

UNBORIFY YOUR BUSINESS TALK!

Engage your audience by using one of these
Seven Awesome Openings

Take your audience from this...



To this!



When a business leader takes that coveted place on the stage, in front of the room, or at the lectern. . . Wait! Hold up. Before I finish that thought, I'd like to suggest you kick that lectern to the side. A big bulky wooden stand creates a barrier between you and the audience. Instead, walk right out and right up to your audience and smile. Don't crowd them but make eye contact and let them know you are there for them. You will be rewarded with smiles in return.

Now pause. That's right, just stand there silently and count to ten, okay, 8, okay, 5, if that's all you can handle. Now watch as more people begin to look up and wonder "What the heck is wrong with this lady?"

Great! Now you're ready to speak.

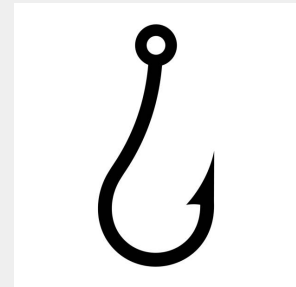
So, back to our first sentence, when a business leader takes that coveted spot as the expert in the room, the first thing you must do is break through the cell phones, the *what do I make for dinner*, the *why did I come to this event in the first place when I have so much work to do*, and any other distractions and grab your listeners attention, and don't let go! So, after the pause. . .

You've got to wake them up!

I learned this lesson during my 17 years as a weekly newspaper columnist. I knew that I was fighting for the attention of every reader and that my first sentence was critical. If it made them curious, if it was shocking, made them mad, or made them laugh out loud, my job was half-way done. I knew they would keep reading if I could continue to keep it interesting.

In the writing world, we called the opening first sentence or two, the “Hook”

But you can also hook your audience. And once you do, hold onto that line, and don’t let go, until you walk off the platform. Your audience will thank you for it!



Here are 7 Hooks to lure your audience into paying attention, the critical first step to impactful speaking:

So, let’s start with a topic for our hooks. How about pizza? It’s almost lunch time here and I’m getting hungry. I’m also from Chicago, the place where pizza was perfected. If you are from New York, you may not agree, but you are wrong.

1. Use Your Audience’s Imagination

It’s all about the brain, my fellow business buds, so let’s get the brains doing what they do best - imagine and create. Once you get your audience to start imagining, neurons and connections in their brains will begin to light up! Let’s say you started your talk this way:

“Imagine for a moment, a world without pizza.”

Boom, our brains are off to the races!

So, let me pause here, for those of you who may be thinking, I usually start by thanking the meeting planner or host, then I go into my talk.

I'd like to propose to you that you never do that again. The thank you has a place near the end of your talk. Of course, not right at the end. That spot is for your drop the mic moment. But right before that moment you can express your gratitude and make an offer if that is part of your plan. Try it, you'll like it, and more importantly, your audience will love it.

When you start with Imagine a world without pizza, you set thinking, imagining, and wondering in motion.



Some brains are yelling, No! That would be terrible! Others are picturing their favorite pizza right in front of them. Half of them will probably order pizza for dinner that night. There is only one person I have ever met in all my years on this planet who hated pizza. That was my father, and yet every Friday in my childhood was pizza night. Because that's how much my dad loved us. Thanks Dad!

Stories from their past, most likely ones with a strong emotion such as love, are popping up in brains all across your audience.



Start your talk with any of these phrases and you will happily hook your audience and begin rev up their imaginations:

Imagine . . .

Imagine if . . .

What if . . .

Fish On! The hook worked.

(Note the Dominos logo in the corner of the pic. Just for the record this is not really pizza)

2. Open With a Story

So here is an example:

Whenever I have the opportunity to put my little granddaughter to bed, right after I tuck her in with owl and giraffe and Purrs the cat and turn out the light and right before I close the door, I say, “Good night, I love you more than pizza!” Then I see the shadow of her sweet little head pop up from the pillow and she says, “I love you more than peanut butter and jelly!” And I say, I love you more than mac-n-cheese, and she says, “I love you more than broccoli!” We exchange *I love you mores* at least three more times before I gently close the door. And it always starts with pizza.

