

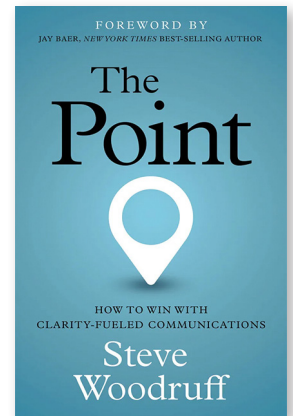


Executive Book Summaries®

The Point

How to Win with Clarity-Fueled Communications

by **Steve Woodruff**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

In a world where noise and confusion reign supreme, communicating your message is far from easy. The only weapon you'll ever need to rise through this cacophony is absolute clarity.

The book *The Point: How to Win with Clarity-Fueled Communications* introduces us to the practice of clarity-fueled communication – where the greatest impact comes from using the fewest possible words. The pages ahead supply you with the tools, insights, and lessons to create brain-friendly messages that truly capture the attention of your audience.

Author Steve Woodruff starts by tackling the greatest communication challenges in our world today. He then helps us build the Clarity Fuel Formula to overcome these challenges and “get to the point.” Finally, he lays out value-packed clarity best practices to achieve communication success in every area - From emails and presentations to purpose statements and branding to social media and networking.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to package information in a brain-friendly way.
- How to create your own Clarity Fuel Formula.
- How to use clarity tools to get the message across loud and clear.
- How to apply clarity best practices in all areas of communication.

Introduction

Effective communication is one of the biggest challenges we all face. The purpose of communication isn't just pushing out words; It's really all about achieving an intended result. Our words are tools, and we must use them skillfully to accomplish specific goals. I wrote this book so you can win the most important competition of all: getting your point across and accomplishing your purpose. In every sphere of life. As you begin the journey, here's my promise: by skillfully and consistently applying the simple tactics of the clarity fuel formula, you will become an increasingly effective communicator. And here's my premise: the most direct route to successful communication is to package your messages in what I call "brain-friendly" formats, a skill anyone can learn and apply. But there are barriers to getting our ideas across to others, so let's begin by finding out what is in our way.

Part 1: Our Formidable Communications Challenges

Chapter 1: The Barriers

The three most formidable enemies of effective communication are the gaps, the noise, and the fog. We suffer from many communication barriers:

- Too much information that overwhelms the brain
- Specialized jargon that listeners don't comprehend
- Big generalities that leave room for varying interpretations
- Poorly chosen words that give an unintended meaning
- Divergent communication styles that don't mesh smoothly

You can minimize the misunderstanding gaps by designing your communications with the Clarity Fuel Formula that I'll cover in the book.

The Point: Your biggest competition is not the competition. It's the noise. Your biggest hurdle is everything that is occupying the mind of your audience. You must immediately show your audience why they should care about your message because there's too much else in the focus queue fighting for attention. Fight the noise with immediate relevance.

The Point: Great communicators clear the fog instead of adding to it. They strive for stability, certainty, simplicity, and directness in their works. Their goal? Clear the fog to

activate and energize people.

So, how do you clear the fog, rise above the noise, and bridge the gaps? By designing all your communications with your audience in mind. Every human has two unspoken requests: give me the information I want the way I want it and make it easy.

Chapter 2: The Brain

The brain's master filter attends to what is most relevant, so you need to get to the point right away. Your brain is processing about eleven million bits of information every second. Processing and sorting all that nervous system data is the job of a brain structure called the reticular activating system, or RAS.

Here's the secret: the RAS pays attention to things that are new, surprising, interesting, threatening, or specific. RAS is the bouncer at the front door of our consciousness, and it only allows the VIPs (Very Important Priorities) through. Aim your communications arrows directly at the target: the RAS.

The Point: Explaining, not assuming, is what allows us to arrive at shared meaning. Don't assume your audience understands what you're trying to say.

