TURN CONVERSATIONS INTO DECISIONS

The Persuasive Communication Framework

Curiosity • Trust • Clarity • Action

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Turn Conversations

Into Decisions

A
Persuasive Communication
Framework

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FOR ZEUS

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Introduction

A funding pitch fails. A partnership conversation goes nowhere. A board presentation ends with "let us think about it", and nothing happens after.

This framework below is designed to fix that problem. It condenses everything that matters about moving conversations to decisions onto one page you can reference before any important conversation.

The one-page structure is just the beginning. The chapters that follow explain the strategic thinking that makes it work: why you must start with the listener's objection, not your enthusiasm. Why concrete examples create trust in ways abstract language never can. Why vague asks guarantee nothing happens.

The framework has been refined through thousands of client interactions since I started EST in 2019. What seems simple now is the crystallization of all those conversations—a living system that keeps improving because people keep using it in the field.

That obsession with compression started for me in high school, when I'd distill everything important about a subject onto a single page before exams. Not summaries. The actual structure of how ideas connected. That process of compression was how I learned. It made complex subjects manageable. It was also, I realize now, a way of emotionally handling complexity—making the overwhelming feel doable.

This framework applies that same discipline to persuasive communication. I hope you find it useful.

Marc Fest

Chapter 1: The Persuasive Communication Framework

A program director at a large foundation spent six weeks preparing a funding pitch. The meeting ended in nine minutes with: "Let me think about it." Nothing happened after.

Most persuasion efforts fail in the first 30 seconds. Not because the idea is weak, but because the speaker is answering a question the listener isn't asking.

The framework at the center of this little book is designed to address that.

Use it when you need to move a conversation from "let me think about it" to clear next steps-before board meetings, funding pitches, partnership asks, or any situation where decisions matter and skepticism is real.

The framework works because it mirrors how people make decisions: curiosity opens the door, trust creates safety, clarity reduces effort, and action becomes easier.

Here's the structure:

PERSUASIVE COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORK

This is a simple framework for turning conversations into decisions. It has two parts: a preflight step ("Objection Prep"), followed by four argument steps (1–4). Each section starts on its own page. To use it, replace the examples with your own situation.

The audio links give added information for each step of the framework.

🔊 Listen to the intro: *www.est.io/intro*

PREFLIGHT: "OBJECTION PREP"

Define your **Audience**, the **Action** you want, and their likely **Objection**. Then make a claim in Step 1 that offers value while directly or subtly preempting that objection.

Example

Audience: My boss, Tom
Action: Try out new decision-making framework at next team meeting
Objection: Decision quality may suffer

✓ **Quality Check:** Once you've replaced the example with your own objection, ask yourself, "Is this the main reason they would hesitate to act?" to strengthen your objection choice before moving to the next step.

🔊 Listen: *www.est.io/prep*

STEP 1: CURIOSITY - CLAIM

Make an interesting claim.

Example

"We've developed a decision framework that helps teams reach decisions faster, without sacrificing quality."

✓ **Quality Check:** What part of this claim truly makes someone lean in, and what still sounds generic?

Key Components

Your claim should directly or subtly preempt the likely objection identified above.

- brief

- intriguing

- appeal to self-interest

Start with "The fact is, …"

🔊 Listen: *www.est.io/step1*

STEP 2: TRUST - EVIDENCE

Offer concrete evidence.

Example

"For example, during a pilot in May with four teams, decisions that typically took 2 weeks were made in five days, and none had to be reversed or reworked. Sarah Chan called it 'faster, not looser.'"

✓ **Quality Check:** If someone fact-checked this, what would they verify first? Is that element present and specific?

Key Components

- time

- place

- number w/ context

- name or character

- quote or phrase

- visual detail

Start with "For example, …"

Tip: If you lack direct evidence, use comparable situations, expert validation, or pilot data-but keep it specific.

🔊 Listen: *www.est.io/step2*

STEP 3: CLARITY - CONCLUSION

Say the point plainly.

Example

"The bottom line is, we saved a lot of time, and the quality held."

✓ **Quality Check:** If your listener repeated this in one sentence, would it match the takeaway you want?

Key Components

- succinct

- no jargon

- one clear takeaway

Start with "The bottom line is …"

🔊 Listen: *www.est.io/step3*

STEP 4: ACTION

Ask for a specific next step.

Example

"Would you be open to trying this framework for one of the decisions in next week's team meeting?"

✓ **Quality Check:** Is this an ask they can say yes to instantly, without effort or hesitation?

Key Components

- specific ask

- easy to do

Start with "So, …"

🔊 Listen: *www.est.io/step4*

FINAL THOUGHT:
Keep this framework one tap away

You won't use this framework if you have to remember it.

You will use it if it's on your phone.

Add it to your home screen now:

1. Scan the QR code below

2. Tap Share

3. Tap Add to Home Screen

That's it. It becomes a one-tap reference before any important conversation.

This removes reliance on memory and willpower. You don't "remember" the framework—you open it.

www.est.io/1

To fit the framework on a single letter-size page, print the web page at the URL above.

