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MORE IMPACT  
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GREATER INFLUENCE

# SHARPENING YOUR POINT

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Winning the **Battle** for  
Communication Efficiency

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Leesa Wallace & Kathy McAfee

Foreword by Jim Horan  
*Author of The One Page Business Plan*



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# Contents

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Foreword by Jim Horan .....	vii
Part 1: Stop .....	1
Chapter 1: Are You A Wild Bore? .....	3
Chapter 2: Be Brief. Be Brilliant. Be Done. ....	9
Chapter 3: Been There. Done That. ....	15
Part 2: Start. ....	23
Chapter 4: Why Am I Here? .....	25
Chapter 5: What's Your Positon? .....	41
Chapter 6: What Do You Want Me To Do? .....	51
Chapter 7: Why Should I? .....	63
Chapter 8: Do You Have Proof? .....	79
Chapter 9: Are We There Yet? .....	91
Part 3: Master. ....	115
Chapter 10: What's The Plan? .....	117
Chapter 11: Aikido For Challenges .....	137
Chapter 12: Go Further .....	151
Resources .....	167
Acknowledgments .....	169
Authors .....	171
About Leesa Wallace. ....	171
About Kathy McAfee .....	173
Works Referenced .....	179
Index .....	181

## Chapter 1

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# Are You A Wild Bore?

**W**e knew a Wild Bore. His name was Frank. Let us tell you about him.

We were sitting in a large conference room with fifteen of our colleagues within the talent management function. Our boss, Frank (name changed to protect the innocent), was going to be briefing us on results from a senior management survey. These weren't just any results. These results were feedback from the direct reports of the senior leadership team. This had never been done before in the organization. Ever. It was a big deal. And our team would be seeing the information first.

The senior leadership team was, predictably, anxious to get this information, and so were we. It was our job as the talent management team to understand both the results and the implications of the results. This was essential so the senior leadership could understand what it all meant and what they needed to do with the information. If we didn't "get it," we knew the senior leadership team wouldn't either—they would reject the results, rationalize, or justify. That outcome would be both a disappointing setback for our team and a lost opportunity for our organization as a whole.

Our team gathered for a preview of the information two weeks before the big day. After thanking us for being there, Frank showed his first PowerPoint slide, titled *Agenda*, and read it out loud to us. And, there on the screen was our one-hour agenda laid out in bullet points. Thirteen bullet points, to be exact. They were:

- Results for Competency 1
- Results for Competency 2
- Results for Competency 3
- Results for Competency 4
- Results for Competency 5
- Results for Competency 6
- Results for Competency 7
- Results for Competency 8
- Aggregate Results for Competencies 1–8
- Senior Leader Narrative Data
- Comments and Narrative for Competencies 1–4
- Comments and Narrative for Competencies 5–8
- Areas of Strength and Weakness

Frank showed his second slide: Results for Competency 1. He showed graphs, charts, numbers, and visuals we couldn't read. He started talking about normative data and mean averages. He talked about Likert scales and cross-rater inconsistency. And we all wanted to put hot sticks into our eyes.

You've experienced this, right? Someone is sharing information, giving an update, leading a discussion, and you have no idea where they are going. You're saying to yourself, "And your point is...?" No structure. It is communication gone wild. And you're tuning out. You're bored. We were in the grip of the Wild Bore.

Wild Bores do real damage. They damage their own reputation by not being able to “bottom line” their communication. They focus on the *trivial many* and not the *vital few*. And, worst of all, they waste everyone’s time, including yours. But wait, there’s more.

### **Wild Bore Proliferation**

If left unchecked, Wild Bores continue to breed more Wild Bores. Pretty soon your organization is filled with them. Not good. Here’s an example of how it happens.

Remember Frank? We accused him of being a Wild Bore. And while that was a weakness, Frank did have some real strengths—including the ability to spot and hire great talent. One such superstar was Louise. She was two years out of college and already had acquired an impressive list of skills and experiences. We welcomed Louise into our talent management team and looked forward to her many contributions.

