

Hacking the Science of the Brain to Create Unforgettable Presentations

David Koff

Actor, SysAdmin & Writer

@themacdweeb • www.themacdweeb.com



Welcome, everyone. My name is David Koff. A little bit about me: I started acting when I was 6; I got my first Apple when I was 11 (an Apple II+); and I began writing when I was 13. It's an odd combination but I've been incredibly lucky in each of those fields. Because of my various backgrounds, I'm here to today to help bridge the gap between technology and theatre.

The 1st thing I want to tell you is this: I'm not here to discuss presentations. I'm here to discuss: **(CLICK)** performances. Presentations are just small performances. And since the most memorable performances are about telling great stories: I want you to begin seeing yourselves as story-tellers. So let's get dressed to perform. **(CLICK)** And let's bring in the people who came to see you perform... **(CLICK)** It's showtime.

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But wait a minute: just who are these people in front of whom you're standing? **(CLICK)** Are they teenagers? College educated? Subject matter experts? **(CLICK)** Managers? **(CLICK)** Investors?

You need to know your audience because, as a developer or sysadmin, you can't just present highly technical information to people who don't understand highly technical information. Instead, you need to craft a performance with your audience specifically in mind and then play to them. And that means – and please listen adobe, microsoft and corporate america – it's a mistake to use the same presentation for all audiences at all events.

The good news: the way to learn how to play to your audience is by asking one simple question – how does the brain work?

Know Your Audience

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Science has determined that every human brain has a split personality: **(CLICK)**

There's a left side: home which is home to language, logic and order. **(CLICK)**

And there's a right side: home to all kinds of art, improvisation and chaos.

In between, there's a bridge. **(CLICK)**

Medically, this bridge is called the corpus collosum, but the name isn't important. What it DOES is important. This bridge combines your perceptions of art and logic in a way that allows you to make sense and find comfort in the world around you.

And this is EXACTLY how you need to see your role when you perform: YOU ARE the bridge. **(CLICK)** When you deliver your performance, **you're the bridge** by which you will guide logical people to understand your creativity and creative people to understand your logic. It doesn't matter if you're showing statistics to your management team, delivering a pitch to investors or a performing a keynote at a conference: the science behind how brains work is identical.

And, since this is a tech conference, let me just give you the rootkit for the brain. **(CLICK)**