The Point: It's your job to skillfully plant the right ideas in the limited brain space you're allocated. There are "very few" unallocated resources in your audience's mind for what you have to say. This is why less is more when it comes to getting a message across.

Do not overwhelm your audience. Make your message accessible and easy to process. Practice simplicity and be as specific as possible. Do not waste time. Pack as much meaning into as few words as possible. Do not assume: Only offer focused ideas expressed in brain-friendly words. Pay attention to focused clarity in at least four dimensions: clarity of purpose, clarity of direction, clarity of expectations, and clarity of expressions.

Part 2: The Clarity Fuel Formula Rules

Chapter 3: You Shall Have a Point

The Clarity Fuel Formula Rules consist of a four-step process you can follow for all forms of communication: These four logical brain-friendly steps include:

- You Shall Have a Point (Strategize)
- You Shall Get to the Point (Sequence)

Before you begin to compose words, determine the exact purpose and intention of the communication. Why this e-mail, meeting, presentation, or book chapter?

- You shall Get the Point Across (Simplify)
- You Shall Get on the Same Page (Solidify)

This chapter discusses the first step. When you articulate the point, you answer the unspoken questions “Why?” and “Where are we going?”

When communicating with your audience, spell out, in advance, the desired objective of every communication – the point. Think about it with the simple “A-to-B” Shift model:

- The audience (one or many) is thinking, feeling, and acting a certain way right now. That’s the status quo: point A
- How do you want your audience to think, feel, and act differently based on your communication? What is the desired specific change? That’s point B.

Before you begin to compose words, determine the exact purpose and intention of the communication. Why this e-mail, meeting, presentation, or book chapter? What’s the anticipated outcome? People need to know the why, and they need to envision the goal. If you want to move others, you need to make sure they – and you – know what the point is.

Chapter 4: You Shall Get to the Point

Whether you’re designing a book, a presentation, a meeting, or an e-mail, the most important thing you can do is to quickly let your audience know why they should tune in. Front-load your message with something striking and relevant that will instantly capture attention. Perhaps after a brief, polite introduction, you can deliver a front-loaded value statement. The human brain needs a smart arrangement to be engaged. For example, here is 1 design sequence I use regularly:

- Attention: take the first few moments to grab those 60 bits of focus
- Relevance: immediately let the RAS know why this interaction matters
- Information: now you’ve earned the right to share more details

- Action: you should share this if the communication has an anticipated result or call to action, once the engagement is already taking place.
- Put your ideas in a sequential order. Design your message so that it moves from simplicity to complexity. Picture a pyramid with three sections, moving from top to bottom:
- Essence. Get right to a condensed summary of the most salient point. That’s the hook. Articulate the simple, distilled essence.
- Outline. Follow with a brief outline, summary, or broader context. Let the reader know where the information is coming from and where it’s going.
- Details. Give us the rest of the information now that the brain is primed by the first 2 steps.

Chapter 5: You Shall Get the Point Across

Once you’ve secured the attention of your audience, the next step is to embed your message in memory and make sure people clearly understand it. Assume that others can easily misunderstand you unless you simplify your words and pointedly explain your meaning. Communicating well is a form of verbal/written painting. You want to create colorful images and memorable Nuggets of truth in the minds of others. You want to engage the imagination and touch the emotions. Design your message with definitions, illustrations, and shortcuts that will overcome any mental metadata differences, light up the brain, and create meaning and memory.

Chapter 6: You Shall Get on the Same Page

You’ve probably heard the common expression, “A verbal contract isn’t worth the paper it’s written on.” You need to nail things down. In writing. In a word: solidify. People tend to listen in bits and pieces, and they often don’t put all the pieces together. So do your audience a favor by employing:

- Repetition: make major points more than one time, in more than one way.
- Conclusion: be explicit about the application; Don’t assume correct implications or deductions.

- Summarization: draw together the information and conclusions in an easy-to-remember format.