And then we noticed it. During meetings and discussions, Louise struggled to communicate her thoughts and ideas in a coherent fashion. Most of the time, she remained silent. But other times, when we could see she was mustering up the courage, she would just start rambling in way that felt more weekend-conversational than business-appropriate. We couldn’t figure out where she was going or what point she was trying to make. We felt for her, but we also felt for us. When Louise was in the room, our meetings and discussions were becoming longer and more painful.

We sensed that Louise knew she had a problem. And it became apparent that our boss, Frank, knew it as well. As her manager, Frank had tried to coach Louise on multiple occasions. He recognized

that she was intelligent, creative, and had a great deal of talent and potential. That's why he had hired her. She was early in her career and was still getting accustomed to the demands of the workplace and the company culture. Frank did what he could to model best practices in communication; he felt what he had done in the past had worked quite well for him and his career. If only Louise would follow his lead. Turns out, she did.

Now Louise and Frank have their own monsters to deal with. In fact, each and every one of us bears the same risk—a sudden takeover by a long-winded, data-dumping, unconscientious, rambling communicator who resides inside of us. For the purposes of this book, we will refer to this monster as the Wild Bore.

No, we are not misspelling it. We, the authors of this book, do not mean a wild boar, the animal (genus and species *Sus scrofa*), although, there are some ironic parallels between the animal—wild boar—and this inner monster—Wild Bore. Dig this (no pun intended):

- According to the Huntercourse.com blog, experienced hunters say that wild boar can be even more dangerous to hunt than a bear. Equipped with thick, razor-sharp tusks, and a razor-sharp mind (hogs are the fourth most intelligent animal in the world) a wild boar can weigh a staggering 660 pounds and exhibit unpredictable behavior. The blog site offers this survival tip: “Pick your tree ahead of time so you can climb out of harm’s way if ever you’re being chased.”<sup>1</sup>
- Human intervention has caused the spread of distribution further, making the wild boar species one of the widest-

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<sup>1</sup> Brent McNamee, “The World’s Most Dangerous Game to Hunt,” Huntercourse.com, November 9, 2011, <https://www.huntercourse.com/blog/2011/11/the-worlds-most-dangerous-game-to-hunt/>.



ranging mammals in the world. Its wide range, high numbers, and adaptability have led the wild boar to become an invasive species.

Invasive species? Unpredictable behavior? Razor-sharp mind? Survival tip—get out of harm’s way? Why then, yes, wild boars and Wild Bores are equally dangerous creatures, especially in the workplace. Let us explain further.

When you let your Wild Bore lead the discussion, you are at risk of the following negative results and disappointing outcomes:

- Unproductive meetings
- Delayed decisions
- Confusion and frustration
- Lost opportunities
- Damaged credibility
- Employee disengagement
- Fewer prospective clients
- Stalled careers

.....

*“When Wild Bores lead the discussion, you are at risk of negative results and disappointing outcomes.”*

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## **Preserve And Protect**

It turns out that communication is a lot harder than it seems. Whether you are an established leader or an early-career professional who has desires and ambitions to be recognized as an emerging leader,

communication will play a pivotal role in your career growth and organizational success.

And that's why we are writing this book for you. We want to introduce you to a different way of communicating at work. We call it the art of *communication efficiency*. By reading this book and applying its proven principles, you will not only eradicate the Wild Bore within, but you will preserve and protect your credibility, your confidence, and your career. Are you ready to dig in?



## Chapter 2

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# Be Brief. Be Brilliant. Be Done.

**F**rank didn't know any better. He did what he always did and it got him, well, pretty much what he'd always gotten—a reputation as a Wild Bore. Problem was, he didn't know how to help anyone else (like Louise) get better because he relied on what he'd been told to do.

