

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

A lot of people think that the only time you really need to present well is when you have a big stage talk and you make the big investment in the script, the big investment in the contrast and story. I'll tell you a dirty little secret. I can get my husband to do chores for me on the weekends with a real quick what is, what could be new bliss. So the ability to just have that contrast as a framework in your brain during a meeting on a phone call, any moment of influence, like literally it works. It works in any format.

Welcome to Lenny's podcast where I interview world-class product leaders and growth experts to learn from their hard-won experiences building and growing today's most successful products. Today my guest is Nancy Duarte. Nancy is the type of guest that I never imagined being able to get on this podcast but I'm so happy that it happened. Nancy is a best-selling author, speaker and CEO of Duarte Incorporated which has helped create over 250,000 presentations for the world's most influential business leaders, brands and institutions including Apple, Ted, Google, the World Bank and famously Al Gore on his inconvenient truth presentation. In our conversation Nancy shares a ton of tactical advice for how to improve your own presentations, how to tell better stories, how to lay out convincing arguments, how to reduce your nerves when you present and even a simple communication framework to improve your relationship

dynamics. I had such a good time chatting with Nancy and I'm sure you will love this episode. With that I bring you Nancy Duarte after a short word from our sponsors.

This episode is brought to you by Microsoft Clarity, a free, easy to use tool that captures how real people are actually using your site. You can watch live session replays to discover where users are breezing through your flow and where they struggle. You can view instant heat maps to see what parts of your page users are engaging with and what content they're ignoring. You can also pinpoint what's bothering your users with really cool frustration metrics like rage clicks and dead clicks and much more. If you listen to this podcast you know how often we talk about the importance of knowing your users and by seeing how users truly experience your product. You can identify product opportunities, conversion wins and find big gaps between how you

imagine people using your product and how they actually use it. Microsoft Clarity makes it all possible with a simple yet incredibly powerful set of features. You'll be blown away by how easy Clarity is to use and it's completely free forever. You will never run into traffic limits or be forced to upgrade to a paid version. It also works across both apps and websites. Stop guessing, get Clarity. Check out Clarity at clarity.microsoft.com.

Are you hiring or on the flip side are you looking for a new opportunity? Well either way check out [lennysjobs.com slash talent](https://lennysjobs.com/slash/talent). If you're a hiring manager you can sign up and get access to hundreds of hand-created people who are open to new opportunities. Thousands of people apply to join this collective and I personally review and accept just about 10 percent of them.

You won't find a better place to hire product managers and growth leaders. Join almost 100 other companies who are actively hiring through this collective. And if you're looking around for a new opportunity actively or passively join the collective. It's free, you can be anonymous and you can even hide yourself from specific companies. You can also leave anytime and you'll only hear from companies that you want to hear from. Check out [lennysjobs.com slash talent](https://lennysjobs.com/slash/talent).

Nancy, welcome to the podcast. Thank you for having me, Lennie. How many presentations

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

have you helped craft at this point both directly and indirectly?

That's a great question. I people know I'll like take a swag at data and pretend it's real. So I had a president who took us a whack at that number in, it was 2014 and he said at that time it was 225,000 and that was like almost 10 years ago. So I don't even, I can't even, I can't even tell you. I mean, it's, we stopped tracking so, but it's a lot. I mean, in 35 years, we have thousands of projects we open and each sometimes has two to a hundred presentations in it. So it'd be hard to tell. 200,000? He said 250,000, but that was, that was 10 years ago and I didn't do the math. So when my team questioned it, I'm like, oh, Dan did the math. They're like, oh, then it's accurate. Because they thought I was just making up this number. I'm like, no, no, we actually went in and looked. Okay. I was not expecting it to be that large. That's insane. It's so funny because I have the whole history of the Silicon Valley in a way, right? It's like every little startup and then they grew to massive brands like Cisco and you could actually look at the rise and fall of all these companies and then I actually have all the decks. I still have a lot of these archives. So it's, it's, I could actually verify that number exactly. Okay. Well, this next question's going to be extra heart then of all the presentations you've worked on, which one stands out to you as

the most memorable or most impactful? I mean, it has to be Al Gore's inconvenient truth, right? Then it kind of hit the world in a season where nobody really knew or had an example of a really well done presentation. So it came out before TED Talks were even out on the web. And so people had never seen someone tell a data story and stand in front of data and the scale and 90 foot screen. But we had worked with him for five years before inconvenient truth. Like people think he went from, you know, vice president to this presenter. And I didn't work with him. I let my team work with him. So they were the ones jetting around, jumping backstage at Oprah. Like they, they loved it. Like it was a real peak season. But the thing actually that was most memorable is, you know, we work with these, you know, 20 some year old CEOs here in the valley and, and they tend to show up

and act like they know better, you know, than someone who's been doing this for so, so long. And what was so interesting about this large figure politician, you know, communicator is we, the team would sit in a room and say, Hey, we think you need to do this this way. We think you need to convey it this way. We think it should be visualized this way or whatever it was we were proposing. And he would literally pause and like touches chin and really think and really consider that we might actually be experts. And more times than not, he would adopt the way we said it should be done. And so I think as like the, the customer who actually probably had some of the most power in the whole world to thoughtfully defer to us as experts was delightful customer and, you know, consulting experience. I mean, I remember when they called me to say it was going to become a movie and that it had gotten funded and I started to get the information they wanted us to do a lot of work to get it movie ready. And I'll never forget. I said, wow, that's going to be a lot of work we'd have to do for free. And who's going to go see a movie about a slideshow anyway? That's literally what I said. And so yeah, I just didn't believe it would become what it became. So the whole process was amazing. Did you expect the impact of what happened after that presentation? Or is that was just like, Oh, we got this one job we got to do. Let's just get through it and then move on. Well, we've been doing it for five years. I think the strategy, whether it was intentional or not, or not, I don't know. So he would go city to city to city to

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

he was traveling for five years seeding like planting seeds for a groundswell. And he went into the, you know, he would go to the Stanford campus, invite, you know, the Bay Area elite, and it was always private and it was always VIP. And so he did a really good job for five years traveling, traveling, traveling, traveling and, and really, really delivering that talk. And I think that created a desire. I don't know that it would have gotten that much traction. I don't know if he hadn't, if people already didn't know about the presentation and hadn't already seen the presentation. And they brought their friends to the movie is how I kind of picture at least that part happening. And he was generous, Lenny. I mean, at the end, when he traveled around for those five years at the end, he always had a slide with our name on it and would thank us if you're in the audience. I mean, super, I mean, and paid, you know, mostly paid for what we did, that we did, you know, give a lot of our own time. But yeah, super generous. And, and yeah, movie became what it was. It was a bit of a surprise. It was good. The movie was good. So it was good. It also makes me think about a pattern that I often see of, it wasn't just like one presentation that changed everything. It was, you said five years of kind of prep ahead of that. And it's, you always see these like, wow, overnight success stories. And you always find, okay, it wasn't actually that. Yeah. And he did a good job after he once it got traction, we built like a whole training program where he could fly people out to his place in Tennessee and start to train people. So it almost became like a train the trainer and he could sanction you as a ambassador for it. So this is the way the whole thing kind of unfolded and scaled and then got traction was lovely. Speaking of impressive clients, I only learned this recently, but Apple has been a client of yours since the day you were founded as an organization. Is that right? Yeah. Yeah. Okay. How did you land that initially? And then also just what have you learned from that experience that's informed your approach to presentation design, communication and how you work with clients? I love that question. So yeah, I had like a real job. I was working my real job and my husband had bought a Mac and he's like, I think this is a business. I think it could be a real business. And he was an illustrator, wasn't a designer, but he had been a fine artist. And he's like, look, I can draw. Of course, it's all pixelated and like bit mappy because look, I could draw lines in here. And he's like, if I could show you his art studio, his work is just gorgeous. So he's definitely a fine artist. And he's like, I think this is a business. I think this could be a business. And I'm very pregnant. We were talking about that earlier. I am very pregnant with my son. And I'm like, dude, you're going to go get yourself a real job. You know, I don't want you playing around with this little Mac thing. He begged me like twice in our marriage. He like literally has gotten on his knees and to try to get me to see his perspective, begged me. He's like, just read a Macworld magazine, just read it through once. And if you still don't think this could become a thing because I was working on a mainframe, I'm like, I work on a real computer. So what happened was I made some phone calls. I called NASA and I called

Tandem, which is now HP, and I called Apple. And we won contracts at all three brands at the same time. And back then, our company was called Duarte Desktop Publishing and Graphic Design.