The most effective way to get people on the “same page” is a written summary. Detailed documentation is important; But, by and large, people can only remember and apply brief, memorable summaries. Alignment and agreement need to occur based on clearly articulated solidifying statements: goals, purpose statements, executive summaries, scope descriptions, and step-by-step plans. Document conclusions, create clear summaries, and outline specific calls to action that everyone can sign off on. This is especially important for any kind of collaborative effort.

Part 3: The Clarity Fuel Formal Tools

Chapter 7: Statements

A statement is a declaration that expresses a fact, opinion, or idea. It is a sentence or phrase that is either true or false, and its purpose is to pointedly communicate information or express a thought or belief. You should be able to distill an idea into a brief, simple sentence for the brain to process it immediately. A statement is not big, and it’s not ambiguous. Statements say one thing well and waste no words. They’re meant to be processed instantly and remembered easily. Think of statements as simple, declarative Nuggets.

Chapter 8: Snippets

A snippet is a short excerpt of something larger. It might be a factoid, an example, a keyword, a statistic, or a quote. It’s a sneaky little piece of information that the brain cannot help but seize on. Snippets are the sound bites of sound bites, turning on the light in the brain and carrying an oversized payload of impact.

Pitchy branding taglines are great examples of snippets: “Just do it” – Nike and “Think different” – Apple

“Your main competitor is the noise” is a phrase I often use that contains a snippet. Because it’s surprising and relevant, it sticks. Let’s say you have a paragraph’s worth of content to share. Look at all those words and ask yourself, “What is the main point here?” Then put that into a single sentence. Now go further and see if you can reduce that nugget into a pithy phrase.

Chapter 9: Specifics

Our minds are far more inclined to tune in to specifics rather than generalities. Specifics are particulars that are explicit

and well-defined. Specifics may be names, numbers, places, dates, details, and examples. Specifics lead to recall, differentiation, and well-defined action. Particulars stick. Generalities are forgettable. Leaders and managers can set their people up for success only by giving memorable and visualizable particulars: precise targets, tangible expectations, specific and measurable goals, and clear-cut expected behaviors.

Chapter 10: Stories

Everyone knows that the human brain is hardwired for stories. Storytelling is often aimed at entertaining, educating, or inspiring an audience. Stories include a beginning, middle, and end. They follow a narrative arc that includes a conflict or challenge, a rising action or reaction, a climax, and a resolution. Stories stick far more effectively than facts. There are many forms of stories that you can apply to get your point across:

- Origin story: how the company (or the individual) started on this quest.
- Evolution story: what happened along the way to bring you to this point?
- Success story: a personal anecdote that illustrates an important point showing why you or your company provides value or fits in a certain way.
- Comeback story: the protagonist sinks into defeat and then rises again to victory and success.
- Case study: stories about how people accomplished something.
- How-to stories: a step-by-step account of how to accomplish a certain thing.
- Heroes journey story: wrapping up a lesson or perspective in the familiar narrative of hero versus obstacle or bad guy

Chapter 11: Stakes

The stakes refer to what is at risk or what you can gain (or lose) as a result of a particular action or decision. Why was the COVID-19 pandemic panic so widespread? Because leaders and health professionals created the perception that the stakes – for every individual, country, even the world – couldn’t be higher. Ask yourself: What’s at stake for you? For your department? For your customers or patients? For the company? Inertia is the enemy of change. You have something important to say. Tell people why it matters, just as I’m telling you in this book why effective communication is so vital to your success.

Symbols play off something very powerful already existing in our brains: a memory hook.

Chapter 12: Symbols

Symbolic language can wrap multiple meanings into a few vivid words, sometimes even a single word. Symbols play off something very powerful already existing in our brains: a memory hook. When you tell others that “Laura comes into the room like a category 4 hurricane,” we know that Laura is a social force of nature, not a reserved introvert. When using symbolic language to describe yourself or your company, keep the language positive and aspirational. Ask yourself, “What is this like?”, “What’s a real-life picture of this?”, or “How would I help a 10-year-old make the leap from the known to the new?”

