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POSITION AND PACKAGE YOUR LEGEND

When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.

—from the movie *The Man Who Shot
Liberty Valance*, 1962

Positioning and packaging is creating a legendary message that meets the expectation of your target audience and gains persuasive compliance. I covered storytelling as a personal persuasion tool in my first book, but this chapter goes much deeper into the process. This is probably the most time-consuming subliminal persuasion tactic, but it is without question the one I'd never be without. This is the tactic that I start all consulting with.

People often ask me to explain the difference between positioning and packaging relative to packaging a company or an

individual and the answer is, there really is none. The same reasons that positioning and packaging make subliminal persuasion more effective make you more effective both one-on-one as well as one on many.

In positioning and packaging a person, a company, or an idea, we are leveraging several critical factors:

1. *We are leveraging storytelling*—Stories are our oldest form of communication and the best stories are the ones that will transcend time.
2. *We are focusing on creating complementary models*—We are positioning and packaging ourselves, our ideas, and our businesses so they fit the schema of the person experiencing them. We are also positioning and packaging so that the story fits the timeless models of stories that people understand so that they understand how to consume and interpret them. We want to make the conclusion impossible to miss.
3. *We are creating a persona that is easily identifiable with you, your company, and your product or your service*—If you look at how politics has evolved, Republicans have taken on the persona of being conservative and Democrats liberal. For a politician to be effective in either party, he or she must have a persona that is congruent with the bigger identities of the party.

The goal is to deeply implant and leverage ideas in the subconscious where most thinking is done. Once we've made our impact on the subconscious appropriately, it is very easy to control the outcome of the messages we are sending.

Gerald Zaltman, author of *How Customers Think* (Harvard Business School Press, 2003), reporting on the work of Harvard professor and psychologist Jerome Kagan says that 95 percent of thinking occurs in our unconscious minds.

It is that thought stew from which we pull the ingredients to create our opinions and interpretations of events around us. Effective narratives enter that thought process effectively, mostly without conscious consideration and reside there waiting for us to pull them back up and leverage the information so we can make a decision. The subliminal persuader understands that the person making the decision mostly does not have an encyclopedic reference system for determining whether the information or ideas she receives are real or fictional. Therefore, when you create narratives, the more congruent they are, the more easily they are accepted as factual. This idea is so important (in reference to recovered memories) that in 1993, the American Psychiatric Association stated, “It is not known how to distinguish with complete accuracy memories based on true events from those derived from other sources.”

When I was an undercover narcotics officer, one of my jobs was to help people create covers and backstories to back up their assumed identities. I was also responsible for helping them develop and encode the stories that they would tell in high-stress situations. We started with a very simple premise: The best lie is 90 percent true. You build the story using one’s own first name. That was something they wouldn’t have to worry about, and if someone shouted his name and he looked without thinking, it wouldn’t be considered a tell, a clue that something was amiss. Start with your own true story when crafting your brand or persona.

In business, we are not creating fictional stories. The most effective marketers and persuaders are carefully crafting, positioning, and packaging stories and ideas to make them most believable and most credible to the public. The extent to which the positioning and packaging is effective will determine the ease with which the idea is accepted. Another word for this kind of messaging is *branding*. Your brand communicates with your customer at a very subliminal level and if the story your brand tells is a good one it becomes real in the mind of the consumer.

The idea of narrative and story as it relates to subliminal persuasion is just coming to the forefront, although it has existed unexplored for quite some time. Professional persuaders are just beginning to understand how to add storytelling to their arsenal.

Subliminal Selling Secret

I spoke with Larry Beinhart, the legendary author who wrote *Wag The Dog* and *Fog Facts*, both must-read books. I asked him for his take on narrative as a persuasive tool and he said, “Everything we think and do is the result of a narrative. We tell ourselves a story in our head about going to the store, getting milk and eggs, then going for some gas and grabbing our mail on the way in the door.”

When you control the narrative, you control the outcome. Stories have the ending that the writer writes, not the ending that you necessarily want. It is up to you as a persuader to begin analyzing the stories you are telling so you can control the narrative in the mind of the person you are persuading.

Narratives also have higher recall than litanies. Stories are easier to remember because they are grouped and connected

ideas. One of the best memory strategies involves linking items together to create a narrative (often a very odd one) that allows you to flow from one item to the next in a long list.

Use stories and narrative when you write e-mails, when you talk to someone face to face, and when you are giving her a list of features and benefits. Rather than give a list, tell a story. The bonus is that she'll remember you better as well because she'll have connected with you on a more personal level.

DECONSTRUCTING YOUR CURRENT LEGEND

You must first understand the story you are telling so you can create a powerful narrative that will allow you to position and package yourself in the most efficient way.