Oh, wow.

I know. I know, right? And we slipped in. Like when you talk about a product life cycle, very early, like everything was still bit mappy, was not attractive. You know, most people as users didn't know how to typeset, didn't know how to do columns, didn't know how

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

to make in this tool at all. And there's about an 18 month window in the life cycle of the Mac and Tosh where graphic designers refused to use it, refused. It's a toy. It's ugly. It's bit mapped. Nobody would do a font like that. We use Lino type. Like it was very the snobby kind of, we won't touch it. And that's right when we entered, like right then, went and checked out books at the library on typesetting. We tried to figure out what we could do. How, you know, what could we do with this tool? And then the rest was kind of history. And so that's how it started and the timing and just kind of pushing the tool that nobody was that interested in, that we're in the design community. It was small adoption.

So that's interesting that it was like cold emails basically or cold reach out just like, hey, we want to work with you. That's an awesome example.

Cold calling. Yeah.

What did you take away from that experience that kind of informed what works and doesn't work in presentations? Presentations used to be 35 millimeter slides in an old carousel. In fact, that's what Al Gore had when he showed us like, here's my slide carousel from the 70s. Like it was just how it was done. But Apple was the first company to hook up the computer to a projector at scale. Now the projectors at these big venues like San Jose Convention Center, I mean, it was huge and it was risky. So because we were kind of, we were first in, they pushed us to start to do the presentations in this tool and it was black and white. Like everything was black and white when we first started. And then we started to push and push and push from how we illustrated things in the tool, how we would colorize clip art. I mean, I'm talking like clip art packages just came out and like, hey, grab these colorize them. And so it was a really momentous moment to win them as an account. And I remember the tool had started really take off and it was ugly. You can call it fugly. I don't know what you want to call it, but everyone who made slides did it so poorly, just so poorly. And we were kind of pushing the boundaries of it to make it look attractive. And there was a sales conference in 1992 in San Francisco and the leader of sales at the time was kind of a creative savant of sorts and sorts. And I remember he's like, I don't know how you're going to do it. But I want you to take the whole slide. Like this is when slides were basically teleprompted, covered in text. If you could stick a piece of clip art on it, you were lucky. And he said, I want, I want you to just make the whole slide. It's just covered with the word big in hot pink. And I want the background black because when this slide pops up in all pink big, I want it to actually light the faces of the people in the audience. And it was like, I didn't know how to like, we couldn't do that. We had to go into freehand, convert it to this, do this, do these six steps. And then we came up with a small JPEG at the time or paying or something and we scaled it up. So it was still kind of pixelated. And I remember I was in that hall during the rehearsal and the production team gasped a couple people's squeal. They're like, who did this? How did you, what is, I mean, it was just the word big in magenta pink. And, and I just remember thinking, this is how it's supposed to be done. Like the putting the tool in the hands of the masses kind of destroyed the medium itself. And I feel like the first 10 or so years I was in business, it was reshaping this medium that ran amok when it got into the hands of the users. It just went completely the opposite way that it was supposed to. So that it's weird to say that was a real defining moment for me to say, well, wait, we can do this different and we can return to how they used to be done when they were 35 millimeter slides. So that's one story. And then, and then I think we're very good at mapping to

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

the brand, the brand requirements. So we take this tool, whatever the tool we have all the brand, all our brands use different ones. They use slides, keynote, they use PowerPoint, like we use whatever tool the brand wants. And we push it in each medium. And, but we, we take their brand guidelines and really push it into the spoken word medium, where when they stand up on a stage, it's cinematic, like the visuals can become an experience in itself. And I just, I remember when Apple came up with the Think Different campaign, Steve Jobs was just back and my designer, everyone, you know, Photoshop was new and everyone's doing these beveled backgrounds with tons of

crap on the background. Like, you know, and I walked by, I'm like, no, we can't have a blue frame looking photo frame to for the Think Different campaign is not going to work. And so I just, I remember looking at all the posters and remembering the Alfred Hitchcock ones that had these particulates, like these particulates, and it was just shadows. And I found a stock video that Adobe had made at the time, and it was just particulates floating through the air at the angle. And we stuck the six color Apple on top of it. That was so revolutionary back there to push the brand and get out of the way every, the whole world was making these hideous templates. So there's these moments that pushed the company forward because of an idea that I knew would not

be okay for the Apple brand, therefore, it shouldn't be okay for any brand. And I think, I think those are just a couple stories of how, how to really push the medium in a way that is more pleasing to the audience. Like, the audience just likes it better when it's really clear what you're supposed to focus on. We love that brand. We love it.

Okay, so let's get a little tactical because you're talking about some very specific things that you found to be working. So everyone listening to this podcast has probably heard many times it's really important to be great at presentations, that there's so much power and storytelling and communication, all these things. And they probably read a bunch of books and blog posts and watched

videos of like how to give a great presentation. But myself and I feel like most people sit down at a desk when they are about to present to an all-handsay a week later or are going to do a meeting. And I'm always just like, what, okay, what do I do? Okay, there's like a beginning, middle and they should have some kind of problem. And it's always like, I don't know what I'm doing. So if someone were to just be listening to this podcast, and they're like, I'm going to write a post it to myself of three bullet points of things that I should remember when I'm starting a deck. What would those three bullet points? Your audience is the hero that was in my TED talk from 2011. I would say it's infuse your talk with story. And I would say it is asking yourself, can they see what I'm saying? Those would be the three tips. Other than starting with empathy, I mean, that that's well, audience is the hero is the empathy-centric approach. But let's dive into these then. So, and I was actually going to ask around empathy and it feels like that comes up a lot in your, in your recommendations to people's empathy is kind of the heart of your methodology of telling great stories, telling great presentations. So let's spend a little time there. Why, why is that so important? And what does that actually look like in practice? Empathy is important too. Duarte, everything we do is empathy first. And some of it comes from my own childhood story a little bit. I was raised by a clinically narcissistic mom and narcissists are missing the empathy gene. So I feel like that void of not having it modeled for

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

me is why I keep clawing at empathy as being important. And I think a lot of people listening might work for a boss that does not have empathy that isn't other centric that doesn't think before they talk and all of those things. And I was raised by someone like that. And so every single book and every single model that I ever make has empathy at the core, because you have to have to have to

think about who am I speaking with, especially in communication? Who am I speaking with? And so when I went on my journey through storytelling, I figured out that I thought, okay, the presenter is the hero. For sure, the presenter is the hero. They're the central figure. They're talking the most. They're well lit. They're up on a stage. So when I started to look at all the archetypes, that's where I landed. And then I was like, Oh, my God, you know, when I got to really digging into the mentor, I realized it's really the mentor in myths and movies. That's the presenter. And who really holds the power in the room of a presentation is the audience. Like the audience gets to make a choice if they accept or reject your idea. So the balance of power is with them and not you. So it really is the role of the presenter to be the mentor. And in myths and movies, the mentor comes alongside the hero. In other words, the presenter should come alongside the audience and help them get unstuck or bring a magical tool. So like, I think Obi-Wan Kenobi is a great example. He did two things for Luke Skywalker. He gave him a lightsaber, which was for his outer journey, the physical journey he was doing. And then an inner tool, which was the resolve, which came to him through the force. So when you're speaking to an audience, they're going

to have an internal conflict that you have to give them something to soothe. And then you're asking them to therefore go and do this thing, take this action, do this call to action. That's asking them to physically do something or physically change it in some way. So they're not going to do that for you. If you haven't empathetically thought about how hard what you're asking them is going to be for them to do. And so it just, you have to change your mindset when you're starting to build your deck to think about, who am I talking to? How am I going to help them get unstuck? And that's just a super foundational principle in everything we do.

