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# The Point Of View Guide

## *For Speakers*

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*Dedicated to those who are willing to stick their neck out in service of  
their audience's improvement.*

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# 1: Introduction

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A point of view is an idea you wish your audience would buy into because their buy-in would make things better for them.

Each part of that sentence has something important to tell us about point of view (POV), so we'll examine each part in turn.

## A point of view is an IDEA

While we can think of a POV in a literal sense as being *where you stand and what you see as a result of standing there*, it's more useful to think of a POV as an *idea*. Ideas can be big or small, important or trivial, and simple or complex.

Ideas don't create mountains or trees, but they have created compound interest, the Internet, copyright law, the 2008 financial crisis, the public school system, vacuum cleaners, cookie consent pop-ups, and sewing needles. Some ideas are toxins, yet so much of what makes modern life comfortable, enjoyable, beautiful, and even *possible* started as an idea.

Ideas can be slightly better ways to do things: optimizations. Or they can be profoundly different ways to do things: transformations. They can be codifications of observations: "handwashing seems to reduce deaths during childbirth". Or they can be expressions of ideals or imagination: "humans could live and thrive on planets other than Earth".

Ideas can be abstract, sweeping, and totalistic: "management is either an act of service or it fails". Or they can be specific and applied: "managers should check in with every direct report on Mondays and Fridays".

*Your* point of view can have any of these qualities. Good points of view are not limited to "big ideas".

## A point of view is an idea that you WISH

We only wish for that which could be, but has not yet happened. The fulfillment of a wish quenches its flame. Dictionary definitions of *wish* are peppered with the language of poetry: want, desire, hope, longing.

What idea matters enough that you feel desire, hope... or *longing* about the idea's fate? Maybe no idea so moves you. But what ideas do you keep returning to? What ideas would you want to discuss with a friend? Or defend? Or make sure someone you were mentoring understood? What ideas would you want to apply to a client project because those ideas have proven themselves reliably effective?

There are countless ideas. But only a few of them will motivate you enough to become a point of view.

## A point of view is an idea that you wish YOUR AUDIENCE

Just as your speaking exists to serve an audience, your point of view exists for your audience's progress and improvement. Your audience reaps the first-order benefits of your POV; you reap the second-order benefits. Identifying, clarifying, and articulating your point of view is an act of service to your audience.

## A point of view is an idea that you wish your audience would BUY INTO

Buy-in is an emotional or intellectual transaction. We trade our previous way of thinking about, seeing, or doing something for one we deem better or more useful. We give up our POV and buy into someone else's.

Buy-in can't be forced. It's an invitation combined with persuasion, reasoned argument, or both.

## A point of view is an idea that you wish your audience would buy into BECAUSE

I'm sure there are people with what we'd consider a great point of view who lucked into it, focused and clarified it, and became famous for it with nearly no

meta-thought about the POV itself. Effortlessly. The rest of us need a *reason* to go to all this trouble.

Why read a book on point of view? Why do the exercises this author suggests? Why try to persuade or put an argument in front of your clients/audience?

There are a few reasons I've noticed why some of us want this POV thing and are willing to endure discomfort to have it:

- Some very smart people, a few who I will name later, say you should have one.
- Analysis of how the most visible players in our game operate, and a dash of mimetic desire, lead us to want a powerful POV of our own.
- A felt sense of a “glass ceiling” on our ability to direct client engagements or build authority causes us to want a more impactful POV.

The most powerful, sustainable reason to want a point of view, however, isn't about *you* at all.

**A point of view is an idea that you wish your audience would buy into because their buy-in would MAKE THINGS BETTER FOR THEM.**

The most powerful, sustainable reason to want a point of view is because it gives you a shot at making things better for those you serve. Your audience.

Being able to clearly articulate and defend a point of view is differentiating. This is a very good thing for your speaking. But if your differentiating POV is not focused on your audience's needs and progress, then it might be interesting to some, but it won't be broadly relevant or compelling to many.

Good points of view attract attention. This can be a very good thing for you. But if that attention does not return a dividend of benefit to your audience, then your POV won't be durable and sustainable.

The larger audience or market you serve is the *ecosystem* that your business exists within. A POV that centers the health of your ecosystem is also a POV that will benefit your business in both the short and long term.

It's for *your audience* that you read the book, do the exercises, and endure the discomfort. It's for them that you write the articles, send the emails, and share the thinking that invites their buy-in.

## POV is not just for missionaries and thought leaders

The way I've described POV here suggests a strong undercurrent of "missionary zeal". It would be easy for you to conclude that POV is something that only thought leaders or those trying to build a large audience need care about. POV is more broadly important than that.

If you're having difficulty seeing how POV could be relevant to anybody *other* than missionaries and thought leaders, you may have made some assumptions:

- A point of view needs to advocate for a *transformational* idea – a fundamental break from the status quo.
- A POV must appeal to a broad or very large audience.
- A POV benefits from being supported by very appealing or dramatic evidence.

If the three things above were true of points of view, then yes, POV would be relevant only to missionaries and thought leaders. But there are plenty of good points of view where none of those three things are true. For example:

- "Entrepreneurial expert firms don't often fail because their work isn't good enough. It nearly always is. No, they struggle because of the quality of their business decisions." –David Baker
- "When you acquire a customer, you have about 3 months to convert the customer to a second purchase before the customer fades away." –Kevin Hillstrom
- "Vertical specialization is the real specialization superpower for authority-building." –Alastair McDermott
- "Agile is really about risk management. If you're not using agile to manage risk, then you're not doing agile right." –Luca Ingiani

These points of view are much more typical of what sophisticated consulting firms will articulate as part of their marketing and work. They are good examples of strong, incisive points of view that also do not appeal to very broad/large audiences, do not need to be supported by highly appealing or dramatic evidence, and (mostly) do not advocate for profoundly transformational ideas. They're the points of view of seasoned practitioners creating a combination of optimization and risk mitigation within real-world clients facing complexity and constraint, not those of the missionary or the thought leader.

## POV is not just for visionaries and “futurists”

Back to that *wish* thing: A point of view is an idea that you *wish* your audience would buy into...

This might suggest that having a POV means we can see far into the future, and we then use that vision of the future and our overpowering charisma to draw our market closer to that future state. Some do this, but you don’t have to do the same to have a good POV.

It’s more likely that your POV will flow from empathetic frustration with some specific way those you serve underperform their potential, or self-sabotage. While those who are stuck in the past (relative to where they *could* be) might see you as a visionary, you’re simply working to help them cure a deficiency in their maturation; you’re not actually seeing the future. Some points of view do represent a vision for what lies beyond the current state of even the most advanced members of the market. But this truly visionary quality is not at all required for you to have a good POV.

## POV can be a tidy hierarchy or a rowdy street gang

Thus far I’ve been discussing point of view using the singular – “a point of view”, etc. This suggests that you only have one idea that you wish your audience would buy into, or that the multiple ideas you wish they would buy into neatly arrange themselves into a hierarchy with a central unifying “umbrella idea” at the apex. If this is how things happen to work for you and your points of view, great, but this is not the only way POV can work.

Some folks will have several great points of view that aim to serve the same market or audience, but have little else in common with each other. This is the “rowdy street gang” of POV. The “gang” has at best a loosely-defined, fluid hierarchy, and its purpose is similarly loose and fluid. If this is how POV works for you, also great! You’ll get tremendous benefit from POV despite lacking a tidy organization of your points of view.

Seth Godin is a good example here. Perhaps at an earlier stage in his career his points of view might have all related to marketing and might have arranged themselves into a tidy hierarchy. But now... he articulates points of view on a much wider range of topics from education and schooling to how to conduct effective meetings. This is POV-as-rowdy-street-gang. To attempt to force this gang into a

neat hierarchy under one “apex POV” would necessitate an unnecessary pruning of an otherwise potent collective.

## Why developing a POV can feel difficult

You may be comfortable sharing what you know. You can explain your expertise, tell stories from your life, or describe what worked in a particular situation. Developing a point of view asks you to take another step: what do you wish your audience would buy into because it would make things better for them?

Your experience happened within a context you know intimately. You know the circumstances, the constraints, and the choices available to you. Your audience brings many different contexts. What helped you might help some of them, need adapting for others, and be entirely wrong for a few.

An example: I made the photographs below while traveling to Atlanta, Georgia to give a talk on point of view. The first image is a single building in Atlanta, and the second one is an aerial view of Atlanta.



What can we say that is both useful and true about the mall housed in this one building? Lots of things, probably!



What can we say that is both useful and true about all of Atlanta, with its multitude of different businesses, residences, government buildings, transportation networks, parks, and on and on? If you allow those questions to sink in for a moment, you will feel the difference between describing one particular context and articulating an idea that could help across many different contexts.

That's where articulating a POV can feel uncomfortable. You're moving from "here's what happened" to "here's an idea I believe would help you." That requires judgment about how far your experience reaches, what supports your idea, and where its limits lie.

You don't need an idea that works for everybody. You need a clear sense of whom it serves, how it helps, and why you believe it deserves their consideration.

## POV *is* risky and speculative

Peter Drucker: "All profit is derived from risk"

Let's think about profit broadly, not just as first-order economic profits for your business but as the shared benefit that you want your POV to create for your audience and your business.

Wanting your audience to buy into an idea for *their* benefit is audacious. I mean, who are you (or I, for that matter) to say what's best for someone else? If the idea your POV is based on is so great, wouldn't that be self-evident to your audience?

If your POV is based on an idea that matters enough to you to become a POV, then your POV is *consequential*, and one of the potential consequences is that you turn down a great potential client because they don't buy into your POV. Such near-misses are part of the risk of going down this POV road.

You can't have the *profit* of POV without some risk.

POV is also speculative. No matter how great your POV feels to you during those early days of identifying and clarifying it, you don't know for sure ultimately how profitable (in the sense we're thinking of profit here) it will be.

- You don't know how much gravitas it will (or won't) have.
- You don't know with certainty whether it will position you as a generous, empathetic leader or an uptight hall monitor.
- You don't know with certainty how many people beyond yourself will care about your POV.

I hope that by defining POV as an idea you want others to buy into for *their* benefit I've predisposed you to cultivate point(s) of view that *do* create lots of the kind of profit we're talking about here, but there are few guarantees in life, and POV is no exception.

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The relevant POV from *my* rowdy street gang – the idea I wish you'd buy into: you would benefit from having a clear, incisive POV. In holding forth this POV, I join some esteemed company:

### **A point of view**

That's the difference between saying, "what would you like me to do," and "I think we should do this, not that."

A point of view is the difference between a job and a career.

It's the difference between being a cog and making an impact.

Having a point of view is different from always being correct. No one is always correct.

Hiding because you're not sure merely makes you invisible.

—Seth Godin, <https://seths.blog/2017/12/a-point-of-view>

• • •

To develop a unique point of view, ask yourself what your stance is on a topic.

—Nancy Duarte, [How the Duarte Big Idea™ Formula Can Make Your Presentation the Best](#)

• • •

Make your idea worth sharing. By that I mean, ask yourself the question: “Who does this idea benefit?”

—Chris Anderson, [TED's secret to great public speaking](#) (7:06)

And in this book, I hope I help you develop what you've got now – which are probably the near precursors to a POV – into a clear, incisive point of view that helps you create more value and stand apart from the crowd.

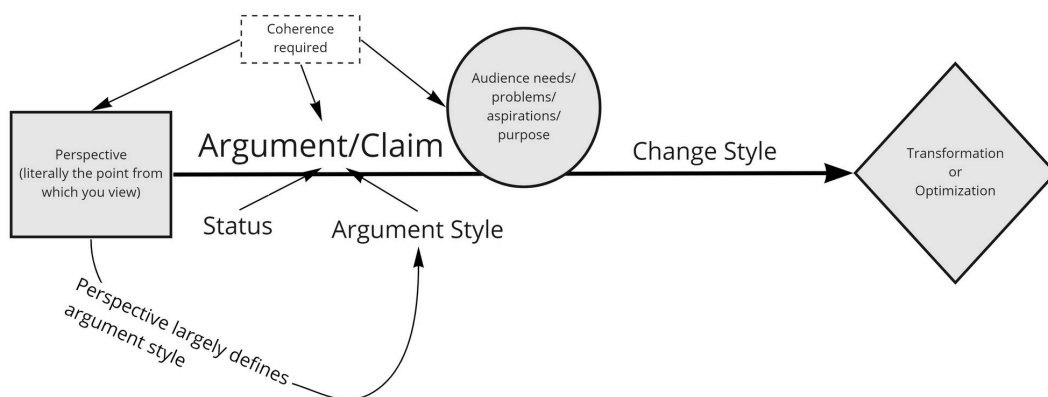
Let's get started.

