



## **Generating Buy-In: Mastering the Language of Leadership**

**Book Review by Frumi Rachel Barr MBA, Ph.D. - Executive Coach, Break Through Consulting**  
[www.breakthroughconsulting.com/executive\\_coaches.html](http://www.breakthroughconsulting.com/executive_coaches.html)

**Author:** Mark S. Walton

**Publisher:** American Management Association

**Copyright Year:** 2004

**Author's Bio:** Mark Walton is Chairman of the Center for Leadership Communication, a center for leadership and executive development based in Monterey, CA and Chapel Hill, NC. In addition, he is Professor of Leadership in the U.S. Navy's Advanced Management Program and teaches at the Senior Executive Institute at the University of North Carolina. For over a dozen years he was CNN's Chief Whitehouse Correspondent.

**Author's big thought:** The strongest leaders are those who create a positive vision of the future. They know how to paint a "big picture" that generates action by tapping into people's emotions. They know how to develop a storyline that fulfills their audience's agenda and makes them say, "Yes, you understand me, I'm on board!". Finally, they know how to ask for a commitment and inspire their listeners to take steps toward the goal. This book will help you master the powerful language and the method that breeds such commitment.

### **Introduction:**

#### **We all need somebody's buy-in**

- However well positioned, intelligent, or accomplished we are, to succeed in this twenty-first century, we all need somebody's buy-in.
- Buy-in means their understanding, commitment, and action in support of our goals. The ability to do so is the most valuable asset of all. The ability to influence people's thoughts and feelings, to generate their buy-in, has emerged as the paramount leadership skill.
- No matter who you are, or where you work, people no longer need to follow your lead, buy what you sell, or accept what you say.
- This book provides you with a uniquely powerful communication methodology - a language of buy-in and leadership.
- This language will empower you to produce the results you want and need with greater ease, speed and effectiveness.
- You will learn a powerful step-by-step process for targeting your audience's needs, capturing their attention, and communicating in a positive, memorable way to successfully:



# BREAK THROUGH CONSULTING

coaching leaders...transforming businesses



- Build, lead, and manage organizations
- Market ideas, products and services
- Gain the commitment and loyalty of customers
- Generate support from analysts, investors, and regulators
- Win elections and legislative approval
- Turn crises into positive, value-added outcomes

## Part 1 – Understanding the Language of Buy-In

### What triggers buy-in?

- Strategic stories of a positive future have been the most powerful language of buy-in since, if not before, the beginning of recorded time.
- Consider this short phrase: “A perfect summer afternoon”. Close your eyes and think about it. We “think” in stories, filled with pictures, images of life are literally the language, the currency of our minds.
- If the mind “thinks” this way, then of course the most effective way to influence the human mind is to communicate with it in its basic programming language: a story.
- Thus the age-old secret to generating buy-in is to strategically design, target, and deliver a story that projects a *positive* future.

### Every leader tells a story

- History is replete with examples. The stories of great spiritual leaders - Moses, Jesus, Confucius, Mohammed, and Buddha - all promising a bright future, continue to mold the beliefs and behaviors of billions of people today.

### How Strategic Stories Will Get You Twenty-First Century Buy-In:

- Strategic stories will provide you with the key to capturing twenty-first century buy-in: people’s attention, emotions, and memories.
- The route to real buy-in, to generating people’s understanding, commitment and ultimately, their action, is to impact, not just their thinking, but their emotions. This is precisely what stories do. Their impact is never-ending. They effortlessly replay themselves, generating buy-in for days, years, even decades to come.
- Once strategic stories grab our attention, they trigger our emotions and actions, and then repeat themselves endlessly in our minds-eye, reinforcing their impact on our behavior, over and over again.
- Strategic stories are the key to programming twenty-first century memories.





# BREAK THROUGH CONSULTING

*coaching leaders...transforming businesses*



## Part Two: Speaking the Language of Buy-In

### A Framework for Buy-In:

We develop strategic stories all the time. It's a natural way of relating to and getting buy-in from others. Developing a strategic story provides you a framework to connect the dots between the future you want (your objective) and the future your audience wants (their agenda).

### STRATEGIC STORY METHODOLOGY

#### Developing Your Strategic Story

##### Goal Setting

- Determine Your Buy-In Objective

**Q:** What action do you want your audience to take regarding your idea, proposal, product, service, or organization?

##### First Step

- ESTABLISH YOUR STRATEGIC STORYLINE

**Q:** What is the "big picture" or vision of a positive future you want your audience to see?

##### Second Step

- DEVELOP YOUR STORYLINE IN THREE CHAPTERS THAT TARGET YOUR AUDIENCE'S AGENDA

**Q:** What are this particular audience's needs, wants, and future goals?

**Q:** What are the three most important ways in which this audience's agenda will be fulfilled?

##### Third Step

- CALL YOUR AUDIENCE TO ACTION

**A:** Ask for a commitment or first step toward the action you want





# BREAK THROUGH CONSULTING

coaching leaders...transforming businesses



## Goal Setting

### Determine Your Buy-In Objective

- Like any strategic process, developing a story for buy-in requires an initial exercise in goal setting, a beginning “with an end in mind”.
- What action do you want your audience to take?
- Impacting people’s thoughts and emotions is, indeed, a crucial part of the buy-in equation. But if we don’t ultimately move them to act, to endorse our ideas, vote for us, approve our proposals, purchase our products or services, we have nothing to take to the bank.
- Action is buy-in’s bottom line!