What is an example of that in practice as we go through these? Because this is really great of that implemented deck that we know about. So I could talk about our own internal ones. Most of what we do is under MSAs because they're fantastical brands. So in my own company, we, before I do a presentation that's going to require goals or them reaching goals or we do an annual vision talk, we do a listening tour first. So some of it's based in surveys, some of it's based in interviews, and we feed that information up and then we compare it to what we're going to ask them to do. And we do some gap analysis. Like we literally, there's some actual questions you can ask yourself, which are somewhat classic design thinking kind of questions about where they're at. And then what we do is I create a real rough cut or the exact team creates a real rough cut. And then we invite the next level of leaders in and we do a fake. I mean, the slides are ugly. Like we don't spend time on the slides. This is about the message and maybe a model or two or three that we're going to go through to feel like it may amplify or make the message more concrete. And then they get feedback. And that's when it's hard. It's hard to go from like rough cut. Here's what we're going to say to making it absolutely resonate. And then we deliver it after all of that work has been done. Then we share it to the company. So we go through that knowing that's the hardest presentation I deliver all year. Like I used to travel and speak

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

and be a public speaker, but it's my own internal ones I have to take more time with. So when I travel and speak, they're like, Oh my God, I love your models. Oh gosh, you know, can I get a picture with you? Right. But when I'm standing in front of my own team, they're like, I wonder what she's going to say because she's about to either make my job harder, or she's going to change my priorities.

Right there. They come in more skeptical. And we definitely have nailed the annual kickoff meeting. Definitely have nailed that. And then we do quarterly updates to that annual kickoff meeting. And it's a cadence and people get enthused and kind of killing it right now.

That's what it feels like from the outside. I'm just thinking about the pressure to create presentations within Duarte Design. If it's like, if you think about your job as hard, creating a deck for your company, imagine that. Presentations in front of presentation experts is like, and I get nervous, like I get really nervous because I have one slide that's kind of flawed. Or I say, um, or I paste too much, you lose a third of your team each time. You know, they're such experts. So it's hard. I want to walk through these three bullet points. So the first is make the listener, the hearer of your story. And that comes from being empathetic and understanding

their challenge. So if you're trying to do that, what are like signs that you're doing it well or not well? Like, is there like the way the flow of the story starts? Is it like, here's the way it starts? Or like, what should people identify of like, I'm doing this well, or I'm not doing this well? If the audience is the hero, you would see visible signs that they get it. People would come like before I did a really good talk and people were tweeting saying, Hey, come to this talk. It's really good. So there's you'd see a reaction. You know, you've done it well. If you're infusing your talk with story, which is the second bullet by utilizing story structures. So when I say storytelling, I'm talking about an anecdote. When I say story structures, I'm talking about this format of a three act structure of storytelling that goes back tens of thousands of years, which is fused into the brain, like fMRI machines. Now you can see them while a story is being told and the science is beautiful. Like if you're telling me a story and I'm listening, our brains are firing in the exact same order in the exact same place.

So it has power to align our brains. And so by by implementing attributes of story, like a beginning, a middle and an end, and we have method for that. And then and also incorporating the rise and fall, like story kind of builds tension and releases it. And that's why we love it so much as we escape through kind of someone else's messy metal and conflict and problems, like it's messy, and then it resolves like you build the tension and resolve it. And that's what a really well structured presentation can do. It can pull on that rise and fall in a way that creates longing. So story, story creates longing, it, it, it helps people long for something they'd never wanted before, because if the future is told in the shape of a story, and they see this alternate future, like so many people escaped through sci fi, they escaped through movie making into these future worlds, right. And so picture that you could verbally paint a picture of this future state. And then you could bring your whole audience to this future state in an amazing way using this kind of this cadence of rise and fall. That's how you, that's how you can incorporate story into a presentation where you need to influence others. It's, it's actually really can be beautiful when it's done well.

And so you gave a TEDx talk on this exact topic. And so I want to go deeper here. And you kind of

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

shared this very visual way of thinking about a great story where it kind of goes up and down and up and down like these teeth, almost, can actually talk about pumpkin teeth.

Can you share what that structure visually looks like? And we'll share a link in the show notes of what that actually looks like. And then just why that is so valuable and important.

Yeah, I love that. So I went on a three year journey through story and I knew that the greatest speeches over all time did have that rise and fall and rise and fall. But it wasn't one single story. It had a whole lot of other very important information, but it still did this rise and fall and rise and fall. So I am not a digital native. I took a quarter inch graph paper. And I would

listen to all kinds of map out took the words when I analyzed Steve Jobs' iPhone launch speech. I did it all by hand. I wrote every word I did. I did quarter inch graph paper. I needed to know I needed to see it the way I work, which was analog. And so at first it was zigzaggy. And

I realized, wait, you can't map something over time and have it be a zigzag. There was too much data lost. So to verbally describe it, you could picture a line at the bottom of your screen. And that line going left to right is what is. And you need to set up every talk by stating what is. And then it moves straight up and you move to what could be, come back down to the bottom line again,

say what is, back up, what could be, what is, what could be, what is, what could be. And then at the last what could be you state the last horizontal line is what we call the new bliss. So this motion of traversing between what is, what could be, what is, what could be, what is, what could be that sense of longing for the future. It makes people leave their current state or the status quo or our current reality and makes them long for this future state by using contrast. So that rise and fall of, hey, here's our current problem. Here's a solution or

here's the state of the union. But we imagine it could look like this. There's so many different ways to build that cadence of contrast that's so lovely. And it, it, it, I mean, it really works.

I think the talk came out in 2011 and, and the amounts of notes and emails of things people have accomplished by changing the structure of their presentation has been really astounding. The state of the union is a really interesting example because I'm trying to imagine this in presentations I've seen and that totally resonates of just like, here's the problem we're having and here's where we're going to go. Here's another problem we're having and here's what

I'm going to change. Steve Johnson was great at that. Like, when he launched the iPhone speech, like he always did like, here's the state of the company, here's how we're doing. Oh my God, our stores are more full than 10 Macworld Expos. You know, he always did a set up of, of what was going on. And then he did a really rapid, what is what could be when he started to compare the iPhone to like the Blackberry. You know, it's like, look how much it sucks now that you've seen what we're doing. Like it's just this, what is what could be, what is what could be.

And so I took all the classic speeches, historical speeches, everything, presidential speeches, and knew that if I could, I could find a pattern in Dr. King and Steve Jobs' iPhone launch speech that was the same, that had the same type of nature of cadence and pulsing to it, for lack of a better word, that I knew I had solved it using story. It was, it was a really great moment to, to finally draw that out on my quarter inch graph paper.

I love that. It was awesome.

I feel like there's just so much opportunity for primary research like that still. Like I

I'm going to change. Steve Johnson was great at that. Like, when he launched the iPhone speech, like he always did like, here's the state of the company, here's how we're doing. Oh my God, our stores are more full than 10 Macworld Expos. You know, he always did a set up of, of what was going on. And then he did a really rapid, what is what could be when he started to compare the iPhone to like the Blackberry. You know, it's like, look how much it sucks now that you've seen what we're doing. Like it's just this, what is what could be, what is what could be.