Marketers will often say that their story is about things like price or selection or convenience. And they may, in fact, be right. But those are typically not the best stories to tell. More on that in a moment.

I want you to deconstruct your story by asking the following questions and writing down your answers. You'll need them as we move forward. This is where your Moleskine will come in handy; I use the mid-sized one with the elastic band and folder in the back.

1. What is the premise or the overarching moral statement of the story you are trying to tell?
2. Who, or what, is the focal point in your story?
3. What are the overriding emotions, memories, and beliefs that you are tying into the telling of the story?

4. What emotion are you trying to evoke with the story?
What emotion *are* you evoking with the story?
5. What vital ideas are you communicating in your story?
6. What actions are the reader, listener, or viewer supposed to take?

Don't be surprised if you don't have good answers to all the questions; most people don't. But you will shortly. Narrative thinking and creation works amazingly well when you do have the answers, so let's take a look at how legends form for the purpose of building a legend that deeply influences the masses and allows them to readily identify you and with you.

CREATING YOUR LEGEND

When I consult with companies and individuals to create rapid consumer acceptance of the ideas they want to proliferate, I start by talking to them about the legend that they want to create.

Nearly always, the answer is, "We don't have a legend."

But that is never true. Your legend is based around what it is that you do better than anyone else, your specific skills, interpretations, applications, or abilities. It revolves around how you got into the position you are in now. But to get to the legend you must start in the beginning.

1. How did I get here?—You start building your legend by asking about how you got here. What unique path brought you here? No detail is too small, and more is better in the building of a legend; you can always pare back later.

In my case, I talk about growing up in a cult as my impetus to begin studying persuasion. I talk about the

things that happened to me there. I build up the experience so that it is vivid and memorable. I connect it to experiences and beliefs people already have. My legend is persuasion; that is the one thing I always want associated with me.

2. What did I learn that others don't know?—Legends often do heroic things or they know things that no one else knows.

Part of my legend is that I learned how to persuade and manipulate from my upbringing in a cult. I learned even more through a course of rigorous study that has lasted more than 25 years and continues to this day.

3. What do I stand for?—Legends have to stand for something. They have to be bigger than life because of what they do and the service they provide.

My legend stands for truth and skills. Persuasion, not unethical manipulation, replicable skills that you can employ at will to get the things you want.

Once you have the basis for the legend there is one more component: building the narrative so that the legend can be transferred from person to person or from one to many.

ELEMENTS OF A SUBLIMINALLY PERSUASIVE STORY

The process I'm about to teach you is as old as stories themselves. If you study literature, mythology, the Bible, or some other religious text of your choice, you'll find stories follow a very similar structure.

Joseph Campbell, one of the world's greatest experts on mythology, termed these kinds of stories *The Hero's Journey*. Some of the best stories ever told, the Jesus story, *Star Wars*,

The DaVinci Code, all follow the Hero's Journey as the model for the construction of their stories.

I've altered the model slightly to fit the needs of the professional persuader.

THE MYTH MODEL

The meta-message of your story, or the ideological statement, is the conclusion you want someone to draw from the story. In the example of the tortoise and the hare, the essence is that slow but steady always wins over quick but careless. The moral of the story is that carelessness costs the race and the story provides the proof.

It is important that you maintain only one clear meta-message in each story. Stories with too many ideas and morals included are difficult to understand and draw a clear conclusion.

Ask yourself, what is the meta-message that I'm trying to communicate? Remember, meta-messages are big, compelling ideas people can believe in. What do I want people to walk away understanding about us and our products or services?

The meta-message is the place where you start developing your story. You create, position, and package the characters of your story to support it. Your narrative wraps around it so that when you tell the story the meta-message is implicit and understood. Understanding the meta-message sets up all future narrative subliminal persuasion tactics.

The Hook

Every powerful story must have a hook that pulls you in, that helps you identify with the central figure of the story, the protagonist.

The hook is a statement that the people hearing the story identify with or find shocking or that supports a belief they already have. The hook should leave them with an intense desire to know more.

Some of the hardest work you'll do on your story is developing the hook. Start by asking yourself this question, "What would people find shocking, or disturbing? Or, what would they find not surprising, or supportive of their existing beliefs about me, my product, service, or idea?"

I provided you an example of a good hook in Chapter 1 when I told you that the book I wanted to write was too dangerous for my publisher to publish, that it was too polarizing. When you find out about that book, it will likely be from some version of this hook:

Read the only persuasion book written by Dave Lakhani that was too dangerous for the largest publishers in the world. The secrets of persuasion and influence were so polarizing and controversial that it was turned down outright.

That hook invokes curiosity, it makes you wonder what there is to learn that you aren't learning here (you'll have to wait and see; the book *will* come to print and will be like nothing you've ever experienced before).

