



The Influential Leader Podcast Series

Influence Tips from Today's Leading Experts

You Do Resonate?

Connie Dieken interviews Nancy Duarte

CD – Connie Dieken, ND – Nancy Duarte

CD: This is Connie Dieken - welcome to the Influential Leader Podcast. In this edition, you'll discover how to use the power of stories to present ideas that *resonate*. Your mentor today is the one and only Nancy Duarte.

Nancy is the author of the new book, *Resonate*, as well as the award winning *Slide:ology*. She is the CEO of Duarte Design, a firm that's created over a quarter of a million remarkable slide decks for some of the world's biggest brands. I know you're going to benefit from hearing what Nancy makes of today's presentations and how you can rock your presentations. Nancy, thank you so much for joining us on *The Influential Leader*.

ND: Thanks for having me. It means a lot to me.

CD: It's exciting for me to talk to a leader who's as fascinated with transforming presenters as I am.

ND: Thanks. We're pretty committed, aren't we?

CD: How did this come to be your life's work?

ND: Well, I fell into it actually. My dirty little secret is I made C-'s in college communication courses. I feel like I always had the passion and commitment to communication - I just wasn't very good at putting together anything that was very interesting to talk about.

CD: The content – that was your problem?

ND: Yes, and I think that's why I wanted to write *Resonate* because I felt like if I could see a structure and a way to create content, that it would help set me free personally. I feel like I've grown over the years, but yeah that's my motivator.

CD: From C- to A+, Nancy!

ND: Yeah. We just fell into it. We started to create demand and decided that this is what we love and the rest is kind of history.

CD: When you wrote *Slide:ology*, you thought the most pressing need was to create better slides to make it easier for the audience to process information. But you've concluded that the problem is much deeper than gussying up slides.

ND: Right, it is. Most people who major in business or business communicators are never required to take courses in how to visually display information. So that's where I thought the breakdown was. I know, we're cranking out really smart MBAs - the problem is that they don't know how to display their findings. And then come to find out, people were still bored silly yet with very attractive slides. I feel like it just was way more broken in a much deeper way than I thought.

We have the power of story and people aren't folding it in to their talks. A storyteller on a stage takes on a completely different presence than if you say you're a presenter on the stage. I wanted to close that gap.

CD: **When some people slip into presentation mode, they become a very boring, wooden version of themselves. It's as if they think, "I'm not enough. I've got to put on this extra layer."**

ND: They become automatons. Like little robotic creatures kind of just moving through their content quickly instead of being interested in their subject matter. It's such a crack up to me, but something happens when we put in a slide in the mix. I think it's sometimes because we host read-a-longs and we're not feeling compelled to identify the insights. We're just like blah, blah - just rattling off the information with little or no insight into the information.

CD: **Most presentations are really just reports, aren't they? Informational. Factual. Audiences experience a read-a-long with a presenter essentially using the slides as a teleprompter.**

ND: They're doing it like a briefing around a report. It never used to be that you would stand up and give an oral briefing of a written report. You would just read the report, so as the presentations circulates and be understood without a presenter, it's not a visual aid. It's a report. Most of what we do in business are reports and we need to call it a report, use it like a report, read it like a report but not stand up and do a briefing. If you have to do a briefing on a report, take the material from the report and only show the insights. Don't share the appendix. Share the insight.

CD: **Many people are afraid of telling stories. They think. 'I'm not a storyteller.' So tell us - what you mean by mastering the art of presenting visual stories?**

ND: There are a couple of ways that my book *Resonate* addresses stories. The story as a framework, and there's something about the structure of the story that helps us repeat it. And so what I did is I found every structural element of a story that could be applied to a presentation.

The story as an overall framework and structure for your presentation – that's kind of putting the heartbeat back into your presentation, which are the actual stories that you tell. You either tell small stories to move your talk along. It's like we need to unwrap and keep unwrapping through a story, what the concepts are that we're trying to convey.

CD: I love how you take people through ‘what is’ and ‘what could be’ in the book. Will you walk us through that? It was an eye opening moment for me.

ND: Yeah, me too. It was so crazy because for two years, I studied story. I would say almost obsessively, with a lot of grace and mercy from my family. I just obsessed over a story. We had already done hundreds of thousands of presentations after 20 something years, so I knew everything about a presentation.

The story was like this wonderland for me of really trying to figure out why is cinema and literature such a page turner that we get into presentation and it’s just terribly boring. Then I looked at a lot of speeches. And as I started to overlay all these things at once including presentations, that’s when this pattern emerged. And the first time I saw it was with Martin Luther King’s “I Have A Dream” speech. I’ll never forget – I could tell that there were these two classes of information and I knew I could throw some things into the left column.