And so I took all the classic speeches, historical speeches, everything, presidential speeches, and knew that if I could, I could find a pattern in Dr. King and Steve Jobs' iPhone launch speech that was the same, that had the same type of nature of cadence and pulsing to it, for lack of a better word, that I knew I had solved it using story. It was, it was a really great moment to, to finally draw that out on my quarter inch graph paper. I love that. It was awesome.

I feel like there's just so much opportunity for primary research like that still. Like I

I'm going to change. Steve Johnson was great at that. Like, when he launched the iPhone speech, like he always did like, here's the state of the company, here's how we're doing. Oh my God, our stores are more full than 10 Macworld Expos. You know, he always did a set up of, of what was going on. And then he did a really rapid, what is what could be when he started to compare the iPhone to like the Blackberry. You know, it's like, look how much it sucks now that you've seen what we're doing. Like it's just this, what is what could be, what is what could be.

And so I took all the classic speeches, historical speeches, everything, presidential speeches, and knew that if I could, I could find a pattern in Dr. King and Steve Jobs' iPhone launch speech that was the same, that had the same type of nature of cadence and pulsing to it, for lack of a better word, that I knew I had solved it using story. It was, it was a really great moment to, to finally draw that out on my quarter inch graph paper.

I love that. It was awesome.

I feel like there's just so much opportunity for primary research like that still. Like I

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

feel like that's why my newsletter does well is I just spend the time doing that work that you're describing of like watching a thousand interviews and then just distilling here's a takeaway here. And so pattern finding, that's an interesting point. I, I worry sometimes, you know, with the emergence of new technologies and stuff, the ability to be able to sit and think, synthesize and all of that is because you don't, you, a human's going to come up with different insights and synthesis than any future machine can do. So I think it's fascinating that, that you do that so well. And it really shows that, you know, you're, yeah, you're really putting your mind and heart into it all. And that's about me. I'm thinking about, but I appreciate it. I'm thinking about product managers and founders maybe listening to this and they're like, oh man, every time I do a deck, I need to create this whole story and this up and down thing. In your experience, when do you go that far to create like, is this when you have like an epic important presentation? You think about a story structure like this, or is there always a way you shouldn't kind of, you know, put this into your presentations of like some kind of story with this contrast? It's interesting question. I think a lot of people think that the only time you really need to present well is when you have a big stage talk and you make the big investment in the script, the big investment in the contrasting story. I'll tell you a dirty little secret. I can get my husband to do chores for me on the weekends with a quick, with a real quick, what is what could be new bliss kind of just that first bit, like what is what could be new bliss. It's like even the very, very short short talk that Abraham Lincoln gave in the Gettysburg address, those it was basically a funeral. It was a eulogy. And back then eulogies used to be two hours long. It was an Aristotelian structure. And he only had a couple hundred words. So there's no pictures of him giving it because it was so short, so tight and done. They were setting up the cameras still thinking they had tons of time. So the ability to just have that contrast as a framework in your brain during a meeting on a phone call, any moment of influence and get in the husband to do some chores for me, like literally it works. It works in any format. And I think the investment that you make in the longer form or when it's a huge audience, you know, you add the visuals, you really hire the speaker coaches, you really make that moment. There's these moments that breach above all other moments where you really have to nail it. Just in basic conversations in a moment of influence, you should if you practice it enough, it'll live in your head as a mental model for when you know you're in a situation where there's influence in the air that you could do. What is, how do you actually do it with your husband if you could share for helping you? Well, I won't get graphic about what the new bliss might be. But, you know, early in our marriage, we figured out that when we, not early, actually it's been almost only the last 10 years we've been married for 40. And we realized that when we tangle, it's usually only about process. So the gaps are when I, if I ask or he asked me to do something or we start to kind of pick on each other, it's because the way I'm executing something is different than the way he chose to execute it. And so it'll be anything from like, why are you chopping? He'll, you know, why are you chopping the onions like that? He'll say to me. And now I'm like, oh, we have a process gap. Do you want to chop the onions? Or do you want me to chop them my way? And so for the what is what could be do bliss, it happens all the time. So he needs a lot of context. He's a detail oriented person. And I've started to learn with him that my what is needs to be quite a bit longer than sometimes I have patience for as I start to frame, oh, hey, baby, could you take the dog over to the, I need you to take the dog over to the dog care. I don't start

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

there. I start with, oh, my gosh, tomorrow, I've got back to back back meetings. In fact, I'm beyond Lenny's podcast right about here. And that's when she's whiny. And what's going to happen is if that doesn't happen, I'm going to have to reschedule next week. And next week is just loaded up. And I, you know, how it is when I'm stressed out at the end of the day. And seriously, I'm kind of hard to deal with, you know, and I'm say, well, what could be, you know, what the doggy place, you know, she was loved it last time she was spooning with a red Cavalier King spaniel and loved it, you know, it's like that I have to unpack it a little bit more for him. And then the new bliss could be any sort of marital promise you want it to be. But I just have to unpack the current state a little bit of the process. And then I state what could be. And it's funny because acts of service like that, like him taking the dog to the doggy daycare for me, or is like, I feel loved. So when someone does something generous with their time for me, it's how I feel loved. And so there's a whole lot there in shaping how you communicate with someone empathetically at my company, everyone knows each other's love language, like they know that this person feels more appreciated when they get a written note, this person feels more appreciated when they get a gift. And everyone knows that. So that's just baked into our marriage, our company, just how it rolls. I imagine people listening to this podcast, we're not expecting marriage advice. And so I love that. I'm going to scrap that if it doesn't work. The process tip that was good. This is going to be the best part. This is going to be the whole podcast. It's just the second, just joking. But this is this is really good advice. I'm going to try to use it myself. So the structure is, I think it's even easier to think about this less as like story, infused story. Like for me, it's more this what is what could be what is the ideal bliss? Like that's almost the simpler way to think about it. The story is this like, Oh my God, I got to think of a story. It has a beginning, middle and an end. So the first what is is the beginning. The middle is the messy middle. That's where you're trying to contrast and show them that it's messy. It might be hard. It's worth it. You know, and then the new bliss you end with what you know, in Western cultures, where it's like a happy ending. So the new bliss is just imagine a world with your idea adopted. Just and then you paint a picture of that world poetically or pragmatically. And it works. It definitely works. Okay, this is really great. So just to recap, point one is to make your listener the hero of the story and come at it with empathy. And I was actually thinking, I think different campaign is an excellent example that because it's about you thinking differently and being this incredible, creative. Okay. And then item two is infuse your presentation with story. And this what is what could be new bliss. And then okay, and number three, what was number three again? Oh, ask yourself if they can see what you're saying. Can they see what I'm saying would be what would be written on the note? I love this. Okay, let's talk about that. What does that mean? And how do you do? Yeah. So for people to see what you're saying, that you have opportunity to use visual tools, like the presentation software, you have opportunities to have live sketches, sketch it while you're talking, there's so many ways you can help people see what you're saying. I would contend that you, you can use something in your talk that gives people something they'll always remember, we call that a star moment. And it could be a piece of dramatic data where the big numbers put up there, it could be an evocative story, it could be a beautiful picture. One of the things that happens really well, especially with tech companies, is demonstrating through a picture so you can get alignment. So the concept of a diagram,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

like when you describe your product that you're working on, is this thing inside of it, outside of it, attached to it, is it on it, is it above it, like especially market texture slides, or just how technology works as something flows through a complex system. When people can see that and it accompanies your verbal narrative, they can actually understand what you're conveying and move on. If you only had a verbal narrative, it wouldn't work as well.