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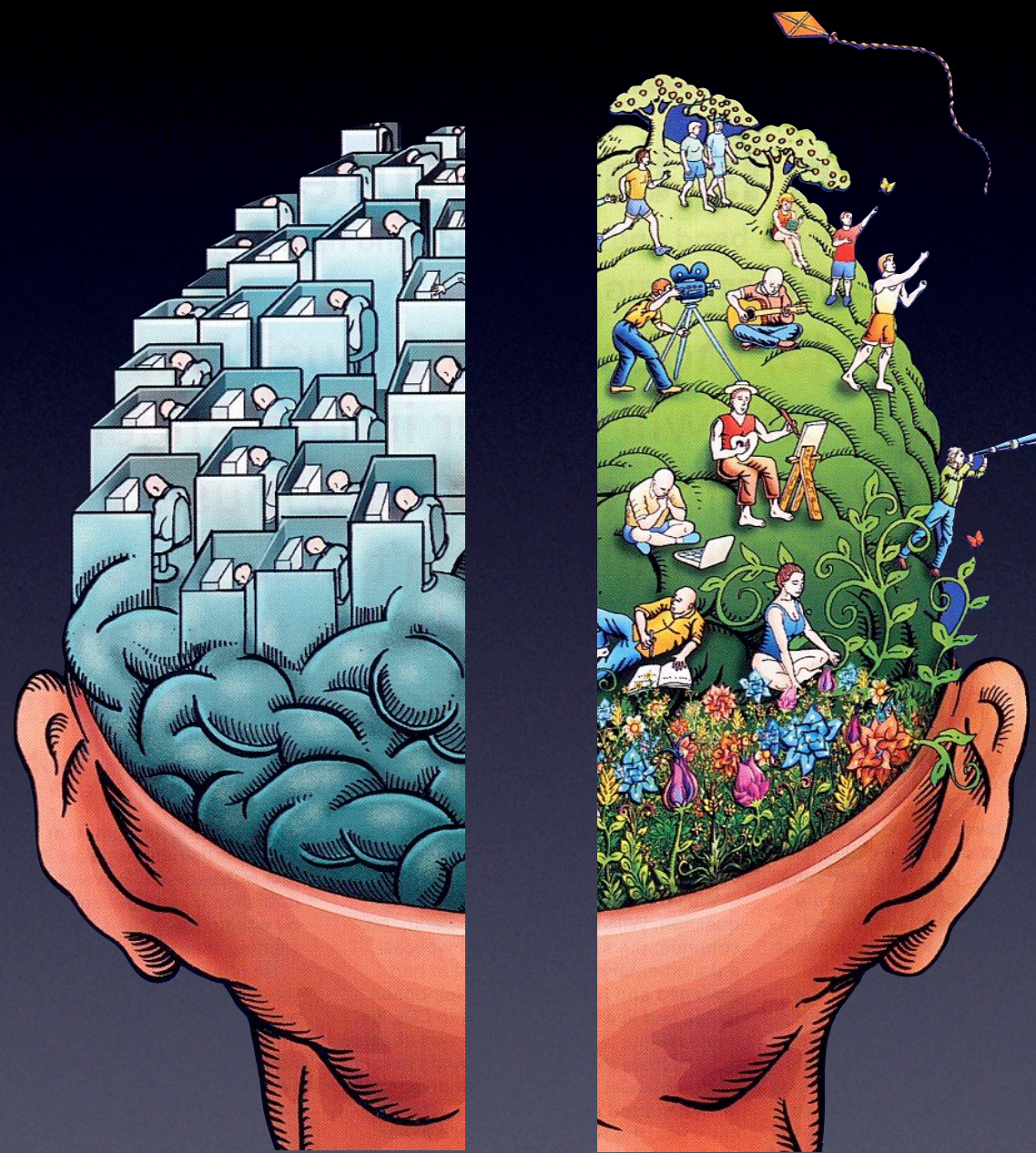
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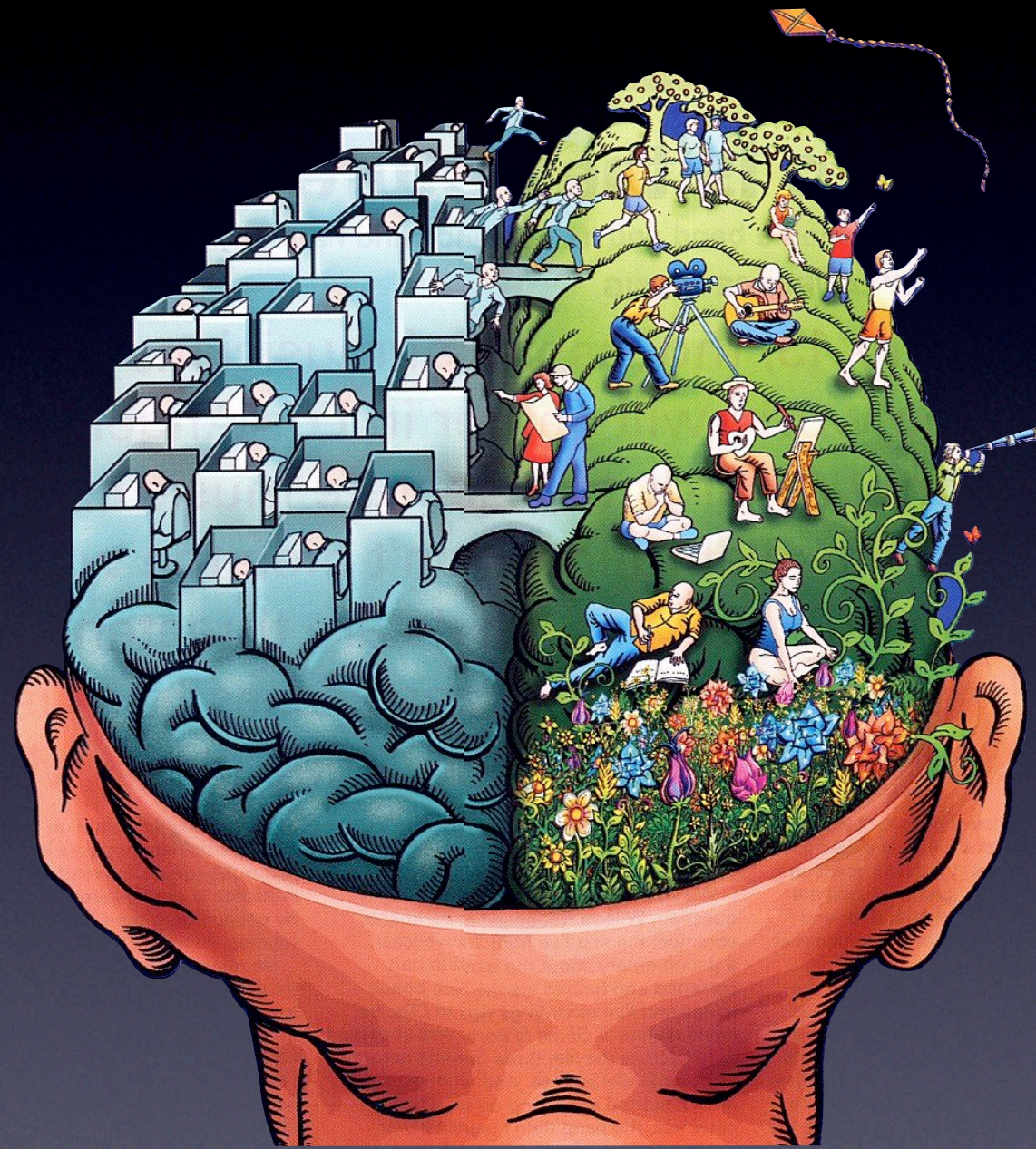