## 2: What Is A Point Of View?

In the previous chapter, we defined a point of view as an idea you wish your audience would buy into because their buy-in would make things better for them.

That definition tells us what a POV is and whom it serves. Now we'll look at how it works: what makes the idea relevant, what adopting it might help people achieve, and how your perspective shapes its expression.

Your POV will usually contain a claim about what is true or how something should be done. Your argument supports that claim and gives people reasons to buy in. The idea is what you want them to adopt; the argument helps them understand why they should.



The diagram's "Argument/Claim" names the idea you are asking your audience to buy into. We'll examine that idea and the factors surrounding it below.

## The Functions Of A Point Of View

A point of view actually *does stuff* in the world and within your relationship with audiences and the people who book you. A POV can be an active force in 4 ways.

**1) Differentiation:** Your topic identifies the territory you cover. Your POV gives audiences and organizers a clearer sense of what you want people to take from that territory. “I speak about leadership” tells them less than a clear expression of what you believe would help leaders and why.

Having a POV doesn’t automatically make you distinctive. Other speakers may advocate a similar idea. But the idea, your reasons for believing it, and the way you connect it to an audience’s concerns can give people a clearer reason to choose and remember you. It can also make you easier to refer: someone can explain what you stand for, rather than simply listing the subjects you speak about.

**2) Service:** A good point of view serves your audience’s progress or wellbeing. It helps listeners understand or address something consequential to them. That might involve challenging a comfortable assumption, naming a problem they have struggled to articulate, or helping them see a way forward.

Service isn’t always comfortable. Your idea may provoke disagreement or ask listeners to reconsider a decision they feel good about. In the case of thought leadership, you might sustain a campaign of arguing for change. What matters is that the challenge honestly seeks the audience’s benefit, and that you take their circumstances and objections seriously.

**3) Screening:** A clear POV helps organizers assess whether your idea fits their audience and the purpose of their event. It gives you something specific to discuss: who would benefit from the idea, what concerns it addresses, and what adopting it might ask of listeners.

Fit doesn’t require everyone in the room to agree with you. An organizer might invite you precisely because your idea offers a useful challenge. Disagreement can be productive when the idea is relevant and you can support it thoughtfully. But if the audience has little use for the idea, or the organizer wants you to advocate something you don’t believe, recognizing that mismatch can help both of you make a better decision.

**4) Positioning:** A clear POV gives you something substantive to bring to the conversation about a speaking engagement. You can explain what you believe would help the audience, why you believe it, and how the talk could serve the event’s purpose.

You can be flexible about length, examples, and format while remaining honest about the idea itself. If an organizer asks you to advocate something you don't believe, that is a different kind of request from asking you to make the talk more relevant to their audience.

A POV is so often associated with deep, real expertise that the POV functions like the penumbra of the expertise.

## The Components Of A Point Of View

There are several moving parts that constitute a point of view. Most good points of view emerge organically from your desire to serve your audience, so as I walk you through the components of a point of view, don't get pulled into reductionist thinking about how you could engineer or construct a point of view from a box of components. Even though you probably don't need to understand *exactly* how a point of view works, it'll help to be roughly familiar with the underlying system's function.

## The Central Elements

There are 3 central elements to a point of view.

**1) Idea/Claim:** The most central element of a POV is the idea you want your audience to buy into. You can express that idea as a claim about what is true or how something should be done. Such claims center on one or more of the following:

- This is **true, or is an under-appreciated truth** that would help if properly appreciated
- This is **how we/you should do X**

There are plenty of subtle variations on the above. For example, "How we should do X" could be "Why Y is holding us back and why X is what we should do about it", or any number of other variations. The power of a POV is not its precise grammatical structure but the usefulness of the idea to the people you hope will adopt it. Your argument gives them reasons to consider that idea: experience, evidence, and an explanation of how it could help.

An audience can agree with an idea without having fully understood its implications or put it into practice. Your POV might challenge their beliefs, but it might also clarify something they already suspect or help them act on something

they already believe. The important question is what their buy-in would make possible.

**2) Relevance:** A good point of view is *relevant* to your audience's needs, problem(s), aspiration(s), or purpose. My point of view on infrastructure in rural America is probably not relevant to your concerns, and that's fine! I'd be foolish to wish otherwise. As in the diagram above, a good point of view's central idea intersects with its audience's concerns. Your supporting argument needs to make that connection clear.

**3) Outcome:** A good point of view aims towards a desirable outcome for your audience. What could become better if they bought into the idea and applied it? The outcome might be a better decision, a more useful way of understanding a problem, or a change in how they do something. Be clear about the benefit you hope the idea will create without assuming that one talk will deliver it for everyone.

Jonathan Stark has a wonderfully relevant POV, the headline version of which might go like this: hourly billing is nuts. The idea asks people selling professional services to reconsider how they charge for their work. The intended benefits might include greater profitability and more satisfaction with self-employment. Whether someone achieves those benefits depends on their circumstances and how they put the idea into practice; buying in is the beginning of that work.

A POV does not need to lead to a completely revolutionary or transformational outcome. It's fine for your POV(s) to advocate incremental improvement rather than rapid transformation, revolution, or reinvention. Some audiences need a fundamental change in how they see or do something; others need a useful adjustment they can try within their existing constraints. Both can be worthwhile things to help people achieve through your speaking.

## The Contextual Elements

There are 4 contextual elements to a point of view. Because a POV emerges from a human being who cares about an audience's progress, the POV will be shot through with unique human-fingerprint-like stylistic qualities. In fact, if Jonathan Stark and I both cared passionately about the same audience and the same specific outcome, we would each have distinctively unique points of view through which we invite buy-in because we are substantially different people (though both with *great* hair, I am told). This difference in POV would be the product of a difference in *context*. Those 4 contextual factors are:

**1) Perspective:** You *stand somewhere* in life; you can't help but do so. Your location partially defines what you see. A person for whom winning at standardized testing has always been easy sees annoying but trivial little games standing between themselves and the opportunities that are gated by that testing. A person who struggles with standardized tests sees heavily guarded doors in front of those same opportunities. Same thing, different *perspective*.

An outsider to an industry might see opportunities to do things better if only X; an insider will remember the times variations of X have been tried before and failed and that insider sees 10 reasons *not* to try X.

A scientist sees a need to evaluate support for a new initiative with a quantitative survey; a visionary sees a need to rally the troops with an inspiring afternoon workshop.

A point of view is called that rather than “an opinion” because the point from which you view (see) things is such an important determinant of *what* you see and *how* you argue for change. Becoming aware of the contextual factor of *perspective* invites you to explore some important questions:

- Do those who you hope to influence with your POV share a similar perspective with you?
- Whether they do or not, how might the overlap (or lack thereof) in your perspectives be a source of power?
- Is there something you have been taking for granted in your perspective that could be a source of power? Are you adept with the *data* your audience hungers for more of? Have you accrued *experience* that could inspire or soothe your audience?

These two 19th-century thought leaders provide a good example of perspective.



Ignaz Semmelweis (left, in the picture above) was born in Hungary in 1818. While working as a chief resident at the Vienna General Hospital, he (and others) noticed that one of the hospital's maternity clinics had a mortality rate that was about 3 times higher than the hospital's other maternity clinic. The deadlier clinic was staffed by medical students who also dissected cadavers, and the other by midwives who did not. Semmelweis theorized that "cadaverous material" was causing the infections that led to the 3x-higher mortality. He convinced the medical students to implement hand-washing, and the mortality rate immediately dropped to match the rate of the other clinic. (Yes, there was a LONG period of human history before the importance of infection control was understood. :))

Semmelweis began campaigning for other practitioners to adopt the innovation of hand-washing; his perspective was rooted in data, and he used data from his experience at Vienna General Hospital to support his argument. He was ignored, rejected, and ridiculed by the medical establishment at the time. Semmelweis was ultimately driven mad by his quest, committed to an insane asylum by his peers in 1865, and was beaten severely by the asylum guards. He died of an infection 2 weeks later at age 47. (Think twice before you decide that thought leadership is right for you!)

Semmelweis died right as the Civil War in the United States was ending. Silas Weir Mitchell, who had been born in Philadelphia in 1829, worked treating soldiers from this war who had lost limbs to gunfire and the rapid field amputations that were done to save their lives. Mitchell coined the term "phantom limb" to

help explain the phenomenon of pain in a limb that was no longer there due to amputation. He did not discover this phenomenon, but—as thought leaders often do—he coined a sticky name for it and then he wrote a fictitious short story for The Atlantic, “The Case of George Dedlow”, about a Civil War survivor who had all 4 limbs amputated and suffered phantom limb pain. Acceptance of the idea of phantom limb pain subsequently grew both within the medical community and in the broader culture in part thanks to this fictitious story.

Semmelweis leaned towards *data* in his perspective. Mitchell leaned away from data in his, and vivified his *experience* with a completely made-up story. If you ever think that data is automatically more powerful than experience when it comes to your POV’s perspective, remember this story. Never worry that there’s anything wrong or inadequate about your perspective. Whether you are coming from data or experience, look for the ways it grants your POV power — they are there waiting for you to discover and leverage them.

(Source: Wikipedia and <https://www.history.com/news/the-civil-war-doctor-who-proved-phantom-limb-pain-was-real>)

**2) Argument Style:** As you invite buy-in to your idea, you are making and supporting an argument. Your *style* — the way you phrase things, the examples you use, the expectations you have of your audience — will land somewhere on a spectrum running from forceful and disruptive to gentle and evolutionary. This style is not wired into you through your DNA and so can be modulated if you want. This again invites exploring a question: what argument style would best support your efforts to serve your audience’s best interest?

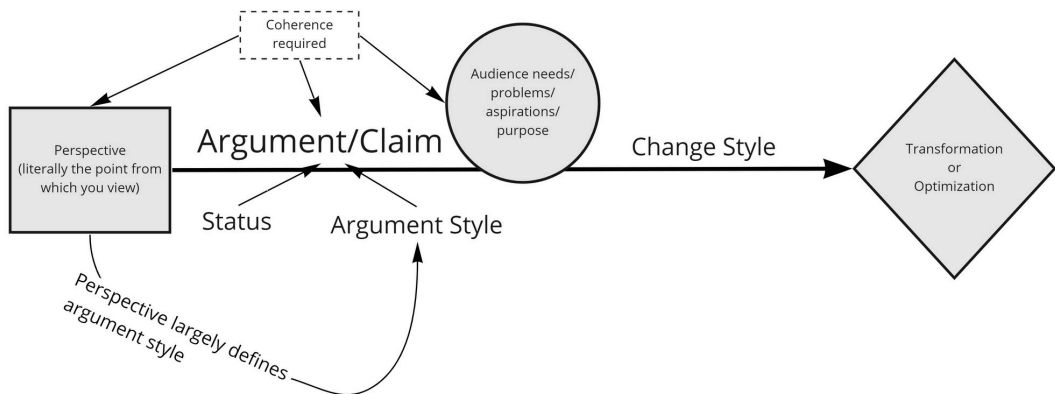
**3) Status:** Your *status* as perceived by your audience is partially a product of how you present yourself and partially a product of your personal history and perspective. Listeners may recognize credibility in your research, your experience doing the work they do, or your experience navigating a challenge they face. An outsider may bring a useful perspective precisely because they haven’t spent a career within the audience’s field. Combined with intentional framing (ex: “I don’t have a background in X, but that also means I’m not steeped in the bad habits of X.”), different kinds of status can be powerful. Don’t get too in your head about it, but do explore the question: what does your background help this audience trust you to speak about, and how can you use that credibility in their best interest?