A Note on Understanding vs. Mastery

This framework is simple to understand and hard to use well.

In practice, people who learn it improve their results significantly on their own-their claims get sharper, their evidence becomes more specific, and their asks get clearer.

Even larger gain come from coached application to real situations. That's where you learn to spot the objection you're missing, catch the abstract language that still sounds specific to you, and distinguish between an ask that feels clear and an ask someone can say yes to.

This booklet gives you the system. Guided practice with feedback gives you mastery.

If you only read one chapter beyond this framework, read Chapter 2. It explains the mistake that kills most pitches: starting where you are instead of where your listener is. Everything else depends on getting that right.

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The following chapters explain how to use this framework effectively starting with the strategic preparation most people skip.

Chapter 2: Start Where They Are, Not Where You Are

The first 30 seconds decide whether the rest will be heard.

Not because the idea is weak. Not because the evidence is missing. Pitches fail because the speaker is answering a question the listener isn't asking.

You walk into a conversation thinking about why your initiative matters. Your listener is thinking about why it might not work, why they don't have time, or why the last three similar ideas failed.

You're starting from different places. And if you don't close that gap, nothing else you say will land.

The Problem with the Default Approach

Here's what most people do: they lead with what excites them.

"I want to talk about our new decision-making framework. It's going to transform how we work. Let me walk you through the five-phase implementation plan."

The listener hears: more work, more meetings, another initiative that will probably fade after three months.

By the time you get to your evidence, they've already decided. The answer is no-they're just being polite about it.

Why This Happens

Every person you talk to carries invisible barriers. Past failures. Competing priorities. Political constraints. Limited bandwidth. Concern about their reputation. Self-interest.

Your proposal doesn't land in a vacuum. It lands in that context.

If your opening doesn't acknowledge their reality, you're asking them to abandon everything they're worried about and get excited about what you're excited about.

People don't do that. They just wait for you to finish talking.

The Cost of Getting It Wrong

Here's what happens when you misjudge the objection:

Your boss is worried this initiative will require headcount she doesn't have. But you think she's worried about the timeline. So you spend your entire pitch explaining how you can deliver in 90 days.

She's not listening. You're solving a problem she doesn't have while ignoring the one she does.

This isn't barking up the wrong tree. It's cutting down trees in the wrong forest.

You're building your entire case around the wrong barrier. Every piece of evidence, every claim, every carefully crafted argument-all of it aimed at an objection that doesn't exist.

If you get this step wrong, nothing else matters. Your evidence can be perfect, your conclusion can be clear, your ask can be specific-and you'll still get "let me think about it."

The Strategic Alternative: Objection Awareness

Before you say anything, ask yourself one question:

If I were them, what would make me hesitate?

Not a generic answer. A specific one.

- Not: "They're busy"

- But: "They've launched two efficiency initiatives in the past year and both added workload without delivering results"

- Not: "They might have budget concerns"

- But: "They're worried this will require headcount they don't have"

Once you can name the specific objection, you can design your claim to address it.

Example:

Audience: My boss, Sarah
Action: Try this framework at next week's team meeting
Objection: She's worried decision quality will suffer if we move faster

Generic claim: "This framework will improve our team's efficiency."

Objection-aware claim: "We've developed a framework that helps teams reach decisions faster, without sacrificing quality."

Notice what changed. The second version speaks directly to what Sarah is worried about. It doesn't ignore her concern-it preempts it.

What This Creates

When your listener hears you acknowledge their reality in your opening claim, something shifts.

They think: *Wait, they understand my situation. This is safe for me.*

That creates receptivity. They're willing to hear your evidence. Your Steps 2, 3, and 4 now land in prepared ground instead of hostile territory.

Objection awareness doesn't guarantee yes. But it dramatically increases the odds that your listener will engage with your case instead of just waiting for you to finish.

How to Practice This

Write down three things:

- Audience (specific person or group)

- Action (specific thing you want them to do)

- Objection (the main reason they'd hesitate)

Then ask yourself: "If I were them, would this be my biggest concern?"

If you can't articulate their objection clearly and specifically, you're not ready to make your pitch.

This is strategic preparation. It's the difference between walking into a conversation hoping it works out and walking in with a plan designed around the actual barrier you need to overcome.

Most people skip this step. That's why most pitches fail.

Chapter 3: How to Use This Framework

This framework works when you use it. That sounds obvious, but most people treat communication tools like reference material-something to read once and file away.

This is different. It's a working tool designed for the moments that matter: before board presentations, funding pitches, partnership conversations, or any situation where you need someone to move from "let me think about it" to clear next steps.

When to Pull This Out

Use this framework whenever you need to move a conversation to a decision.

That includes:

- Asking leadership to approve a new initiative

- Pitching a partnership to another organization

- Requesting budget or resources from a funder

- Presenting findings that require board action

- Convincing a colleague to try a different approach

If the stakes are high enough that "let me think about it" would be a problem, this framework is relevant.