There's a lot of times though, where you don't have the support of a presentation or slides, you could be at a dinner table. If you're in an interesting conversation and you want someone to see what you're saying, that's where you pull out the napkin and you draw it. So you could both see it in meetings sometimes, someone will just walk right up to the board and draw something. And my team, especially my design team, is so good at this because they'll just stand up and say, I want to draw for you what I see because we're about to prepare them to present to an audience. When you verbally said that, I saw this, was that your intent?

And then the room will stand up and we'll start all co-creating a graphic so that everyone sees the exact same thing, the exact same steps, the exact same insights in the order.

So nobody leaves with a question in their mind. And that's just so important for there to be an alignment around. What is this? What are we all fighting for? What are we all living for? What are we all working for? And those moments of alignment are so, so important. And I'm a leader who sees things in the air. I just see it. And to me, my pattern finding nature, which you're like that too, right? I could see these patterns. And to me, I see a whole scene and I could see it all clearly. But when my team's trying to look at the same thing, they might see 22 mosaic tiles out of a massive mosaic beautiful picture. I see the final beautiful picture, but I've only served up a little tiny mosaic tile in a few places. And so I even have to be better about really bringing it to earth and saying, Oh, here's the seven steps to get to this amazing outcome. Sometimes we see things so plainly in our mind's eye. And I was working with a really famous, powerful CEO. And as she was talking, I could see her, I was watching her hand motions too.

And she was like, and this thing and this and like, she's moving her arms around in a distinct way.

And I said, I can tell you, you have a picture in your mind's eye. Let me draw for what I did.

The same thing walked up Drew had this, had this, had this. And she's like, exactly. And we were brought in because nobody could articulate at all what she saw in her mind's eye. And so that was a massive program to be to be rolled out to the entire retail, that's like 100,000 retail workers needed to understand this graphic. And the whole process she was trying to roll out wasn't getting traction. So the minute people could see what she was saying, then it had all the breakthroughs needed to happen around that program. That reminds me of when I was working on the super host program at Airbnb. I don't know if the story will be of any interest to anyone, but I just remember I had this very clear handset of motions that described the strategy of the super host program. And then my friends like, you should, you should draw this on a slide. Yeah. Unless it's such a powerful hand gesture, right? You could do that because your body is visual. And the other thing we try to get our customers to do is like, if Dr. King had slides that day of the I have a dream speech, it just wouldn't have been as beautiful. Like his words painted the pictures in our mind's eye. And so when we can have the slides off, so people are focused on the verbal stream and what's coming out of your mouth, that is such a powerful moment is to not have any visuals

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

supporting you. So they're 100% focused on your, on your body, how you're showing up and on the words coming out of your mouth is, and they're verbally seeing what you're saying versus actually pictorially seeing what you're saying is good. I like the idea that people are not staring at me and I prefer them distracted with a slide, but I want to talk about like nerves and stuff presenting in a bit. But that's interesting. So you're talking about very kind of some concrete tips for slides. And something I've heard a lot is when you're sharing a deck internally or talking like an internal meeting, it's really powerful to just have obviously just like a quick image thing, but then also the title of the slide is the point you want them to get from that slide is that some of you recommend and then generally any just like very tactical advice on how to make a slide. Yeah, the concept that each slide should make one point. So your, your whole presentation should be grounded in what we call the audience journey, which is the big idea, where you're trying to move them from where you're trying to move them to. And then a big idea is what is your point of view on what's at stake if they do or do not adopt it? That's the organizing mechanism for your whole deck. And then each slide itself that supports that one big, big idea, each slide itself should make one point in support of that big idea. People can't process too many things at one time. So depending on where you work, some people want something that's not the key insight at the top of the slide. Some people do. So some might want the action to be taken or some might want the dreamy future state to be clear. A lot of some consulting firms where the slides are much denser because they were paid millions of dollars to make a big old deck. You know, some of them are like, Oh, it always belongs in the lower right corner. It always belongs. So it's kind of a little bit up to the brand. And everyone believes it belongs somewhere else. If you're making what we call a slide doc, which I think your listenership is interest would be interested in. Presentations go from a big staged event to like in a meeting where you're trying to persuade your peers to, Can I make a presentation? I can just circulate on email and everyone gets it. Well, that's called a slide doc. You put more words, you put stronger picture, you could have a hundred page appendix and maybe the front of it's only five slides. But everything they need to see your thinking it follows behind it. And you could circulate those and people read it. You write full senses, you write full pros. It's kind of like the six page memo that's so popular at Amazon, but we can tend to the df words and pictures. The six page memo is better. So how do you send a memo around without the help of a presenter? And that's on one extreme. And those are called slide docs that you build in presentation software. And then the other extreme is I'm on a massive stage somewhere. And there's all kinds of usage in between. And so I think the one idea per slide is important. And then this guiding principle like, don't make a single slide unless it supports the one big idea of your whole talk. That's another principle for slide making, because most people go back to like some sort of repository in some data store somewhere, and they dig through old crappy slides and see if they can assemble something super quickly. And that's a cop out. Like some most of the time, if you really think empathetically about your audience, the going to the repository might get you halfway there, but you should be modifying and mapping all of the content based on who you're talking to. And especially if it's high stakes. And sometimes you're speaking to an audience that wants high density slides, because that's how they communicate in their culture. And if you showed up with cinematic stage ready slides, they'd laugh you out of the room. And so you just really got it. I mean,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

got to know your audience, got to know how they communicate, who they talk to, and map to that. Or trying to run your own experiments through a clunky marketing tool. When I was at Airbnb, one of the things that I loved most about working there was our experimentation platform, where I was able to slice and dice data by device types, country, user stage.

Epo does all that and more delivering results quickly, avoiding annoying prolonged analytic cycles and helping you easily get to the root cause of any issue you discover.

Epo lets you go beyond basic click through metrics and instead use your North Star metrics, like activation, retention, subscription, and payments. Epo supports tests on the front end, on the back end, email marketing, even machine learning claims. Check out Epo at geteppo.com, that's geteppo.com, and 10x your experiment velocity.

What's your take on the Minto pyramid principle? I don't know if you think about that. Okay, yeah, because, because there's a recommendation of just like start with the conclusion and then explain why. And you're saying sometimes that's effective, sometimes not, maybe in, yeah.

Sometimes it's effective. So the Minto principle is amazing. Like she's got the, was it horizontal and vertical thinking? So your main segues or your main section head should add up and then all the slides should support it. And then also how the construct of it is. And when when you state the conclusion first, that's a great thing to do with execs. It's a great thing to do when you are fundraising. It's a certain type of an audience that that works for. There's other audiences where they really need to be taught to long for this future state and you need longer to unpack it. So one of the reasons you would start with the conclusion is, especially in a funding round. Now my version of a conclusion or a result is different than how she describes it, because I would say you start with the new bliss. So if you're trying to raise funds, you would say, I'm going to share you some, share with you something today that, and you share how

your solution increases human flourishing. Like it needs to be tied to the humanness and the big problem you're going to solve and how human, how solving how humankind will benefit.

Well, that's different than just like a consultant would show up and say,

hi, I have this 800 page deck and the results of it are this, let's unpack it. It's just a completely different motion. And we use a three act story structure that's quite a bit different too.

But that work is solid and it was based kind of like my work. Her work was based in going super deep in McKinsey's thinking over time. Whereas my work is going laterally across the 35 highest performing brands in the world that have been our customers. So I went laterally across all those brands and then come up with solutions that are based more in story and based in a broader, a bit of a broader application across companies. I have tons of respect for that body of work.

Awesome. And willing to, I wrote a post about this whole concept for folks that want to dig deeper. Maybe one more question around tactical slide stuff. And I know this is like, people ask you about this stuff all the time, but I can't help it. I guess just any other tips for just like you're sitting there trying to create a couple slides, like what else maybe people should keep in mind to make it effective. And let's say this is for like a small meeting.