### First step: Establish your strategic story line

- The first step in developing, and later in delivering, your strategic story, is to establish its beginning and basic character.
- The storyline is a strategic story’s central message, title, and theme. Its purpose is to grab attention and communicate, in “big picture” terms, what the story is all about: a positive future!
- Brainstorming this question is a great way to start.

***Q: To generate the action you want, what is the big picture or vision of a positive future you want your audience to see?***

### Second step: develop your storyline in three chapters that target your audience’s agenda.

- What makes a positive future depends on your audience’s point of view.
- What are this particular audience’s needs, wants, and future goals?
- A targeted chapter is a projection of a future in which a target audience’s specific needs, wants and goals are fulfilled.
- Each chapter begins with a targeted message, which asserts that an audience’s agenda for the future will be fulfilled. It then goes on to provide credible supporting evidence that this assertion is true.
- The reason for three chapters is an ancient formula, known as the “Rule of Three” or “Trilogy of Persuasion”. A methodology used by masterful influencers, from prophets and attorneys to presidents and marketers, the Rule of Three is, structurally speaking, buy-in’s Holy Grail.





# BREAK THROUGH CONSULTING

*coaching leaders...transforming businesses*



## Third Step: Call your audience to action

With the end of the strategic story comes the opportunity to make your objective clear. Now is the time to ask your audience to take the actions you're proposing, to call them to "come along" and make the story come true.

### The Rule of Three

- The mind most easily receives, retains, and recalls information presented to it in threes.
- The practice of leveraging the Rule, of communicating in threes to enhance audience reception, retention, and recall, dates at least to the Greek mythologists of the eighth century B.C.
- From that point forward, our collective consciousness has been saturated with threes:
  - Father, Son, Holy Ghost
  - Faith, hope, charity
  - Body, mind, spirit
  - Duty, honor, country
  - Past, present, future
  - Red, white, and blue
  - Lights, camera, action
  - You get three wishes
- If people welcome information delivered in threes, it stands to reason that they'll react the same way to strategic stories designed with this formula in mind.
- A strategic story of a positive future – strategic storyline. Three targeted chapters with supporting evidence. Call to action

### The Charisma Quotient

- Communicating a positive future impacts not only the audience but the communicator, too.
- A strategic story of a positive future empowers the person who delivers it.
- It boosts commitment. It maximizes focus and energy. Without artificially orchestrated body language, eye contact, or tone of voice, communicating a positive future generates natural charisma and with it, buy-in from one's audience.





# BREAK THROUGH CONSULTING

*coaching leaders...transforming businesses*



## The Best Evidence

- The best supporting evidence for a story or message about the future is a credible, real life example from yesterday or today.
- Nobel winning psychologist Daniel Kahneman demonstrated this scientifically in the mid-1970's. He established unequivocally that:
  1. First impressions shape subsequent decisions.
  2. Vivid examples are overwhelmingly more influential in shaping decisions than abstract information, even if the information is more accurate.

## Part Three: Putting the Language to Work

### Using the Tools of Buy-In:

- Through the real-life examples in this book, the author visited executives facing a broad spectrum of buy-in challenges, from retaining a sales force, to rebuilding customer and investor confidence, to motivating an entire nation.
- The executives' positions, target audiences, and goals varied significantly. Some faced workplace challenges, others needed buy-in in the marketplace or public arena.
- The methodology they applied, the language they spoke, to successfully achieve their objectives was exactly the same:
  - They presented a strategic story of a positive future.
  - The strategic storyline had three targeted chapters with supporting evidence.
  - This was followed by a call to action.

### What follows is a sample scenario:

A fairly common scenario - an executive is seeking an increased budget.  
Here is what it would look like using this methodology.





# BREAK THROUGH CONSULTING

coaching leaders...transforming businesses



## Key Elements of a Budget Presentation in Strategic Story Outline Form

### Buy-In Objective

*Get the board to approve an immediate 10 percent increase in budget*

### Strategic Storyline

*A small budget increase will mean great things for our future.*

### Targeted Chapter 1

Targeted message (Audience's agenda: Increased revenues)

*It will generate new revenue*  
(Provide supporting evidence)

### Targeted Chapter 2

Targeted message (Audience's agenda: Higher profits)

*It will produce higher profit*  
(Provide supporting evidence)

### Targeted Chapter 3

Targeted message (Audience's agenda: More valuable company)

*It will make us a more valuable company*  
(Provide supporting evidence)

### **CALL TO ACTION**

**I request your immediate approval of a 10 percent budget increase.**

**About the Reviewer: Frumi Rachel Barr, MBA, Ph.D. - Executive Coach, Break Through Consulting**  
[www.breakthroughconsulting.com/executive\\_coaches.html](http://www.breakthroughconsulting.com/executive_coaches.html)

Frumi Rachel Barr MBA, Ph.D. is an Executive Coach at Break Through Consulting. Frumi has had a distinguished twenty-eight year career history as an entrepreneur and financial executive. Her experience and expertise as both a CEO and a CFO provides responsive and collaborative support to executives in a wide array of companies and industries. It is this unique blend of practical, theoretical, strategic and communications skills that makes the work Frumi does unique among business advisors and coaches.