The Three-Part Practice Method

The framework becomes second nature through repetition. Here's how to build that skill:

1. Replace the examples

Start with a real situation. Write down your audience, action, and objection.

Then work through each step, replacing the example language with your own specifics:

- Step 1: What claim addresses their objection?

- Step 2: What concrete evidence supports that claim?

- Step 3: What's the one-sentence takeaway?

- Step 4: What specific action do you want?

Don't aim for perfect. Aim for complete. Get something down for all four steps.

2. Test with the quality checks

Each step includes a quality check question. Use them.

- Step 1: "What part of this claim truly makes someone lean in, and what still sounds generic?"

- Step 2: "What detail here would be hardest to fake?"

- Step 3: "If your listener repeated this in one sentence, would it match the takeaway you want?"

- Step 4: "Is this an ask they can say yes to instantly, without effort or hesitation?"

These questions expose weak spots. If you can't answer them confidently, revise that step.

3. Refine based on what's missing

Usually one step is weaker than the others.

Your claim might be strong but your evidence is vague. Or your evidence is concrete but your action step is fuzzy. Or you realize your objection wasn't the main barrier.

That's normal. Revise the weak step. Run the quality check again. Keep tightening until each step passes its test.

Your Most Honest Advisor

Here's a practice method most people skip: record yourself saying your pitch out loud, then listen back.

Not to critique your delivery. To hear what lands.

When you're writing, your brain fills in gaps. You know what you mean, so vague language feels clear. Generic claims feel specific. Awkward transitions feel smooth.

When you listen to a recording, those gaps become obvious. Your emotions will tell you immediately:

"Wait, that claim sounds like every other pitch." "That evidence is too abstract-I can't picture it." "I have no idea what I'm asking for."

You'll feel it before you can articulate why. That gut reaction-the moment you cringe or lose interest-is the same reaction your listener will have.

How to do this:

Use your phone's voice memo app. Read your four steps out loud as if you're in the conversation. Don't perform it. Just say it naturally.

Then listen back without looking at what you wrote.

Ask yourself:

- When did I lose interest?

- What sounded like empty corporate language?

- Where did I want more concrete detail?

- Did I understand the ask?

Your recorded voice is the most honest advisor you'll ever have. It bypasses your internal justifications and shows you what your listener will hear.

Then revise based on what you felt, not what you think you should fix.

What Success Looks Like

You'll know this framework is working when conversations change.

Before: "That's interesting. Let me think about it and get back to you."

After: "Can we add this to Thursday's agenda to discuss next steps?"

Before: You leave meetings uncertain whether anything will happen.

After: You leave with a specific commitment and timeline.

The goal isn't to win every pitch. It's to get real engagement instead of polite deferrals. When someone says no after hearing your full case, that's still progress-you learned something. When they say "let me think about it," you learned nothing.

Keep It Accessible

This only works if the framework is physically available in the moment. That's why we have participants add it to their home screen in training—not as a convenience feature, but as part of the discipline.

If you haven't already done it (from Chapter 1):

1. Scan the QR code

2. Tap Share

3. Tap Add to Home Screen

www.est.io/1

The framework becomes a one-tap reference before any important conversation.

This isn't course material you reference once. It's a tool you use repeatedly until the structure becomes instinctive. Eventually you won't need to look at it—you'll naturally think in terms of objection, claim, evidence, clarity, action.

But until then, the framework needs to be one tap away, not three folders deep.

Chapter 4: Why Concrete Examples Are Everything

Your claim gets attention. Your conclusion creates clarity. Your action drives commitment.

But none of that matters without Step 2-concrete evidence.

Examples aren't decoration. They're the fuel that moves your idea from "interesting" to "let's act on it." Without specific details, your pitch stays vague. With them, people visualize it working. And seeing is believing. It is how you generate trust.

What Makes Evidence Concrete

Abstract: "Our approach has been validated by industry experts and shows promising results in early testing."

Concrete: "When the grants team piloted this last month, they cut approval time from three weeks to five days. Sarah Chen called it 'way less back and forth.'"

The difference: factual nuggets-names, numbers, timeframes, quotes, context. These create the texture of realness. When you say "last month," "three weeks to five days," and "Sarah Chen," people think: *This happened. I can trust it.*

Walk the Extra Mile to Concretize

Strong evidence requires becoming a detective to find your proofs : call for the exact quote, check your calendar for the actual date, pull real numbers from the spreadsheet.

Example:

Weak version: "We tried this approach recently and people said it helped."

Strong version: "When we piloted this in May with four teams, approval time dropped from two weeks to five days. Sarah Chen told me: 'It's faster, but we're not cutting corners-that's what surprised me.'"

The difference: one phone call, one date check, one data pull. Five minutes of work that transforms dismissible impressions into undismissable evidence.

Before you finalize your pitch, ask: Can I get the actual number? The exact words? The specific date? The real name?

I see this constantly: people assume general memory is good enough. It's not. That extra mile is what separates someone who uses this framework from someone who uses it well.