So, as I shared my story with you, I bet you were picturing this story in your mind. You may have had image of my granddaughter popping up from the bed playing on your movie screen. You may have watched me gently close the door or turn off the light. You may have been picturing your own grandchildren, and a special game you have with them. Or maybe you imagined putting your own daughter to bed just as I was tucking my granddaughter in. And you may have felt the emotion of love, and that hooked you in, just as the story did.



And scientifically, as I shared my story, your brain was lighting up in the same areas that were lighting up in my brain. It's as if you had experienced the event right along with me. And most likely, this will be the most memorable part of this PDF you will take away with you.

In his book *Brain Rules*, molecular biologist John Medina explains this phenomenon. "When the brain detects an emotionally charged event, the amygdala releases dopamine into the system. Because dopamine greatly aids memory and information processing, you could say it creates a post-it note that reads, 'Remember this.'"

Neuroscience professor, Paul Zak, discovered that there are two key aspects to an effective story. First, it must capture and hold our attention. The second thing an effective story must do is "transport" us into the characters' world.

3. Make a Shock and Awe Statement

Did you know Americans eat about one hundred acres of pizza a day, which is about 350 slices per second?!

Now thatsa lotsa pizza!

If you start with a shocking statement about your topic, a startling statistic, a fact, or data that goes against the status quo, you will see heads pop up, just like my granddaughter's did.

The first step is to know your audience well enough to know what will shock them into paying attention. It's the old brain connection. Way back in our history, when we were cave people sitting around the campfire, stories were the way to alert our cave buddies of danger

ahead. “Hey bud, watch out for a big hairy guy with spikes coming out of his head. He uses those spikes to kill you dead!” Our brain is wired to be alert for danger, and a shocking statement is registered in the limbic part of our brain. It sends out a SOS signal to STOP AND PAY ATTENTION! Since this is exactly what you need them to do, it works masterfully.

Be sure and check your data and facts for accuracy, and in many cases citing the scientist, university, or study is a great idea to lure in the data-driven techies in your audience. They may want to read more on the topic or check your facts. Google is my friend for data-driven information. And I also search google for Scholarly Articles when I want to dive deeper into a subject. As an avid reader, I also quote authors, scientists, and studies I have read about. And another fantastic way is to gather your own “proof of theory” is to conduct your own study or test. If you poll one hundred or more subjects, it makes a nice case study. Of course, if you’re a researcher, you would use a stricter method, which you know more about than idea. Again, consider the audience and how savvy they are on your topic. The savvier, the audience the more research you must do.

4. Set an Expectation

“By the end of this talk, you will understand why a slice of pizza could save your business and quite possibly, your life.”

Now that’s a pretty high expectation! And if a speaker were to say that to me, I’d cross my arms and say, “Okay, go ahead. I dare ya!”

And that’s a great position for you as the speaker to be in. Of course, now you have to deliver, 100%. In this article, I just proposed the

expectation. I don't really have an answer. But if someone challenged me, I could possibly come up with a case for how it might save your business.

Last night, I ordered pizza for my book club. Since I live in Wisconsin now, great Chicago-like pizza is hard to find. But I found it, and I knew my book club would be impressed. And they were! The sausage and green pepper pie and the pepperoni were gobbled up in no time. Through their oohing and ahing they asked, and with everyone wanting to know where the pizza came from. From that point on, the book club was a huge hit and everyone was in a good mood after such a delicious feast. Now imagine if this was your client. The right slice of pizza, served at just the right time, could put your client in such a state of ecstasy that he or she might just close the deal!

For those of you who live in the Waukesha area, this is the pièce de resistance!



So, set a high expectation and watch your audience sit up straighter, and quite possibly fold their arms across their chests. They are daring you to deliver. If you do, you'll have them eating out of your hands.

5. Use a Quote

Comedian Kevin James said,

"There's no better feeling in the world than a warm pizza box on your lap."



Now, this quote has a lot going for it! First of all, in one short phrase it stirs up emotion, engages the senses and tells a story we can all relate to. And even if your audience doesn't know of the comedian, Kevin James, they will still be curious about his quote. Probably everyone in your audience has had the experience of sitting in the car with a warm pizza on their laps. This memory will instantly come to mind, and your audience will be riveted.



In addition to all of the above, this quote has something even more important to a great opening – humor! It's a perfectly set up joke, and you didn't even have to create it yourself. All you have to do is find an interesting quote about your topic. If it engages the senses, tells a story, evokes and emotion, and is funny, it's a homerun.