Conflict and the Antagonist

For the story to be effective, there must be conflict in the form of some kind of shared antagonist (that is, The Man, the government, the devil, the Illuminati, taxes, grime, health care, the war). The antagonist presents a challenge that our hero must overcome.

It is important to develop an antagonist that everyone can recognize as having a shared enemy that allows the person

experiencing the story to become a part of the story. The more that the person experiences himself as being a part of the story or relating to the story, the more seamlessly he accepts it.

The Revelation

As your story progresses, the hero of your story must experience a revelation. The revelation may come in the form of a discovery, an encounter with a benevolent teacher, or a literal revelation from some divine authority. The revelation exposes success secrets that everyone presumed were true but were reserved for a select few. Our hero, once in possession of the secrets, is willing to reveal them to you so that you can experience the same results he has.

When you are crafting your story, your revelation can have far-reaching implications, but it should explore no more than one major outcome. That outcome should be a major belief outcome.

For example:

In selling business opportunities by information marketing (direct marketing through the Internet, direct mail, direct response television, or direct selling MLM opportunities), offer a singular big promise for the riches you desperately crave and deserve.

Nearly all of the stories follow a very similar construct. They start out with the meta-message that you can, and in fact do, deserve to be rich. The story starts out with our hero telling you his story. "I was broke and struggling with no prospects of a better job when, by accident, sheer power of will, or divine intervention I discovered a process that virtually anyone can use to get rich and I want to do something no one else ever does: I want to share these secrets with you because I make all the money I need."

Layer On the Proof and Link It

We need to tell another critical piece of the story for the revelation to be accepted and compliance assured. This is the piece where we link us to them, we are alike, and we layer on proof that the revelation is true and that we truly were just like them. We link the idea that we used to do the same thing that they do now with the idea that the secrets we are about to reveal will transform them like they transformed us. Why? Because we are alike.

Let's continue with the previous example.

It doesn't matter your level of income, your level of education, if you have special skills, or even where you live. I was living in a van down by the river (tip of the hat to the late and hilarious Chris Farley), I was working in a dead-end job that was stealing my life, I was working 80 hours a week and missing the most important part of my kid's life.

The storyteller simply chooses the part of the story that best matches the reality of his audience and layers it in. He then moves to the proof portion.

And, best of all, because we are alike, these secrets will work for you, too, and the secrets will start working immediately. Look how they worked for these people (insert social proof/testimonials here).

The story goes on to reveal some of the secrets so that you can see that they are real and exclusive. (For example, "The rich know banking secrets you don't; go to your bank and talk to them about their private banking programs.") It all sounds very logical, it follows a pattern that reinforces a belief that you have that you deserve to be rich and if you just had one lucky break you would be and this might be it.

The Conclusion

The conclusion is to bring the story to an emotionally compelling close. That close must include a call to action and the promise of a better future that the meta-message promises.

The conclusion also shows the student evolving into the teacher or the keeper of the secrets who benevolently shares them with those who are on the same path.

Let's finish the example that we began earlier.

I know how you feel. Like all the people you've seen who've been successful using this system, you've tried everything. You've worked hard, paid your taxes, even tried other systems, but none of them have the time-tested and economy-proven techniques that I'm going to give you. You simply need to take action, call now, click here, invest the small fee that the course costs (because one of the secrets is that there is power in the transfer of money or they'd give it to you for free) and the secrets are yours and I'll see you in the hallowed halls of the rich reserved for us.

Now, I used a very obvious story that we've all heard a million times. And, chances are that you even bought into it a few times. But the truth of the subliminal persuasion that affected you was not the power of this story; it was the cumulative power of your exposure to the meta-message (you deserve to be and can be rich). What will determine the effectiveness of this story is how congruent the secrets are, and the product is with your personal experience. If they are congruent, you'll likely buy again. If you have any success, you'll become an ardent fan who spreads the story over and over again. And, if one of the profit points revolves around you spreading the

story as an endorsing evangelist, you'll spread it with all your energy and soul.

Let's look at how the process might be used in a local accounting firm.

Meta-message: The IRS takes too much of my money and I want it back.

The Hook: Did you know that people who earned over \$50,000 last year paid on average 25 percent more tax than they had to and their accountants never told them?

Conflict and the Antagonist: The Internal Revenue Service does not reward accountants for taking advantage of legal loopholes available to you. In fact, they go out of their way to hide them. And, accountants don't get paid more to find them for you. I grew up in a family that paid their taxes without question. They took basic deductions and nothing more. We got a modest refund back each year. I went to college and started studying accounting. I went back over my parents' tax returns for the last 10 years and discovered that they'd left almost \$25,000 in the Internal Revenue Service's coffers, money that they could have used for a vacation, investments, even to pay for my schooling! I talked to them about it and they said exactly what people like you say to me, "No one told us."

