Developing a Communication Strategy

As you prepare to talk about your work, it is important to have a strategy that you can quickly adapt to changing circumstances. The strategy is not a script. Rather, it is akin to the melody of an improvisational Jazz piece, where each player will add their own riff to make the music unique. The same improvisational process happens during effective communication. Having a clear strategy in place will give you the flexibility to listen, adapt to the “riff” of your audience, and achieve your communication goals.

Who is Your Audience?
Ask yourself the following questions to figure out who your audience is and what common ground you might have with your audience?

Basics
What do I know about my audience in terms of demographics? (age, gender, race, religion, culture...)
What occupations, educational backgrounds, and socio-economics might be represented?

Expectations
Why are they here? (required, vested interest, on a whim...)
Do they have any social norms or expectations I should be aware of?
What do they know about my topic? (accurate or inaccurate)

Perspectives
Do they have experiences or challenges that relate to my message?
Which parts of my message might they agree or disagree with?
What do they care about in life? What values do they hold?

What is Your Communication Goal?
Your communication goal should connect you to your audience. It should be evocative, motive you to speak with energy and motivate your audience to THINK, FEEL, or DO something. If you are stuck trying to define your goal, start with something simple and then ask yourself “to what end?” several times and see what emerges. Try to focus on what you want the audience to think, feel, or do as a result of your interaction instead of what you would like to come away with.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Move from a DULL GOAL</th>
<th>to a stronger choice</th>
<th>or how about feeling?</th>
<th>or even action!</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To tell...</td>
<td>GET THEM TO THINK</td>
<td>GET THEM TO FEEL</td>
<td>GET THEM TO DO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To explain...</td>
<td>To challenge...</td>
<td>To inspire...</td>
<td>To motivate...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To alarm about this issue...</td>
<td>To empathize...</td>
<td>To change something...</td>
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Ask Your Listener the Following Questions (Pitch)

What do you think the main point of my message was?

When in the message did the main point occur?

As the listener, what do you think, feel, or want to do based on what I just shared?

What would you remember about what I said tomorrow?
Storytelling Prompts
How did you become interested in your research topic?

What's weird or surprising in your work/field?

What's the tension in your work/field?

What are your motivations and hopes?

Nothing in ______________ makes sense, except in light of ______________.

______________ [what you're studying] is ______________, ______________, and ________________ [fill blanks with interesting adjectives].

And, But, Therefore (ABT format):
______________ and ________________, but ________________; therefore,
______________.
SCIENCE IN A STORY
This is a story about __________________________
(hope, triumph, resilience, realization, commitment, partnership, loss, dreams, perspective, growing up, change, etc.)
My audience is ________________________________
My goal is ___________________________________________________________________________
They would care because __________________________________________________________________

1. Once upon a time

2. One day

3. But something happened

4. There was a terrible struggle

5. Then something changed

6. When all of a sudden... CLIMAX!

7. And as a result, the world was different!