

Converting Vision and Strategy into Action:

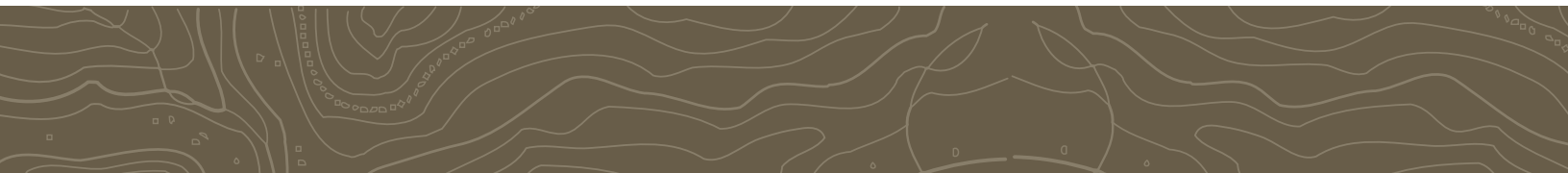
Three Strategies for Turning Words into Results

By Scott Weighart, Director of Learning and Development



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Growth is the ultimate yardstick used to measure your effectiveness as a leader. The primary goal is to achieve sustainable, profitable growth for your shareholders and investors. To lead an exceptional organization, you must do this consistently, regardless of global pressures, economic fluctuations, market forces and competitive challenges.

That's no small feat these days. Consider the following:

- As the economy gradually recovers, shareholders are impatient. Treading water isn't going to satisfy your important audiences any longer.
- At the same time, capturing greater market share is difficult in a developed market. A 2012 PricewaterhouseCoopers survey of over 1,200 CEOs, leaders finds they are going after emerging markets in order to grow.
- The challenges of the last few years means leaders in the pipeline have not received the training and development they need. And now companies are competing to attract and retain top talent that will drive growth.

Delivering growth in this environment means leaders have to more quickly convert their plans into action and results. In this guide, we'll focus on the three key principles that differentiate the leaders who are able to build and sustain a "growth culture" at their organizations:

- **Enterprise thinking:** Your culture has to encourage and reward leaders that have a broad, enterprise-wide focus on growth instead of a narrow, functional emphasis on resources, logistics, and tasks.
- **Exceptional communication:** Leaders must master tools and strategies to drive home the powerful messages that engage hearts and minds and prompt action.
- **Relentless focus:** Discipline to do the right things at the right times so that you and your organization don't stray from your vision and strategy because of inevitable distractions.

Let's look at each of these areas in detail.



“There are two ways of exerting one’s strength; one is pushing down, the other is pulling up.” - Booker T. Washington

Exceptional Communication

As a leader, the combination of your words and actions will tell your teams what really matters at your organization. If you worked under the late Steve Jobs at Apple, for example, you quickly would learn what qualities were valued most highly: artistry, design, innovation, passion, clarity, and simplicity. Those values live in on Apple’s products, and they have resulted in the world’s most powerful brand.

Pepsico CEO Indra Nooyi talks constantly about “performance with purpose,” meaning that she wants to run a company that people feel good about—internally or externally—because of their products and policies. She’s lived up to that talk by investing in healthier food lines while bringing in record profits.

To drive growth, you need to develop and deliver messages that give people reasons to get excited about your vision. One tool that we constantly use to craft the right message is our Audience Agenda System. It requires you to put yourself in the shoes of your audience. If you’re planning a presentation to one of your teams, for example, we would begin by having you write down everything that’s on your agenda for the meeting as follows:

My Agenda	Audience Agenda
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We need to increase revenues by 20% in the next fiscal year.• Our shareholders are not going to accept another year without growth.• I need to show the Board that I can get results despite the economic realities.• I’m frustrated with this team because they need to be contributing more to the top line.	

Next, imagine yourself to be a member of the audience for this presentation. And not just any member: What are the more skeptical people in the crowd thinking about your topic? Do they even care about your agenda? What are their concerns? With those thoughts in mind, we would then fill out the right-hand side of this table from that perspective:

My Agenda	Audience Agenda
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to increase revenues by 20% in the next fiscal year. • Our shareholders are not going to accept another year without growth. • I need to show the Board that I can get results despite the economic realities. • I'm frustrated with this team because they need to be contributing more to top line. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We're exhausted. Are we going to be pushed to work even harder this year? • Does our CEO understand how hard it's been to not lose revenues in this market? Are we appreciated? • Why should I be excited about whatever the CEO has to say? All we hear about is metrics. • Please, no finger pointing.... Let's hear something positive.