The Six Types of Factual Nuggets

Strong evidence includes at least three of these:

- **Time** - "last month," "in May," "within 48 hours"

- **Place** - "in my lab," "at the Seattle office," "during the board retreat"

- **Numbers with context** - "three weeks to five days," "20,335 compounds in 3 minutes," "four teams"

- **Names** - "Sarah Chen," "the grants team," "our CFO"

- **Quotes** - "'way less back and forth,'" "'You have to see it to believe it'"

- **Visual details** - "test tube the size of your index finger," "single spreadsheet," "two-page memo"

The more of these you include, the harder your evidence is to dismiss-and the harder it is to fake.

The Hierarchy of Evidence (and Why Specificity Matters at Every Level)

Not all evidence carries equal weight. From strongest to weakest:

1. **Direct outcome data** - "We cut approval time from three weeks to five days"

2. **Pilot data** - "When we tested this with four teams last month, approval time dropped from two weeks to five days"

3. **Comparable cases** - "When the Seattle office tried something similar, they reduced processing time by 40%"

4. **Expert validation** - "McKinsey's 2024 analysis of 47 organizations found a 40% reduction in decision cycle time"

5. **Anecdotal patterns** - "Three program officers-Sarah Chen, Mike Rodriguez, and Lisa Park-mentioned the same bottleneck"

Use the strongest tier available. But whatever tier you're in, specificity determines whether it creates trust or skepticism.

Compare:

- Vague: "We've seen significant improvements in efficiency across multiple teams"

- Specific: "The finance team closed month-end in four days instead of seven. The grants team approved three proposals in the time it used to take for one"

Generic language sounds like marketing copy, even when true. Specific details sound like reality. When evidence is abstract, listeners fill gaps with skepticism. When it's concrete, they fill gaps with belief.

The Dual-Use Warning

Concrete details create credibility precisely because they're hard to fake. They're also easy to fabricate.

The framework doesn't prevent lying-it makes lying more effective. That's why your character matters more than your technique.

If you're tempted to invent a name, inflate a number, or fabricate a quote, stop. This framework is designed to make true things easier to believe. Use it that way.

What to Do When Evidence Is Limited

If you're pitching something new without direct results, be honest about your evidence tier:

"We haven't implemented this yet, but when Seattle tried a similar approach, they reduced processing time by 40%. Based on our workflow analysis, we'd see comparable results."

Weak evidence presented honestly beats weak evidence dressed up as strong evidence. What kills credibility is pretending or fabricating.

The Bottom Line

Your claim sparks curiosity. Your evidence builds trust. Without concrete details-names, numbers, timeframes-your pitch stays theoretical. With them, it becomes actionable.

Examples are the difference between "interesting concept" and "let's move forward."

Chapter 5: Common Mistakes to Avoid

In practice, people get two or three steps right. Then one step undermines everything else.

Here are the patterns that kill pitches-and how to catch them before they cost you.

Mistake 1: Leading with Process Instead of Outcomes

What people say: "We're launching a five-phase rollout with stakeholder engagement sessions in Q1, pilot implementation in Q2, and full deployment by Q3."

What the listener hears: "This is going to take forever and require me to attend meetings."

The problem: you're describing how you'll do something instead of what will change.

Fix it: "We'll cut approval time from three weeks to five days. Here's how we'll get there: a four-week pilot with the grants team, then rollout to the other divisions."

Lead with the outcome. Then, if they're interested, explain the process.

Mistake 2: Leading with Institutional Identity Instead of Impact

What people say: "I'm the Senior Director of Strategic Initiatives at the Alliance for Community Development, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1987 with offices in five cities. We work on systemic change through multi-stakeholder engagement."

What the listener hears: A list of credentials that tells them nothing about what happens.

The problem: you're leading with status markers-title, organization name, tax status, longevity, geographic footprint-instead of what you do and who it helps.

This feels safe because it establishes legitimacy. But it wastes the most valuable part of the conversation: the opening seconds when people are still paying attention.

What this sounds like in practice:

"Hi, I'm Jennifer Martinez, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Education Consortium, a regional intermediary organization established in 1995 serving six school districts across the tri-county area."

Versus:

"Hi, I'm Jennifer. I help school districts share what's working so they don't have to reinvent solutions that already exist in the district next door."

The second version tells you what happens and who benefits. The first version tells you nothing useful-it's just institutional packaging.

Why people do this:

Leading with credentials feels professional. It signals that you're legitimate, established, and worth listening to.

But legitimacy doesn't create interest. Impact does.

Your title and organization's tax status might matter later-after someone understands what you do. Leading with them guarantees most people tune out before you get to the interesting part.

The fix:

Before you introduce yourself at a conference, in an email, or in a meeting, ask:

"What changes because my organization exists?"

Not: "What does my organization do?" But: "What's different in the world because we do it?"

Then lead with that.

Instead of: "I work for the Center for Innovation in Public Systems" Say: "I help government agencies cut processing times so people get benefits faster"

Instead of: "I'm with the Regional Food Access Coalition"
Say: "I help rural communities get fresh food to people who can't reach grocery stores"

The organizational name can come later. Lead with the outcome.

