

PUBLIC SPEAKING & STORYTELLING  
FOR PROJECT MANAGERS & ENGINEERS

Rashid N. Kapadia

# Necessary Bridges

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Project Managers & Engineers

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Rashid N. Kapadia

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With infinite gratitude I dedicate this work to ...

My parents, for their limitless love and their sterling examples. And for invaluable memories of contentment, erudition and equanimity.

My wife and son, for their limitless love and their selfless support. And for making us the blessed family we are.

I would also like to dedicate my work to ...

All engineers and project managers, past, present and future. Alas, too often, “the world little knows ... nor long remembers ...” the greatness of our professions.

All who bring passion and purpose to public speaking, storytelling and oratory.

All who set audacious goals, long to build necessary bridges and make the world a better place.

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# Preface

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*“It always seems impossible until it is done.”*

— Nelson Mandela

I remember being truly mesmerized, watching a scene from the movie *Invictus*. This is the scene in which the president of South Africa summons the captain of its national rugby team to his presidential office, and plants the seed of an idea: “Win the Rugby World Cup; our broken nation needs this of you. Together, we must all become ‘One Team, One Nation.’”

This movie portrays a portion of the multifaceted book called *Playing the Enemy* by John Carlin. It is one of the best sports books I’ve read, covering one of the greatest sports stories of all time; but it is much more. It is an inspirational self-help book. It is a book about a political genius who faced multiple impossibly difficult challenges, and who responded with, “It always seems impossible until it is done.” It is a book about an epic injustice and an epic reconciliation. It is a book about a leader, who perhaps more than anyone else on this planet, mastered the art of making friends and influencing people. It is a book about a superb public speaker. It is a book, which describes the most unlikely exercise in political seduction ever undertaken. And it is a book, which led to a superb scene in a marvelous movie.

*President Nelson Mandela (NM): Tell me, Francois, ... what is your philosophy of leadership? How do you inspire your team to do their best?*

*Captain of the Springboks Rugby team, Francois Pienaar (FP): By example ... I’ve always thought to lead by example, Sir.*

*NM: Well that is right ... that is exactly right. But how to get them to be better than they think they can be? That is*

*very difficult, I find. Inspiration, perhaps. How do we inspire ourselves to greatness, when nothing less will do? How do we inspire everyone around us? I sometimes think it is by **using the work of others.***

*On Robben Island, when things got very bad ... I found inspiration in a poem.*

*FP: A poem?*

*NM: A Victorian poem ... just words ... but they helped me to stand when all I wanted to do was to lie down.*

*But you didn't come all this way to hear an old man talk about things that make no sense.*

*FP: No, no, please Mr. President ... it makes complete sense to me. On the day of the big match, say a test, in the bus, on the way to the stadium, nobody talks.*

*NM: Ah yes, they are all preparing.*

*FP: Right. But when I think we are ready, I have the bus driver put on a song, something I've chosen, one we all know ... and we listen to the words together ... and it helps.*

*NM: I remember when I was invited to the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. Everybody in the stadium greeted me with a song. At the time the future ... our future, seemed very bleak. But to hear that song in the voices of people from all over our planet made me proud to be South African. It inspired me to come home and do better. It allowed me to expect more of myself.*

*FP: May I ask, what was the song, Sir?*

*NM: Well ... it was Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika ... a very inspiring song.*

*We need inspiration, Francois, ... because in order to build our nation, we must all exceed our own expectations.*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQhns5AwAkA>

I wondered why this scene moved me so deeply. I thought long and hard about it. Engineers all too frequently cannot leave great feelings, or well enough alone. They try to “figure it out.” You already know this. I wasn’t really satisfied with anything I initially came up with. That changed after I was exposed to the worlds of public speaking and storytelling.

After spending a few years trying to improve my public speaking and storytelling skills, I got a much better appreciation and understanding of why I was so mesmerized by the powerful *Invictus* scene. It is the same power that public speakers and storytellers everywhere attempt to harness.