Whenever we go through this exercise, there is always a huge gap between what the leader wants to say and what the audience needs to hear. So what should we do about that? We draw a giant red 'X' across the "My Agenda" side of the page!

The most essential rule of leadership communication is this:

If you don't address your audience's agenda, your strategy will fail.




That's not to say that your own agenda is unimportant. But if you frame your speech around the needs and concerns of your audience first, you'll find a way to connect with them... and, almost magically, you'll find that you're able to satisfy your agenda as well.

Now try it out for yourself. Think about a presentation or talk that you'll be giving to one of your important audiences in the next month. Using the template below, write down "My Agenda," and then "Audience Agenda." This will give you insight into the needs and concerns that you'll need to address if you're going to get your teams excited about your vision for growth.

My Agenda	Audience Agenda
<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••	<ul style="list-style-type: none">••••

Another differentiator in driving your strategy forward is sharing stories that highlight the values and behaviors that are critical to growth. The importance of storytelling may surprise you. As a leader, you rose in the ranks because of your intelligence, hard work, and technical expertise—not because you could tell a story. But a recurring theme for leaders is that what gets you to the top won't be sufficient to success once you get there. Now you need to be able to marshal action by moving hearts and minds. You need some new tools for your toolbox, and storytelling is the best one for the purpose.



If you're focused on driving growth, why would you spend time telling stories? If your strategic goal is to increase your revenues, why would we devote energy into sharing a story?

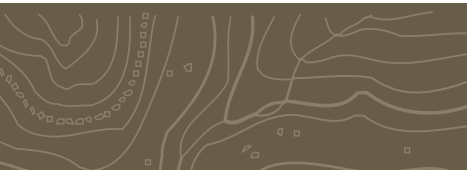
There are many reasons:

- Storytelling is as old as the hills and as hot as your latest iPhone app. Storytelling has been around for thousands of years because it's a sophisticated, high-level form of communication. Stories engross people—just like a great movie or book.
- Stories you help connect with people, logically and emotionally. In an Age of Distraction where people's attention gravitates to their BlackBerrys and iPads, stories give people a reason to keep listening to your message.
- Stories help people remember your important point. As a vision, “we need to grow by 15 percent” is an abstract statement. It's not going to inspire people beyond your board or C-suite. But a story sticks, and a great story is something that people will share, spreading your vision.

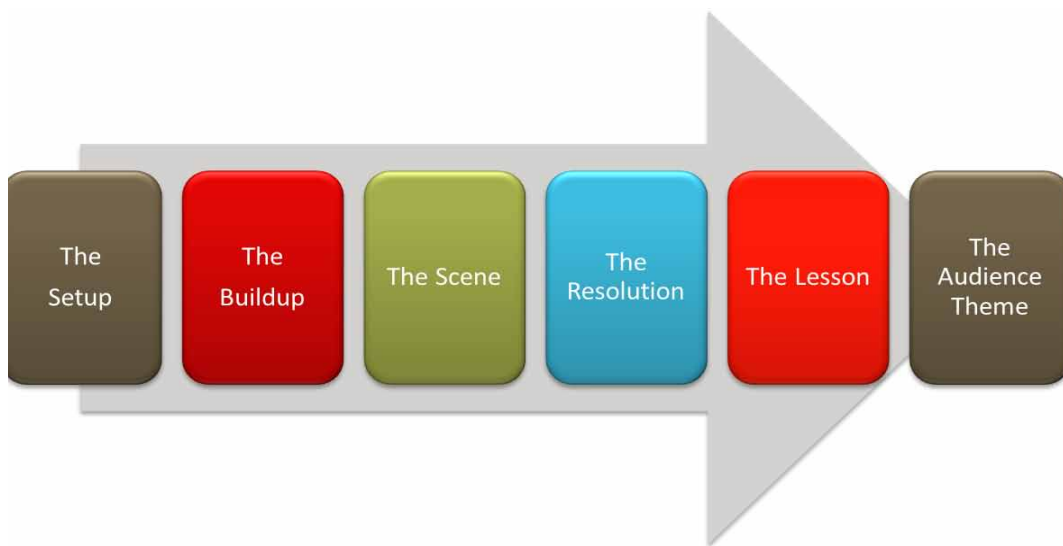
More than anything, though, stories are an opportunity to capture, bottle, and share the steps people are taking to drive growth for your organization. Your vision and strategy may be compelling... but they're abstract concepts. When you share a story, you're telling people what you really mean when you're talking about the culture you want to create.