This applies to the framework too:

When you're building your Step 1 claim, the same mistake appears.

Generic claim: "The Alliance for Community Development has created a new capacity-building framework for grassroots organizations."

Objection-aware claim: "We've developed a framework that helps small nonprofits write grant proposals in days instead of weeks-without hiring consultants they can't afford."

The second version tells you what changes and for whom. The first version just lists what the organization created.

Your listener doesn't care about your institutional structure. They care about what you make possible.

Lead with that.

Mistake 3: Polluting Step 3 with Jargon

Step 3 is where you distill everything into one clear takeaway. This is the sentence your listener will repeat to someone else.

If it includes insider language, organizational acronyms, or abstract concepts, it won't travel.

What people say: "The bottom line is, this initiative will enhance our organizational capacity for cross-functional collaboration and drive synergies across verticals."

What works: "The bottom line is, teams will make decisions faster without adding meetings."

The test: Would your listener's spouse understand this sentence? If not, simplify it.

Mistake 4: Making Vague Asks

What people say: "So, let me know what you think." "I'd love to hear your feedback." "Feel free to reach out if you have questions."

These aren't asks. They're conversational exits that guarantee nothing happens.

What works: "Can we add this to Thursday's agenda to discuss implementation?" "Would you be open to a 15-minute pilot with your team next week?" "Can I send you the proposal by Friday for approval before the board meeting?"

Specific action. Specific timeline. Easy to say yes or no.

If your listener can't immediately visualize what you're asking them to do, revise Step 4.

Mistake 5: Skipping Objection Prep Entirely

This is the most common mistake and the most costly.

People jump straight to writing their claim without identifying what their listener is worried about.

The result: a well-structured pitch aimed at the wrong concern.

Your boss is worried about headcount requirements. You spend your entire pitch explaining how you can deliver in 90 days. She's not listening-you're solving a problem she doesn't have.

This is the "wrong forest" problem from Chapter 2. You can have perfect evidence, clear language, and a specific ask-but if you misidentified the objection, none of it lands.

The fix: Before you write anything, force yourself to complete this sentence:

"The main reason they would hesitate to say yes is: _____"

If you can't complete it with a specific concern, you're not ready to build your pitch.

Mistake 6: Using Abstract Evidence

What people say: "This approach has been validated by experts and shows promising results."

What works: "When McKinsey analyzed 47 organizations using this approach, they found a 40% reduction in decision cycle time."

The difference: specific source, specific number, specific finding.

Generic phrases like "experts agree," "studies show," or "research indicates" destroy credibility even when you're citing real research. Name the source. Include the number. Give the context.

If you find yourself writing "significant," "substantial," or "considerable," stop. Find the actual number.

Mistake 7: Fabricating Specifics

The framework teaches you to use names, numbers, and quotes because they're persuasive.

That same specificity makes fabrication tempting.

Don't.

If you invent a quote, create a fake timeline, or attribute results to someone who didn't say them, you're not using the framework-you're misusing it.

The consequence isn't just ethical. It's practical. Made-up details eventually get exposed, and once your credibility is gone, no framework can rebuild it.

If you don't have strong evidence yet, use a weaker tier honestly rather than inventing a stronger tier dishonestly.

Mistake 8: Trying to Perfect It Before Testing It

People spend hours refining their pitch in isolation, then deliver it once and wonder why it didn't work.

Better approach: draft it quickly, say it out loud, get feedback from one person, revise, and test it in a lower-stakes conversation before the high-stakes moment. You can also record yourself and listen to the recording. Your own recorded voice is your most honest advisor.

The framework improves through iteration, not perfection.

Your first version will have weak spots. That's expected. Find them early by testing early.

The Pattern Underneath All These Mistakes

Every mistake comes from the same root cause: focusing on what you want to say instead of what your listener needs to hear.

You want to explain your process. They need to know the outcome. You want to sound sophisticated. They need plain language they can repeat. You want general approval. They need a specific action they can take.

This is Chapter 2's core principle applied to execution: start where they are, not where you are.

The framework works when you use it to close the gap between those two things.

When you catch yourself making one of these mistakes, the fix is always the same: stop thinking about your pitch and start thinking about their experience of hearing it.

Chapter 6: Built for Responsible Use

This framework works because it mirrors how people make decisions: curiosity opens the door, trust creates safety, clarity reduces effort, action becomes easier.

Because it works, you need to understand what you're holding.

Persuasion vs. Manipulation

The framework doesn't create truth. It creates clarity around what's already true-helping people understand and evaluate your case through concrete evidence, plain language, and specific next steps.

Manipulation hides the logic and bypasses critical thinking. This framework does the opposite: it makes your logic visible. Your listener can see exactly what you're claiming, evaluate whether your evidence supports it, and say no based on what you've shown them.

That's persuasion, not manipulation.

The Dual-Use Reality

The same techniques that make true things easier to believe also make false things easier to believe. Names, numbers, timeframes, quotes-these create credibility and they're easy to fabricate.

The framework doesn't prevent lying. It makes lying more effective by teaching you exactly which details create trust.

This is why ethics don't live in the framework. They live in you.

What Responsible Use Looks Like

- **Use real evidence.** If Sarah Chen didn't say it, don't quote her. If you don't have a number yet, don't invent one.

- **Be honest about evidence tiers.** Using comparable cases instead of direct outcomes? Say so. Weak evidence presented honestly beats weak evidence dressed up.

- **Address legitimate objections.** Speak to real concerns directly, not around them.

- **Make claims you believe.** If you don't believe your case, don't make it more convincing.

- **Respect your listener's judgment.** A "no" after a clear case isn't technique failure-it's them exercising judgment based on information you don't have.

What Irresponsible Use Looks Like

Fabricating details, misrepresenting pilot data as proven outcomes, making bad ideas sound good, or manipulating people into decisions that serve your interests but not theirs. The framework makes all of these more effective. That's the dual-use problem.

Why This Matters

You're learning a tool that creates asymmetry. Most people pitch with vague claims and abstract evidence. You'll have objection awareness, concrete details, and specific asks.

That asymmetry creates power. And, as the Spiderman saying goes, with great power comes great responsibility.

Use this framework to make true things clearer, and you'll help people make better decisions. Use it to make false things believable, and you'll erode trust-not just in yourself, but in everyone trying to communicate honestly.

The Standard

Would you want someone to use this framework on you the way you're about to use it on them?

If you'd feel manipulated by your own pitch, don't make it. If you'd appreciate the clarity and directness even if you disagreed, you're using it responsibly.

The framework is powerful. How you use it matters more than how well you use it.

Chapter 7: Quality Checks

Before you deliver your pitch, run it through these checks. They expose weak spots faster than any other method.

Each question targets a specific failure point. If you can't answer confidently, that step needs work.

Objection Prep

Question: "If I were them, would this be my biggest concern?"

What this catches: Generic objections that sound plausible but miss what's really blocking yes.

Red flag: You're naming a concern you've heard before rather than the specific barrier this particular person faces.

Fix: Get more specific. Not "they're worried about resources" but "they're worried this will require two FTEs they don't have budget for."

Step 1: Curiosity (Claim)

Question: "What part of this claim truly makes someone lean in, and what still sounds generic?"

What this catches: Claims that sound like every other pitch in your sector.

Red flag: You could swap your organization's name with three other organizations and the claim would still work.

Fix: Make it more specific to your actual approach or more directly tied to the objection you identified.

Step 2: Trust (Evidence)

Question: "What detail here would be hardest to fake?"

What this catches: Abstract evidence that sounds credible but provides no proof.

Red flag: You're using phrases like "significant improvement," "multiple stakeholders," or "proven results" without names, numbers, or timeframes.

Fix: Add at least three factual nuggets: time, place, numbers with context, names, quotes, or visual details.

Bonus check: Read your evidence out loud. If it sounds like marketing copy, it won't create trust.

Step 3: Clarity (Conclusion)

Question: "If your listener repeated this in one sentence, would it match the takeaway you want?"

What this catches: Conclusions that are technically accurate but too complex or jargon-filled to travel.

Red flag: Your conclusion includes acronyms, insider language, or requires context to understand.

Fix: Simplify until someone outside your organization could repeat it accurately. The test: Would your listener's spouse understand this sentence?

Step 4: Action

Question: "Is this an ask they can say yes to instantly, without effort or hesitation?"

What this catches: Vague requests that sound like asks but create no commitment.

Red flag: You're using phrases like "let me know what you think," "I'd love your feedback," or "feel free to reach out."

Fix: Make it concrete. Include what you want and when. "Can we add this to Thursday's agenda?" vs. "Let's continue the conversation."

The Overall Coherence Check

After you've tested each step individually, check the full sequence:

Question: "Does my Step 1 claim directly address the objection I identified in prep?"

If your objection is "they're worried about decision quality suffering" but your claim focuses on speed without mentioning quality, you've built the wrong pitch.

Question: "Does my Step 2 evidence prove my Step 1 claim?"

If your claim is about reducing time and your evidence is about increasing satisfaction, there's a gap.

Question: "Does my Step 4 action match what I said I wanted in objection prep?"

If you identified "get approval for pilot" as your action but you're asking to "discuss possibilities," you've softened the ask.

Question: "Would I believe this pitch if someone used it on me?"

This is the honesty check. If you'd be skeptical of your own evidence, your listener will be too.

When to Use These Checks

Run through these questions three times:

- **After your first draft** - Catches the obvious problems

- **After you record yourself and listen back** - Catches what your emotions flag

- **Right before you deliver it** - Final verification that nothing has weakened

These aren't theoretical exercises. They're diagnostic tools. Each question is designed to surface a specific type of failure before it costs you a yes.

Chapter 8: What to Do Next

You have the framework. Now use it.

Step 1: Add It to Your Phone

Scan the QR code below.

www.est.io/1

Tap "Share" → Tap "Add to Home Screen"

This puts the framework where you'll use it: accessible in the 10 minutes before an important conversation.

If it's buried in a folder or saved as a PDF somewhere, you won't reference it when it matters. Make it one tap away.

Step 2: Practice with a Real Situation

Pick something you're working on. Not a hypothetical. A real pitch you need to make in the next two weeks.

Write down:

- Audience (specific person)

- Action (specific ask)

- Objection (their main concern)

Spend real time on that objection line. This is the foundation everything else builds on. If you get it wrong, you're in the wrong forest (Chapter 2). If you get it right, your entire pitch becomes strategically aligned.

Then work through Steps 1-4, replacing the examples with your own language.

Don't aim for perfect. Aim for complete. Get something down for all four steps.

Step 3: Record Yourself

Say your pitch out loud into your phone's voice memo app. Then listen back.

Your emotional response-the moments you cringe, lose interest, or feel confused-shows you what needs work.

Revise based on what you felt, then record again.

Step 4: Test It in a Lower-Stakes Conversation

Before you use this framework in a high-stakes moment, test it with a colleague, a peer, or in a less critical conversation.

Get feedback on:

- Did the claim address what they'd be worried about?

- Was the evidence concrete enough to believe?

- Could they repeat the conclusion back to you?

- Was the ask clear and actionable?

Revise based on what you learn.

Step 5: Use It When It Matters

The framework is ready when you need to move a conversation from "let me think about it" to clear next steps.

Before board meetings. Before funding pitches. Before partnership conversations.

Pull it up. Review your objection prep. Check your quality checks. Then make your case.

What Happens After That

You'll get better at this through repetition. Your first few pitches using the framework will feel mechanical. That's normal.

Over time, the structure becomes instinctive. You'll stop needing to reference the one-pager because you'll naturally think in terms of objection, claim, evidence, clarity, action.

But that only happens if you use it.

If You Want Mastery, Not Just Familiarity

This booklet gives you the framework. Mastery requires something this booklet can't provide: feedback on your specific pitch from someone who can spot what you can't see.

The 90-minute EST workshop walks teams through the full process with coached application to real situations. You'll practice on your actual pitch, get feedback on what's still vague or generic, and leave with a case that's ready to use.

Group sessions create shared language across your organization. Everyone learns to build cases the same way, which means faster decisions and less re-litigation.

One-on-one sessions let you focus on your specific high-stakes situation with direct coaching on the objection you're missing, the evidence that needs tightening, or the ask that still feels fuzzy.

The gap between understanding the framework and using it well is feedback. That's what closes it.

Learn more at est.io

The Bottom Line

Most pitches fail because people answer questions their listeners aren't asking. They lead with what excites them instead of what concerns their audience. They use abstract language instead of concrete evidence. They make vague requests instead of specific asks.

This framework fixes that.

It won't guarantee yes. But it dramatically increases the odds that your listener will engage with your case instead of politely deferring.

The difference between "let me think about it" and "can we add this to Thursday's agenda" is this framework-used consistently, tested iteratively, and applied when it matters.

You have it now. Use it.

Chapter 9: For Organizations: Build a Nugget Collection System

The framework gives individuals a tool for high-stakes conversations. This chapter gives leaders a way to scale that capability across their entire organization.

It's called the Nugget Collection System, and it solves a problem most organizations don't realize they have: great examples of their impact exist, but they're scattered across staff members' memories instead of being accessible when anyone needs them.

The Problem

Your organization does remarkable work. But when a board member gets asked at a conference, "What makes your organization different?" they default to abstract language:

"We provide excellent service to underserved communities."

Meanwhile, your program director could tell them:

"Last month at Jefferson Elementary, Principal Martinez told us, 'This is the first time in 12 years every student will start with everything they need.'"

That nugget-the school name, the principal's name, the timeframe, the quote-makes the impact real. But it lives in one person's memory, not in your organization's shared knowledge.

The Solution: 5 Minutes Once a Month

Add a standing agenda item to your monthly team meeting: "Nugget Hunt."

Ask: "What concrete moments from this month illustrate our impact?"

Listen for the six types of factual nuggets:

- Time: "Last Tuesday," "within 48 hours," "after three weeks"

- Place: "Jefferson Elementary," "the downtown clinic waiting room"

- Numbers with context: "374 families," "12 years," "every student"

- Names: "Principal Martinez," "volunteer coordinator Sarah"

- Quotes: Exact words someone said

- Visual details: Descriptions that help people see what happened

Collect the best ones in a shared document. Call it your "Nugget Hall of Fame."

That's it. Five minutes a month.

Why This Works

Three things happen when organizations implement this system:

1. Everyone becomes a spokesperson Staff, board members, volunteers-anyone can now speak convincingly about your work because they have concrete examples at their fingertips, not just abstract mission statements.

2. Evidence is ready when you need it When you're writing a grant proposal, preparing a board report, or pitching a partnership, you don't have to scramble for examples. You have a curated collection ready to use.

3. Team morale improves Regularly celebrating these moments reinforces what's working. People see their impact more clearly when you name it and collect it.

Organizations that implement this through our workshop get the system started in 90 minutes, with everyone practicing on real examples and leaving with their first Hall of Fame entries complete.

Start with Your Top 3 Claims

Don't collect nuggets randomly. Start strategically.

Identify the three most important claims your organization makes. Then collect nuggets that prove those specific claims.

Example:

Claim 1: "We create lasting change" **Nugget needed:** Evidence of long-term impact, not just immediate outcomes

Claim 2: "We serve the underserved"
Nugget needed: Specific examples of who you reach that others don't

Claim 3: "We respond quickly" **Nugget needed:** Timeframes showing how fast you act compared to alternatives

This focused approach ensures you're building evidence for the advantages that differentiate you, not just collecting random good moments.

Why This Beats Story Banks

Many organizations maintain "story banks"-full narratives about program participants or successful projects.

The problem: stories are long. When you're in a conversation and need evidence, you can't remember the five-minute story about Maria the scholarship recipient.

But you can remember the nugget:

"Graduate Destiny Williams texted us: 'Remember when you said I was college material and I laughed? Thank you for seeing what I couldn't see.'"

That single quote illustrates transformation without requiring anyone to memorize an entire narrative.

Nuggets are small enough to keep in your back pocket and drop into any conversation. They're evidence you can use in the moment.

Examples from Organizations Using This System

Healthcare nonprofit: "When 89-year-old Mr. Johnson got his first smartphone through our tech literacy program, he FaceTimed his granddaughter in California for two hours straight. She told us, 'I haven't seen him smile like that since Grandma passed.'"

Environmental organization: "Our volunteers removed 1,847 pounds of trash from the river last Saturday. Local news anchor Maria Santos called it 'the cleanest she's seen the riverbank in 15 years.'"

Education foundation: "This year's scholarship recipients earned $847,000 in college scholarships-an average of $12,100 per student, which covers full tuition at our state university."

Notice what makes these work: specific numbers, real names, exact quotes, concrete timeframes.

How to Implement This

You can implement this on your own or through our group workshop, where your team learns the framework and builds the Nugget Collection System together in one 90-minute session.

DIY Implementation:

Month 1: Introduce the concept at your team meeting. Ask everyone to bring one nugget to the next meeting that illustrates one of your top three claims.

Month 2: Create your "Nugget Hall of Fame" document. Add the best nuggets from Month 1. Make it accessible to everyone-shared drive, internal wiki, or simple Google Doc.

Month 3 and beyond: Make "Nugget Hunt" a permanent 5-minute agenda item. Each month, add new nuggets. Celebrate the people who contribute them.

Who Should Own This

Assign someone to be the Nugget Curator-usually your communications director, development director, or someone who writes frequently about your work.

Their job: facilitate the monthly Nugget Hunt, update the Hall of Fame document, and make sure the nuggets get used in grant proposals, board reports, and staff talking points.

This isn't extra work. It's five minutes a month of collection plus occasional curation. The return-an organization where everyone can speak convincingly about your impact-is worth it.

The Connection to the Framework

This system operationalizes Step 2 of the framework at an organizational level.

Instead of each person scrambling to remember examples when they need them, your organization systematically collects and curates the evidence everyone needs to build trust.

When someone needs to pitch a partnership, write a proposal, or respond to "What makes you different?" at a conference, they pull from the shared Hall of Fame instead of relying on whatever they personally remember.

Start at Your Next Team Meeting

You don't need permission or budget to implement this. You need five minutes and one question:

"What concrete moments from this month illustrate our impact?"

Make it a standing agenda item. Build your Hall of Fame. Watch as your entire organization gets better at showing-not just telling-why your work matters.

Want help implementing this system across your team? Our group workshop walks your entire organization through the framework and Nugget Collection System together, creating shared language and practice that sticks. Learn more at est.io

About the Author

Marc Fest is the founder of EST and creator of the Persuasive Communication Framework.

Marc built this framework after watching smart people lose decisions they deserved to win-not because their ideas were weak, but because they couldn't make the case in a way that moved conversations forward.

Marc has trained more than 2,000 leaders across foundations, nonprofits, and corporations, with consistent feedback like "total game-changing work" and "seriously one of the best trainings I have ever received."

He's a former VP of Communications at the Knight Foundation and New World Symphony, and the author of *Elevator Speech Training* and *The Message House Method* (*www.messagehouse.org*).

His approach emphasizes concrete evidence over abstract language, objection awareness over feature lists, and specific asks over vague requests-the principles you've learned in this booklet.

Work with EST

Group Workshop - 90-minute virtual session for teams
Turn "let me think about it" into "can we add this to Thursday's agenda?" Your team learns the framework together, practices in small groups, and leaves with shared language for clearer conversations.

One-on-One Training - 60-minute focused session
Get direct coaching on your specific high-stakes pitch: funding proposal, partnership ask, board presentation, or career conversation.

Learn more and see current pricing at *www.est.io*