I know I want to exceed my own expectations on a regular basis. Who doesn’t? But to hear and see it dramatized this way was a game changer.

Vikas Jhingran has written a book called *Emote: Using Emotions to Make Your Message Memorable*. In his approach (with his uniquely analytical articulation of the role of emotions in speech craft), he recommends that we start writing a speech after having made a clear decision of the “final emotion” we want to leave the audience with.

Well, the emotions that I was left with at the end of this scene would be a fabulous way to feel at the end of any speech or presentation—regardless of whether I was in the audience or speaking to an audience.

I have drawn much inspiration from the movie *Invictus*, and especially from using **the work of others**.

In *Necessary Bridges*, I have used **the work of others** extensively. I acknowledge with much gratitude all that is available to us on the road to exceeding our own expectations. I have meticulously credited sources. Whenever I have cited the work (or the words) of others, I have italicized them. In the unlikely event I have inadvertently omitted to cite a

source, I apologize in advance. The oversight error is entirely my own.

To the reader, if I have cited sources in a way that seems excessive, and occasionally disrupts the smooth flow of reading, or requires you to read too much italicized font, I ask your indulgence. It is an essential compromise: I ask your understanding.

Over many years as a project manager and engineer, it became clearer and clearer to me project managers and engineers were inadvertently compromising their professional and career advancement by not being “good enough” in public speaking and storytelling.

I committed to write this book because I inadvertently stumbled into a hole. I became aware of a gap, a mismatch; one that I could no longer ignore.

Briefly, these conclusions dawned on me: (1) there is a mismatch between what project managers know they need to excel at: and with what they commit to excelling at: and (2) there is a mismatch between what engineers think they need to know and learn: and with what they really need to know and learn. Put differently, this topic found me and in an inexplicable way commanded me to act! “Write a book, Rashid. Evangelize public speaking and storytelling to project managers and engineers. In time they will thank you for this contribution to our professions.” A bonus benefit: Writing a book on a subject helps the author become an expert on that subject.

The primary purpose of this book is to get project managers and engineers to commit to acquiring expertise in public speaking and storytelling. The secondary purpose is to provide (just) enough content (accompanied by exercises, examples and directions to other resources—i.e. the work of others) to keep the commitment strong and sustained over

years. There is plenty of marvelous content out there.

This book is NOT about technical presentations or presentations specific to the professions of engineering and project management. The content of this book is generic and exposes the reader to the basics of public speaking and storytelling.

This analogy may help explain my thinking. In the 1970s there was a revolution in which personal computers began entering our lives in a major way. Two dominant companies driving this revolution were Microsoft and Apple. Microsoft focused on providing really useful and ubiquitous products, but they were (in my opinion) not too concerned, perhaps even indifferent, to the design and the beauty of the products. Apple, on the other hand (in my opinion), was deeply concerned about the design and beauty of its products, perhaps obsessively so.

I see the Microsoft approach as one to which possibly engineers and project managers (at least of my age and background) default. Certainly that was my approach. I mean, “Who cares what it looks like as long as it works well?” It was only after the stunning success of products like the iMac, the iPod, the iPhone, the iPad, the MacBook Air etc., that the advantage of great design dawned on many of us.

I have come to believe that deciding to lavish deliberate attention and care on public speaking and storytelling can make the same difference to our professions that Apple’s “design is very important” approach made to the computer (and computer-based consumer devices) industry.

This book has been conceived and created more as a product to be used in combination with other resources, than as a stand-alone book. It has been developed as a guide book providing course work. It has been conceived as an incubator of and companion to a self-development project,

of minimum two years duration. It has been conceived with the intention that the reader will return to it multiple times over the duration of the self-development project, and read it along with other recommended books simultaneously. This is also called syntopical reading.

Indeed, here is a sample recommendation. I recommend that you procure a book called *How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading* by Mortimer J. Adler and Charles Van Doren, and read that book in parallel with *Necessary Bridges*. You will extract much more value out of *Necessary Bridges* if you follow this approach.

It is my hope (dare I say vision), that someday in the not too distant future, project managers and engineers will routinely be thought of not only as smart and educated individuals, but as excellent public speakers and storytellers too; the way Apple products are thought of as marvels of engineering and are beautifully designed, too. Why? Because these are essential skills to move any human endeavor along. Public speaking and storytelling are essential skills to (using a line from Apple's Think Different ad) "*to push the human race forward.*" Public speaking and storytelling skills are lubricating oils that keep the machinery of engineering, project management and relationship management running super-smoothly. And engineers and project managers have moved — indeed, pushed — the world forward as much as or more than any other profession.

It is my hope that engineers and project managers increasingly communicate in a way that leaves everyone around them experiencing the same final emotion I felt at the end of the *Invictus* movie scene; inspired and committed to exceeding their own expectations.

It always seems impossible until it is done!

Chapter 9

# **Leaders Are Speakers**

(Rondo 1)

*“Mend your speech a little, lest it may mar your fortunes.”*  
— William Shakespeare: King Lear to his  
youngest daughter Cordelia

The purpose of these rondo chapters is not to provide PS&ST content, but rather it is to:

1. Evangelize PS&ST to PM&Es. I intend to use new knowledge, new ideas, and real-world examples to accomplish this.

2. Motivate PM&Es to decide—really and truly decide—to commit (time and money) to PS&ST expertise. I intend to use new knowledge, new ideas, and real-world examples to accomplish this.

These are the primary objectives of this book; of this product.

Here are some **real-world examples** to contemplate.

Neither Shakespeare nor King Lear could have possibly imagined that centuries after their time, a man called Warren Buffet would be guided by a similar message. *Mend your (ability for public) speech a little, lest it mar your fortunes.*

There is a series of documentaries called *Bloomberg Game Changers*. One of the documentaries is on Warren Buffett. Mr. Buffett is one of the most successful, admired, respected, and famous investors of all time, and amongst the wealthiest people on the planet.

Here is a small section from this documentary, Warren Buffett Revealed: Bloomberg Game Changers ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJ1MW-OR0tI&list=PLUqYZEKhvdmUJzr4I6fDkL\\_WPTWL7yU\\_U&index=6](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJ1MW-OR0tI&list=PLUqYZEKhvdmUJzr4I6fDkL_WPTWL7yU_U&index=6))

*Armed with a grand philosophy, Buffet headed back to Omaha to start his own business. He formed the original partnership with seven or eight people. Convincing people*

*beyond the first seven investors got rockier.*

*Buffet: My sales pitch wasn't very effective. I was twenty years old. I looked like I was about sixteen, and I probably behaved like I was about twelve. So I would go around and call on people. They were always nice to me. But I would see a Mr. Smith and I would go through all these facts and figures about why you should buy some stock. And when I got all through, in my head I would count to three, I would go one, two, three; and then Mr. Smith would say, "What does your Dad think?" and I would always want to hit him (laughs).*

*Narrator: It was frustrating. Buffett knew he had to be a better salesman. So he turned to popular self-help guru Dale Carnegie.*

*Buffett: "Well, **I had to be able to communicate with people better; I mean in groups, particularly. I just knew that I just couldn't go through life terrified of public speaking** and I'd heard about the Dale Carnegie course."*

*Narrator: And he applied those lessons when he began dating his hometown girl.*

*Buffett: "I mean, I proposed to my wife during the Dale Carnegie course, so (laughs) I mean I got my money's worth right during the course. I had the intellect to succeed, but I did not have the persona. I was not put together as a person until I met her.*

*Narrator: Buffett was finally ready to put his career in gear.*

Here's a question that crossed my mind. If Warren Buffett had, on principle, refused to make a commitment (including time and money) to improve his public speaking skills, would he be where he is today? Of course any thoughts and opinions are just speculation and nothing more, yet I cannot but conclude—no, Warren Buffett may not have been where he is today had he not crossed a necessary bridge. Indeed he seems to be implying this himself.

One does not have to be a truly great communicator, public speaker, or storyteller to be a great leader, project manager or engineer, or for that matter a billionaire, but one has to be at least a very good communicator, speaker, or storyteller to realize one's **full potential**. At the very, very, least; one must be a good-enough communicator. Do you agree?

Dear Reader, you are a PM&E. By default you are an ambassador for our professions; there is no argument here. Others will judge our professions by the way we are. Period. Are you a good enough communicator? If no, isn't it reasonable to conclude that you will deny yourself access to the greatness within you? If no, isn't it reasonable to conclude that you will be a less than an optimal ambassador for our professions? If no, isn't it conceivable that some of your greatest gifts may end up in a graveyard? My request is that you take a very serious look at these questions.

As you have come this far in the book, you have already taken the first steps and made the first commitments, even if only tentative commitments, toward PS&ST expertise. If you indeed have a two-year (or more) project plan with time and money commitments—excellent. Nonetheless, sooner or later commitments and motivations waver. When, not if, this happens, I invite you to revisit this chapter and re-commit to either commencing or continuing your PS&ST voyage. And that means time and money.

My reading and viewing include a fair amount of biography and autobiography. Stories like Warren Buffet's are everywhere. There is a clear pattern of successful people being splendid communicators, yet somehow PS&ST does not seem to be accorded high status in the arsenal of essential knowledge of PM&Es as other subjects. This is a mystery to me.

Here are a couple more examples.

Both Bill Gates and the late Steve Jobs were pioneers

and legends of the personal computer era. Steve Jobs was, additionally, a pioneer of the computer-based devices era, and Bill Gates is additionally a pioneer in philanthropy. They have both secured places amongst the pantheon of greats.

We see the same pattern in a Bill Gates documentary, as we saw in the Warren Buffet documentary. The pattern being “communication made the difference; communication was the enabler.”

From: The Bill Gates Documentary

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fO2u-uxVBIc>

Bill Gates joins Lakeside High School—a top private school

*Narrator: He began to blossom at Lakeside, making new friends and finding more challenging classes.*

*Fred Wright (Teacher): He was an excellent math student. He was excellent across the board. He was a superb drama student, and interested in reading all different kinds of books. **He wasn't just math- and science-oriented. He had a wide breadth of interests.***

*Later in the documentary (minute 18:45) At the end of 1978 with sales approaching the one million mark, they moved Microsoft from Albuquerque to Seattle. Bill was glad to be back and went into high gear to promote his hometown company. **It was Bill Gates who was actually the real marketing genius behind Microsoft.** Early on he was the one who was actually going out on the road and trying to sell his company and his software.*

Fast forward to 1995 when Windows 95 was released (minute 37:45). Again the same commentary. **“Clearly Bill Gates was still Microsoft's best salesman.”**

When you think of Bill Gates, do you think “best salesman?” Do you think “super communicator?” If not, why not? Another question that crossed my mind: Would Microsoft have become what it is, had Bill Gates not been a super-effective

communicator? These are relevant and valid questions to ponder.

Most people already know what an outstanding speaker (mesmerizer may be a more accurate word) Steve Jobs was. He famously persuaded many listeners with his reality distortion field. He reinvented the product launch and brought a burning enthusiasm for his products to his keynotes. In characteristic Steve Jobs style, he reinvented the keynote. Books have been written about his presentation secrets. His videos on YouTube have been viewed millions of times. Steve Jobs was a phenomenal speaker who used storytelling masterfully.

Same questions again. When you think of Steve Jobs, do you think “best salesman?” Do you think “super communicator?” If no, why not? Do you think Apple would have become what it is, had Steve Jobs not been a super-effective communicator? These are relevant and valid questions to ponder.

Here is yet another question that comes to my mind. Granted, any answer is pure speculation; nonetheless no harm done in contemplating the question anyway. If somehow either of these individuals started out by being “not-good-enough” communicators, and neither cared to work on their PS&ST skills, would the PC and (computer-based) devices landscape be different? I think it likely.

Turning this question around, is it possible to imagine that there were other, even many PM&Es, with the same level of engineering prowess and talents as Gates and Jobs, who were not good-enough communicators and PS&ST, (who stubbornly opted not to improve) and as a result of this, the world has lost many engineering and consumer marvels? I think it is likely. Is it realistic to wonder if much of the genius of the “not good enough” communicators amongst the masses of PM&Es is destined for the graveyard?

If you agree, even partially, with this line of thinking, then

shouldn't we evangelize PS&ST for PM&Es right from the college level? It seems totally necessary to me.

Why don't you watch a few Warren Buffet, Bill Gates, and Steve Jobs talks now, and study these real-world examples to see if you can learn anything. Let their examples convince you that being anything less than a good-enough PS&ST is to sacrifice your gifts. "Good enough" is not a low standard here. It is a high bar, which requires commitment, knowledge, disciplined practice, and feedback.

Sometime in the future, consider evangelizing PS&ST to future PM&Es, especially young students. Thanks in advance.

## About the Author

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Rashid N. Kapadia, a marine engineer and project manager for decades, discovered the transformational power of public speaking, storytelling and oratory after joining a Project Management Institute (Houston) sponsored Toastmasters club.

He also discovered, to his surprise and dismay, that too many engineers and project managers seriously underappreciate—even shun—these transformative skills.

Having always seen himself as an ambassador for his storied and challenging professions, he has made it a personal mission to evangelize PS&ST to engineers and project managers around the globe.

# Connect

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To book the author to speak at your event or to learn more about his work and how he can help you, please visit [NecessaryBridges.com](http://NecessaryBridges.com) or [rashidkapadia.com](http://rashidkapadia.com).

# NecessaryBridges

PUBLIC SPEAKING & STORYTELLING FOR PROJECT MANAGERS & ENGINEERS

Excellence in engineering and project management can open a vast number of doors—*in early career*

Expertise in public speaking and story telling can open more elusive doors —*right away, and in late career*

**Engineers, I.T. Professionals and Project Managers:** Whether you are commencing a career, savoring stunning success, or plateauing, within these pages you will find ideas, incentives and inspiration to pragmatically progress your career—and find fulfillment in the process. You will become comfortable and skilled working with soaring vision and lofty rhetoric, while remaining firmly grounded in pragmatism.

By studying *Necessary Bridges*, you will:

- ▶ Learn the “why” and “how” of public speaking and storytelling
- ▶ Be persuaded to become a better communicator and leader by making a 100% commitment to acquiring expertise in public speaking and storytelling
- ▶ Create a project charter for a multi-year self-development project “Become an Expert Public Speaker and Storyteller”
- ▶ Assign explicit time and money commitments towards the project and seek out mentors
- ▶ Systematically articulate all you know about yourself and complete an icebreaker speech project
- ▶ Get tools, guidelines and resources to become a confident, motivated and inspirational presenter
- ▶ Understand the roots of glossophobia (fear of public speaking) and learn how to manage it
- ▶ Take steps towards becoming a master orator through a wide range of exercises.

Additionally *Necessary Bridges* will ask that you:

- ▶ Become a life-long ambassador for the forever forward facing professions of engineering and project management
- ▶ Evangelize public speaking and storytelling to young professionals and students of engineering and project management—across the globe

As an engineer & project manager for decades and a public speaking & storytelling aficionado in recent years, Rashid N. Kapadia has made it a life mission to bridge these two estranged worlds.

[www.NecessaryBridges.com](http://www.NecessaryBridges.com)

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