In short, storytelling is not a nice-to-do activity; it's a must-do essential for leaders looking to make great things happen.

You might be thinking that you're just not a natural-born storyteller. Well, nobody is. But it's a muscle that you can build with the right coaching and tools. We recommend a tool called the Bates Story Structure. Using this tool, you can take just about any powerful experience—personal or professional—and turn it into a three-minute, six-part story that will resonate with your audience. In simple terms, here's that structure:



- The Setup: The who, what, when, and where of the story
- The Buildup: A problem, conflict, challenge, or obstacle faced
- The Scene: A “moment of truth” or specific point in time when you walk us through exactly what happened
- The Resolution: How did that conflict or problem turn out? What was the outcome?
- The Lesson: What did you learn or take away from this experience?
- The Audience Theme: How does that lesson connect to an important point that you want to make to the specific audience that is listening to or reading your story now?



How would you come up with stories that could be told with this structure? You can start off by focusing on a business challenge—such as the need for pumping up your team to deliver growth. Then you would follow these steps:

- Ask yourself, “What is this like?” In other words, think about past experiences that are similar to the current challenge. If the theme is growth, you would think about situations you’ve faced personally or professionally that required in growth or resulted in growth.



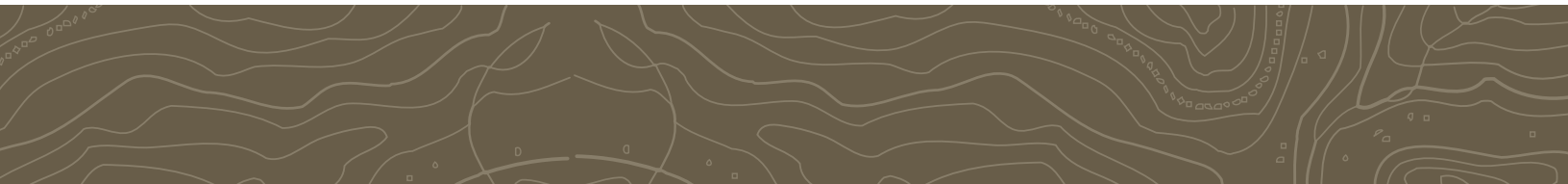
- Be patient and persistent as you look for these connections. Think of it this way: When you're comparing a past situation to a present one, you're comparing apples and oranges. But think about it: apples and oranges actually have a great deal in common: size, shape, density, edibility, Vitamin C content, seeds, color before they ripen, etc. In the same way, your past experiences with growth are more comparable to the current challenge than you might think.
- Keep working on making connections. Believe it or not, something happens to you or your team every day that could be turned into a story. It's just a matter of learning of how to recognize them and develop them.
- Keep sifting through your experiences, and you'll find gold. The more you look and listen at what's happening in your life and at your organization, you'll find real treasure to share with your teams.

Let's see if we can come up with a few "situational story" ideas right now. For each of the prompts below, jot down a few specific situations that come to mind:

1. Innovations, inventions, creative thinking, new ideas

2. Getting results, becoming more productive, big wins, great leaps forward

3. Missed opportunities, dead ends, steps backward, paths not taken



Did you think of any situations that you haven't thought of for a long time? With some time and energy, you can turn some of this “rare ore” into polished gems in the form of a powerful story about your vision for growth.