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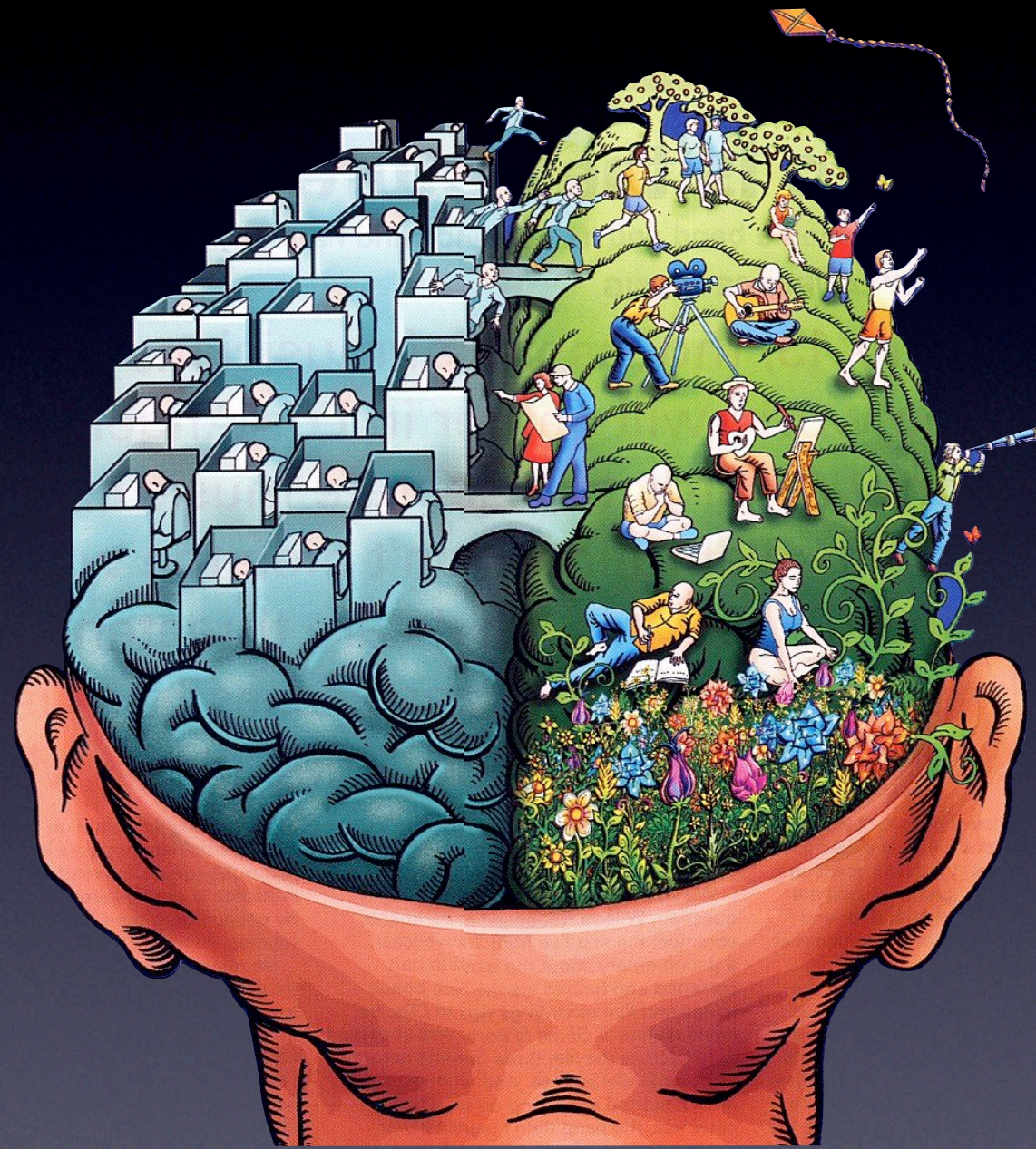
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Here's the rootkit: **(CLICK)** people think using pictures, not words. **(CLICK)**