That's a good question. I think that if do some thinking first, if it's important, like if it's an important point of the meeting, my team is a thought to just kind of sketch, change your environment up a little bit. A lot of people will fire up the deck, which is very linear. It's like make one slide, second slide, third slide. So just think and plan

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

for a minute. And we tend to draw like storyboards. It's like, okay, the first point, the second point, the third point, or the, you know, just think first. It can be analog or digital, like put a page in front of all your decks. It's just boxes, just get the narrative right. And then when you actually open up the software, that's where you have to think about what are the, what's the slide type that will convey this the most? Is it a table? Put a table, especially for like program managers, you have to convey dense project information, program information, product information. And that comes with density. So if you're in a room with your peers, and everyone in the room is a team and everyone has their own shorthand and way of working, put that common slide up there. That common slide for that team might be dense to the outside world, but everyone's used to using it. So there's no harm in using a commonly known, commonly acceptable framework or slide or table or Excel spreadsheet, because you're aligning around a process. And so don't feel like every single meeting needs like cinematic pictures of kittens, because that's not going to get you anywhere. You're trying to move an objective along. And that does mean that your slides might be more dense and sometimes internal slides have a lot more important information that needs to be on it to kick a product along or kick a process along. You're just talking about process. And that is a great segue to a question I wanted to ask is just what does your process look like when you're working with a company to help them craft an awesome presentation? Yeah, yeah, it's funny because I don't have to do this much anymore. I haven't done it for about 15 years, which is nice. I have a gorgeous team of strategist riders, conceptual thinkers, beautiful design coaches. Yeah, I get coached. I get it's fun. I definitely my books look awesome, not because of me, but because I'm followed around by people that are do really gorgeous work. But the phrase that we use internally and sometimes with customers is we make presentations the way Pixar makes movies. And that's very similar to the way we get somebody that has this high stakes moment where it's a big deal. And this moment you have to win in the moment to push things along. And so we do like we literally craft a narrative, craft the big idea, craft the script and visualize certain moments, we start to map it out, we start to chunk it out. And then big models, sometimes when you're really making a revolutionary model, one that could drive all the web assets, a lot of that stuff people don't realize actually happens in the presentation first as an idea. So sometimes we'll start working on some of the key models right away too. And we start to circulate that around the company because everyone has to build consensus around it. So sometimes there's multiple motions happening at the same time, like let's sketch this, you go away, you work with this department, you try to get this settled, you get that set, you get this, you know, and so, and then it gets reassembled at the end. And then the narrative is work where you work all the kinks out. And then when they stand and deliver, it's like, yes, the it's the voice track that all the all that process supported. And then other times that we're building a report in a slide doc, or there was a time where we had a multinational head of a multinational company that will remain nameless. And the guy that was head of all of India was going to come over here and petition the CEO for \$100 million, \$100 million budget, it's not trivial. And he comes and is like, okay, I need your help with these five slides. And he just sends us the five slides. And we're like, well, yeah, \$100 million, that's kind of a lot. You really want to put technology between you and the CEO. Do you really want to sit side by side and both be looking at a computer in this moment where it's like, you're petitioning them for, that's a lot of money. And he's like, yeah, you're right. So what we did is we made a mental model,

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

he could hold up in his head. And the structure was so simple and clear. And then there was three moments where we're like, just, I don't know, just grab a piece of paper or go to a whiteboard and just start to draw in front of him. Let him see your eyes, let him have eye contact, let him see your passion. Like, don't be dispassionately looking at this computer. And he did it. And he called us. And he's like, I got 100 million blocks, you know? So it's just those moments that there's just those moments where you have to realize, wait, wait, wait, wait, do I need a doc? Who am I talking to? And should I, should I, is this a cookie cutter thing? And is the same process work every time? No. So every time we solve something, it's very different. And we try to make it unique to the presenter and the audience that they're speaking to. Along the same lines, a lot of presentations now are actually remote and on Zoom and virtual. What do you recommend to people in terms of how they present and put presentations together being remote? Yeah, it's funny. We spent a lot of time coaching people to look in the camera. So while I've been talking to you, I'm not actually looking at your face. I'm looking at the little dot at the top of my screen and my camera. And a lot, a lot of people can do that. So it's gotten to where I can see that little white glowing dot in my heartworms. Like, I know you're there. I feel you. I can say I can get sensations in my skin when, when I know I'm talking to someone that's that, that I adore or admire. And that took a long time to get there. And I was presenting remotely pre COVID. So a lot of our coaching was about eye contact and doing the other thing that happens is people don't see our hands anymore, like they're under the table. They can't see much space in a room we're taking up. They can't, they can't see a lot of the characteristics that are common in communicating. And so there's a lot of coaching around presence and how do you have presence in a room? How do you even get the microphone away from someone that's remote, all those kinds of things. And a new study just came out, I just came across my desk today. And it said that soft skills really suffered. And the people who did it right say and looked at the camera, they don't have good eye contact skills anymore. When they are looking face to face in someone's eyes, it's like, Oh, they're, they are not used to it. It's been so long. And then the other thing is, you know, how, where do I sit in a room? Who's got the position of authority? Like just kind of some classic things that convey information in real life that so it's interesting, it peaked and now people are going back to the office some a percent or back in the office. And now we have this weird place where it's, Oh, it's half in the office and half people are remote. And the people that are remote are having a hard time hearing getting their voices heard, because the people in the room consume most of the air. So it's kind of going through this undulating life cycle of new communication skills people need while, while they're remote. It's all changing. I'm glad that I was not a PM in this remote world, to be honest. I never experienced it. So, and I, but I have a lot of empathy for being a product manager and yeah, in this world, remote work world feels like the job got a lot harder. It did. I think it did. Yeah. So let's talk about nerves and stage fright. So I hate public speaking. I get extremely nervous. People may not feel this when they watch me, but it's not my natural state. You work with a lot of people that I imagine are like, Oh my God, I'm so scared to give this presentation. What advice do you give them to help them through that and feel more comfortable? I think people who are more thoughtful and contemplative about speaking have better content. Like they tend to really think through stuff than someone who's like, I got this. I'll just wing it. I'll just walk on the stage. Like anyone who's like, it tells me I am a nervous

**[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte:
How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks**

presenter. I'm like, you have probably got gorgeous content in your heart that the world needs to hear because usually they are really deep and thoughtful. Like you already mentioned you're a pattern finder and you like to do thoughtful work. And so it's, it's hard. Like my husband is actually brilliant communicator is just getting him to feel like he wants to take up the space. He's a, he's a better communicator than I am. And so what happens is the reason you get scared, it's a fight or flight instinct. For some reason, stepping out on that stage, you feel your body and your mind and your psyche is feeling threatened, like you would be attacked by an animal. Like that's literally what's happening. And so you couple things you could do, you can actually sit in one of the seats of the, of the auditorium and just sit there and look at the stage, look at the setting so you can imagine yourself on it. But then picture yourself as that friendly face, the one that's happy to see you, the one that's delighted that you're speaking. And then as you're standing up, remember, remember, remember that you saw yourself sitting there smiling and very happy. You have to change your visual model that, that people's faces will be scowling. They'll be judging you, they'll be doubting you. All of those things are only in your head because getting you out on the stage to be able to start to expose people to this amazing content you have. The biggest battle is to get you out on the stage and, and, and delivering it. And those are my, I asked a bunch of people once, I did like a survey of all these public speakers and was like, how do you prepare? How do you prepare? What's your pre-talk ritual? And some of them were like, I play heavy metal music and I skip around the entire convention center just to get all fired up. I'm like, wow, I have to calm myself down because I already have over the top energy. So I literally find the dark, I don't go to the green room. That's stuff. I don't like to hear a gibber jabber. I have to be focused on my content. And so I find the darkest corner of the backstage and calmly sit and just breathe. I just breathe. Sometimes if I'm nervous, like if there's someone real famous in the audience, I have a little list, a little playlist of funny things that people sent me, but I never watch. And that way, right before I walk on stage, I chemically, my whole body chemically shifts from nervous to laughter. And that really helps me too. Cause it is a, it's chemical and you have to train your chemistry a bit. Oh, I really liked that tip. What are these funny things you watch? If you just like YouTube things, like just things that I tag and I try not to watch them or things that make me laugh. Like there's this dorky and low, like low watched video of a guy with tin cans wrapped around his waist and he plays them. And my husband walks around the house like, like him and making the noise. And I could probably sing the beat if I had. And so sometimes I just play that cause I, I, it just transports me home cause a lot of times I'm presenting away from home. And it just makes me laugh at my, at my husband who's hysterical. So it's just random, random things. But if you laugh and somehow can transport yourself outside of the fear of walking out there, it, it, it helps reset you before you walk out on stage. I really like that. Is there anything else just to have your head that just like right before you go on stage that you find to be really effective? So watching funny videos, I love that's breathing. Anything else? Oh, something I breathe. I think I, I've learned a breathing pattern. I take three, I take a deep, deep breath. And then I take that one while my lungs are full. I take another gulp of breath and I have to let it out real slow. But when I got the feedback that my friend, and some people get over their fear by head banging to heavy metal. So I'm not saying that's

