1.0 “We live in a world that rewards effective thinking.”

We live in a world that rewards effective thinking. Let’s see one classic example of that in action.

1.1 Back to the Future: An old new way of getting your audience’s attention

General Motors had just introduced employee pricing for everyone in the American market. Ford quickly followed. Honda, Toyota, and the other imports countered by offering substantial cash back offers and low-interest rate financing.

DaimlerChrysler needed a way to respond.

Specifically, in the summer of 2005 it had to find a way to a) break through all car company commercials saying “we have the lowest prices” and b) give people a real reason to buy from Chrysler.

It accomplished both objectives by bringing back Lee Iacocca as its spokesman.

In the early 1980s, as the then Chrysler Corporation teetered on the brink of oblivion, Iacocca had gone to Congress and asked for a bail out. He got it. But that only solved half of the company’s problems. Chrysler still needed to convince consumers to buy its cars which at the time were mostly gas-guzzling vehicles that included the Gremlin, Pacer and Volare—automobiles not destined for the design hall of fame.

Iacocca took his appeal directly to the American people. The commercials used the tagline: “If you can buy a better car, buy it.”

More than two decades later to announce Chrysler had an employee pricing plan of its own, Omnicom Group Inc.’s BBDO advertising agency reworked that 1980s commercials and put the now 80-year-old Iacocca in front of the camera in a series of spots that also featured Jason Alexander from Seinfeld and rapper Snoop Dogg.

But the core message was (once again) “If you can buy a better car, buy it.”

The new commercials were just as effective as the old; Chrysler sales shot skyward, but that should have come as no surprise.
1.2 Explaining why what you have will benefit your audience

The world’s best business executives, salespeople and professional speakers—people such as Jack Welch, Meg Whitman, Rudy Giuliani, and Buck Rogers—always, always, always present whatever they have to say or sell in a way that viscerally connects with their audience.

How do they do it?

They focus on one thing: Explaining “what’s in it” for the audience, just like Iacocca did. By the time the Iacoccas, Welches and Whitmans of the world are done communicating, the audience knows what they have just heard means for their personal goals and their priorities.

1.3 You need to master this way of thinking

You need to master this type of thinking and communicating, because “what’s in it for me” is always in your audience’s mind. If you can answer that question simply, succinctly and clearly you have a competitive advantage. If you can’t, you will lose to those who can.

1.4 The starting point: What is in your audience’s mind?

Let’s take a step back. No matter what you do for a living, the people you are presenting to/selling to/speaking with/ want to know two things:

• What do you have and
• Why should I care?

In other words, they listen to your presentation/pitch and say to themselves: “So what? What’s in it for me?”

Your audience is listening to what you have to say and invariably thinking “so what? How does this affect me?” If you don’t have an answer, you’re doomed.

Answering these questions—before they are asked—is critical. If the audience doesn’t have a vested interest in what you have to say—in your phone talk, phone call, conversation in the hall, i.e. anywhere—they simply are not going to pay the attention you want.

The most effective people know that. Indeed, that is why they are effective. Without fail, they answer the implicit “so what” question that is in their audiences’ minds.

1.5 This is a more efficient way of thinking

Understand what these people have done. By taking this approach, they have raised their level of thinking from “what do I (the leader/presenter/salesperson) want to accomplish” in this conversation to “what does the other person truly need/want/value?”
No wonder they are so effective: They are appealing directly to their customers (or employees or stakeholders) wants and needs.

And, indeed they go further, not only answering the “so what” question for the people they are speaking to, but also for the audience’s audience—their listeners customers, suppliers, employees and other members of the value chain. As a result, the answer to the “so what” question cascades down from the primary audience to everyone who could possibly be affected by the message.

No wonder this approach is so effective.

1.6 Every communication needs to be structured this way

You need to start thinking this way. We are not going to spend a lot of time teaching you tactics. Our goal is NOT to teach you a new set of skills. Rather, we want you to adopt a new way of thinking that requires you to answer the “so what” every time you interact.

Each time you communicate ask yourself: “If I were listening to this, what would be important to me?”

That needs to become your starting point.

It sounds simple, but it is not. Most people usually begin from the opposite end, wondering “what’s in it for me (the speaker)” instead of “what is in it for them, the audience?”

That doesn’t work well. If Iacocca had said (in essence) “please buy our cars so we don’t go bankrupt,” do you think Chrysler would still exist?

1.7 How this is different

What we are talking about is creating a new frame for every conversation you have.

Most people—whether they are leaders, presenters or salespeople—talk about the features, benefits and advantages of what they have to offer. That’s good.

But the visceral, what’s-in-it-for-me-the-listener component is lacking. Putting that piece up front makes every conversation more effective.

1.8 This is now mandatory

This approach is now required. There is so much information coming at us—from books, magazines, videos, the Internet—that it can be overwhelming. In the face of all that data, people are likely to tune out what they read, hear, or are told, if the relevance is not immediately apparent. Answering the “so what” question not only helps you break through the clutter but is also the easiest way to forge a connection with your audience and get your message across.

That skill is absolutely essential today. True mastery requires you to internalize this way of thinking to make it a part of you because the fact is you are “always on.” Not only
are your employees, colleagues, vendors and the like constantly evaluating what you are saying, but you never know when you going to run into someone who could be a potential client.

Automatically answering the “so what?” question before they ask it shows you understand their needs wants and desires, it forges an instant connection that makes subsequent communication more effective as well.

1.9 A final thought: We reward effective thinking

Life is a series of presentations and answering the “so what?” question will make those presentations as effective as possible.

As we said at the beginning: We live in a world that rewards effective thinking, and answering the “so what?” question in every interaction you have is effective thinking in its purest form.