

3 Minutes + 4 Diagrams = \$6M

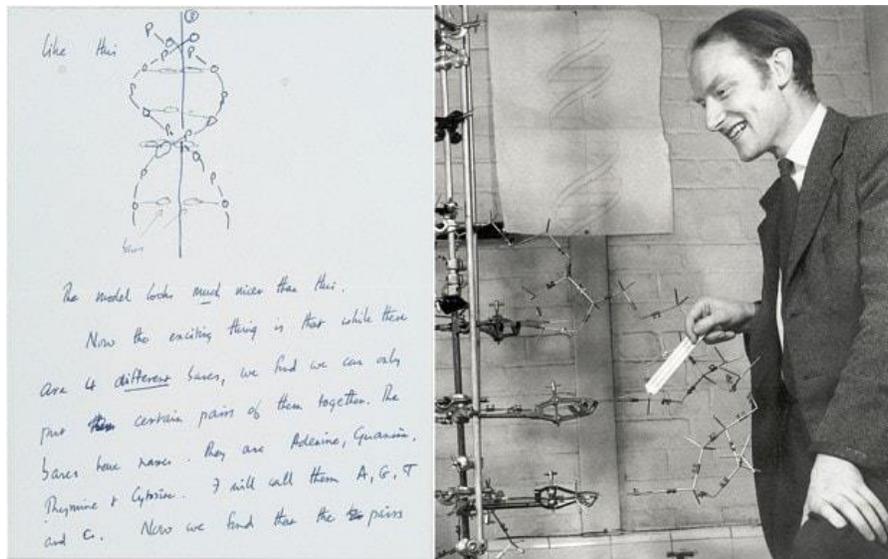


Photo of Francis Crick and the prized letter to his son by Anthony Barrington Brown/BNPS

As a professional speaker / business educator, I follow the “practice what you preach” philosophy when it comes to continuing education and training. In other words, since I earn my living training businessmen and women how to outcompete in the marketplace, I must continuously be educating myself. How else to stay ahead of my competitors?

One of the areas I focus on for my own continuing education is presentation skills – not only because I make a living with my presentations but also because I teach others how to do the same. And I have a lot of competition. A simple web search of training courses on presentation skills resulted in thousands of distinct hits. Here’s a sample that share what I view as a particularly morbid theme in their titles:

- “5 Tips for Delivering a Killer Presentation”
- “Top 10 Steps for Creating & Delivering Killer Presentations”
- “18 Tips for Killer Presentations” [... ‘cause 5 or 10 just weren’t enough, apparently]
- “Killer Advice for Giving Killer Presentations” [overkill if you ask me, pun intended]

So who are we trying to kill anyway?

One of the first things my partner and I did was to chart a different path for naming our course – “Engineering the Presentation.”

Why?

To Engineer (v): “To skillfully or artfully arrange for a situation to occur.”

That struck a chord with us for two reasons. First, our client demographic is typically a high-tech company where engineers or other technically-trained individuals have a difficult time crafting

compelling presentations. Second, appealing to the listeners of your presentation requires that the structure, organization and talking points be skillfully and artfully crafted.

With that in mind, I want to cite a useful bit of learning I uncovered in “Pitch Anything” by Oren Klaff, a professional pitchman that raises venture capital for great ideas (and perhaps even for merely just good ideas that he pitches greatly). You should read his book. Lots of gems.

One in particular relates the story of how James Watson and Francis Crick “pitched” their Nobel Prize winning idea about the double-helix structure of the DNA molecule in less than five minutes. I couldn’t really believe that claim until I saw an article about James Watson auctioning off his Nobel gold medal in order to support his philanthropic efforts (a noble cause of its own) and I looked a little closer.

In that article was a link to Crick’s original letter to his son written a few days before submitting their paper to a scientific journal. The March, 1953 letter was handwritten, seven pages long and had four hand-drawn diagrams (does anyone handwrite seven page letters anymore?). I read the letter aloud and timed myself – three minutes.

Think about that for a moment. A then 37-year old father writing to his 12-year-old son about what can be argued is one of, or perhaps, ***the most important scientific discovery of all time***. The letter is written in a way that the average lay person (myself included) can mostly understand the concept and comprehend the significance.

According to multiple sources, that letter sold at auction in 2013 for \$6M. The most expensive letter ever, nearly double an original letter by Abraham Lincoln.

Three minutes. Four diagrams. One Nobel Prize. Six million dollars.

Now that’s “Engineering the Presentation” (see www.xtramile.biz for more details on the course).

Please share some of your great presentation moments – something you have observed or have engineered yourself.