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

not the wrong thing. So I thought, well, maybe I should try that before I could do a talk. And so I literally didn't do that. But I stretched, I bounced, I jumped a little just low jumps, put my arms real big up in the air. And then I walked on stage. And I happened to be speaking at a massive medical company, like big brand. And I finished my talk and, and they, my assistant got a call and they were like, we're low worried about Nancy. We think she might not need to see a doctor. She could never control her breathing. And we're really concerned. And it was just because I just pumped myself up a little bit. And I, so I don't do that not whatsoever anymore. I, I went back to my calming, contemplative, meditative, pre-talk ritual. So for some people, literally, I do encourage people to try head banging to heavy metal. It might work. It's just a matter of what you need. And every, nobody would guess that I'm not one to dance around or pump myself up. But I am not. I have to calm myself down. It's the opposite. Awesome. Just a, just a few more questions. Sure. So you wrote a book called Illuminate. And something that stood out to me from that book is this idea of a torchbearer and torchbearer leader. Can you just talk about what that is and why that is important in part? Yeah, I loved writing that book. Co-author Patty Sanchez, a hat tip to her. So to come up with this book, we knew that there's one presentation, there's a single presentation, could be on a stage, could be in a meeting, just updating people on project status. And we knew, though, that every presentation usually is part of a larger movement where you're trying to move people en masse to this alternate future. So we studied movements. We deconstructed the largest movements. We met with Marshall Gans at Harvard to say, hey, could this be true? Because he studies movements. It was so fun. And then movements have a five-act structure. So picture, there's this moment where you have to verbalize the dream. Like, hey, we're going to head to this new place. And this is what I have to do at my kickoff meetings. It's like, imagine this place in the future that we're headed to. So it's five steps. It's a five-act story structure. If you want to call it five acts, it's dream, leap, fight, climb, arrive. So the torchbearer, the reason we called that is the leaders know where they're headed, but they might not ever see it super, super clearly. And we chose a torch because a torch, if you're in a cave and you have a torch, you only see about five, eight feet around you. But it's enough to dissipate the fear of the people following you in. And so nobody sees the future clearly. Like, nobody has that kind of level skill. All we know is I need to traverse this direction to be at the right place in the future. So all my staff is safe. We stay a leader in the industry. That's all I know. And as we start to head there, there's these moments of communication you need to do, which is, hey, everyone, here's the dream. Here's where I headed. That's the dream phase. Then there's this moment where they either choose to jump in and go with you or they choose not to. You could talk about Frodo, like Sam, and only a few hobbits followed him. And so it's like people select to commit to this journey. That's the beginning of your movement. But then the middle is the messy middle of a story. We call it the fight and climb phase. So what happens is they commit to your idea, they commit to your program, your project, and they're like enthused at first. And then they go into the state of, oh my God, this is harder than I thought. It's a long slog. This climb is getting exhausted. I don't know if I have this much fight in me to make this all work, not fight with each other, but like, oh my God, I'm having to overcome this roadblock and that roadblock, and we have to go get that budget. So it's like a fight, climb, fight, climb, fight, climb. And then ultimately you arrive. Each one of those five phases, you need to use speeches, stories, ceremonies, and symbols at

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

each phase to give the people traveling with you the emotional fuel they need to keep going, to keep seeing that idea become realized. And it literally is about fueling the right emotions, speeches, stories, ceremonies, and symbols, while you're moving people toward a bigger initiative. So it's bigger than just one presentation. It's multiple presentations, multiple stories, multiple ceremonies. So that's, I loved that book. People are really feeding off of it right now because leading change has been, what, nonstop. It's just been change, change, change, so that's especially a few years.

Change is the only constant, like they say. Exactly. I really like this metaphor of the torch giving you a sense of like, as a leader, you can see some portion around you, but you're not going to see the entire cave necessarily. That is really interesting. Maybe a final question, very tactically. I saw you give an interview where you shared that you, you had kind of two videos, one where is very informal. You just didn't stand in front of a whiteboard and like, jeans or something, just like talking about some, about data, I think, in presentations.

And then you had a similar video where it was very well constructed, high production value. And the informal video did a lot better. Is that something you're seeing? Just that kind of content ends up being more successful? And why do you think that is?

I think video content production quality now isn't the expectation for it being high quality. It's just completely shifted over the last five, eight years or so as everyone's an expert and can show up as an expert. There's a big difference to me about showing up as a keynoter, which is like, I'm gonna stand, I'm gonna look around, I'm gonna have this eye contact, I'm gonna nail it, my slides are gorgeous, I'm, I'm driving the industry and, and for people to think that our explanations of things needs to be done as a stand and deliver keynote, that's just not true.

So I experimented with that and I had some videos I had done and one of them, like you said, was me looking in the camera. I even had HD makeup, a film crew. I was well lit. I looked amazing. I mean, I did look amazing. And it was polished. I delivered it really well. And then I thought that because on LinkedIn, I post a lot, that's where my primary channel is. And I thought, what would happen if I just posted a rando shot of me and I'm maybe airing on a little bit like orange. I look a little Trumpian, a little bit orange, not, it's not color corrected, but it's super informative, like really full of information. And that was my highest viewed video so far. And I realized that it's like, you know, people want the content. And we do as a presentation company, I have to nail it maybe more than others, but it doesn't have to be fully video edited, infographics, spinning, swooshy things forward and swooshing things back. Like that kind of nature of it was, it's not necessary to get the message across. And so we actually have a whole process and program we're rolling out where you're gonna see a lot more video from us, partially from that insight,

but partially because my team, I have a team of experts, they have a lot of great things to share. And so I'm trying to give them, I'm trying to make it be like Duarte does not equal Nancy Duarte. I'm trying to make it so it's like, so many experts work at Duarte, you got to watch any video from any of them is where we're moving it towards their freaks of brilliance and just experts, their world-class experts. So that's what we're trying to do.

I feel like you have a similar challenge to me where I name my newsletter, Lenny's newsletter. Yeah, same thing. Same thing.

Yeah. Anyone else? It's a challenge, but I don't know, worked out. Okay, actually a real

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

final question before we get to a very exciting lightning round. Have you seen examples of product managers specifically telling really good stories?