So I actually took his whole transcript, put it into Word, I aligned half of it left and I could pick different phrases and align them right and I knew they were different. It took me a long time – it’s past and the future. I kept trying to name it and then as I just kept going along and analyzing different speeches and classifying them the same way, I realized what I’m doing is moving back and forth between what is and what could be. It was such a great moment to actually be able to figure that out and name it.

CD: ‘What is’ and ‘what could be.’ Steve Jobs does this - so many great presenters do this. Can you tell our listeners how they can they apply ‘what is’ and ‘what could be?’

ND: That’s a great question because as a leader, what we’re trying to do is make a brighter future or we’re trying to get our employees aligned around an idea that’s going to prove our organization’s success. So our jobs as leaders are to define as clearly as possible where we need to be in the future. And what you do is you try to compare what currently is to what could be, which is the idea and the future with your idea adopted.

And by moving back and forth as a structural device – this is for the middle of your presentation – by moving back and forth between what is and what could be, you’ll start to compare what is to what could be and start to paint the picture that you know what? The status quo of what is not as alluring as the loftiness of my great idea.

So if you’re not constantly comparing – here what is. Here’s what we’re doing now. Look, here’s what could be. Here’s what is but here’s what could be. And by using that contrasting structural device, people will be like oh my gosh, I don’t want to stay where I’m at because that would be foolish

I want to move towards this new idea that my leader is telling me. So it is a powerful tool to use contrast in that way as a structural device.

CD: A general story pattern might have A) a situation, B) a complication, and C) a resolution. Right?

ND: Yeah - so it's the same pattern. The situation is 'what is' and then the transformation is 'what could be.' Everything in between is all the roadblocks and frustrations. By moving back and forth between what is and what could be and what is and what could be, you start to address all the roadblocks and complications that would happen from not being able to have this transformation occur.

So some of the 'what is' that you're addressing are the roadblocks – the resistance. Now you would say I realize that part of what's on the table is you guys are going to resist this idea, but look. Look at the idea with no resistance or look what happens when we harness the resistance and move forward. So the way a great presentation ends is by describing the new bliss. What you need to do is take the time to describe really well 'what could be' and how utopian the world is or how blissful the current situation is if we all move in this direction because the Principle of Recency says that people will remember most the last thing they were told.

You want to paint a beautiful picture of what the world is going to look like with your idea adopted as the very last thing. You tell them what the world will look like transformed, basically.

CD: **Some leaders may be thinking, 'Yeah, but what if there's Q&A at the end?' In this case, I suggest going back and repeating 'what could be' after Q&A. There are *two closes* to your presentation when you have Q&A. It shouldn't end on the last question.**

ND: Yeah, and I think sometimes you can package the answers. I sometimes – sometimes you don't get the opportunity to restate your final new list, so I try to make it as memorable of a new list as possible. Then I do frame up and put language into all of my answers that reinforces what I said. So even if they ask kind of a derailing question, as I'm answering it I still try to bring it back to the core point, which is tricky but works.

CD: **In the TV industry that I was in for years, we called that 'bridging.' You bridge any question back to the answer you want people to hear, instead of just answering a negative question. Bridging carries it from negative to positive.**

Here's something else I share with my clients – 'You're Diana Ross. The slides are the Supremes.' (Or for guys, "You're Bono. The slides are U2.") That's similar to another comparison you make in *Resonate*: 'You're Yoda, not Luke Skywalker.'

ND: I think it's easy as the presenter to feel like I'm all that. I'm on the stage. I'm doing all the talking and we instantly default to this, 'I'm here to save the galaxy. I'm your hero. Worship me.' But in reality, that kind of stance and posture does not spread ideas because when I started to really study archetypes, I went there with the assumption I see, the hero is the presenter and then I really quickly – once I really studied the mentors and some of the other roles, I realized in reality, the audience is the hero because if I have an idea and I put it out there to an audience and they don't grab onto it and hold it as dear, my idea dies.

I might as well not even presented it because it's gone. It won't move forward. So that's when I realized, "You know what? I need to play the role of mentor. I need to come alongside the audience and really work with them until they get it." It just changes your mindset because it emits a movie and mentors. They bring a special gift, a magical tool or they help a hero get unstuck.

When's the last time you heard a presenter that made you feel that way? My gosh, I gave them an hour, and I left with a valuable insight or a special tool. Something that I can use. It's just not very often that we do it and that's all because we don't spend enough time thinking about who we're talking to and we don't talk to them like they're a friend.