90% of all information transmitted to the brain is visual. Visuals are processed 60,000X faster in the brain than text.

Here's a quote from Dr. Lynell Burmark, Ph.D: "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak." Biologically, vision evolves before speech for all humans.

There's a reason why the expression is "A picture is worth a thousand words." So remember: unless our words, concepts and ideas are hooked onto an image, they won't last. **(CLICK)**

Visuals affect our emotions, our emotions greatly affect our decision making and -- here's where things get really interesting -- most of our decisions are based on relatively quick intuitional judgment. Do you know how many decisions are influenced by visually-appealing, easily-digested graphics? Ask someone in advertising or marketing. They've harnessed this science to sell their products and ideas.

But so can you.

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Buy my product:
I'm Heisenberg.

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Here are what I call “The Foundational Hacks”. I call them “hacks” for a simple reason: using them, is like bypassing the brain’s OS and going directly to the results center. Follow these rules to harness the power of anyone’s brain to help create a memorable presentation:

- 1) You only get 90 sec to grab people’s attention.
- 2) The human brain is limited. Limit yourself to ONE theme per slide.
- 3) You get NO fucking bullet points. Ever. Ever. Ever. All data is visual, no exceptions.
- 4) Find SOMETHing exciting when you perform. If you’re not jazzed, no one else will be either.
- 5) Deliver your stats in context: Use the power of an image to better demonstrate what you’ve done. Apple and then Pam Lefkowitz.
- 6) Practice the 10min rule: after 10min, do SOMETHing different.

These six foundation hacks get you closer to your goal: being memorable, effective & polished. And, since we’re about 10min in, let’s go to a few demos.

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(memorize these...)

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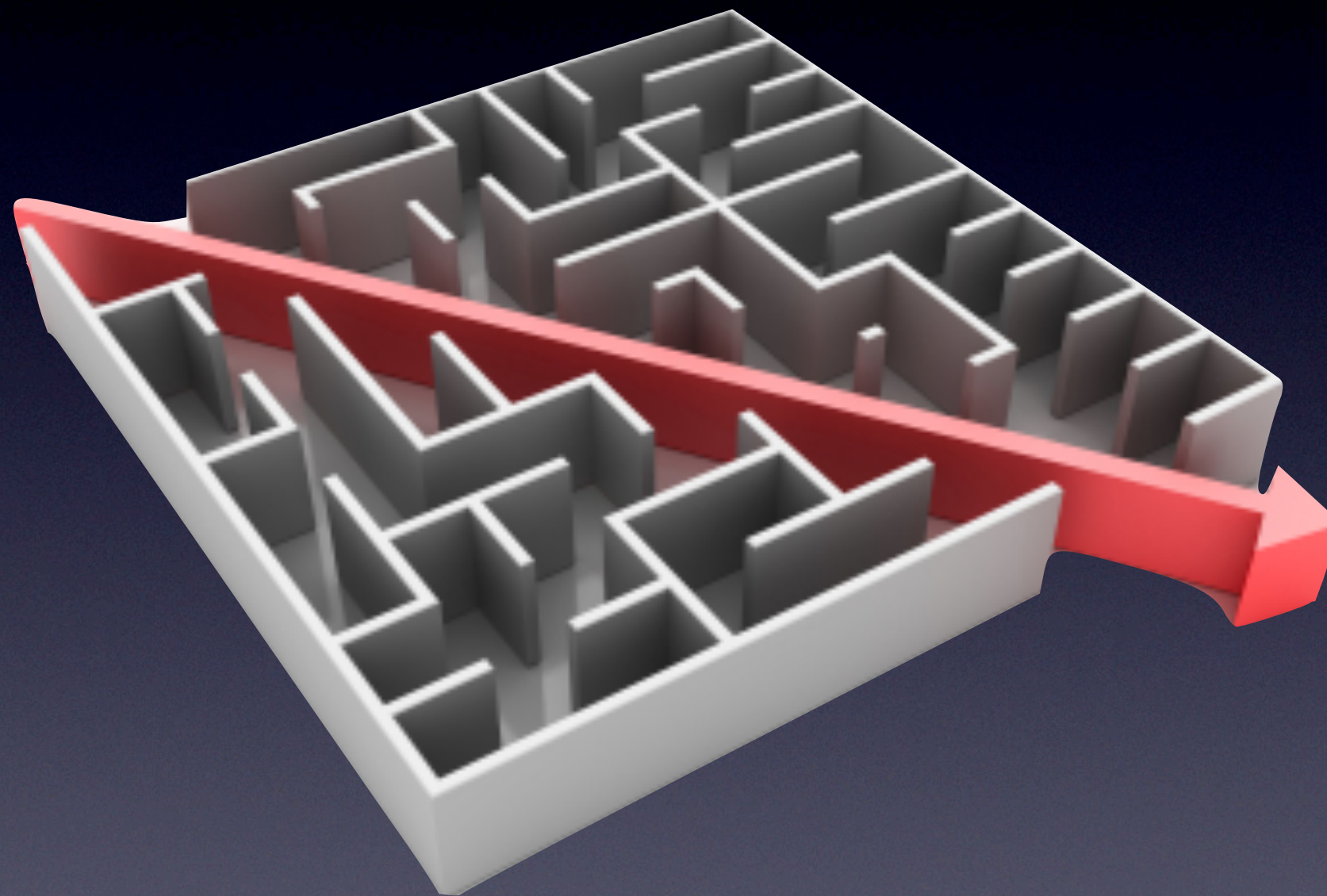
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- WHY BULLET POINTS SUCK
- People read instead of listening.
- People can read faster than you can talk.
- That makes you redundant.
- #fail
- sudo killall bulletpoints