**4) Change Style:** Finally, as you help listeners consider adopting your idea, you’ll have a natural *change style* — a way of helping them approach uncertainty, the

status quo bias, risk, discomfort, institutional inertia, communication friction, and so forth. Your argument style shapes how you make the case; your change style shapes how you help people move towards putting the idea into practice. You might invite a small experiment, help listeners anticipate obstacles, or encourage them to question a familiar way of doing things.

Like your argument style, your change style can develop with experience and deliberate practice. You may have only a short time with an audience, while the practical work of change happens afterward. Consider what would help listeners take a useful next step within the constraints they will return to, and whether that approach is coherent with your idea, your argument style, and their needs.

All together, the 3 central factors of your POV (idea/claim, relevance, and outcome) and the 4 contextual factors (perspective, argument style, status, and change style) combine to create a human-fingerprint level of uniqueness to any given POV. My goal in explaining the components of a POV is not for you to get in your head about optimizing each element in some way. Rather, I hope this merely leads to a deeper level of self-awareness that helps you communicate the idea more effectively and support your audience's progress.



(Same diagram as before, just repeated here for convenience and emphasis now that I've explained every component of the diagram.)

# 3: Cultivating A POV

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You can't force a plant to grow. But you can create conditions that are conducive. Likewise with POV.

## Developing Your Point Of View

Points of view *emerge* from a living relationship between you, your concern for the people you hope to help, and those people themselves. Can they instead be engineered? Manufactured?

As a speaker, you work with audiences at two scales. There are the people listening to a particular talk, with their own circumstances, concerns, and reasons for being there. There are also the people you hope to reach and help over time, through many talks and perhaps through writing, recordings, or other work.

These audiences overlap, but they aren't interchangeable. A room full of first-time managers might be part of a larger audience of people you want to help become better leaders. What matters most to that room today may differ from what matters to experienced leaders encountering your ideas elsewhere.

Cultivating your POV involves learning about both. Your larger audience gives you a continuing reason to develop the idea. Particular audiences help you discover where it is useful, what people misunderstand, and what makes it difficult to adopt.

You can adapt the examples, emphasis, and invitation to act for a particular talk while keeping the underlying idea coherent. You can also revise the idea itself when those encounters give you good reasons to reconsider it.

Not that I have any experience in songwriting, but I think it's a bit like songwriting. You can nurture points of view (and songs) into being. You can create the pre-

conditions that make it more likely for a point of view to emerge. You can take a mess of opinions and sift through for good “POV material”. You can polish a raw POV into something more impactful and effective.

But I do not think you can engineer or manufacture a POV from nothing. That begs the question: what is the *something* you must have to nurture a POV?

You have to *care* about your audience’s improvement. Expertise and visibility can help you communicate an idea, but concern for the people you hope to serve gives you a reason to develop it and keep learning whether it helps.

In other words, a good POV grows out of caring about your audience’s wellbeing. As you’ve seen if you’ve read this far, there’s quite a lot to say about POV itself, but the starting point is simple: you have to care enough to stick your neck out with a thoughtful perspective on what would make things better for those you seek to serve.

Maybe you have the requisite care for your audience’s improvement and wellbeing, but you don’t think you have a great POV. You *probably do* have “POV raw material”; most people who have been around the block a time or two do. This chapter is about helping you surface that raw material. There are two groups of exercises here: one to help you filter the raw material that’s currently floating close to the surface, and the other to help you surface new raw material that might be buried deeper in your thinking.

## The POVSpace

When I run a workshop on point of view, I ask participants to locate themselves in a “POVSpace” that has 4 dimensions. Most participants tell me they enjoy and benefit from this exercise, but it can be challenging because it invites a sort of self-reflection that is new to many of us. As with everything else in this guide, I hope you don’t get too in your head about this idea of POVSpace; rather, I hope it helps you see behind the curtain of the points of view out there that you admire while making you more effective about refining your own POV.

For speakers, this map offers 4 ways to reflect on the perspective and approach you bring to your POV. We can think of each of these as an axis with two poles; we can describe your usual approach as a point — or more likely a range — along each axis. This is similar to personality characteristics. Nobody is 100% introverted or extroverted all the time; most of us are somewhere in between

these two extremes, and most of us have some amount of range and fluidity in how we express introversion or extroversion.

Here are the 4 elements:

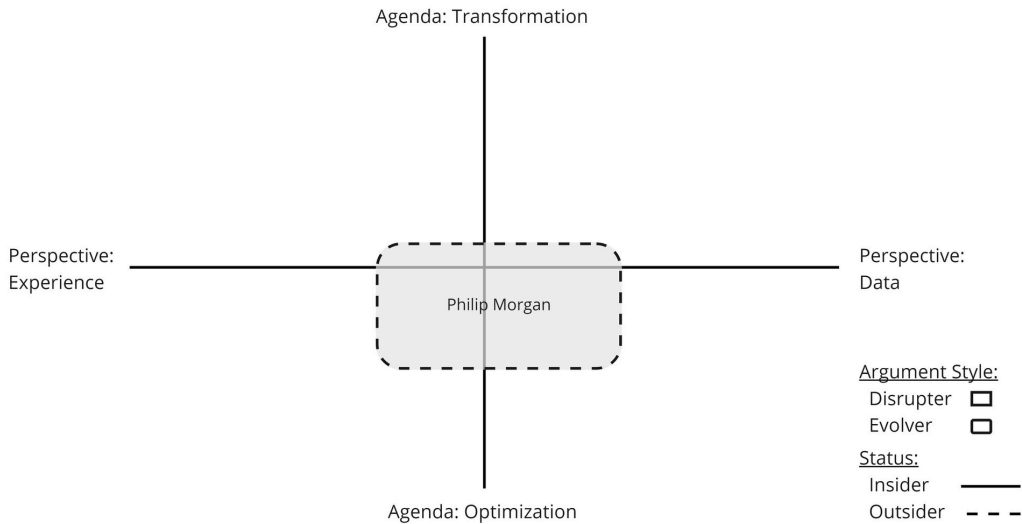
- What is your **perspective**? This will range between arguing from **data**, arguing from **experience**, or some combination of both.
- What kind of **change** are you arguing for? We can think of this as your **change agenda**. Do you seek radical **transformation**, progressive **optimization**, or something that lies in between these two extremes?
- With what **argument style** do you advocate for change? Do you encourage a rip-the-bandaid-off, **disruptive** approach to change, a **gentle, evolutionary** approach to change, or something in between? (A transformational agenda and an evolutionary change style *are* compatible.)
- From what **status** do you argue? Are you perceived as a **pedigreed insider**, an **expert outsider**, or something in between (or both, depending on which audience sub-segment you're interacting with)?

Yes, I know reality is complex and nuanced in ways this map can't represent. You may emphasize data with one audience and experience with another, or use a different tone with people who are encountering your idea for the first time. Your perceived status may also vary: you can be an insider to one group and an outsider to another. The map helps you recognize your usual "center of gravity" and consider how you express the idea in a particular talk. There is value in forcing yourself to consider which of two binary poles your approach is closer to; the artificial simplicity can be clarifying and empowering.

## Map Yourself On The POVSpace Map

That's why I'd like you to take some time to think, reflect, and map your POV on this POVSpace Map. Here's how to do that.

The easiest way to explain this is to show you a completed POVSpace Map and explain how it was created. Here's an example from my past consulting work with custom software developers and digital agencies:



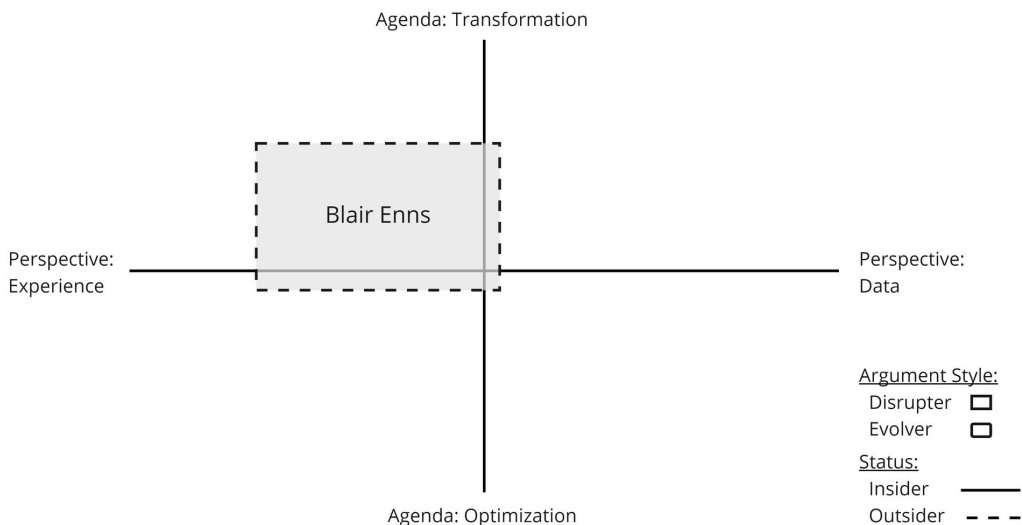
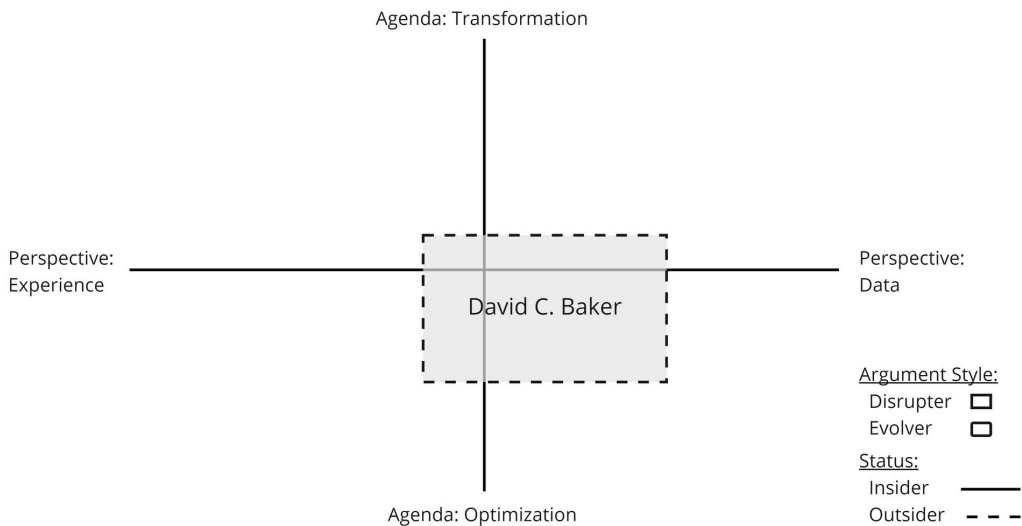
In this example, I mapped my POV as:

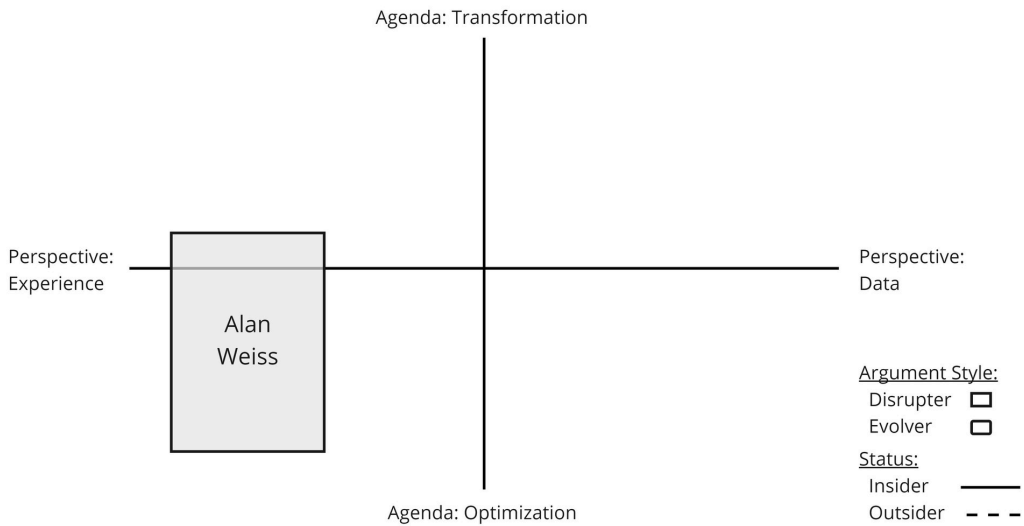
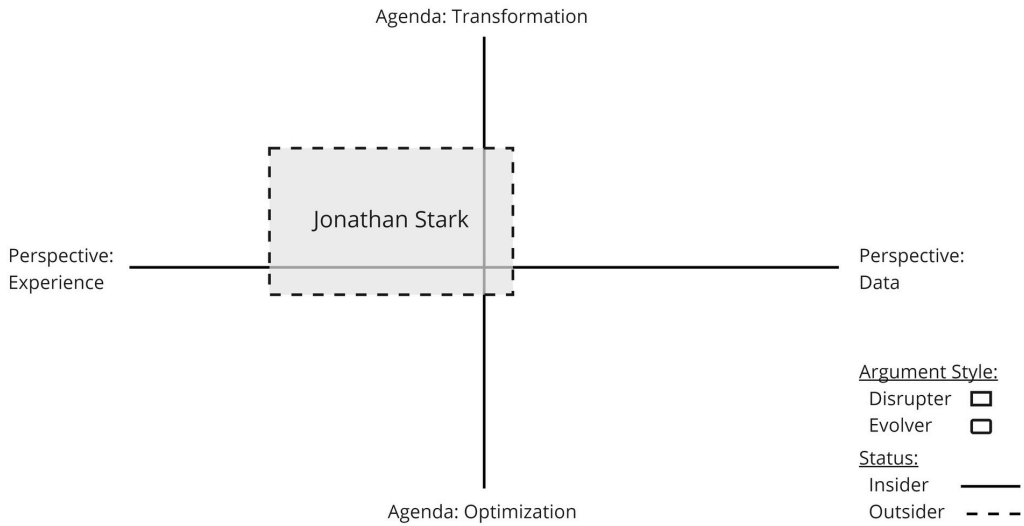
- Covering a range of agenda from **mild transformation to moderate optimization**. My work on lead generation skews towards optimization, while my work on positioning has a more transformational quality. I've represented this on the POVSpace map with a rectangle. You can see it covers the range from mild transformation to moderate optimization.
- **My perspective is rooted in** both experience and data. My argument for transformational change needs to have an inspirational feel to it, and it's easier to use experience to create that inspirational feel. But when I talk about lead generation, I have access to data that nobody else does, and that proprietary data becomes central to my argument there, causing me to use a more data-informed argument style. That's why the other 2 sides of the rectangle I've drawn on the POVSpace Map define a range from experience to data.
- Despite often arguing for transformational change, I do so with a **gentle, evolutionary tone**. I represent this on the map by using gently rounded corners for the rectangle I've drawn. If I wanted to represent a sharper, disruptive change style, I'd use sharp corners on the rectangle.
- Finally, my **status** in this example is mostly that of the **expert outsider**. My work focused on custom software developers and digital agencies, yet I had never gotten paid for writing code. I do have a technical background and could talk like an insider in this world thanks to that background and actually caring about the world of software development, but I'd characterize my status in this example as mostly *expert outsider*. I've used a dashed line

to represent expert outsider status; a solid line represents pedigreed insider status. This distinction works in color and in black and white.

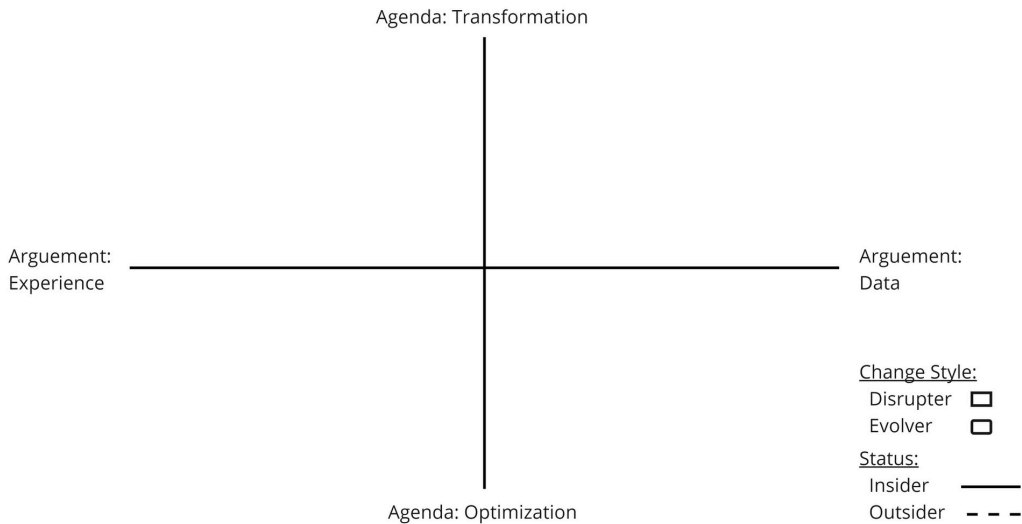
If at this point you understand how to use this map, you might go ahead and fill one out for yourself. A blank map appears below; you can also open or save a copy to annotate at [philipmorgan.net/povspacemap/](http://philipmorgan.net/povspacemap/).

If you'd like to see a few more example maps, I've mapped out the POV of a few people's public work, some of which I hope you are familiar with. I'm doing my best to be accurate as I do so, but I hope it's clear these maps are built on my subjective impression of these people's work, not their own description of their own POV.





Alright, here is that blank POVSpace map. You can mark it on paper or annotate an electronic copy. You can't do this mapping thing wrong, and the questions this activity surfaces for you will be productive ones even if you can't answer them immediately, so do give it a try!



## Surfacing POV Raw Material

If you have some level of clarity about where you are coming from in your POV, I can more efficiently guide you through the following questions that help you surface “raw material”, which consists of ideas, opinions, and beliefs that you might want your audience to buy into. In other words, I hope you surface the somewhat rough, unpolished precursors to a more crisp, sharp POV.

I’ve grouped these questions based on where you might stand along the two primary axes of the POVSpace Map: Data vs. Experience and Transformation vs. Optimization. So someone whose perspective is more based in data and whose agenda is enabling an improvement for their audience is called a Data-Based Optimizer and would focus on the questions in that section below. I hope the other groupings are named in a way that immediately makes sense to you. Of course you can look at all these questions, no matter which section they’re grouped in. :) The questions are simple and open-ended in nature to provide you with a jumping-off point for your own thinking and ideation.

Start by thinking about the larger audience you hope to help. Your raw material might come from research, work, personal experience, or conversations with people from that audience. Client engagements can be one source, but you don’t need a consulting practice to have useful experience. Then consider a particular talk: which of these ideas could help those listeners, and what would you need to understand about their circumstances?

## Data-Based Optimizer

1. What does your data tell you about the problem(s) the people you hope to help face? (Or others' data?)
2. How might your data run counter to conventional wisdom?
3. How might your data support conventional wisdom?
4. Does your data suggest a specific sequence by which those people improve or make progress — a path that optimizes for lowest risk?

## Data-Based Transformer

1. What “icebergs” does your data tell you the people you hope to help are headed towards? (Imagine if The Titanic had radar or sonar and could have seen the iceberg it was headed towards.)
2. Do you have data on radical/fundamental transformations in people's lives, organizations, or communities that your audience would like to learn from? Can this data create a portrait or a story of these successes?
3. Elite segments of military forces have entrance tests with objective criteria. Does your data suggest a similar set of “go/no-go” criteria for potential transformation?

## Experience-Based Optimizer

In the following questions, I'm going to refer to the traits or accomplishments that your audience admires as “ideals”. For example, in the marketing vertical, commercially successful creativity might be a very salient ideal, while in the finance vertical, it probably won't be.

1. Your audience probably puts some people or companies on a pedestal because they admire those people or companies. Who does your audience put on a pedestal?
2. Why does your audience admire these people/companies? What traits or accomplishments in particular does your audience admire?
3. What ideals represent the “common sense” or obviously desired states of being for your audience? (ex: Within team environments, diversity, alignment, and “great culture” are often considered self-evidently desirable states to work towards.)
4. What behavioral ideals match the values or norms of your sector? (ex: Within academia and science, objectivity and elevating the pursuit of truth over personal gain are idealized.)

5. What people or companies or institutions from outside your audience also match the ideals you've listed?
6. What stories about challenge and change do you hear over and over again from within your audience? (ex: We are right to wonder if Apple could spin up an enviably profitable division that licenses all the stories about challenge and change that are associated with its brand. These are now almost more lore and legend than anything else.)

## Experience-Based Transformer

1. Who does your audience admire in a really emotionally driven way, even if this person is far removed from your audience's day-to-day reality?
2. What represents a "pure" or "Platonic" path of improvement for your audience?
3. When your audience compares their sector to another, what are they comparing to and how?
4. Are there specific versions of "The Hero's Journey" story that get repeated or have significant mindshare among your audience?

## More General Question Prompts

The following may also be useful prompts. These aren't specific to any particular perspective that you might be coming from.

### **Pattern Of Stupidity**

You might notice a pattern of stupidity among the people you hope to help. Ultimately I'm going to ask you to run all your POV ideas through an "empathy filter", but for now I'll use blunt language like "stupid" to remind you that you're not looking for subtle, little things; you're looking for big, motivating issues to base your POV around.

1. Are the people you hope to help making objectively bad decisions?
2. Where are they not doing the hard work of being well-informed and thoughtful?
3. Where are they misunderstanding cause and effect?
4. Where are they following the herd rather than thinking for themselves?

### **Frustration Or Dissatisfaction**

You might notice patterns of frustration within your larger audience, or you may feel frustration on their behalf. These can be pointers towards a point of view.

1. Where are the people you hope to help being misled?
2. Where are they missing low-hanging fruit?
3. What do they aspire to?
4. Where do they face difficult external headwinds?
5. What have they been *putting up with* or *enduring*?

### **Experience/Data**

You may notice patterns in your work, personal experience, research, or conversations with audiences. These can be the precursors to good POV candidates.

1. What patterns are quite clear to you?
2. What stories from your experience come up over and over again when talking with people you hope to help?
3. If you had to give a conference talk based only on your experience, what idea would you want the audience to take from it?
4. What “icebergs” does your data warn about?

### **The Empathy Filter**

Every POV idea you come up with should be run through an “empathy filter”. When I talk about empathy, I’m not suggesting that you need to feel warm, tender, gushy feelings towards your audience. Rather, I use the word empathy as a stand-in for the harder-to-summarize idea of being motivated by what would make things better for the people you hope to help, being able to see things from their perspective, and trusting that acting directly in their best interest will also serve your best interest. Empathy in this book is more of a stewardship of your audience’s best interest rather than a strongly felt emotion (though it can be the latter, too, and for some people it will be).

1. Who benefits from buying into this POV?
2. How difficult is it to implement this POV?
3. What good reasons/counterarguments explain why this POV isn’t already adopted?
4. What good-faith misinterpretations of this POV exist?

Consider these questions for your larger audience and for the people attending a particular talk. An idea can be useful in general yet poorly suited to the circumstances of that room. What would you need to learn, explain, or adapt for those listeners?

## Signals

The other elements of POVSpace — your status with your audience and your change style — are also important. They operate more in the world of “signals”, which are more subtle things like how you phrase things, tone of voice, and so on.

## Signaling Pedigree

The following might be ways you signal your pedigree, without clumsily saying, “You should listen to me because of my pedigree, bitches”:

**Name-Dropping:** I don’t mean this in a negative sense here. What famous-to-your-audience people are you on a first-name basis with? Who do you have access to? There are clumsy and artless ways to name-drop, but there are also artful ways to do this.