This is also a fitting example of how to set up a simple joke for your audience. This uses the element of surprise to evoke laughter. The first sentence leads you in one direction. You immediately start thinking of one of the best feelings in the world. You may have thought about a puppy, a baby, a first love, or a cherished family member. And you're waiting to hear what Kevin James will say, but you are quite sure it will go in that direction. And then, he pulls the rug out from under you and takes you in a completely different direction, and it creates instant laughter, because it didn't match with what you expected.

This leads nicely into our next awesome opening.

6. Tell a Joke

Now be careful, kids! – as my granddaughter would say. Unless you're quoting an actual tried-and-true joke, this can be tricky for many beginning and even veteran speakers. I will be offering a class on this topic in 2022, but I will share some of my tips here, to get you started.

The best news is that you don't have to be funny. In fact, humor is about truth and pain, not jokes. That is why we laugh at a man who slips on a banana. What does that mean in terms of your business talk?

It means you must know your own truth and pain and also know what kind of painful challenges your audience is going through right now.

During covid virtual talks, I would often share with my audience that there is one plus to all this pandemic stuff, we can dress for success just on the top! Or am I the only one in pajama pants right now? I mean, right now, yes, I have on my comfy pajama pants right now. It's the best, especially after devouring an entire Sal's pizza.

And keep in mind that you're not looking for a huge laugh here. Just a smile, or a nod of understanding and yes, even a groan works great here!

So, why was the pizzeria desperate for business?

Because they kneaded the dough!

Pa dump pum.



Okay, it's a groaner, but if you know it's a groaner and your audience groans and you smile in agreement, they will laugh, especially if you laugh with them. They will know you don't take yourself so seriously and they will be listening for the next fun thing you do.

Here are some benefits to starting with a joke.

- *Laughing increases positive emotions

- *Laughing is contagious, and it increases the positive emotions of others around you

- *Laughing exercises the respiratory muscles which helps to lower blood pressure, and it fosters likability and closer relationships. All of that just from a couple of ha-ha's!

- *Humor helps you retain and remember information.

The ability to respond with humor in the face of stress and adversity is an effective coping skill. This allows your audience to shift perspective and reappraise a problem situation. And since it requires both sides of the brain to understand a joke, we once again open up the door to creativity and intuition. According to Rod Martin, one of the leading humor researchers, ***the positive emotion that comes from laughter replaces other negative emotions of anxiety, depression, or anger.***

Now, who doesn't want all that to be happening for your audience? When a bit of humor is sprinkled sparingly, and tactfully throughout your talk, you will get referrals, and be asked to speak repeatedly.

7. Ask a Rhetorical Question

Did you know that people were eating pizza as early as 997 AD?

No, I didn't know that!



The word pizza was first documented in 997 AD in Gaeta, and successively in various parts of Central and Southern Italy. Pizza was mainly eaten in Italy and by emigrants from there. This changed after World War II when Allied troops stationed in Italy came to enjoy pizza along with other Italian foods.

The rhetorical question is a simple opening technique that works well because we are designed as humans to answer a question if we are asked one. If your question also creates surprise, you will immediately engage the listener.

I'd like to share a word of caution here. The Rhetorical question is often an overused opening technique. If you are in a group and every speaker uses this format, you want to avoid it like the plague. And just know, if you do use it, that someone in your audience may answer your question, which could throw you off, unless you learn to anticipate it and play with your audience. Then it can be fun and become part of your repertoire.

Now that you have seven awesome openings, how do you try them out? You don't want to practice on your audience right out the gate. You can ask a colleague, or try it out at a networking event, or ask your spouse. (I highly recommend you don't ask your spouse.)

Here are some ways you can work with me!

- a. You can join my Business Speaker Academy which I founded for precisely this reason. It's the place where business professionals practice the art of speaking to grow their business. The membership is free to all of my newsletter subscribers. Click here to learn more.
- b. You can also contact me to set up a complimentary call. I help you write, present, and practice your business talk so you stand out on the stage and make an impact on the platform.
- c. You can bring me into your place of business, so I can help your team with their presentations. This is a customized program designed in collaboration. Please set up a call to discuss.