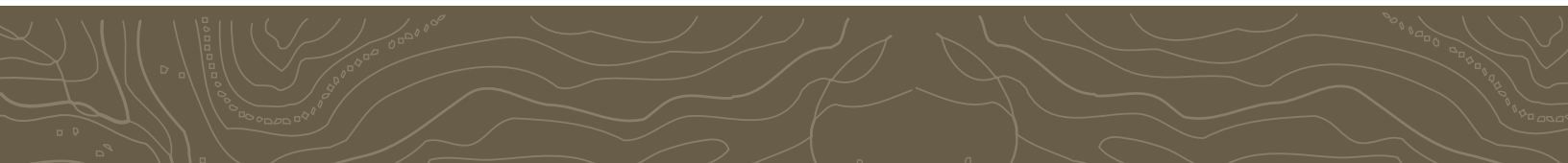
Stories are the best way to drive your vision and strategy down into your teams. By regularly sharing great stories about how individuals on your team have driven growth—whether you do so in speeches, meetings, or regular “good news” emails—you'll be broadcasting a loud message about what you want and expect from your team. Imagine how powerful it would be to inspire your team with stories about extra effort that led to a new customer relationship, an expanded territory, a big contract, or a surprising sale.

Enterprise Thinking

Effective leadership communication is just the starting point. To create a “growth culture” at your organization, you need to make sure that all of the leaders who work for you are thinking like the CEO. That means that people are focusing on enterprise-wide concerns—such as delivering growth—rather than competing for resources and advocating for the selfish interests of their functional areas.

What's happening at your organization right now? A company like Johnson & Johnson has done a great job of creating a culture that is ruled by their credo, which emphasizes that their primary responsibility is to those who use their products and services. At J&J, as anywhere, there can be heated debates about what course of action to take... but the central point of such arguments comes down which course of action best reflects the values captured in the credo.

However, that's not what happens at many companies, and creating such a culture takes time and energy. To convert vision and strategy into action, you may have to take steps to ensure that your leaders are strategic thinkers. In fact, when we recently analyzed the action plans of dozens of our most recent coaching clients, we found that over half of these executives wanted and needed to do substantial



work on their ability to be strategic thinkers.

We work with many executives who are talented, smart, successful people. Yet many of these leaders have been told that they need to “get out of the weeds” and stop focusing so much on tactical issues or championing their function instead of looking at the world the way a Board or CEO needs to see it. Without that skill, the Board and CEO often end up very frustrated with the communications coming out of their teams.

But with coaching and the right tools, any leader on your team can improve dramatically when it comes to developing a laser focus on strategy. One tool we recommend is our Template for Presentation to Decision Makers. We created it after watching several presentations to senior leaders go down in flames because the presenters had missed the point so badly.

As a senior leader, you want any presenter to be able to come to you and succinctly identify a business problem and what should be done about it. You don’t need to hear about the history of the topic from A to Z. This tool gives presenters a structure designed to deliver what you need to hear in five minutes or less. It can be captured in just six slides:

- State the business problem or challenge: What’s broken that we’re trying to fix? What’s okay but could be so much better?
- Provide proof: What data do you have that shows that this is the right problem to solve?
- The Big Idea: In 25 words or less, capture an exciting idea that pulls together a proposal with its benefits and outcomes. It should be an energizing concept that gets excited about the future state we’ll enjoy by implementing this idea.
- The Proposal or Solution: This fleshes out the Big Idea and gives us more detail about how it will play out in action.
- Cost/Benefit or Risk/Benefit: Assuming the decision makers are excited about the idea, this is where they’ll want the presenter to go next. What do we gain by implementing this idea? What are the costs or risks.



Business
Problem
or
Challenge

Proof

The
Big
Idea

Proposal
or Solution

Cost/benefit
or Risk/benefit

Recommended
Next Steps

- Recommended Next Steps: This gives the audience an action plan. What do we want them to do as a result of the plan?

Using this template requires people to think like the CEO and the Board—focusing on real business problems and efficiently breaking down the need-to-know facts about a proposal.

Relentless Focus

Even when you have strong leadership communication and strategic thinking, there are still obstacles that can slow down or even prevent you from delivering growth. One surprisingly big problem for many senior leaders comes down to relentless focus on the vision and strategy. There are all sorts of forces that threaten to bog you down in tactical issues and pull your focus away from what matters most.

Many of our clients are paddling hard to keep from drowning in the hundreds of emails they receive each day. They get stuck in relentless meetings, wondering when they'll be able to get back to the real work that they want to accomplish. They often fail to find time to prepare adequately for a major speech, presentation, or meeting.