Chapter 13: Side-by-Sides

One of the most helpful ways you can help people understand ideas is to line them up with other concepts. Compare. Contrast. When making a comparison, you should first identify the similarities between the subjects being compared, followed by their differences. For contrast, you should focus on identifying the differences between the subjects being contrasted, followed by their similarities. In both cases, it is important to provide specific examples to clarify your points to the reader. The ultimate side-by-side advertising initiative was the Pepsi challenge, where tasters blindly tasted Coke and Pepsi and had to choose which soda they preferred.

Chapter 14: Summaries

Brief recaps are far easier for the human brain to process and remember than long-form explanations. A summary is a brief overview or condensed version of a longer text, speech, or other piece of content. If what you’re communicating is important, make it sticky. Your brain hosts a truly staggering number of loops. The more hooks an idea has, the better it will cling to memory. If you are like me, you want to get your message across and embed it as fast as possible.

Part 4: Applying Clarity Best Practices

Chapter 15: Email

Composing punchy, effective emails is your best training for putting clarity into practice. Each day, multiple times a day, you can apply all the tactics you’ve learned in this book. When you and your team master e-mail clarity the rest will come naturally. Set a hook to your subject line and the first sentence to draw the recipient in, then make the rest of the message easy to absorb. Here are some simple suggestions to make your e-mail design more brain-friendly and effective:

- Have a clear Point B before you start composing.
- Make it obvious up front what matters most about this message and what the recipient should do about it.
- Make it mobile-friendly.
- Inside the main text of the message, consider judiciously using a highlight or a bold font for the main point to ensure that the busy reader immediately grasps the purpose.
- Use white space to avoid a jumbled overload of words.
- Compose brief, single-focused messages that the reader can respond to immediately.
- Use bullet points to provide quick, easy-to-skim summaries if your communication needs to be longer

Chapter 16: Presentations

When presenting to a live or online audience, have a clear upfront hook secure engagement, and avoid information overload. Present a compact theme or message on each slide, accompanied by no more than one graphic. Use a simple design approach. Sprinkle in some humor and personal anecdotes. Include visual snippets and player video clips. Give tangible examples to illustrate specific points. Remember, you’re not being asked merely to deliver a presentation. You’re being asked to deliver value. What will your audience walk away with that will spark discussion, inside, and change?

Chapter 17: Teaching and Training

Great teachers make ideas come alive. They don’t just transmit, they illuminate. Unstructured information leaves it to the listener to sort through the haystack and find the

needle. The teachers and trainers are there to prioritize and make sense of that information:

- Map out your content into major points, minor points, and supporting information. Ask yourself: what matters most? Why does it matter? How should I expect my audience to respond and act?
- Let learners know the relevance and the stakes right away.
- Generously weave illustrative and interesting stories into every lesson.
- Remember, you're not only there to impart gems of wisdom, but to make the process enjoyable.
- Use the news. Current events are on everybody's mind.
- Ask audience members to provide their own instances about how a particular principle or our team worked itself out in their lives.

Chapter 18: Leadership

Leadership involves talent management and talent management means proactively wrapping words around unique personal or professional characteristics and putting people in the right roles. Leaders also provide clarity of message. They set the direction and communicate the direction – unambiguously. Here's how leaders can employ clarity principles and practice on a day-to-day level:

- Help every team member gain self-awareness by identifying their value and their strengths.
- If employees are unclear about their day-to-day responsibilities, ask them what they perceive to be their three main priorities and then explain and clarify what you are expecting.
- Practice imparting clear details and tangibles. Goals, priorities, processes, outcomes, deliverables – all should be as practical and measurable as possible.
- Praise team members by pointing out very specific contributions.
- Create specific purpose statements for each part of the organization.
- Assemble stories that sum up the values and successes of the organization and disseminate them regularly.