**“When I was...”:** A prime example: “When I was at McKinsey, blah blah blah.” This is the ol’ authority-by-association move. As with every one of these pedigree-establishing “moves”, overusage is going to get people’s eyes rolling, but artful usage can accomplish what you want, which is a transfer of authority from the respected company, institution, or context to you.

**“War Stories”:** Here you are presenting stories of success, case studies, and so forth that are interwoven with the source(s) of your pedigree. I think here of how Joanna Wiebe references writing a successful long-form sales page for Intuit. This is both referencing a household name *and* using a “war story” to argue for a specific POV (in this case, the claim that long-form sales letters are effective even in a modern SaaS context).

**Style Of Dress** can send signals about pedigree.

There are yet more subtle forms of signaling, too:

**Diction:** Earlier in my career when I did tech writing work for an agency that did a lot of work for Microsoft, I noticed that every long-time Microsoft manager I interacted with spoke very quickly, under-enunciating syllables wherever possible and almost tripping over their own words. (If you listen to an interview with Ben Thompson, you’ll hear a good example of this style of diction. The *Conversations With Tyler* interview is a good one to seek out.) I can’t prove it, but I’m pretty sure that most of the 6 most recent US Presidents have made conscious choices to lean into styles of diction that signal a *lack of pedigree* to make them feel more

relatable. Again, don't get in your head about this, but how could leaning into or away from your natural style of diction send the kind of signal you want?

**Jargon And Phraseology:** You might use certain jargon or phraseology to signal your “insiderness” or “outsiderness”. Even if this jargon is intentionally opaque to some, that may serve your pedigree-signaling purpose.

## Signaling Experience

When you want to signal that you have valuable expertise, you can just present the expertise itself, but often you need to first earn enough attention to even have a chance to present your expertise or make a case based on that expertise. That's where you may need to *signal* that you have relevant, valuable expertise rather than just presenting the expertise itself.

The way this is done in books like *Good To Great* is to talk about impressively large numbers: the number of file drawers filled by the book's source material, the number of hours spent collecting and analyzing it, and so on. Despite that particular book's fundamental methodological flaw, the basic authority-building approach of saying “I've looked at way more data than you have” is sound. Of course you wouldn't say those exact words – that comes across as bluntly arrogant – but you can often earn a hearing for your POV with some variation of this opening gambit.

This gambit combines well with an “I'm not any smarter than you, but after looking at this much data, X is obvious, even to me” message, which artfully combines self-deprecating humility (“it's obvious even to an ordinary intellect like mine”) with an appeal to authority (“I have more data than you, therefore I know more than you”).

Another appealing framing takes the opposite approach. Rather than saying that your data or experience has a brute-force ability to prove your argument, you instead have noticed a pattern that few others have been careful or insightful enough to see. You've discovered a secret. Many will hold their skepticism in abeyance and their curiosity will give you an opening to support this heretofore-only-visible-to-you insight with your data, experience, or a combination of both.

Deep experience is the usual headwaters of expert confidence, and so *confidence* signals the upstream presence of deep experience. Many of us take someone's expert confidence as a proxy for the wisdom that comes from deep experience. This is a too-easily-hacked heuristic, thus the power of the confidence scheme.

For us, we need to remember that deep expertise engenders both confidence *and* caution. If you want your POV to be impactful and your status is that of the expert outsider, lead with confidence and follow up with caution and caveats.

## Signaling A Disrupter Change Style

The following will signal a disruptive change style:

- An urgent tone; an emphasis on need for dramatic change
- A direct, prescriptive invitation to act
- Dismissing or downplaying objections to change (ex: “Just do it! It’s not as hard as you think!”)
- Using examples of disruption rather than evolution

## Signaling An Evolver Change Style

The following will signal a more gentle, evolutionary change style:

- An emphasis on the importance of the resulting change (to keep folks motivated over the course of a potentially lengthy change)
- An invitation to explore, experiment, or build support for change
- Addressing and contextualizing objections to change or the actual risk of change
- Celebration of small victories
- Contextualizing the contribution of small actions to important/big outcomes

## Ideation

In the workshop I’ve run on POV, I ask participants to make a personal copy of this Google Doc and freewrite their way through the set of questions that matches their POVSpace location: [POV questions worksheet](#). I encourage you to do the same now.

At this point, these can be just opinions. They don’t have to be finely refined POVs, and in fact going for that level of polish will dampen the effectiveness of the freewriting. The filtering and polishing come later.

Immediately after doing this freewriting, list out every opinion you have that might be relevant to the people you hope to reach through your speaking and other work. You will structure these opinions into a POV “layer cake” format later, so if it’s easier to just freewrite a list of all the relevant opinions, do that.

Again, the document where you can do this freewriting: [POV questions worksheet](#).

## Audience

I use the word *audience* to describe the people who encounter your POV. For a speaker, that includes both the listeners at a particular talk and the larger audience you hope to reach over time. Your larger audience is defined by the people you want to help and the concerns you want to help them address; it needn't consist of people who already follow your work.

I'd like you to think about where your larger audience would lie on our POVSpace map. This will be a challenging and possibly frustrating exercise. They are people with differing backgrounds, purposes, and approaches to achieving those purposes. If the group is too broad to describe meaningfully, choose a more specific group within it to start with. Ask yourself: where is the center of gravity of *their* point of view? How do *they* see the world? What is *their* agenda for themselves? What is *their* change style?

Then make a second map for the audience of a particular talk, whether it's an upcoming engagement or one you'd like to give. How do those listeners differ from the larger audience? What do they already know or believe? What matters to them now? What constraints might make it difficult for them to adopt or apply your idea?

Neither audience is a monolith, and even your best map will be an approximation. Note the differences within each group that matter to your idea. Talk with the organizer and, where possible, people from the audience to check your assumptions. The goal is a clearer understanding of whom you're trying to help, rather than a diagram that pretends everyone thinks alike.

## Overlaps/Tensions

There will be some amount of overlap or difference between your location on the POVSpace map and each audience's location. This leads to an important question: how could this overlap or difference help you make the idea useful to those people?

I wonder if you are imagining that any difference between your POV and your audience's POV is problematic. I don't think so. I think both overlaps

and differences are sources of leverage; leverage that can be used to persuade, challenge, inspire, empathize, connect, or convince.

- Overlaps position you to reinforce or justify your audience's views to them. Their potential reaction: "I always felt this, but couldn't quite articulate/support it so clearly before."
- Differences position you to challenge or enrich their views with an outside perspective. The hoped-for reaction: "I've never seen things that way before..." or "wow, I'd like to achieve that!"

For a particular talk, ask which beliefs you can build on, which you hope to challenge, and what listeners need to understand before the idea becomes useful. A difference might open up a productive conversation, or it might reveal that the idea doesn't fit this audience. Agreement might give you a starting point for action, or it might mean you need to explore implications the audience hasn't yet considered.

Over time, look across those encounters. What do different audiences find useful? Where do the same misunderstandings or objections recur? What have you learned that should change the idea itself? The work of getting really good at this can be the work of an entire career, and individual talks can give you opportunities to keep learning.

## Filtering Your Opinions For Good POV Material

The output of freewriting your way through those questions should be a bunch of opinions of varying quality. These are "POV candidates". If you try to avoid self-editing during the freewriting process, you increase the chances of discovering some good stuff that lies just outside the well-trod path of ideas you are normally focused on. Hopefully there is lots of good stuff in your list of ideas, but now is the time to ruthlessly filter that list in search of what might be impactful POV material.

Below are some qualities of a good POV. Some of these are qualities you should try to maximize, and some are qualities you aren't trying to maximize, but ones you should think more deeply about to understand how the POV in question fits (or doesn't!) with the people you want to serve and the work you want to develop.

### **Durability**

Here are some questions that will help you evaluate the durability and potential longevity of a candidate POV:

- For how long is the candidate POV likely to be relevant?
- For how long will it be seen as a challenging perspective before it becomes mainstream or conventional wisdom (if ever)? What would have to change for it to become a mainstream POV?
- Consider how Dan Ariely's apparent use of faked research has cast a shadow over the entire field of behavioral economics. How exposed is the candidate POV to this kind of risk?

For speakers, it's also useful to distinguish repeated delivery from repeated exposure. You might give a talk about the same idea many times, with each audience encountering it for the first time. Meanwhile, people who follow your work over time may benefit from fresh examples, deeper exploration, and what you've learned since they first encountered the idea.

- Could this idea help successive audiences even after it becomes familiar to you?
- What would keep it useful to people who encounter it repeatedly?
- What new questions, examples, or implications could you explore as your understanding develops?

Neither situation requires inventing a new POV for every engagement. An idea can continue to serve new listeners while you develop a richer body of work around it.

A POV doesn't have to be extremely durable to be worth investing in, but you do want to have a sense of a candidate POV's durability before you go all in on it.

### **Audience Benefit**

To what extent is the candidate POV focused on *audience benefit*? If I were frustrated by listeners checking their phones during a talk, it would be tempting to cook up a POV about how audiences should pay more attention to speakers. But that idea could quite transparently flow from wanting a more comfortable experience on stage. What would those listeners gain by buying in? Their wellbeing and progress need to be at the center of the idea.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>It probably is possible to re-frame a you-centered POV like this in terms of audience wellbeing/progress. Just because it starts out you-centered doesn't mean it needs to remain stuck there.

Ask this for both audiences: what could the idea help your larger audience understand or do, and what would make it useful to the people attending a particular talk?

## Saleability

Some people will agree with your POV, or even find it obvious because it so closely matches theirs. Others will need to *buy into* your POV. This kind of buy-in is a sometimes-costly but usually non-financial process that involves them coming to accept and agree with your POV. In essence, they adopt your POV and use it as part of how they see, interpret, and understand the world. They become intellectually and/or emotionally “bought in”.

This is the right place for a reminder of this well-known quote from Upton Sinclair:

It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it.

For structural reasons, some people will never buy into your POV. Maybe their job or revenue model depends on never buying in. Perhaps they have no interest in updating their view of the world, or they have no incentive to endure the discomfort of even temporary cognitive dissonance. Some, however, *do* have that motivation or interest. For them, your candidate POV may present an intriguing or appealing possibility for growth and progress, but the buy-in process may be costly, requiring a lot of independent exploration or plain ole laborious thinking. How do you “sell” these folks on the candidate POV?

How much *evidence* do you have for the candidate POV? Evidence can be data, but it doesn’t have to be. We humans also respond to stories about others’ experiences (anecdotes).

What are the *implications* of adopting your candidate POV? Does it merely provide a new/better way of understanding the world, or will it require further action, a shift in identity, or deeper forms of change in order to fully buy in?

Your candidate POV(s) may make a promise (to solve a problem or improve a status quo) to its audience. How *attractive* is this promise to your audience?

Ultimately, how *pragmatic*, *achievable*, or *realistic* is whatever you are explicitly or implicitly promising in the candidate POV? This doesn’t mean you have to limit yourself to easily achievable promises, but it’s worth reflecting on how

many will ultimately realize and benefit from<sup>2</sup> the optimization or transformation you are advocating for.

### **Fit With Your Speaking**

Does this idea lend itself to the kind of speaking you want to do? Can you support it with material that helps listeners understand and use it? Does it invite the kinds of talks, workshops, or follow-on work you want to develop?

Consider both a particular engagement and your work over time. You might be able to communicate the idea usefully in a short talk, explore its application in a workshop, or develop its implications across writing and future talks. Which of those possibilities interests you, and which would serve the people you hope to help? You don't need to pursue every form, but it's useful to notice where the idea could lead.

### **Conversational Potential**

The core of your POV is an idea you want your audience to buy into, and your argument gives them reasons to consider it. Ideally, the idea is a jumping-off point for a variety of conversations: questions during a talk, discussions afterward, exchanges with people who follow your work, and conversations among listeners themselves.