As the leader, you are the only one in a position to stop this madness. You have to deliberately, mindfully, ruthlessly keep your priorities straight and manage your calendar. You have to say no to things that are not going to move your business forward and say yes to the things that do.

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Take a moment to consider the questions below:

1. How satisfied are you with the amount of time and energy you devote to activities that are helping your company grow?

1: Very dissatisfied 2: Somewhat dissatisfied 3: Mixed feelings 4: Somewhat satisfied 5: Very satisfied

2. How happy are you with your ability to manage incoming and outgoing communications (such as email) in a timely and effective manner?

1: Very dissatisfied 2: Somewhat dissatisfied 3: Mixed feelings 4: Somewhat satisfied 5: Very satisfied

3. To what degree are you satisfied with the amount of time you build into your calendar to prepare strong leadership communications (e.g., developing presentations, practicing for important speeches)

1: Very dissatisfied 2: Somewhat dissatisfied 3: Mixed feelings 4: Somewhat satisfied 5: Very satisfied


4. How good do you feel about managing your calendar—making sure that there is ample time for what's most important for you and your business?

1: Very dissatisfied 2: Somewhat dissatisfied 3: Mixed feelings 4: Somewhat satisfied 5: Very satisfied

5. How satisfied are you with the amount of time you currently take to step back, reflect, and be creative about the steps you can take to move your company forward?

1: Very dissatisfied 2: Somewhat dissatisfied 3: Mixed feelings 4: Somewhat satisfied 5: Very satisfied

If you add up those point totals, a 25 would be the best possible score. 20 or higher would be solid, but less than that should be a red flag for you.



Is there a secret formula for making time to develop your skill to communicate with power and purpose? As described in *Motivate Like a CEO* by Suzanne Bates, there's a three-part strategy:

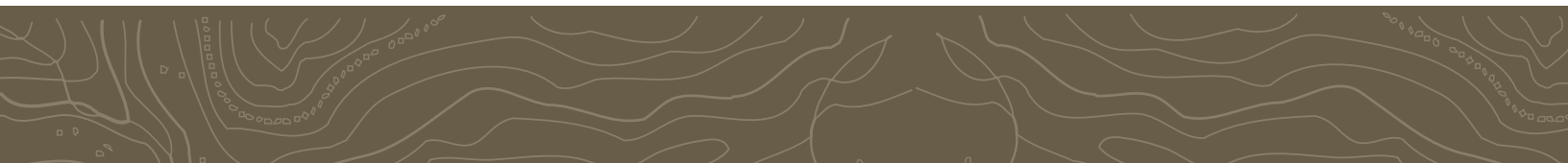
- clarifying intentions
- scheduling intentions
- having the discipline to stick to your plan

Clarifying Intentions

Leaders who speak clearly—with purpose and passion—have spent a lot of time getting clear about what matters. They have thought through what needs to be said and what needs to be done. By clarifying intentions, it becomes obvious how to spend your time and arrange your activities. Every action begins with an intention, and the intention should be connected to your highest priorities. Intention is the first step.

If you want to be the kind of leader who communicates purpose with passion and moves an organization forward with growth, it will require you to get very clear about what you want to accomplish. This process of setting intentions is like creating a reset button in your head. No matter what comes up during the day or week, if you have intention, you can hit the reset button and decide whether to do something, or not do it.

The clarity of your purpose is essential. Clarity makes it easy to create intention. For example, you might decide you need to spend time with a group that has not been as connected or feels forgotten. Your intention will guide you to take a detour over to their office, set up a brown bag lunch, or go for a visit. It will remind you to send out a note of congratulations, call someone to thank them for doing a great job, or even find a good story that highlights a success for your next meeting with that group.



When faced with a choice about what to do with powerful intention, you'll default to the activities that reflect your priorities and move you closer to your goals. Intention is the most powerful force in the universe. What you intend to do, you do. Without intention, you're just wandering.