Chances are, Frank was likely taught to communicate with the *just-in-case* method. “*Just in case* someone listening to you has a question about XYZ, you better talk about it before the question is asked.” Or, “*Just in case* someone might disagree with you, you better be ready to counter the argument or defend your position.” Or, “*Just in case* folks don't understand things in the way in which you are explaining them, you should probably have other ways to explain it.” This way is wrong. Period. The point of engaging with other people is to encourage questions, dialogue, dissent, and discussion; not to avoid it, not to avoid them.

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*“The point of engaging with other people is to encourage questions, dialogue, dissent, and discussion; not to avoid it, not to avoid them.”*

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Do you have a case of *just-in-case*? Lots of folks do. Let's test it out. Check yes or no below if you do this. Be brutally honest. Promise, we're not judging.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 1. In situations where I need to get my point across (e.g., meetings, updates, discussions), I think about all the topics and information I need to cover. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 2. I start with PowerPoint to begin putting my information together.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 3. I get rattled or lose focus if someone asks a question I wasn't prepared for.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 4. I get nervous or rattled if someone challenges me when I'm speaking or trying to get a point across.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 5. If I project my handouts onto the screen, people can read the information easily.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 6. I have a clear sense of the beginning, middle, and end of my discussion.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 7. My listeners have a clear idea of what they should do as a result of hearing me speak.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 8. People listening to me always know why they should care about the topic.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 9. When I speak, my point is always clear to those listening.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 10. I give listeners the big ideas or headlines before getting into the details.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | 11. Within ninety seconds of me speaking, my listeners know why they are there, what I want them to do, and why they should do it.                         |

**Scoring:**

One point for Yes answers to questions 1, 2, 3, 4: Subtotal \_\_\_\_

One point for No answers to questions 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11:  
Subtotal \_\_\_\_

Add Subtotals for your Total Score: \_\_\_\_

Even a score of *one* may make you a victim of *just-in-case*.

**The Problem With Just-In-Case**

The *just-in-case* method is not only boring, it's also inefficient. Think about a baseball game in which the batter, after hitting to the outfield, runs to first, then to home, then cuts across the pitcher's mound to get to third, doubles back to second, and then touches third base before running home. It sounds silly, but this is what happens when we use the just-in-case method to communicate.

What do we recommend that you do instead?

**Just Enough**

Replace your just-in-case practice with a Just-Enough mindset. Think about it: There are three questions—and *only* three questions—everyone listening to you is asking:

1. Why am I here?
2. What do you want me to do?
3. Why should I?

We believe that if you can't articulate the answers to those three things within ninety seconds, you are at high risk of becoming a Wild Bore. And if you can, you are well on your way to communication efficiency.

What exactly do we mean by communication efficiency? It means that a message sender presents information clearly and concisely, without excess verbiage.

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*“The point of engaging with other people is to encourage questions, dialogue, dissent, and discussion; not to avoid it, not to avoid them.”*

.....

Who has the responsibility to deliver a clear and concise message? Why, that would be you, the facilitator, whenever you are in charge of leading the discussion.

And what benefits does communication efficiency offer you and your career? Here’s why you should embrace the mantra, “Be brief. Be brilliant. Be done.”

- It takes less time to get your main points across to others.
- Listeners are more likely to pay attention to you.
- Listeners are more likely to find your message appealing when it is delivered in an efficient manner.
- Reducing unnecessary words minimizes the potential for confusion and misunderstanding of your message.
- Listeners (including the leaders in the room) may recognize your brilliance and potential for advancement.
- Knowing when to stop talking increases the opportunity for you to listen, breathe, and learn from others.

- Having the ability to communicate efficiently will bolster your confidence and prepare you for higher-level discussions.

There are easy ways to increase communication efficiency and we'll walk you step by step through the process in chapters 4-9. But first, let us share some examples of how we, the authors, were once Wild Bores...and wildly inefficient communicators.