I can't give any recipes or formulas to help, but I can urge you to consider the potential that your POV candidates do or don't have to spur *conversations* with your audience. This could be an inner mental conversation within an individual, between their priors and your POV's challenge to those priors. Or it could be an asynchronous conversation between a number of people carried out across books, articles, and social media. Or it could be a real-time conversation between people. In any event, a POV that leaves no room for conversation suffers reduced potential for impact. I won't offer any evidence to support this claim; instead, I'll invite you to a mental conversation with yourself, or with me if the opportunity arises, to move you towards accepting or rejecting this idea.

What questions might this idea invite in a particular room? What would people want to discuss with one another afterward? Across your larger audience, which questions could sustain further exploration? Treat listener feedback as a chance to learn what is clear, what is disputed, and what needs more thought.

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<sup>2</sup>You can benefit from the pursuit of something you do not ultimately achieve. I might benefit from running a marathon even if I come in last or can't complete the race; the training and effort and growth it creates has value independent of the outcome.

## Coherence

A good POV is coherent with the people you want to serve and the body of work you want to develop. This is both obvious and easily forgotten. If you want to help people make practical, incremental improvements, you don't have to adopt a sweeping transformational idea simply because it sounds more impressive on stage. And yet, the world as it is, and social media in particular, exerts a narcissizing influence on us. It's easy to forget that you don't have to have a strong, un-nuanced POV on every single issue of the moment, even if those issues are really important to your audience. Likewise, your points of view do not need to be driven by what authorities or famous personalities within your field are allocating their airtime to.

So it might be easy or sexy or popular to have a POV on X, but do you *really* care? (Also, a lot of these “of the moment” POVs are going to fail the durability test.) Do you want to keep speaking, learning, and developing material around this idea? Can you support it honestly and help listeners understand what adopting it would ask of them? If the POV is transformational, do you have the emotional budget to keep advocating for it and responding thoughtfully to resistance?

An idea might fit one event but have little connection to the work you want to build over time. Conversely, an idea central to your larger work might not serve a particular room. Consider both kinds of fit as you decide which candidates to develop.

In a way, coherence is the uber-quality, because it rolls up so many of these other qualities. This one asks: Is this POV the right instrument to serve the people you care about and support the work you want to develop?

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I realize this part of the book might feel especially “mechanical” or “inorganic”. This is the only way I know to reveal the kind of thinking I do when helping someone formulate their POV, but in reality that work is much more like a wide-ranging, messy conversation. A somewhat frustrating one, at times, to be sure, but usually an enjoyable mutual exploration. If you find this systematic approach laid out here to be somewhat cold or off-putting, the best way to go about this for you would be to find a “thought partner”, someone who can function simultaneously as champion, critic, and co-developer of your thinking, and talk through this stuff with them.

## 4: Articulating A POV

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How do you *articulate* a POV? How do you package it in a way that's accessible and impactful? How do you tell the world about your POV?

While many experts with both a great POV and lots of visibility make the articulation part look effortless and completely organic, there are somewhat mechanical patterns that we can spot and learn to imitate on *our* way to effortless mastery. Those patterns break down into two categories: 1) argument form, and 2) the application of that form over time.

Your POV is an idea you want your audience to buy into for their benefit. Your argument gives them reasons to consider it. Articulating your POV means making that idea understandable, supporting it, and helping people see what adopting it could mean for them. Your POV will have both stylistic and substantive distinctiveness:

### **Stylistic Distinctiveness:**

- Your *argument style* can be abrasive and disruptive, supportive and evolutionary, or somewhere in between
- Your *status* can be framed as that of the expert outsider, the pedigreed insider, or a combination of both

### **Substantive Distinctiveness:**

- Your *perspective* can be rooted in data, experience, or somewhere in between
- Your *argument* can be advocating rapid transformation, gradual optimization, or something in between

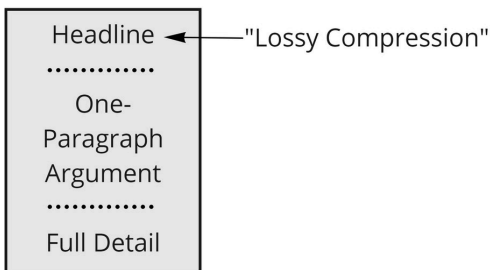
Your idea itself may not be totally unique, but these stylistic and substantive qualities can make your POV — even if fundamentally similar to an idea that others also advocate — distinctive to your audience, like an “intellectual fingerprint”.

Despite having a clear structure, your POV still needs to be packaged so people can understand and use it. Much of the value of a great book comes from the content — the words and ideas — but significant value also comes from the layout that makes those ideas easy and pleasant to take in, and from the packaging that makes the printed book comfortable or even delightful to handle (or the electronic book convenient to access and nice to read on a screen). In a talk, the sequence of ideas, the examples, and the way you connect them serve a similar purpose. Here, I'll refer to this as the POV's *form*.

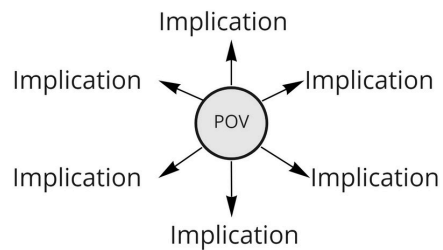
## Form

### FORM

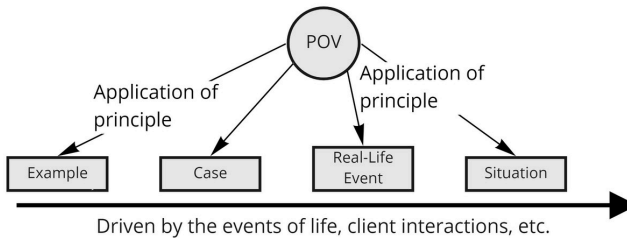
#### The Layer Cake



#### The Hub & Spoke



#### Principle & Specifics



A nearly infinite variety of rock songs can be based on just 3 guitar chords. Here I'll describe 3 POV argument forms that are mix-and-match elements that might become part of how you articulate your POV(s). These are mostly *forms of argument*, not *specific ways you physically arrange words*, and these 3 forms are not mutually exclusive — you may use several or all of them to articulate your POV.

Think of these forms as frameworks or even rules, but know that as soon as you can, you should abandon them. That's what mastery is — abandoning and transcending the very rules that got you to the threshold of mastery. But rules

can help us progress in the general direction of mastery, so I want to provide them here in the form of 3 frameworks.

## 1) The “Layer Cake” Framework

A point of view can be packaged into a 3-layer structure that goes like this:

- Short headline that expresses a vital part of the idea
- Paragraph-length explanation of the idea, why it matters, and the central reasons to consider it
- The base layer: the evidence, stories, counterarguments, and applications that support the idea. This can extend across talks, a book, a series of articles, or your entire body of work

Authors will usually have several versions of their bio ranging in length from 2 sentences to a page or more. That’s similar to what’s going on here with the “layer cake” structure. We can also think of how audio files are compressed:

1. The base layer is completely uncompressed, like a WAV file.
2. The middle layer preserves more of the substance and reasoning than the headline does, but a paragraph inevitably leaves things out. Unlike the lossless compression of a FLAC file, it can’t preserve every detail.
3. The headline uses lossy compression, which preserves enough vital information but at the cost of losing other less-vital information. MP3 files do this.

I’ve repeatedly used Jonathan Stark’s point of view as an example because 1) it’s well-constructed, 2) it’s vividly expressed, and 3) it impinges on the topic of money, which many of us can’t help having strong feelings about, which makes it easier to notice the patterns I’m describing here. I’ll write my summary of Jonathan’s POV using the layer cake framework. To be clear, these are Jonathan’s ideas (he’s a friend and I’ve followed his work for years, so I think I’m portraying his ideas faithfully) but my words.

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1. **Headline layer:** “Hourly billing is nuts.”
2. **Middle layer:** Hourly billing hurts both service provider and client because it disincentivizes speed and innovation. It hurts the service provider because it deprives them of a fair share of high-value outcomes. It hurts the client because they don’t know the true cost going in, so can’t make a good ROI decision. This is why hourly billing is crazy (nuts).

3. **Base layer:** To articulate this layer, there's a book<sup>3</sup>, a long-running podcast that Jonathan hosts<sup>4</sup>, many podcast guest appearances, Jonathan's email list<sup>5</sup>, and other stuff I'm not thinking of right now. In other words, there is an *ocean* of supporting argument — a body of work — at the base layer of Jonathan's POV.

...

You can see the “lossy compression” in that headline I wrote up for Jonathan's POV, right? There aren't enough words there to fully support the argument, or even to fully flesh out Jonathan's core claim about hourly billing. The headline has a different job: to earn enough *attention* to introduce the middle layer. Whether the headline ultimately functions as the title of a book, the title of a talk, or something else, it will always be both true and incomplete. There simply isn't enough real estate for it to be both true and complete, so instead it needs to be true and intriguing, or true and somewhat surprising, or true and repulsive (it's a form of service, actually, to repel those who have no chance of getting value from your POV).

In my attempt to translate the middle layer of Jonathan's POV into writing, I hope I've correctly identified and crisply described the essential elements of his argument. There's still “compression” happening here, but more of the reasoning is visible than in the headline. The person who perhaps has been feeling a dissatisfaction with hourly billing that they can't quite articulate will “feel seen” by this language, and may have an “ah ha!” moment. The person who was offended by the headline is being offered a thoughtful argument or a doorway by which the offense can become a debate. Both of these people now have an incentive to explore the base layer, which is the ocean of content that Jonathan freely shares to help his audience understand, embrace, and implement a transition away from hourly billing to something better.

For a speaker, the layer cake is useful preparation. Can you state the idea concisely? Can you explain why it matters and give listeners a reason to consider it? What material supports it when someone wants to go deeper?

A particular talk draws from the base layer; it doesn't need to contain everything you know. Choose the evidence, stories, counterarguments, and applications that help this audience understand and use the idea. Over time, your larger

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<sup>3</sup><https://jonathanstark.com/hbin>

<sup>4</sup><http://podcast.ditchinghourly.com>

<sup>5</sup><https://jonathanstark.com/vpb>

audience may encounter more of that supporting material across different talks and other work.

## 2) The Hub & Spoke Framework

In the hub & spoke framework, the hub is the POV and the spokes are *implications* of the POV. The implications of a POV are every significant variation of “X is true, *therefore Y*”.

I’m not sure I’d call the following Blair Enns’ *core* POV, but this is certainly *a* POV I’ve heard him express multiple times: “Sales is not persuasion, it’s helping a prospect understand if there’s a fit with your services.” (Again, not Blair’s words, but my attempt to accurately summarize his.) What are the implications of this POV — the *therefore Ys* of this X? An incomplete list:

1. Sales is fundamentally not about persuasion, therefore “being persuasive” might not be all that important to being effective at sales. What, then, creates effective salespeople?
2. Sales is about effectively understanding *fit*, therefore my own lack of clarity about who is a good or great-fit client might be harming my sales effectiveness.
3. My close rate with sales has been bad. How could I better fit the market’s needs in order to increase my close rate?

You can see that the implications might be downstream realizations that flow from the POV, second-order effects of embracing the POV, or they might be follow-on questions raised by the POV.

When preparing a talk, choose the implications that matter to the people in that room. Which ones connect to their concerns? Which need explanation before listeners can act on the idea? You don’t need to cover every spoke in one talk.

Across talks to different audiences, you might explore different spokes while keeping the hub recognizable. If you fully explored the significant implications of your POV and wrote 1,500-word essays on each implication (and maybe one to three such essays on the core POV), you would have material for a book. The same exploration can also supply a series of talks or a workshop.

### 3) The Principle & Specifics Framework

The “principle & specifics” framework differs from the hub & spoke in how you tease out the implications of your POV. In the hub & spoke framework, the implications are a list that you arrive at through something like an up-front design process, much like how you’d outline a book before writing it. In the principle & specifics framework, the events of your life supply you with examples, cases, hypotheticals, and situations upon which to apply the core principle(s) of your POV(s). That’s why I describe the principle & specifics framework as “event-driven”.

Especially if you are open to using analogy and teaching stories, living even a relatively ordinary life will supply you with all kinds of raw material that you can apply the principles of your POV to. Work, research, and conversations with audiences can supply it too. These give you repeated opportunities to make an idea accessible through concrete situations.