You *may not* use bullet points. Ever. For any fucking reason.

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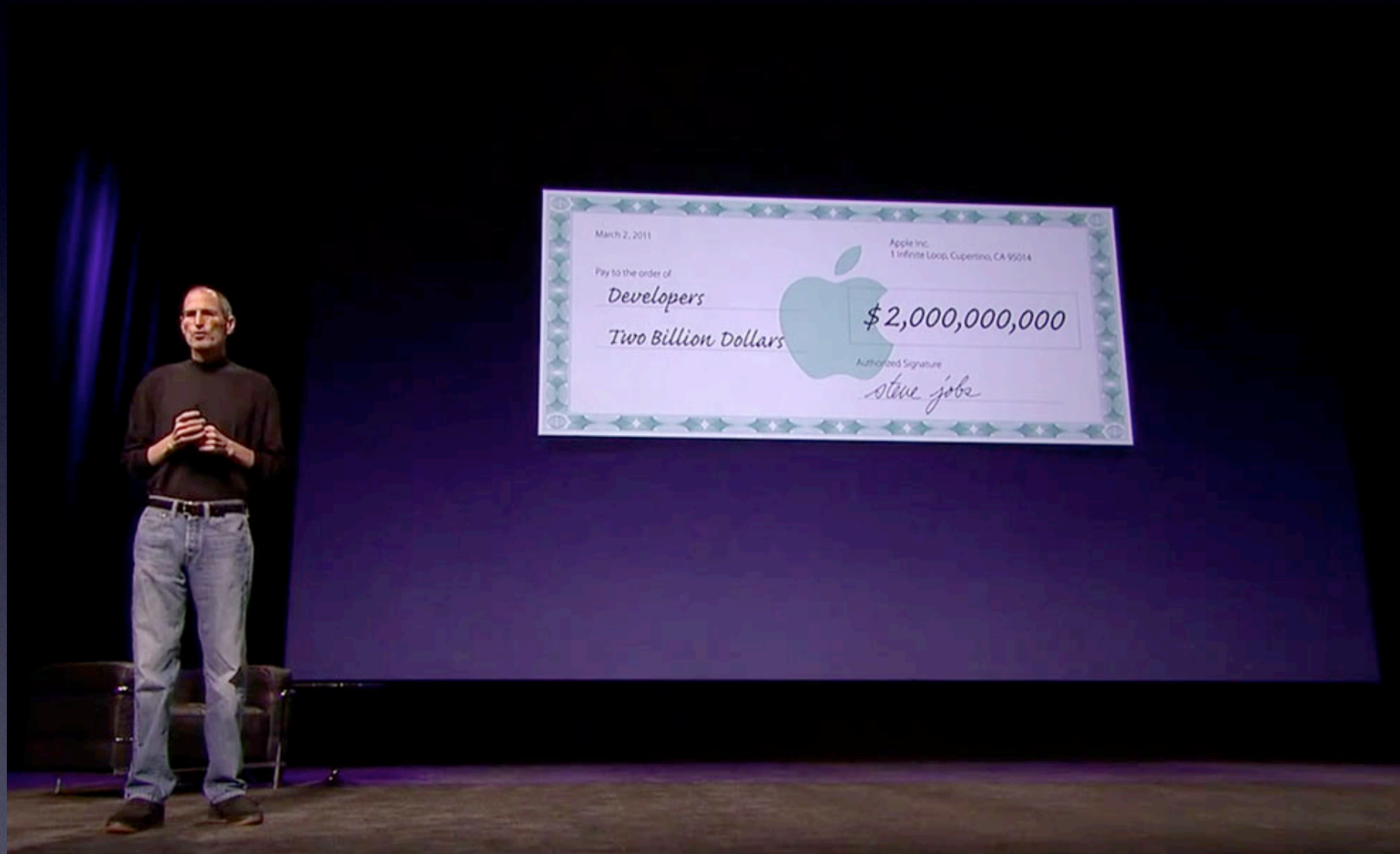