Chapter 19: Collaboration

Collaboration is key for any business. But unified effort can only come from aligned expectations. Begin with the end in

mind and then reverse engineer the steps to get there.

- Don't expect multiple stakeholders to magically have common goals and expectations. Instead, articulate the highest-level goal and gain verbal and written agreement on that before moving to a deeper outline of expectations and processes
- Practice iterative development on your projects. Start with the simplest framework and gain agreement, then move to the next level of development.
- A written plan, both at the high level and detailed level, is the key to successful collaboration.
- When working with external vendors, be sure to schedule a kickoff meeting where everyone gets to agree on all expectations, timelines, and variables.
- Define and assign specific responsibilities.
- Write out a clear purpose and agenda for each meeting and provide written summaries afterward to ensure agreement and alignment.

Define, summarize, and document. That's how you get collaborators on the same page.

Chapter 20: Purpose Statements

Positioning and purpose statements provide the North Star for any company to express exactly why they exist. Purpose statements should be brief, practical, and specific to create clarity and motivation. Don't settle for vague, generic purpose statements that could apply to 1000 other companies. Aim for something authentically aspirational. A purpose implies something helpful, something higher, something better. Eliminate every whiff of jargon. Each division across the organization should have its own specific purpose, and people in those departments need to align with their unique organizational values.

Chapter 21: Branding

The goal of branding is to occupy mind-space and heart-trust. Most people think of names, logos, and taglines as the essence of the brand, but that's only part of the story. But when it comes to a clear outward-facing message, the real foundation of the brand can be found in the statements and stories that sum up your specialness. Your target customer is looking for help and results, not platitudes. Define your niche and your unique value proposition. Your brand should be summarized in five clear statements:

- What. Exactly what solution or product you are offering

- Whom. Your specific target customer
- Why. The customer pain or aspiration you're addressing
- How. Your unique superpower
- Where. The geographic or marketplace areas you serve.

Chapter 22: Personal Branding and Career Direction

Personal branding is the way people perceive you, your reputation, and what you represent. It helps you differentiate yourself from others, establish your credibility, expand your network, advance your career, and remain consistent in your actions. People are going to think thoughts of you. Why not shape those ideas with accurate words instead of leaving them to chance? Self-awareness, with strengths and value summarized in keywords and brief phrases, will be your guide to making the best career decisions.

Chapter 23: Social Media

In sales, you need to have a clear focus on who your audience is and what they will find valuable from you. As a general rule, don't create long-winded dissertations on social platforms. An accompanying visual to your post will generally increase interest level and engagement. Package your return message using brevity and shortcuts. Be active where your target audience is most active and easily found. Have a clear purpose if you engage in social media. Establish yourself as a thought leader by consistently sharing your insights and other resources around your particular area of interest.

Chapter 24: Networking

Your professional network is the source of your future

opportunities. So, you need to equip your colleagues with clarity the memorable words and images that best portray who you are. Don't jump into networking opportunities by blabbing about all about your needs right away. Instead, create warm and interesting relationships by being a "storyasker." Be sure to prepare a few brief stories you can tell others that illustrate what value you bring and what types of open doors you are looking to find.

Conclusion

This book is meant to give the broadest possible audience a host of immediate takeaways for the most common circumstances. You can apply these practices as an individual, but the greatest impact will be teams and companies that together embrace the approach and transform their organization. The Clarity Fuel Formula is a long overdue universal protocol for effective human-to-human communication and is adaptable and applicable to just about any setting. Now you know the rules, and you have the tools. You're ready to win the noisy battle. Let's get to the point, shall we? Let's do clarity!



Steve Woodruff is known as the King of Clarity. His decades of business consulting and client training have had a uniquely creative focus on communications clarity based on principles of practical brain science. Steve, a graduate of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN, is the author of the acclaimed 2018 book *Clarity Wins* and is a contributing author to the 2017 book *Unstuck*. He launched his solo consulting business in 2006, and currently resides in historic Franklin, TN.

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