For a particular talk, choose situations that help those listeners recognize what the idea means and how they could apply it. Make the connection explicit: what does this story or case help them understand? An analogy can illuminate an idea, but it doesn’t by itself establish that the idea is true. Over time, new situations can also help you discover the limits of the principle and where it needs refinement.

This framework is less hierarchical or structured than the hub & spoke framework (due to substituting the events you encounter for an up-front outline). You can use it to develop examples for a talk or to keep exploring an idea across future talks, writing, or recordings.

The layer cake, hub & spoke, and principle & specifics frameworks are not the only 3 forms that your POV can assume; there are certainly others, or notable variations of these 3. Again, my purpose here is to help you see the little “magician tricks” that master articulators of their POV use. For example, you might subscribe to Jonathan Stark’s daily email list and think that he’s smart and prolific (he is!) and that raw talent is the only explanation for the quality of his email list. But there’s now a good chance that you’ll see something else in his email list: his POV articulated using the principle & specifics framework. If you can spot these frameworks at play in other points of view that you find impressive, there’s a good chance you’ll be one giant step closer to articulating your own impressive POV with mastery.

## Application

### APPLICATION

#### Repetition

Daily reminders

Infusion of POV throughout everything you do

#### Ubiquity

ex: Book launch

#### Intensity

A book

Keynote-level talk

#### Intimacy

Prospect interactions

Colleague interactions

Client interactions

Each of these forms can help you articulate a POV in a particular talk. But what about how you use them over time? Remember the two audience scales: the people listening to this talk and the larger audience you hope to reach and help through your work.

A POV can give people a useful way to understand something, while also helping them remember what you stand for (“Oh, the ‘hourly billing is nuts guy’? You mean Jonathan Stark?!?”). That can develop through one substantial encounter or through many encounters with the idea. The following approaches can complement one another, within a talk and across your work.

## 1) Repetition

Dripping water wears away the stone; little strokes fell great oaks. We all both understand and sometimes under-appreciate the power of repetition. Within a talk, you can return to the central idea after an example, connect a new implication

to it, and bring it back when inviting listeners to act. Each return should help them understand or use the idea, rather than merely hear the same words again.

Across engagements, you may deliver the same idea to successive audiences who are hearing it for the first time. For people who follow your work, repetition can instead mean encountering the idea through new examples, implications, and what you've learned since their last encounter. An email list combined with the principle & specifics framework is one way to do this; future talks, audio, and video offer others. You don't need a new POV for every engagement, but it's worth considering what each encounter adds for its audience.

## 2) Ubiquity

Another form of repetition is repetition across a lot of “surfaces”, otherwise known as ubiquity. A print ad can appear on billboards, bus stop benches, and a multitude of other surfaces. Likewise, people might encounter your POV through talks, interviews, articles, recordings, or an email list. Some of these are places where you publish your own work; others are invitations into someone else's audience.

Choose the places that suit your strengths and help you reach the people you want to serve. A particular talk may introduce the idea, and a recording or article may give interested listeners a way to explore it further. These are possibilities, not a requirement to maintain every channel.

We've all been on the receiving end of ubiquity. Unless you are completely (blissfully? :)) insulated from the American media ecosystem, you are certainly aware that circa spring 2022, a new “Top Gun” movie was released. That was at least a year-long campaign of ubiquity and buildup on a scale that we could never achieve. But when I self-published the first version of *The Positioning Manual*, appearing within 6 months on a half-dozen or so podcasts serving the ecosystem of freelancers was enough to attract over 1,000 new email list subscribers, which was a remarkable achievement for me at that time. That was ubiquity at our scale.

## 3) Intensity

Intensity gives people a sustained encounter with an idea, through a talk, workshop, or book. How many books have changed your thinking but you've never heard from the author again, or they're not active on social media or whatever? One encounter can have lasting impact.

For a speaker, intensity might mean taking listeners through the reasoning, addressing a difficult objection, or giving them time to work through an application. Duration alone doesn't create depth. What matters is whether the encounter helps people understand something they can carry beyond the room.

Books can be developed and tested<sup>6</sup> to learn whether they help readers, and a talk can also be refined through delivery and listener feedback. Neither guarantees lasting impact. For your larger audience, a substantial talk, workshop, or book can offer a place to go deeper than a brief introduction allows.

## 4) Intimacy

There are also opportunities to articulate a POV through more personal exchanges: a small-group discussion, Q&A, or a conversation after a talk. Nobody takes their clothes off, but I label this category of POV articulations *intimacy* because it generally involves some heightened level of trust or vulnerability. People can bring their own circumstances into the conversation and explore what the idea would mean for them.

Alcoholics Anonymous offers an example of how these forms can come together. My ex-wife was a recovering alcoholic, and the AA meetings I attended in support of her were usually 30 people or fewer. I saw reminders of the framework through the book and the repetitions of folk wisdom and formal literature. But I also heard people speak with unvarnished honesty about their setbacks and wins. Some stayed afterward to enjoy one another's company. To me, those personal exchanges helped connect the framework to people's lived circumstances.

For a speaker, a smaller conversation can reveal questions or obstacles that didn't surface during the talk. You may learn something that improves your next articulation of the idea. Across your larger audience, these conversations can help you understand the variety of circumstances in which people are trying to use it.

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<sup>6</sup><https://writeusefulbooks.com>

## Do You Need To Have Some Certain Specific Combination Of Form And Application?

Is there some “recipe” you’re going for here that requires, say, 40% hub and spoke, 60% principle & specifics? No. As you’ll see in the examples that follow, a lot of things *can* work.

Just as POV itself emerges from your living relationship with and care for your audience, the specifics of how you articulate it over time can develop through practice. For a particular engagement, consider the listeners, the time available, and what you want them to understand or do. A short talk might explore one implication through a concrete story. A workshop might give participants time to apply the principle to their circumstances and discuss what happens.

For your work over time, consider your strengths and where your larger audience is likely to encounter the idea. Maybe talks will be its main expression. Maybe you’ll develop a book from those talks, or use writing and recordings to explore things you can’t fit into them. A book or an ongoing publishing schedule is optional. Choose forms that you can use well and that help the people you want to serve.

Keep learning from those choices. Where do listeners need more explanation? Which examples help? What questions remain after a talk? The idea, your ability to communicate it, and the circumstances in which people encounter it all affect what it can do for them.

## Examples

Let’s look at some examples of POV articulation. This is a small convenience sample, not a rigorous cross-section of all POV articulations ever. It takes time to do so, but I trust if you’re really curious about POV you’ll take a close look at each of these via the links I’ve provided.

**Joe Morrison:** This medium-length article from Joe Morrison, who writes about the satellite imagery business, is an excellent example of articulating his POV. This piece explores implications, argues for the benefits that applying his POV would yield, addresses obvious and non-obvious counterarguments, and references specific examples and experiential data points. I see this piece as combining the hub and spoke framework and using intensity: <https://joemorrison.substack.com/p/open-all-of-the-satellite-imagery>

**David Maister:** A nice example of *intensity*, David Maister gave a talk called “The Problem Of Standards”, and the transcription is here: <https://davidmaister.com/articles/the-problem-of-standards/>. This talk has some of the looseness of the principle & specifics framework, but is a clear and powerful example of intensity.

**Jonathan Stark:** I’ve already mentioned Jonathan’s email list, but I want to also include it in this examples section to keep things well-organized: <https://jonathanstark.com/vpb>. Jonathan’s email list usually hews to the principle & specifics framework, but you’ll also notice his usage of repetition and, if you look outside his email into the market ecosystem that he serves, you’ll see ubiquity at play.

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I love it when I can find examples of developing work. This is why I so often recommend that anytime you are impressed or perhaps intimidated by what some “hero” of yours is doing *now*, take a trip to <https://archive.org/web/> and look at the history of how they got to where they are today. The Wayback Machine can’t show you the inner workings of their journey, but you’ll often find that the thing you are so impressed by now began its public presence as a humble, almost embarrassingly embryonic version of what it ultimately became. I find this simple form of research very empowering! The work I do, via my workshops and coaching, often puts me in the virtual room with folks who are sorting through the raw material they have for a POV and starting to use these frameworks. The following two examples are snapshots from when I first wrote this guide, showing points of view that were developing at that time.

**1) Alastair McDermott:** My headline for Alastair’s POV at the time might have been “Vertical specialization is the *real* specialization superpower for authority-building.” I pointed readers to his email list as a place to observe its development. His site: <https://therecognizedauthority.com/>

**2) Luca Ingiani:** “Agile is really about risk management”. I’m struck by how inert and unremarkable this POV might be to those *outside* the world of software development and how provocative and intriguing it is to exactly the audience Luca wanted to reach. You’ll see this with lots of great points of view. “True believers” will see the POV as self-evident and a bit boring, but *they aren’t the intended audience*. At the time, I expected Luca to build on podcasting and short-form video, combining repetition and ubiquity with the intimacy of his training work with groups of a dozen or so people. This illustrates how someone’s existing

strengths and audience interactions can suggest ways to articulate a POV. The podcast I linked to in that example: <https://agileembeddedpodcast.com/>

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**James Clear:** My quick attempt at a headline for James Clear’s POV: “To improve yourself, change your environment before you try anything else.” There are certainly other angles on his core POV, and while I’m using him as an example here, I’m not as well acquainted with his body of work as I’d like to be. What interests me here is the combination of his medium-length articles, which I see as using the principle & specifics form, and the sustained encounter offered by his book *Atomic Habits*. This illustrates how repeated explorations of an idea can be complemented by an intense articulation of it.

**Blair Enns:** Blair is a great example to end with because his POV articulation sequence is somewhat reversed. I’m sure Blair was articulating his POV into the world in various ways *before* he published his *Win Without Pitching Manifesto* book, but I think most folks will encounter his book first, and then after that intense encounter with Blair’s POV (expressed in the book using a hub and spoke form), they’ll sign up for his email list and get a follow-on articulation of the same POV using a principle & specifics approach with a bit of repetition in the mix. It would be a powerful combination no matter what the order of these two elements, but the typical order is a nice contrast to the James Clear example, and proof that there’s no one “recipe” or sequence by which you must articulate a POV.

## What’s The Difference Between POV And Thought Leadership?

Elsewhere, I’ve described thought leadership as a protracted campaign of arguing for the change articulated in your POV. So where does POV end and thought leadership begin?

A POV is the idea you advocate. Thought leadership is sustained work to develop, support, and spread that idea. For a speaker, that work might connect a series of talks with research, writing, and conversations that help an audience understand and use the idea over time.

An individual talk can articulate a POV without belonging to a larger campaign. When you keep developing the idea, learning from particular audiences, and

connecting those encounters into work that serves your larger audience, you're doing the sustained work described here as thought leadership.

That work can support a speaking business, workshops, or other paid offerings. It can also serve educational, community, or other purposes. A complementary business model may help sustain it, but monetization isn't what defines it.

# 5: Getting Started

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“Philip, this is all great, but give me a process, please. Or at least a starting point.”

Ask and you shall receive. I’ve run a workshop on POV for consultants several times, and the following “recipe” adapts what I’ve learned from helping those groups grapple with these ideas to the work of a speaker. Think of this as the “Getting Started Guide” that you find when you unbox a new tech product or piece of software.

## The Process

### 1) Model Others’ POV

One very reliable way for a teacher to get a smart but less-than-fully-confident student to feel awkward is to put them on the spot in front of the class. We recreate these unfavorable dynamics when we “put ourselves on the spot” with this POV-cultivating work. So instead of doing that – instead of diving headfirst into the question, “what is *my* POV?” – start with the question “how do *other people’s* points of view work?”

Use the POVSpace Map to map out points of view belonging to other people. You’re looking for POVs that you are already familiar with, but in case none immediately come to mind, here are some kinds of people who might have a POV that you are familiar with:

- Politicians or historical figures
- Authorities within your industry or discipline (for developers, Joel Spolsky comes to mind, for designers, Mike Monteiro, and for marketers, Seth Godin)
- Authors with very useful or well-known books within your industry or discipline

- Speakers whose talks have helped you understand something or see it differently

For a talk you know well, ask: what idea does the speaker want the audience to buy into? What argument supports it? How do the examples, emphasis, and invitation to act make it useful to those listeners? Then use POVSpace to examine the speaker's approach.

Here's a blank POVSpace map that you can print or annotate electronically: [philipmorgan.net/povspacemap/](http://philipmorgan.net/povspacemap/).

You can't do this mapping "wrong", and grappling with the slippery, somewhat ambiguous nature of it is incredibly productive, so give it some good deep-thinking time!

## 2) POV Ideation

Generating ideas that become a *good* POV can happen in a variety of ways, but we generally see three phases:

1. **Generate** a bunch of ideas of varying quality
2. **Filter** those ideas for the ones that work well as a POV
3. **Keep refining** the good ones into better, more arresting, and more impactful packaging

Now is the right time to start the ideation and filtering work. Use the [questions for surfacing raw material](#) in chapter 3. Draw on work, life, research, and conversations with audiences as you generate ideas. Then use the [empathy questions and other prompts](#) and the [POV filters](#) to examine them.

The output you're looking for is a shortlist of ideas you might want your audience to adopt for their benefit. They don't need to be polished yet.

## 3) POV Prioritization

Some points of view have pure shock value that makes them noticeable and memorable, but the most *valuable* points of view have relevance to your audience's immediate concerns or long-term progress. That's why the next step I'd propose in this process is to map out your audience's POV on the POVSpace map. Start with the larger group you hope to help through your speaking and other work. Then consider the audience of a particular talk, whether it's an upcoming engagement or one you'd like to give.

Use a separate blank POVSpace map for each audience, available at [philipmorgan.net/povspacemap/](http://philipmorgan.net/povspacemap/). These maps are approximations; note the differences within each group that matter to your idea, and where you need to learn more.

Ask the following questions at both audience scales. They will help you think about how your POV candidates relate to your audience's POV, and how those overlaps or tensions might point to the more useful or valuable POV candidates on your list.

1. If there is a *gap* between your POV candidates and your audience's POV:
  1. How might this gap *challenge* your audience in a productive way?
  2. Alternatively, how might this gap prevent your audience from finding your POV *relevant*?
2. If there is significant *overlap* between one or more of your POV candidates and your audience's POV:
  1. How might this overlap *inspire or motivate* your audience?
  2. If the idea is already familiar, what application, implication, or obstacle to adopting it could you help the audience explore?
3. More generally:
  1. If you see things *differently* than your audience, why is that and how can that difference benefit them?
  2. What similarities give you a useful starting point? What good reasons support the audience's existing approach, and what would they need to understand before considering a change?

These questions have 2 goals. The first is to help you explore the value of any overlaps or tensions that exist between your way of seeing and your audience's. The second is to help you prioritize which of your candidate POVs might be most relevant and useful to your audience.

Choose one promising idea for one particular audience. What could those listeners gain by adopting it? Keep its fit with your larger audience in mind, but give yourself a specific talk to work toward.

#### 4) POV Design And Packaging

A POV can be more like a maypole or mycelium: a prominent central feature of your speaking, or a more subtle thing that's diffused throughout your work. Either way, the "layer cake" form from chapter 4 can help you prepare to articulate it: a concise headline expression of the idea, a 1-paragraph elaboration, and the supporting material beneath them.

This form helps you sharpen and clarify the idea before choosing how to develop it in a talk. As you know from earlier in this book, the headline version of your POV will be true but incomplete, while the paragraph-length version will fill in some of the nuance and supporting argument that can't fit into the headline. A particular talk draws from the supporting material; it doesn't need to contain everything you know.

The next step in this process: get to packaging; take the candidate you chose and write the headline version and the 1-paragraph version. As you do so, remember:

- Headlines can be either incomplete or complete sentences
- A headline can be blunt, but it should be clear and accurate. Don't exaggerate the idea to make it sound more arresting.
- If you constrain the paragraph-version of your POV to 6 to 8 sentences, you may find that helps sharpen and focus your thinking on the most essential elements of your argument. Treat this as an optional aid, rather than a requirement.
- As you write the paragraph, think about why the central claim of your POV is true or useful. The job of the paragraph is to *support* that central claim. The paragraph does not need, nor will it often be able to, definitively *prove* your POV's claim.

Then select supporting material for the talk:

- What example will help these listeners understand the idea?
- What evidence gives them a reason to consider it?
- What objection needs an answer?
- What could they do with the idea afterward?

## 5) The Fear Inventory

Right about now is usually the right time to make a written inventory of every fear – baseless or not, large or small – that you're feeling about articulating your POV into the world. No other human ever need see this fear inventory, but that doesn't mean it's low-value or something you should skip. Writing the fears down can help you examine them and decide what to do next; it doesn't have to make them disappear to be useful.

Some fears may be about being visible, being disagreed with, or saying something imperfectly. Others may point to preparation you still need: an unsupported claim, an unanswered objection, or uncertainty about whether the idea fits this

audience. Which concerns call for more work on the idea or the talk? Which discomforts might you carry with you as you try it?

## 6) From Strength To Strength

I hope at this point you have a promising idea, a particular audience in mind, and material you can use to explain and support it. Try a short spoken version with a few people who resemble that audience. Give them the idea, a reason to consider it, and an example or application that connects it to their circumstances.

Ask those listeners:

- What idea did you take away?
- What felt useful?
- Where were you unconvinced or confused?
- What would make this easier to apply?

Use their answers to revise the idea, the supporting material, or how you connect it to the audience. If the idea is still tentative, this trial can help you decide whether to keep developing it. Choose your next opportunity to try the revised version.

Then consider how this particular talk connects to your larger audience and the work you want to develop over time:

- How might you build on areas of strength (or potential strength) in your POV?
  - Is the idea clear and accurate? Could more direct wording make the useful challenge easier to understand?
  - Are you using your audience's terminology and idiom? If not, would your POV resonate more if you did?
- How might your talks, workshops, writing, or recordings become more *coherent* with your POV?
- If you designed a talk around helping listeners understand and adopt the idea, what would you change about its examples, emphasis, or invitation to act?
- Another thought experiment: if you kept exploring this POV for the next 3 years, how could it serve both new listeners and people who encounter your work repeatedly? What new examples, implications, or questions could you develop?
- What ways of articulating your POV would be clearest and most helpful for the people you want to reach?

- Does an approach closer to Tony Robbins, Fred Rogers, or somebody else suit you and this audience? What style can you use well?
- How could persistence, authenticity, and empathy help you articulate the idea in a way that feels natural to you and useful to listeners?
- How might future talks or workshops explore the idea more deeply? Where could it challenge listeners in a productive way, and what support would help them respond?

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I hope this process leaves you with an idea, an audience, a concise articulation, supporting material, and a next opportunity to try it. Keep learning from those encounters as you develop a clear, distinctive, impactful point of view. I hope that point of view creates value that both you and your audience share.

## 6: Conclusion

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I believe that part of what makes things happen is knowing they *can* happen; knowing they're possible. So, if I want to live in a world where more of you have powerful, empathetic, and distinctive POVs and reap the benefits of those POVs, then one way I can nudge things in that direction is helping more people see that kind of POV as possible, and the precursor to *that* is knowing how a POV functions. Thus, this guide.

Again, I am convinced that the best POVs emerge from the concentrated experience that flows from focus *and* an empathetic but somewhat frustrated, impatient concern for your market's progress and improvement.

So if you feel some POV raw material rolling around inside you but don't yet have one defined, let me close by saying I hope this guide has been helpful, and by encouraging you to stick with it! The struggle is worth it, even if it takes some time to resolve into one of those crisp, impactful POVs we all admire.

Sincerely,

Philip Morgan <https://philipmorgan.net>

# POV Exploration Prompts

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For each prompt (1 per day max), set a timer for 20 minutes and aim to write 200 words (this is a target, not a ceiling or floor). Then publish what you've finished to social media, an email list, etc.

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## A Few Terms

**Buy-in:** Accepting an idea as true or useful enough to make it part of how you think. In this guide, that means adopting a POV because you believe it could make things better for you. Buy-in can precede action; agreeing with an idea doesn't mean you've started using it.

**Implementation:** Putting an idea into practice. If buy-in is "I believe this could help," implementation is "I'm changing what I do because of it." That might mean trying a new behavior, changing a decision, or using the idea to guide your work.

**Dissonance:** The tension you feel when ideas, experiences, or actions don't fit together. You might buy into a POV and then notice that your habits run counter to it, or encounter an experience that challenges an idea you believed. That tension can give you something to examine: should the idea change, should your actions change, or is there more to understand?

## The List Of Prompts

1. List every possible argument *against* your POV. Anything is fair game, even if the evidence for an argument-against is weak, or purely emotional in nature. (Ideally, create a bullet list of these arguments-against, and describe each one with a phrase or 1 to 2 short sentences. You will more

fully explore this list in later writing prompts, so there's no need to fully explore each argument-against today.)

2. What is the *strongest* argument against your POV?
3. That "strongest argument against your POV"... Why is it the strongest one?
4. If you wanted someone to buy into *your* POV despite good arguments against it, how would you invite their buy-in? You can list a bunch of "brainstorming" ideas or develop what you think is the single best idea for inviting their buy-in.
5. What is the strongest argument *for* your POV?
6. That "strongest argument *for* your POV"... *why* is it the strongest one?
7. (Some people are ready to buy into your POV now. Others, despite the strength of your argument, need some things to happen first.) What makes people "not ready yet" to buy into your POV?
8. (Some people are ready to buy into your POV now. Others, despite the strength of your argument, need some things to happen first.) What things need to happen before someone is ready to buy into your POV? (These could be events, stages of maturity, failures of other approaches, or the like.)
9. Does remaining bought in to your POV happen naturally, or is it like maintaining adherence to a difficult diet? If it's like the latter, what could cause someone to "fall off the wagon" with respect to your POV?
10. How much *change* is required for the average member of your audience to buy into your POV? How would you measure this change in terms of magnitude, intensity, or another way of measuring?
11. Are those who buy into your POV inclined to "sell" it to others? Why or why not?
12. In nakedly scientific or economic terms, what do people or organizations *get* when they buy into your POV? Status? Profit of some kind? Power? Something else?
13. Think of the words you use to communicate your POV. What one word is the most likely to get potential adopters "hung up"? Or confused about your meaning? Or hesitant for some other reason?
14. Is your POV part of a lineage or "family tree" of ideas? (It almost certainly is.) What are its relatives?
15. Again, is your POV part of a lineage or "family tree" of ideas? Are there new or long-running "family feuds" between your POV and its close or distant relatives?
16. Again, is your POV part of a lineage or "family tree" of ideas? At the yearly family reunion, which "POV family members" does it enjoy connecting with? Which ones does it try to sit close to at the dinner table? Why?

17. After a person or organization buys into your POV, they will start taking different (changed) action. Where will this change first show up for them?
18. Post buy-in, post changed action, adopters of your POV may reach a moment of heightened difficulty. Their new actions may be criticized or create new downstream problems. Write about this moment of heightened difficulty, and do so from your POV adopter's perspective if you can.
19. Think back to your nakedly scientific or economic description of what people/orgs *get* from buying into your POV. Is what they gain evergreen, or time-bound? If the latter, when will they see a plateau? What does the plateau look like? If the former, what makes your POV "the gift that keeps on giving"?
20. Does buying into your POV create cognitive or other forms of dissonance?
21. Does implementing your POV create dissonance?
22. There are things that at first seem unrelated to your POV, but will be affected when people adopt your POV. Think of these like parts of a lake touched by the ripples that emanate from a stone dropped into the lake. What are these things?
23. Your POV is probably not a great fit for everybody. Who should *not* buy into your POV? Why?
24. If someone became excited by your POV, bought into it, and began implementing it on their own, where might they screw up the implementation?
25. Think back over the last week of your life. There is at least one thing that's happened to you – or that you've done – that serves as a good example or metaphor you could use while discussing your POV. What's the story that comes out of this event from the last week?