I was outraged that my parents, upstanding people, hardworking, and kind, were paying an unfair amount of taxes because their accountant didn't want any extra scrutiny from the IRS. He just wanted to get as many returns done in the shortest time possible. There is virtually no incentive to an accountant to find deductions for you.

The Revelation: I began to study the tax code and the brightest minds in tax law and code interpretation. I discovered that there are literally dozens of loopholes that the average person can take advantage of if they know what to look for. I started with my parents and went back through their last three years of taxes and was able to file amended returns for all three years and the IRS had to write them a check for \$5,200! That was an unexpected windfall. But I wanted to be sure. So I did my own taxes and those of family and friends just to be sure. In virtually every case, we got a refund. My folks called their old accountant and asked whether he thought they should look at their taxes for any missed deductions and he said, “We took every deduction you had coming that wouldn’t send up a red flag to the IRS; any small amount wouldn’t be worth the potential problem.” I don’t know about you, but I think that \$5,200 is no small amount.

The Conclusion: I’ve developed a program that allows you to regain all of the taxes you have due for the past three years and I take all the risk. If I can’t find at least a \$1,000 refund for you in your past three years’ taxes, you owe me nothing and we part ways as friends. But if I do, you’ll pay my standard amended return filing fee of \$150 per return. If I find you just \$1,001 in savings, you still net \$551 in your pocket. All you need to do is bring me your last three years’ statements and I can get started right away. Your money belongs to you, not the IRS. Once you have your money back where it belongs, I’m going to ask you to be a client for life. Is that fair?

You see, by simply creating a narrative that leads them through a process that concludes in their favor, they’ve made the decision to buy long before you ask them to.

Subliminal Selling Secret

Develop an elevator pitch that combines the power of the question with narrative to create a qualifying statement that will literally instantly qualify or disqualify everyone you meet. Keep your meta-message in mind as you develop your pitch.

Start with the question or phrase: “Have you ever . . .”
Add the qualifying statement: “Met someone who _____ or has seen the _____ of your dreams?”

The answer to “Have you ever met someone who _____” should be a *no* or a *yes* with a question. If they say no, you simply say that is exactly what I do; would you like to experience _____? If they say yes and they really have, then you know they are not a client or if you don’t think they have, you simply ask them to tell you about that person so you can further determine whether they really have met someone like you before.

In the case of “Have you ever seen the _____ of your dreams?” whether they say yes or no, you say, “I’d love to hear about the _____ of your dreams because I have a unique process for helping people like you make that dream come true.” Their next question, of course, will be, “How do you do that?” which is the invitation to begin your story.

Joel Bauer, author of *How To Persuade People Who Don’t Want To Be Persuaded* (Wiley, 2004) is the master and originator of this technique and helped me refine and polish this technique to the point that it is nearly imperceptible when used. Thank you, Joel, you are masterful.

What does our accountant's elevator pitch sound like?

Prospect: Hi, I'm William Roberts, what do you do?

Accountant: Have you ever met someone who beats the IRS at its own game and gets you at least a \$1,000 refund check from taxes you've already filed?

Prospect: No . . .

Accountant: That is exactly what I do. Would you like a refund check in the amount of at least \$1,000 from the IRS in your hands in the next 60 days?

Prospect: Absolutely!

And that is the power of a well-constructed narrative to move someone who would normally have said no to beg for more information.

Implementation Is Everything

Money Follows Action

Put down this book before you go any further and deconstruct your current legend. Determine what the story is that people are taking away about you. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Is this the correct story that I want the masses to tell one another about me or my company?
- In what ways can the story be enhanced to create a much more congruent and emotional narrative that will move the masses?
- What is the meta-message of the story that is currently being told and does it need to be changed or improved?

Develop your 30-second elevator pitch that initiates your narrative interaction with your prospects.

Wouldn't you rather have people asking you for more information than having to sell to them all the time?

You are beginning to understand the power of Subliminal Persuasion.

ESSENTIAL FURTHER STUDY

Books

Storytelling: Branding In Practice—Klaus Fog, Christian Budtz, Baris Yakaboylu (Springer, 2005)

Brainwashing—Kathleen Taylor (Oxford, 2004)

How to Persuade People Who Don't Want to Be Persuaded—Joel Bauer and Mark Levy (Wiley, 2004)

Audio Interview

boldapproach.com/benmack: An interview with Ben Mack on creating a legend platform. This is a must-listen exposé on legendary branding.

Movies

Wag the Dog—(New Line Home Video, 1998)