The product management process has multiple phase. There's the creative, explorative process all the way through to getting it produced. And I think story gets you, can take you along in each phase. So there's example, which I read about, I wasn't actually even part of that Brian Chesky at Airbnb. There was a whole article where he unpacked this moment in their product development cycle,

where they decided they would take a walk in the shoes of their customer. And they hired a Pixar illustrator to illustrate each scene as the team's like, okay, okay. They said, this is her name.

And they were like, okay, what happens? Her alarm goes off. Okay, what happens next? What happens

next? Okay, now she's decided she needs to book something. What does she do? She wants to do that.

They realized from this little walk in the shoes of their customer, just this day in the life, which is a classic storytelling method for any product, they realized that they had their strategy wrong, that they needed to move as soon as possible to a mobile first strategy.

And it was just because they actually thought about, okay, okay, she goes, brushes their teeth, they do this, they were just literally walking through the life of their ideal customer. And that was when they realized they had it all messed up. But the other phase is like, after all this work, people put into product and the making of the product and the managing of pushing it through.

We have a large client that makes shoes or athletic things. I love telling stories if I can't say this. And there's this moment right where we get brought in and like, could you please train our product people and story? Like, what's the big problem? They'll spend a year or two on a shoe and be like, chunk, put it on the table. And they're like, what would you have to say about it? They're like, it's red. And it's like all these years of investment, all these years, they couldn't unpack any sort of story or any sort of reason or even their passion for why they chose red. You know, it was like, here's my shoe, it's red. And so this ability to move things along by adding meaning or why and then wrapping it in a story actually can get a product chosen or rejected. There's just so many examples of different spaces in the product cycle that could benefit from a really well told story from, like I said, how the products innovate in the roadmap all the way through to, you know, what gets accepted. And then the big reveal, like you think about even all the big Apple launches, it's about a big product reveal. It's about it's about revealing this thing that had been hidden for so long. And it's another moment, you know, to tell amazing stories. So that's kind of a little bit of an insight on the product side of how to use story.

The Airbnb example is an awesome example. It's all true. And when I joined Airbnb, is actually right, they were right in the process of doing that.

I love that.

And they ended up drawing these key frames of the journey as you described and they became, they put it right in the center of the office. Here's the journey of a host and a guest.

That's like 12 frames of that journey. And that actually became the strategy of the company is let's pick six of these frames and make them awesome. And that's what we're going to do.

That's awesome.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

Make the booking experience awesome. Make the arrival experience awesome.

So there's a lot of truth to that.

And that was visualized, right? The vision was visualized like we were saying.

It's here's we're headed in the future. And it was super clear. I love that story.

Yeah, yeah.

So cool you were there.

Yeah, it was very cool. And they actually were very mobile. You can like grab one of these drawings and bring it to your desk and like, how are we gonna make this moment better this week?

Awesome.

Yeah. And it was actually indeed a Pixar storyboard artist that they hired for like a year.

That was his job. Draw these key frames.

That's amazing.

And it connects so directly with your point about empathy. Like there was like the epitome of empathy. Here's what the guests and hosts are going through. And here's where we can do better.

Yeah, it's amazing. Yeah, it does tie together.

If folks want to look this up, by the way, we'll link in the show notes.

If you just Google Snow White Airbnb, you can watch our video of how they all came up with this.

Well, with that, we reached our very exciting lightning round. I've got six questions for you if you're ready.

Yep, I'm ready.

What are two or three books that you recommended most to other people?

I think I always classically recommend The Gospels because there's just so much love and groundbreaking thinking there. And then for people who do wind up taking an interest in story, I think one of the best books, if you want to pick that up is Chris Vogler's The Writers' Journey, where he took Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey, made it 12 Steps, and he was a Disney story analyst. So it's just a really classic body of work that will really help people get their minds around story and the archetypes.

What is a favorite recent movie or TV show?

It's my little sinful pleasure. It's way into K-drama, Korean drama. Don't even ask me how, but I'm way into that. I've seen almost all of them now. I'm at the bottom of the barrel of them.

Is that our favorite?

We just, my husband just lost one. It's called Business Proposal, and he watched it with me, and he's like, oh, no, no, I'm going to be hooked too. They're just real. They're just cutest button, and they have a longer arc. They're like an epic length tail. They drop in 12 part seasons, like, or one season 12. Anyway, don't even get me started. It sounds dumb because I like the epic tales and the dramas, but they're cute. They're just cute.

This is great. Again, very real. What is a favorite interview question that you like to ask people that you're hiring? Oh, favorite interview question. We ask a lot about who they are. We use psychometrics a lot here, and we really understand who they are, and we actually ask people to tell a story. If that's uncomfortable or the psychometrics are uncomfortable, they're not really a fit because we are a systemic story culture. We define empathy at the company as know yourself, accept yourself, kind of work on yourself, and then adapt to others.

[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte: How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks

So if people aren't open to really understanding how they show up, and then adapt and change under our care, then we don't hire them. What is a favorite product you've recently discovered that you love? I'm excited about a tool I just paid for last week. It's called [writer.com](#). So it's built on multiple language models, and including, it's going to be trained on our own. All my IP, all my books, every blog post, it'll learn the voice, and it'll use my own kind of language model to help us write faster. So we put really good prompts in, and we get a really good product out. So I'm super excited about that. I'm actually an investor in that company, so this is great to hear. Oh, yeah, that's awesome. [Writer.com](#). Yeah. What is something relatively minor you've changed in your approach to developing presentations that has had a big impact on your ability to execute and get them out? Yeah, I think there's the biggest roadblock for so long that made things painful was the edit cycles. How do we do a round with a client? Then you have multiple version, then you have version control. So we've come up with this annotation system. So everyone on a project knows exactly the status of that slide, and there's no way related check slides in and out. And so we've come up with this amazing, beautiful, very visual process where everyone knows the exact status of the slide, and it's really easy. Like you could put it in thumbnail mode and be like, we're 80% complete. Everyone's going to focus on just these two things. So that part of the process, especially enterprise at scale where 20 or 30 people are contributors to a deck, that little process we made is clients are really liking it.

To leave people with one final tip to give better presentations, what would that be?

To become a better presenter, pick a topic you are passionate about, something where you're like, oh my gosh, I've got to see this happen. And pick that topic and be so passionate about it.

Work on that talk or stand up at a volunteer thing and really work on something that makes you feel passionate. And then in the future, when you're presenting something that you're not passionate about, everything you learned will come, will apply to a business presentation, but you're going to have that feeling. You're going to know what it's like to present from your soul and from a place of passion. And the great presenters tap into that passion point and pull from that. And that's what makes them a great presenter on other topics that I might not be as passionate about. Nancy, I so appreciate you making time for this. It's been an honor.

You're amazing. You're amazing. You're amazing. Two final questions. Where can folks find you if they'd like to reach out and how can listeners be useful to you? Oh, they can find me at [dortay.com](#). There's also a [dortay.com slash Nancy](#), where I've got a ton of free stuff where you could find a lot of the things I've talked about. I'm on Twitter at [Nancy dortay](#), and I do connect to everyone who connects me on LinkedIn, which is kind of fun. So I think how could they be useful to me? I think it will cure so many problems if everyone became a really good communicator. So you can help me by working hard on your communication skills, working hard on your clarity, and making everyone around you much happier people.

What a beautiful way to end it, Nancy. Again, thank you so much for being here.

Oh, you're amazing. Thanks for having me.

We're amazing. Let's end it.

We are. Let's just say it.

All right. Bye, everyone.

Thank you so much for listening. If you found this valuable, you can subscribe to the show on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or your favorite podcast app. Also, please consider giving us a rating or

**[Transcript] Lenny's Podcast: Product | Growth | Career / Storytelling with Nancy Duarte:
How to craft compelling presentations and tell a story that sticks**

leaving a review, as that really helps other listeners find the podcast. You can find all past episodes or learn more about the show at lennyspodcast.com. See you in the next episode.