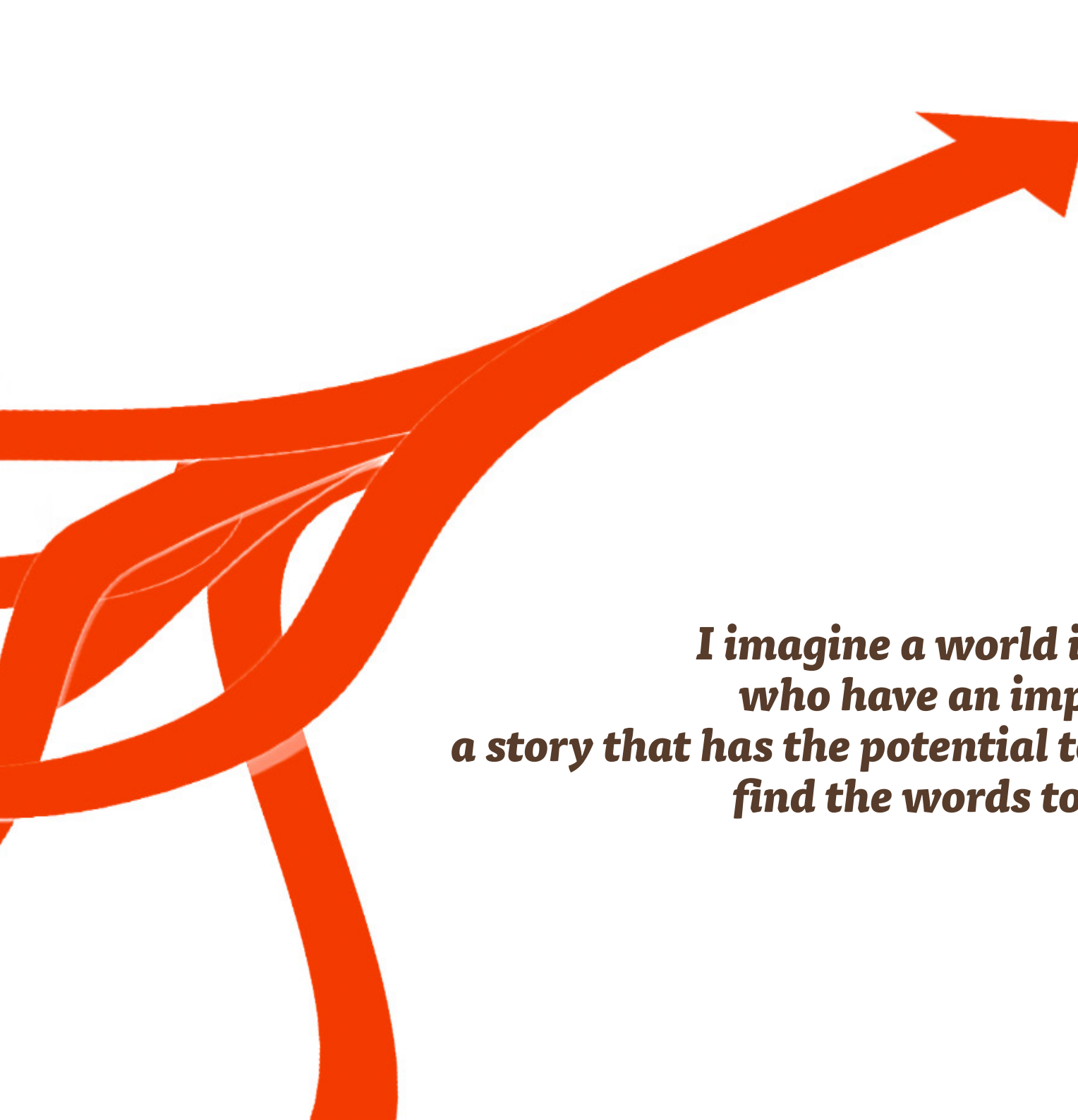


DR. MICHAEL GERHARZ

LEADERS ***LIGHT THE PATH***

How great communicators
make change happen

LEADERSLIGHTTHEPATH.COM



***I imagine a world in which those of us
who have an important story to tell,
a story that has the potential to **change the world**,
find the words to make that happen.***

Can you see it?