CD: I believe that your role as a presenter is to create a groundswell. To get out there and make things happen. I advise clients to begin by developing their close first. You have to figure out, "What specifically do I want this audience to do, think or believe?"

I'm always surprised by how many people think, "I better open PowerPoint!" when it's time to get started designing their presentation. I think that's the *worst* place to start. Instead, the best place to start is with a GPS mindset - where are you taking the audience? Are you heading to Indianapolis? Phoenix? Where am I taking them?

ND: I guess because you're kind of asking them to think through the end of movie before they get to the beginning, but that's what is so important. We have a methodology in the book where you need to move them from one state of being and doing to this new state of being and doing. You have to define that because if you don't define that, they won't get there. They're not going to magically get there just to end up in ramble. I think that's the problem people don't realize.

CD: The only thing you're going to do that way is create slides. I counsel people to create two sets of slides. There's the initial set of slides – the practice deck - and then there is a totally different set pared down for your audience. That's the visual deck.

ND: Yeah. There are different methods to rehearse - I think I even put that in *Slide:ology* where you can practice and practice and then you start eliminating a word, you eliminate another word and you pair it down. There's also a way to setup your presentation in a slideshow mode where all your notes will be on your laptop. So your view of what you see is very different than what the audience sees.

It's a PowerPoint and a keynote feature, so it's in setup slideshow. So what happens is you're going to have as many words as you want. You can have a big as a crutch there as you need to remind you what you're going to say, but then your audience is reading along. They can only process one channel at a time.

Either they're going to listen to your audio or read your slides. So the whole time you're reading your slides they are not listening to your audio stream.

CD: I call that ‘The eyes trump the ears.’ What they see will trump anything you’re saying. If they’re busy reading your slides, this is what they’re hearing: “Wah, wah, wah” – like Charlie Brown’s teacher - right?

ND: True.

CD: Technology has given us so many ways to communicate today, but you and I believe that presentations are still important. They’re a true human experience - and people want that. They just don’t want a boring one.

ND: Right. It’s not very often where somebody is like. “I get to go to a presentation!” What I’m hoping is that people – especially in B2B sales, when a business is selling to another business, 90% of the time there’s a slideshow towards the end in the final decision making process. If you can get your potential customer to in some way become attached to your idea emotionally, and by emotionally I mean that they can see how the world is going to be a better place with your idea adopted. If you can get them to see it but your competitor can’t, they’re going to go with the one where they can how the world is going to be a better place.

It’s important that you convey that in a way that’s alluring. We love to be interested. We enjoy laughing. A lot of people enjoy life and we just suck the life out of people for an hour when we invite them to a presentation. So I just feel like it is an opportunity to connect in a really real way and in person, yet we just blow it off. We just don’t put the kind of investment in it that can actually make that exchange powerful.

CD: In the forward of your book, it says ‘this book is intended for people who have ambition, purpose and an uncommon work ethic.’ This isn’t for slackers.

ND: Yeah. Look at the people that are the greatest communicators. I get that question all the time. What about people who aren’t natural communicators? Even if they think these people were natural communicators and did not invest the time, they are just full of themselves.

There’s a great story in the book that I love. I studied the life of Martha Graham, and she was a dancer who completely changed and revolutionized how we dance. It used to be all uptight, just classical ballet and she made dance about self expression. So here’s this woman who could express every emotion on the planet through her body on the stage and it was just moving, yet she was terrified of public speaking. So she could express herself with her body, but the minute they asked her to open her mouth she would hide in her dressing room and lock the door and she overcame it.

She worked really hard at it and she has been deemed the most successful ambassador of the United States ever had to Asia because she overcame and she actually figured out how to apply the same discipline of dance to her lecturing that she did and it worked. She was terrified of it, but she worked hard at it. I think that some people just think of someone like Steve Jobs or Martin Luther King. I had someone say, “I’m not one of them. I’m just a CEO” and I’m like, “what a terrible way to look at life.”

What if Martin Luther King woke up and just said. ‘I’m just a southern Baptist preacher?’ We wouldn’t have had the revolution we had. So anybody can be a brilliant communicator, but it does take time and commitment.

CD: You recently spoke at a TedxEast conference. For those who aren’t familiar with Ted, you basically have 18 minutes to give the presentation of your life. Talk about pressure. Some people seem to think, ‘Well, I only have an 18 minute talk, so I don’t have to put much preparation into it.’ You say the inverse is true - the shorter the presentation, the *more* work you have to do.

