. Which of the following are examples of abstract nouns? [choose all that apply]
A innovation
B enhancement
D service
3. Which of the following sentences uses the power of good verbs? [choose 2]
B The junior engineer impressed the managers with his presentation.
D A strong leader will advance the company's goals.
4. To test whether you are keeping it real, you can ask yourself: am I

B talking about people?
5. What is one way to help you focus on concrete reality?
A Tell stories.
6. Which of the following are ways to keep it relevant? [choose 2]
B Discuss your listener's lives and work.
C Use metaphors that people can understand.