Every change starts with someone who sees a better future.

"I see that we can change the way people listen to music."

"I see a time when no-one is judged by the color of their skin anymore."

"I see a cure for gastric ulcer."

*"I see that with a small change in how we make decisions,
we can create a much stronger sense of 'Us' in our company."*

But the others don't see it, yet.

For very different reasons. Some don't care for the cause, others don't think it's feasible. Some don't get the point, others haven't even tried. Neither of them sees what you see.

And so they stall. The customer doesn't buy, the team doesn't follow along.

Can you make us see it?

Surely, you know one or two of these fascinating communicators who just nail it.

These people who always seem to find the right words. Who have the gift of making us see things in a way that we can't unsee them, anymore. Who make the difficult feel easy and the complex feel simple. And who make it obvious where to go next because they light us the path.

Steve Jobs had this gift that people called the reality distortion field. Martin Luther King had the gift of painting his people a future to live up to. But also my uncle ... he had the gift of reframing problems and making me see a tiny step forward. Or my school teacher who had the gift of making us appreciate the power of curiosity.

All of them lighted the path for me. All of them in their own unique ways of saying words that made me see what I needed to see.



The shift in leadership

For our grandparents, the predominant leadership model was command & control. Leaders told their team what to do and the team was pretty much expected to follow. Teams moved when the leader pushed.

For our parents, the carrot was added to the equation and the predominant leadership model was the carrot & the stick. Leaders used incentives to motivate their team to do what they wanted them to do. Teams moved when the leader managed to attract them. Yet, by attaching the incentives to goals it was still the leader who decided what was right and what wasn't.

Today, we see more and more leaders trust in the ability of their teams to make the right decisions. Their tools aren't command & control or carrot & stick, but empathy, honesty, and trust.

Leadership is shifting to a model that's based on trust and inspiration. Leaders inspire rather than enforce actions. Rather than to incentivize goals, they light the path to make their teams see what they see.

Case study: Managers not allowed

In 2006, Jos de Blok started a revolution in The Netherlands' healthcare market. He decided that the best managers are no managers and founded the Buurtzorg community care organisation. He trusted nurses to know what's best for the patients. They work together in teams of 12 and have enormous freedom in making decisions.

This has led to the highest satisfaction rates of any healthcare organisation while at the same time saving around 40 percent to the Dutch health care system.

The magic ingredient that Jos de Blok used was a clear path shared by all employees: To start from the patient perspective and do what's best for the patient. Rather than micromanaging every single step along the path (the default in healthcare), de Blok trusts the employees to know how to walk the path.

The shift in marketing

Back in the old days, marketing was basically *push marketing*. In a disconnected world where mass attention was controlled by a few TV stations and a couple of magazines, whoever had the biggest budget could basically buy attention and get a huge advantage to sell their products.

With the rise of the internet, things changed. Rather than to be unavoidable, marketers figured out a way to become irresistible. Suddenly, it was possible to reach masses of people without a big budget and so, marketing became *pull marketing*. Businesses built lead magnets, honey traps, and scarcity campaigns which customers couldn't resist.

Today, we see more and more marketers embrace a third kind of marketing as they discover that their customers don't really like being pushed or pulled. Given the choice, customers prefer to decide on their own where to go.

These marketers *build products that make a difference in their customers' lives*, they *tell true stories around it* that make their customers see what they see, and then they *trust their customers with the decision to buy*.

With empathy, honesty, and trust these marketers light the path.

Case study: Public Thinking

The world of tech is messy and noisy. Trends come so fast and disappear so quickly that it's hard to understand what's really going on, which trends matter (and why), and most importantly, what will happen next.

Benedict Evans does the hard work for us. He digs deep so we don't have to and explains his findings in a weekly newsletter which goes out to more than 170,000 subscribers.