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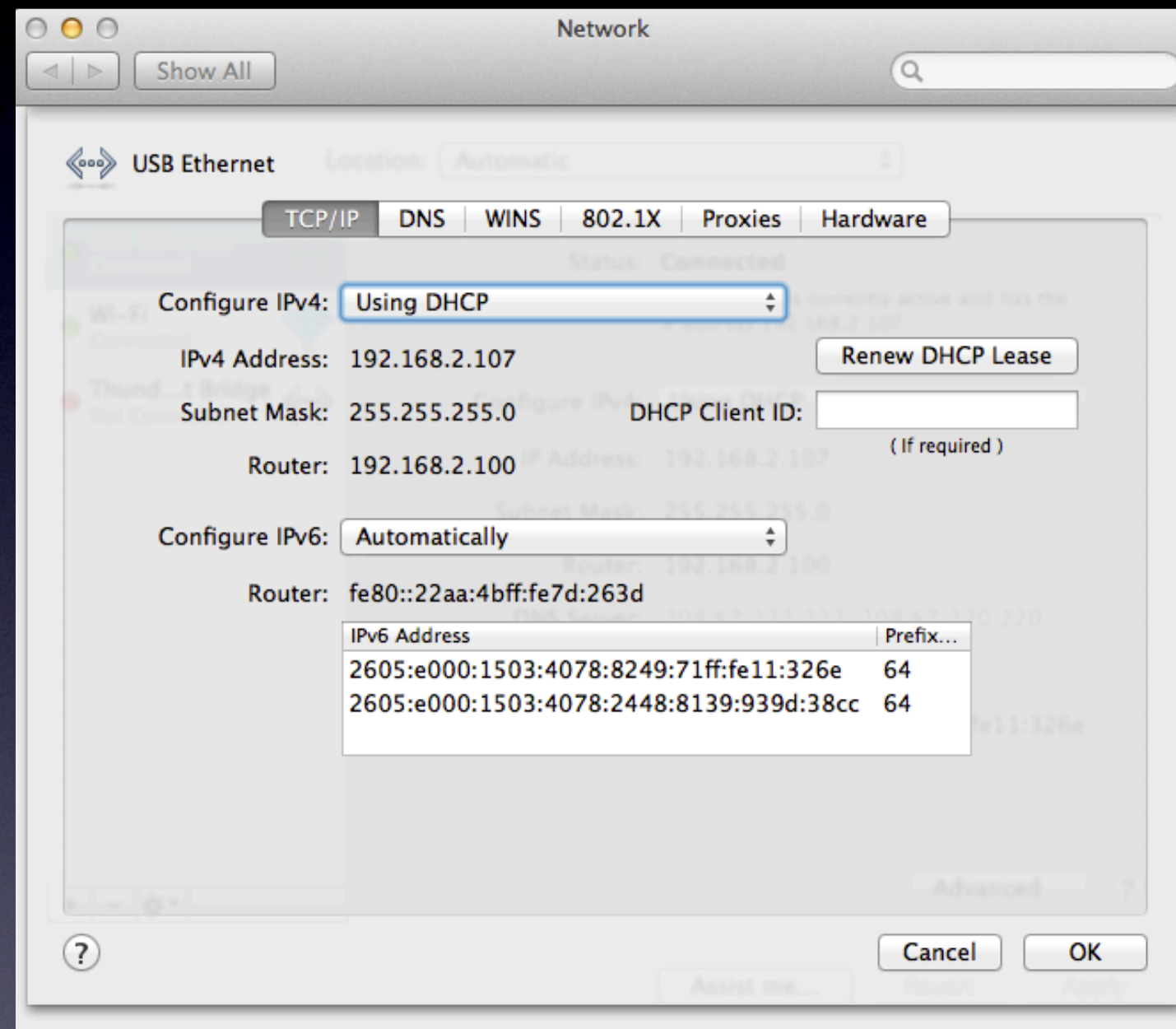
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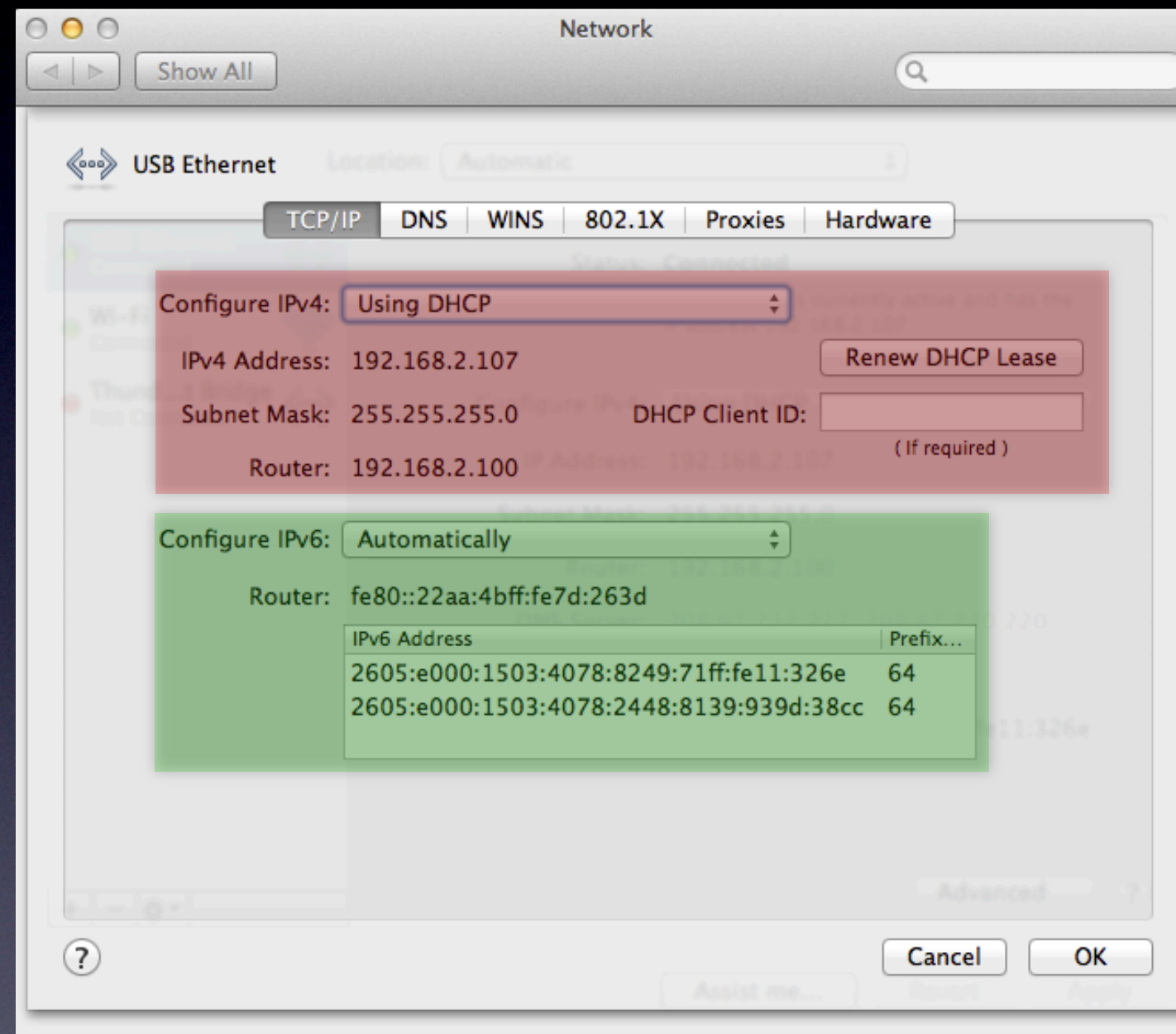
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Find a way to *contextualize* your message, instead of presenting raw data.

