

# communicating a message powerfully

Whether you are speaking with a decision maker, writing a letter, or convincing a friend to join, Results uses two key strategies to communicate powerful messages:

1. You must structure your message so that it is set up to be persuasive and make a call to action.
2. You must speak from the heart and tell a story that is compelling in order to motivate others.

Once you have mastered these two strategies, and are able to combine them, you will be more convincing and persuasive and as a result you will have more power to create change. Keep in mind that you will often use a laser talk to “hook” your listener and draw them in further into discussing the issue with you.

## structuring a powerful message with laser talk (the EPIC model)

Laser Talk is a short and compelling speech that gets the listener’s attention, then presents a problem, a solution, and a specific request. The laser talk is one of the tools we use to become supremely effective advocates.

When approaching a Member of Parliament (MP), decision maker, a member of the media or even a friend whom you want to recruit as a volunteer, you will typically only have one or two minutes to get your point across before they lose attention. Learning the “laser” format and a handful of laser talks will help you make the most of these opportunities to advance our issues.

A Results laser talk has four sections, using the anagram EPIC— **E**ngage, **P**roblem, **I**nform, and **C**all to Action.

## engage

People most often remember the first and last thing you say - start strong by getting your listener's attention with a dramatic fact or short statement. You can begin with an observation or a point of reasoning to capture your listener's attention. For example:

As devastating as COVID-19 has been for Canadians, no one has been hit harder than those living in low-income countries.

## problem

Explain or elaborate on what the problem is. You can find some useful facts on our [website](#). Try to connect the problem to an issue that the listener is likely to care about (i.e. personal security or children). For example:

The World Bank is estimating that the number of people living in extreme poverty will increase by as many as [150 million](#) people in 2021, which is three times the amount of people who left extreme poverty between 2015 and 2017. This will perpetuate and exacerbate existing issues, such as access to water and sanitation, immunizations, nutrition, and education, impacting women and children the most.\*

**Tip:** prepare the next section "inform" first so you can define the problem simply for your listener. Problems are often very complex, so stick with the part of the problem that directly relates to the solution you're about to present.

## inform

Provide the listener with a solution to the problem, like a funding mechanism or policy advancements. Paint a picture of the impact of the proposed solutions; give examples of how/where the solution has worked to benefit people experiencing poverty, and how it has proven to be a cost-effective solution. You could do this by providing information found on our [call to action](#) or on our [website](#). For example:

The World Health Organization launched the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator (ACT-A) in April 2020. A first of its kind coalition, it brings together global health agencies like the Global Fund to Fight Aids, Tuberculosis and Malaria, GAVI the Vaccine Alliance, and the World Bank Group amongst others to accelerate the development, production, and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines.

## call to action

Leave your audience not only informed, but aware of steps they can take at an individual level to contribute to a solution. Here are some tips for structuring your call to action:

1. Make your action concrete and specific. This makes it easy for you to follow up and determine whether they have taken the action.
2. Present the action in the form of a yes-or-no question.
3. State the call to action in one sentence.

For example:

Can you commit to advocating for Canada to invest just 1% of what is being spent to address COVID-19 domestically towards a global response and recovery, with a portion going to global health agencies delivering on the ACT-Accelerator (ACT-A)?

**Tip:** Practice it aloud until you feel comfortable. Learning a good repertoire of laser talks that you can use when the time is right will help make you a powerful, opportunistic speaker. Remember, you don't have to say the speech verbatim; you can adjust it based on the flow of your conversation.

## storytelling

Embedding stories and speaking from the heart while using this structure is incredibly effective in communicating a powerful message. Moving stories captivate us and reach us at the core of our being. They can make us laugh and make us cry. They are the key to changing hearts and minds. Compare these two stories to see why they are so powerful:

1. The World Health Organization reported that in 2019, [5.2 million](#) children under the age of five died due to preventable illnesses and diseases.
2. “While I was a volunteer in Pakistan in 2018, I came to realize that the pain of needlessly losing a child is not equally shared around the globe. While I was there, Fahad, a friend of mine lost his newborn daughter to polio. He came to me for help, knowing there wasn’t a doctor or medical center for miles. When I arrived, the beautiful baby was listless, but breathing. As I watched Fahad stroke her hair as her breathing slowed to a stop. I immediately crouched on the floor, put two fingers on her sternum and tried frantically to revive her, but it was too late. Due to a lack of access to the polio vaccine, she never had the same chance to live a full life as those who have access to vaccinations, clean water, and medical facilities. She was one of the 5.3 million preventable child deaths that year.”

Both examples are powerful, but the second one puts a face on the problem in a way that is gut-wrenching and elicits an emotional reaction. This is what moving stories do; they take something that could seem abstract and impersonal, like a statistic, and turn it into something very personal and emotional. A moving story softens the listener and appeals to their humanity in a way that facts alone cannot.

We use moving stories to help community members, the media and MPs to be touched by both the problems of poverty and their solutions. Your MPs, like most people, remember stories that move them.

The story doesn’t have to be your own experience; you can share other stories (such as news article, books, or other’s experiences) that have personally touched you and that you have permission to share. Stories can be memorized, like laser talks or, if they are longer, we can read them to our audience. The best ones illustrate the problem and the solution, providing both numbers and a human element to which we can all relate.

Here are some key principles to keep in mind when you are telling your story:

- **Stories are about people:** make sure there is a person at the centre of your story, not a number or statistic but an individual with a name and character traits.
- **Stories speak the audience’s language:** plain and straightforward language is always best; using jargon or big words will not be helpful in communicating your message.

- **Stories don't tell, they show:** rather than listing or explaining the facts, why not show the challenges a child faces in accessing the proper nutrition or education in low- and middle-income countries.
- **Stories stir up emotions:** stories touch the heart of the listener and help them relate to and feel connected to someone that would otherwise be distant from their daily life. They remind us of the universality of our humanity.
- **Stories have a moment of truth/clear meaning:** there is always a moment during a story where the meaning becomes clear, this is the powerful moment of the story where we are able to communicate our message and connect the story to our call to action.

*Updated: May 2021*

*\*Note that the statistics shared throughout this document are only to provide examples. You should not use these numbers without first doing your own research to ensure that they are still accurate at the time that you wish to use them.*