Although the newsletter is basically like a magazine, his marketing couldn't be more different from magazines. No flashy ads and no espresso machine for subscribing. Evans markets by making his thinking public. On Twitter and in his blog, he tells true stories about what he's currently thinking about. People know exactly what they subscribe to. Which is precisely what makes them subscribe. Evans trusts them with that decision.

It's not about you

When you want us to see something, you need us to look. You need our attention.

Poor communicators fail to get our attention. So, we can't see what they want us to see. Change can't happen – even if we care. We don't see it.

Good communicators make us see the things they care about. They serve us their cause as something we should care about. And probably we do, but probably we don't. Change might happen or not depending on whether we do.

Great communicators are different.

**Rather than to speak so that we get *them*,
leaders who light the path get *us* and speak about it.**

They make us see a path forward that we care for.

A path we *want* to take. One we *choose* to take.

They change our lives.

Getting attention

If you want someone's attention, pay attention first.

*What are they proud of? What do they care about? What are their struggles?
What do they desire?*

Pay attention to it. Care for it. Figure it out.

When we want to be seen and heard, we tend to speak a lot about ourselves:
"We're good at this", "We've done that", "We care for this" and
"We've invested that much effort" ...

Yet, what makes people really listen is when *they* feel being heard, what makes them look is when *they* feel being seen. When we solve *their* problem as opposed to having them solve *our* visibility problem, they will start to look closer.

So, where does your audience want to improve in? Where do they come from?
Where are they now? What do they strive for?

Make them feel seen and heard and they will hear you.
Solving their visibility problem will solve yours.

Figuring out a path

Directing the light onto the people whose attention you seek is way more likely to get you their attention than directing it at yourself.

Lighting the *path* pushes it even further.

When we know where our audience comes from, what matters to them now and where they're headed, we can figure out a path that takes them there and light it for them.

Don't get me wrong, though. This is not about painting some fake picture of a glorious destination that appeals to them. It's not about saying what they want to hear. That's what bullshitters do.

It's about finding common ground. About resonating with what's important to them in a way that's true to your cause.

It's about figuring out a path *that works* – for you, but especially – *for them* and communicating it *clearly*, speaking their language.

It's about making a positive impact.

The complete secret recipe

Here's the complete guide to making an impact:

Ask yourself this question: "If they knew what you know, would they follow?"

Depending on the answer, do this:

If not, don't even bother with your communication. Fix your offer. Repeat.

If yes, all you need to do is tell a true story about your offer.

Skip the bullshit. Speak with clarity. That's all there is to it.

(Really, nothing secret about it. Go ahead, try it!)

Speaking the truth

If your idea truly changes things for the better, then all you need to do is to speak the truth.

I'm amazed by how often people just don't trust in that truth. They will look for all sorts of fluff and stuff to decorate the truth to make it look more appealing.

Don't get me wrong. Make things sound and look as good as you can.

But in the end, it's not about how great things look but how well they resonate. Audiences enjoy a great show, no doubt about that. But would you rather care about "what a great show" or about "what a great idea"?

If your idea truly changes things for the better, then what you need most is the truth. Told with clarity. From a point of empathy. These two are the prerequisites for a great story.

Start there. Focus on the truth not the decoration.
(The "wow" will follow!)

Case study: TED's most viewed speech

Sir Ken Robinson has delivered TED's most viewed speech of all time:
"Do Schools Kill Creativity?"

The speech lacks anything that would count as spectacular. It's pure conversation – Robinson letting us in to his mind. Inviting us to take a look from his perspective. Making us see the things he sees and feel the things he feels.

He tells simple everyday stories that make it obvious what's wrong with the school system and how a better approach looks like. The stories are so familiar and his ideas so tangible that they become a powerful message about our children's creative potential.

It's not fluff and decoration that makes his speech so powerful, but thorough research, rigorous thinking, pragmatic solutions, and clear communication in plain English.

He just told true stories.

The point of no return

The final step is to lead your audience to the point of no return. The point where they can't unsee anymore what you made them see.

The point where they see and feel what your idea means for them so that they are able to make a conscious decision. A decision that's based on *their* truths and *their* worldviews, on what matters to *them*.

And yet, a decision that's made *in light of the path you made them see*.