ND: You have to boil it down to its essence.

CD: What was that like for you? Was it brutal?

ND: I can get up and talk on just about anything for 40 minutes, but you have to take that and basically you’re cutting that in half. So I took what I thought was my best talk. I printed out all the little slides nine up because at nine – when you print out your slides nine up, it’s almost the exact same size as a little tiny sticky note. So what I did was I made sure I pulled out half of them and then I supplemented little segues in there. Then I rehearsed about 35 times because it’s embarrassing – I can’t be the presentation lady and get the hook on the test day.

You have to stay within 18 minutes or the curator starts to walk on stage and everyone in the audience knows, ‘what a screw up.’ They don’t know how to stay within 18 minutes. So I can’t be the presentation girl and not fall within the time constraints. So I literally timed it up in the counter and timed it down on the counter and just said everything I could and literally finished and just about died when I finally looked up at the clock and I had six seconds left. I went six, five, four, three, two, one and I was completely done. But wow, that was hard.

CD: When you gave the presentation earlier in India, did you have any problems?

ND: I had some problems. I had a very bad head cold and I had practiced with my external communications manager several times before I left and I had 15 minutes. Then I was following in at 14 and a half. So I was doing pretty well. I’m not going to have to rush, just kind of pace myself. I had a head cold and what I did was that week in India I kept rehearsing it, but I never timed it.

Even right until I walked onstage, I’m like playing things through my mind and sure enough, I went about a minute over and the curator walked up. I’m like gosh. So fortunately, I had two endings built in, where I could end at the end of – since I was India I analyzed Nehru’s speech. The end of Nehru’s speech, fortunately, had such a beautiful new bliss. I just kind of recited his new bliss and pretended that was the ending, but I had a whole ending still to go.

So I really messed up and nobody knew. Literally everyone was like – they stood up and they cheered and everything, but I was like, dang. I had such a better ending and it was embarrassing. It was really embarrassing.

CD: **Something like a head cold can throw your timing off ...**

ND: Absolutely. Going a week without really timing it, that was a real dumb oversight on my part.

CD: **But a cold for you is like natural nerves for someone else who doesn't like to present. For some people, giving a presentation is like an out-of-body experience. They stand up there and suddenly, anxiety kicks in, and they kind of lose their head and morph into this *evil twin of themselves* who's very boring and robotic. 'Presentation mode,' as I call it, takes all of the humanness out of them. What advice do you have to overcome becoming so emotionally neutral? To not think 'everybody's looking at me' and center on themselves, rather than the audience.**

ND: Yeah and it's hard. I know nerves are there. I get nervous every time I present and I have coping mechanisms that I do with some breathing exercises and focusing exercises. One of the things that's interesting about persuading someone is that it's really easy to persuade a friend. If you spent enough time thinking about who's in the audience, what they love, what keeps them up at night, why are they going to resist, how do they spend their income, whatever it is.

When you really think about who they are, when you get up on stage, it'll feel like you're persuading friends and not persuading strangers. Just your body language, your eye contact, everything.

Actually, from Nick Morgan's book it was one of the greatest insights I got from his book, *Trust Me*. I know we're both part of his fan club. He said right before you walk onstage, think about a loved one and pretend you're going to see them. He said in the book – your shoulders will hang different. Your body, my body, and the chemistry of my body changed because I pictured myself meeting my kids and I pictured them running to me. And then I realized my whole body feels different and he said do that right before you walk onstage, and pretend you're seeing some loved ones for the first time and it'll drive your tone and it'll drive your stance.

CD: **It warms you.**

ND: Yeah, it warms you. I felt my whole body melting when I did his exercise. It was good.

CD: **Warmth is an incredible connector between you and your audience. It softens you. You can see that in facial expressions, everything. I highly recommend adding warmth. Forget the tired old advice of 'picture the audience in their underwear.' Is that officially dead? I think it should be, don't you?**

ND: Yes.

CD: **That's not how we should teach people presentation skills.**

ND: Right. I put that in my book. I think picturing them in their underwear is dead. Now you need to picture them in superhero tights.

CD: **Because they're the heroes.**

ND: Yeah, because that's what they are. They're the hero of your idea, so you need to picture them in superhero outfits.

CD: **it's now much easier for people to understand their audiences because of the Internet. You can check their social media pages. You can look at what their issues are beyond just what they tell you.**

ND: Right.

CD: **I love the story in *Resonate* that you tell about when you had to speak to a beer group - and you had essentially nothing in common with these beer guys. You did a lot of research – even a beer contest.**

ND: I research every time. For example, later this week, I fly to Orlando to talk to a bunch of e-learning people. I was asked to speak in front of learning people and learning organizations once before and people walked out on me. That's the only time they walked out on me.

I'm so nervous to speak this week, but I feel like I get who they are. I get what makes them tick now. I even sent out some tweets to ask people what are their concerns in the e-learning space. I did a survey of e-learning people and I feel much more like I know who I'm talking to and I know what's on their mind. When you don't do that, they'll do things like walk out on you or they'll tweet terrible things behind your back or whatever.

I actually – if I know the names of people, sometimes when you're talking to a smaller group I think for the example I gave in the book, there were about 40 people and I had their names. I had somebody on my team just look them all up. So I had two to three links of who they are, what they look like. I could figure out what they're interested in and I just felt like I knew them. I just felt more like I knew them. That worked for me.

CD: **Audiences know when you're blowing smoke or whether you seem to actually care and understand what's important to them.**

ND: Right. They do. They can feel it. They can see it in your body language. They can see what comes out of your mouth. And I think that's when we're the most bothered by a presentation.

It's like, 'don't they value my time? Don't they know that would not have been interesting to me?' Then we feel kind of insulted and that all has to do with not being prepared and not thinking through who you're talking to.

CD: **Most people go in thinking, ‘Well, I’ll just bury them in information. I’ll tell them everything I know.’**

ND: Or come across as smart.

CD: **Right. And they may do it from the goodness of their hearts. Some people want to share everything. That’s what I call the ‘Fire Hydrant Approach.’ You flood an audience with information. But a confused brain remembers *nothing* and they’ll act on nothing.**

ND: Right. I liken it to the Tower of Babel where the language was confused. It’s too intense. It’s too much jargon. You’re coming across trying to impress and that is not the way a mentor behaves.

And if you’re coming across as an arrogant know-it-all, nobody takes advice from an arrogant know-it-all. So it takes a lot of time, especially if someone is in a specialized field where they do have their own lingo and it is kind of narrow. It takes a long time to get yourself out of that mindset and start to use more common language that people can actually take bites of. It’s work.

CD: **I’d like to give you, our listeners a resource to help you resonate. You can pick up Nancy Duarte’s book called *Resonate* or her other award-winner, *Slide:ology*, wherever books are sold. You can also go to Duarte.com where you can read Nancy’s blog or sign up for workshops or webinars. Tell us about the webinars.**

ND: We took the full day workshop - because we know not everybody can get into Mountain View - and we split it into six one-hour long webinars that we do. Pretty fun.

CD: **Where is Mountain View, California?**

ND: Mountain View is right in the heart of Silicon Valley. We are about 35 miles south of San Francisco and about 20 minutes north of San Jose, right on the peninsula.

CD: **Do you also hold workshops around the country?**

ND: We are working on having a couple of regional public workshops and if people want to follow along on the blog, we’ll announce it when they’re ready to go. We’re looking at a couple of East Coast cities and somewhere in the middle of the country.

CD: **Final question: why did you name the book *Resonate*?**

ND: I’m so glad you asked that. Because if you say, ‘Wow, that really resonated with me,’ it means you’re on board. It means it impacted you in some way. My son made for me a colloquy plate and when I saw this plate, which is a beautiful, scientific physics example of resonating, I said I want to name my book *Resonate*. He took this salt and he poured it on a plate and there’s this signal that runs to the plate. What happens is the little pieces of salt, when it actually resonates at a resonate frequency they all puff up like little snap, crackle, pops.

They hop up to this new place. It was like they knew where to go. They automatically knew to jump up into this new pattern. So when you resonate deeply, you can cause a lot of people to do self organizing behavior around the frequency that you're sending out, but if your frequency isn't really clear, they're not going to know how to organize at all. So the metaphor of resonance became really special to me.

As I started to build it, I knew when someone has spoken well, they'll say 'that really resonated with me. I think that person really thought through what they had to say.' And that's what I want everyone to be able to say when they're done with a great presentation.

CD: After all, the purpose of the presentation is to push an idea out of your head - and get it out in the open so it will resonate and others will adopt it.

ND: Exactly. Why speak otherwise? If the status quo is okay, then you don't need to present.

CD: Nancy - it's such a pleasure to have you with us today. Thank you for joining us.

ND: You're welcome. I had a great time.

CD: I want to thank everybody for listening to this edition of *The Influential Leader*. Until next time, this is Connie Dieken. Now get out there and influence your world!