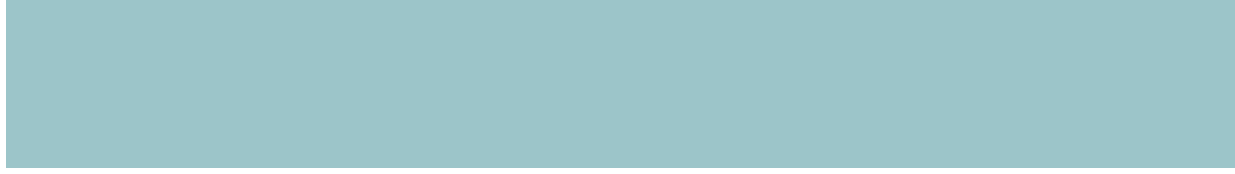
Scheduling Intentions

Once you have created the intention, the second step is to make sure your calendar reflects those intentions. When a sound vision and strategy is not getting translated into action, you can usually find the forensic evidence on a leader's calendar. Your calendar is a reflection of your business and life priorities. And you do have a choice, every day, about how you spend your time. It may not feel that way when you look at the rest of this week's calendar and it is chock full of meetings and events. Yet much of it, when you analyze it, is discretionary. As a leader, you do choose how you spend time and how you choose determines what gets done.

As you review your calendar with your intentions in mind, you may find that you need to make some very different choices, not only about what you do but how much time you spend on each type of activity. Balancing the priorities also ensures that you carry out your intentions.

The choices need to be made against intentions. The secret of time management is that it's ultimately up to you. Whatever is important goes on your calendar. Whatever is not does not. The calendar is your ally if you so choose. It can affirm your purpose, move you more rapidly toward your goals, and help you achieve great things. When you look at it that way, your calendar is a liberating device that tells you and the world how you're going to get where you want to go.

No one is saying this is easy; that wouldn't be true. It's actually quite challenging. Most of us struggle with how to spend our time. But relatively small changes can make a big difference, if you keep looking at your calendar and asking yourself whether it reflects your intentions. Don't take your calendar lightly. It's a serious document. It's more than a computer page; it's the ultimate reflection of how you intend to live your purpose.



A great executive assistant can help tremendously. Make sure your assistant has clarity about who can and can't be added to your calendar automatically for a meeting as well as how much time should be allotted for your meetings. Communicate regularly about what's working for you with calendar management and what could be even better. Build in time to reflect or come up for air. It makes all the difference.

Discipline to Stick to the Plan

The third step is to have the discipline to stick to the calendar and the priorities. A strong intention and a calendar that reflects that intention will go a long way toward that. But things come up and that's when you may find it difficult to stick to the plan. You need some flexibility in the schedule to handle the urgent, while having the discipline to get back to what is important.

Discipline around your priorities is often what separates you from the rest of the pack. There are many talented leaders around who have the skill and ability to get a job done. Those who have the discipline to set priorities, schedule important activities and stick to them are most effective in their roles.

Practice the art of saying no. If you're already doing this, I congratulate you. You would be surprised how many people in very big jobs have not yet figured it out. I've worked with senior executives who are killing themselves working way too many hours, and while it's partly due to the demands of their business, it's also because they haven't just learned to let go and say no. They refuse to admit that they can't do it all. So, surround yourself with people and systems that keep you on track. And learn to say no. Be determined to carry out your intentions.

With great leadership communications, a team of strategic thinkers, and a relentless focus on strategy and vision, you can deliver sustainable, profitable growth. In the process, you'll continue to grow and learn, becoming the best leader you can possibly be.

Executive Coaching in Communications

An executive's ability to communicate strategic business objectives is critical to achieving corporate growth. At Bates, we like to say our executive coaches are the leaders behind the leaders, partnering with executives to develop exceptional level of skill, capability, and confidence. We help executives enhance performance through consistent, efficient communications with employees, teams, clients, boards, shareholders and influencers.



About the Author: Scott Weighart,
Director of Learning and Development

Scott Weighart has spent over two decades helping adult learners reach their full professional potential, whether through books, articles, workshops, classes, one-on-one coaching, or integrated learning systems. He joined Bates Communications in August 2011 as the firm's first-ever Director of Learning and Development, where he creates innovative tools to assist individuals as they work toward mastering powerful communication.

Although he has worked intermittently in education as well as the private sector over the years, one constant has been his focus on designing and delivering creative, innovative curricula that make learning engaging and memorable for audiences. He is the author of three textbooks on experiential learning and one book on organizational behavior. As an authority on experiential learning, he has presented at numerous conferences across the US and Canada.