If you've done your homework and your idea is actually great, they *will* choose to follow you. Even if their truth was totally different than yours.

It's a much more satisfying experience for your audience when you let *them* decide. When you respect *their* truth. *Their* worldview. *Their* perspective.

Do the right thing. Make it obvious. Let *them* decide.

That's how leaders who light the path treat – and trust – their audience.

Lighting the Path

Lighting the path means making it obvious for your audience where to go next.

Because it's the right path to take. It's a path that crosses their current place and leads to a destination they long for.

This kind of communication favors those who deeply care for what matters to their audience. **By starting with empathy, these leaders manage to *create relevant products and messages that resonate strongly with their audience.***

They work ruthlessly to speak with clarity so that the path becomes obvious.

They make their audience see what they see and lead them to the point of no return.

The point where they can't unsee anymore what you made them see.

Something that's unmistakably for them. That solves a struggle that actually matters to them. A path that's in their best interest to follow you along.

Of course they will want to follow you along the path.

Case study: A thousand songs in your pocket

A lot has been said about how brilliant it was to translate 3GB into 1000 songs for marketing the iPod. Indeed, it can't be overstated how much better "1000 songs" is than "The 3GB MP3 player". But the "pocket" is way underappreciated.

If the slogan ran like this: "The MP3 player that carries a thousand songs." ... it would still be better than "The 3GB MP3 player" ... but not even close to Apple's version.

What the "pocket" does is that it translates the slogan into a story. With this device, you can carry your whole music library (back then) in your pocket. It's not about the device at all, neither 3GB nor MP3 (or AAC, for that matter).

It's about you! You are going to have your entire music library with you. How cool is that? Struggle solved. True story told.

Once you see it, you can't unsee it. That's why Apple didn't need to incentivise the purchase with marketing tactics but could trust the audience with the decision to buy. They made something that transformed their customers' lives and led them to the point of no return.

How does your product transform your customers life? Don't stop at translating the numbers. Translate it into a true story that relates to our life.

PS: Who do you leave behind?

Sometimes, we need to make a tough decision: Who do we leave behind?
As a customer. As a team member. As a partner.

It might sound like a cliché, but it's true. We can't be everything for everyone. It's impossible. Let's start by being something for someone instead.

When we don't have to please everyone, it means that we don't have to cram everything into our message. We can make our message *a beloved something for someone special*.

The real value here is this: We tell friends about our beloved somethings. Even more so when it makes us feel special. And so, the message spreads.

Given the choice, I'd always choose a die-hard fan over a skeptical crowd. I'd always delight someone special rather than having a crowd just barely approve, half of which complain afterwards, anyway. The thing is: it is a choice.

So, who would you leave behind?

A better way to communicate

There's a better way to communicate. As a leader. As a marketer. As a human.

One that's clear and concise, truthful and honest.

It's grounded in work that matters.

It starts with empathy.

It's way more authentic.

It's about resonating stronger, not persuading harder.

It inspires action. It can even create movements.

It enables positive impact.

It changes everything.

Can you see it?



Where to go next?

The best learning is by doing the work ... because it's all theory and "could" and "would" until you actually do the work. Here are three things you can do right now:

1. Light the path for your audience!

Use the secret recipe and tell a true story about the important work you do.
Tell it to those who are ready to come along and dare to leave the naysayers behind.

We need you to light us the path! (If you need help just reach out at michael@LeadersLightThePath.com)

2. Spread the word about this approach!

We can't leave the field to the bullshitters. Or the sneaky salespeople and selfish marketers.
We need more people like you. People who actually care. People who make a difference.

Please forward this manifesto to everyone who needs to read it so they can light us the path!

3. Send me your feedback!

Did this little book help you? Is there anything that can be improved? Do let me know!

Even better: Send me your next steps and any questions you might have so that I can give you some feedback. I really want you to light the path: michael@LeadersLightThePath.com

Thanks to my wife, Stephanie, and to Antionia Mahon-Fidelle, Tim Huelin, Walter Freiberg, Jobien Hekking, and Françoise Hontoy..

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Please **share** the manifesto:

