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## Don't Nickel and Dime the Quarter

As we've continued our work on connecting stories to storylines, we're often asked to show how some of the driest content in companies can be more relatable and compelling to listeners.

The quarterly review always ranks high on the list of boring presentations. It's a mainstay in companies and a common way of sharing information. But, listeners say that the reviews aren't insightful and they don't get anything out of them.

That's because in these report outs, people usually "nickel and dime" the quarter by sharing details that listeners already know. These reviews become a run-through of data that has already been released or is easy for the listener to analyze themselves. Listeners say: "You're saying a lot without telling me much of anything."

Most quarterly reviews are presented to higher levels in an organization, and sometimes the audience expands to senior leaders. It's a guaranteed moment of visibility for managers, and it rarely delivers an impactful impression. Both the senior managers who ask for reviews and the managers who deliver them own responsibility for the lack of impact.

Why?

### Senior Manager/Leader Perspective

Senior managers and leaders don't really want what the description of this meeting implies. They aren't looking for a review or play by play of the quarter as it occurred. They're really looking for insights on what data doesn't tell them. They want to know why you got great results or why you didn't. They want to know the gaps or discrepancies that the numbers don't show and what you can do to improve them.

They are more interested in the kind of information you can share versus the amount of information you bring. And, they get frustrated trying to uncover it. Senior managers and leaders share this frustration with us, but they don't always coach their teams on how to do it well. Instead, they share frameworks and outlines to standardize these report outs. And, there is very little coaching on how to work beyond the framework to deliver insights.

### Manager Perspective

Managers approach report outs and reviews as an exercise in gathering information. They invest a lot of time collecting data and filling out the frameworks provided. They focus on recreating those moments in time and the culmination of the quarter's activity. And, they often run out of time or stop short of thinking about what the data really tells them. They worked so hard to be consistent with the framework and specifics in the data that they missed the opportunity to be differentiated in the report out.

We've been successful in improving the quality and impact of quarterly reviews by working with senior leaders and managers to bring three things into these discussions.



### THREE KEY ELEMENTS OF THE QUARTERLY REVIEW:

**A Definitive Message** – We teach messaging across every program we deliver. And, the quarterly review is no exception. In fact, it may be the most likely situation where the message gets repeated verbatim by a senior leader.

And, that's because the listeners in this meeting are listening for clear takeaways or outcomes. Many senior leaders will actually ask in these meetings: "So, what's the bottom line of last quarter?" And, most managers can't reply to that in a single sentence.

Senior leaders run these meetings in multiples, rarely one in a day or week. So, they want this bottom-line takeaway as a snapshot of each manager's success or challenge. Otherwise, they have a lot of information to sift through.

When we teach messaging, we use a simple cause and effect statement:

**By (doing this), we accomplished (this).**

Messaging in a quarterly review can be a look back at the biggest impact or a look ahead at what you plan to do in the quarter ahead. Here are some examples:

*By leveraging our new marketing tools, we increased prospect meetings by 20% and closed ten new accounts.*

*By adjusting the rollout of Project X by thirty days, we resolved two bugs and will deliver zero defects for the June rollout.*

*If we shift our focus to bundled products next quarter, we can make up our revenue gap and capture an additional \$2Million for our xyz product.*

**A Connected Storyline** – Quarterly reviews are heavy on data but light on storylines. This means that the points are standalone elements and don't always seem relevant to each other. That makes it difficult for the senior manager or leader to connect the dots on what the data really says. It's important to weave a storyline across the data so that the listener feels as if the metrics back up the message and ultimately lead to some conclusions and takeaways.

When we work with managers on specific report outs, we usually see a PPT document. And, the manager can explain each slide, but they can't always connect the thought across the slides. Our coaching technique is to spread out the slides on a table and ask the manager to give us the talk track. We also can help organize thoughts into our framework which makes it easier for the listener to digest the points and feel that the storyline is proving out a takeaway.

**A Memorable Story** – I always tell managers to remember that information rolls up. The quarterly review is a great example of this. When managers add a story or example that illustrates their points, it makes a point much more impactful and memorable to the leader.

And if it's memorable, it increases the chance that the senior leader will repeat the concept in their own report outs.

Our initial work on stories began with data stories. These are the tougher ones because it means a manager has to learn how to put context to numbers and build a story around insights and hypotheses. It is a story without an ending because it hasn't been proven out and it hasn't wrapped up. But, these can be compelling stories and they get repeated because they bring the quarterly review to life and they help a manager's insights stand out.

If a senior manager or leader sits through five report outs in a day, they have a lot of information to hold onto. They are much more likely to remember and repeat the data stories the next week versus the details of data that were provided on a specific slide.

And, that's when the quarterly review and this moment of visibility for managers becomes an impactful impression. Managers who deliver definitive messages, connected storylines and memorable stories make an impact in their organizations. And in short order, they become the senior managers or leaders.