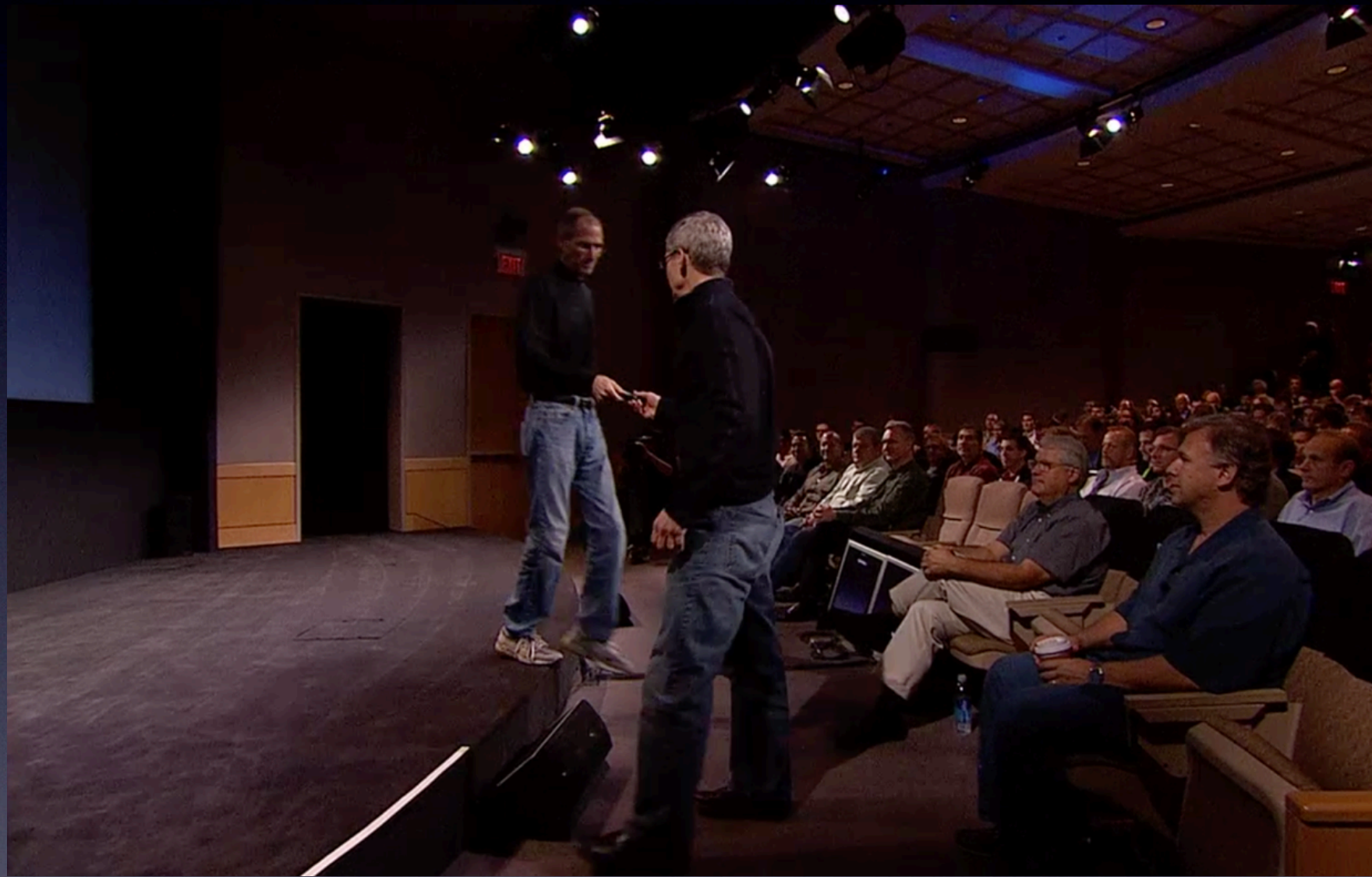
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- 5) Deliver your stats in context: Use the power of an image to better demonstrate what you’ve done. Apple and then Pam Lefkowitz.
- 6) Practice the 10min rule: after 10min, do SOMETHing different.

These six foundation hacks get you closer to your goal: being memorable, effective & polished. And, since we’re about 10min in, let’s go to a few demos.

Know The Hacks

(memorize these...)



Practice the *10-minute rule*: change things up after 10 minutes.

Here are what I call “The Foundational Hacks”. I call them “hacks” for a simple reason: using them, is like bypassing the brain’s OS and going directly to the results center. Follow these rules to harness the power of anyone’s brain to help create a memorable presentation:

- 1) You only get 90 sec to grab people’s attention.
- 2) The human brain is limited. Limit yourself to ONE theme per slide.
- 3) You get NO fucking bullet points. Ever. Ever. Ever. All data is visual, no exceptions.
- 4) Find SOMETHING exciting when you perform. If you’re not jazzed, no one else will be either.
- 5) Deliver your stats in context: Use the power of an image to better demonstrate what you’ve done. Apple and then Pam Lefkowitz.
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Then, structure your story with a beginning, middle and end.

Then communicate your story. Discover the core message you wish to impart to others and then: **(CLICK)** say it simply. Here's an entire story distilled down to two words. **(CLICK)** Here's one that uses three. **(CLICK)** Here's another that uses four.

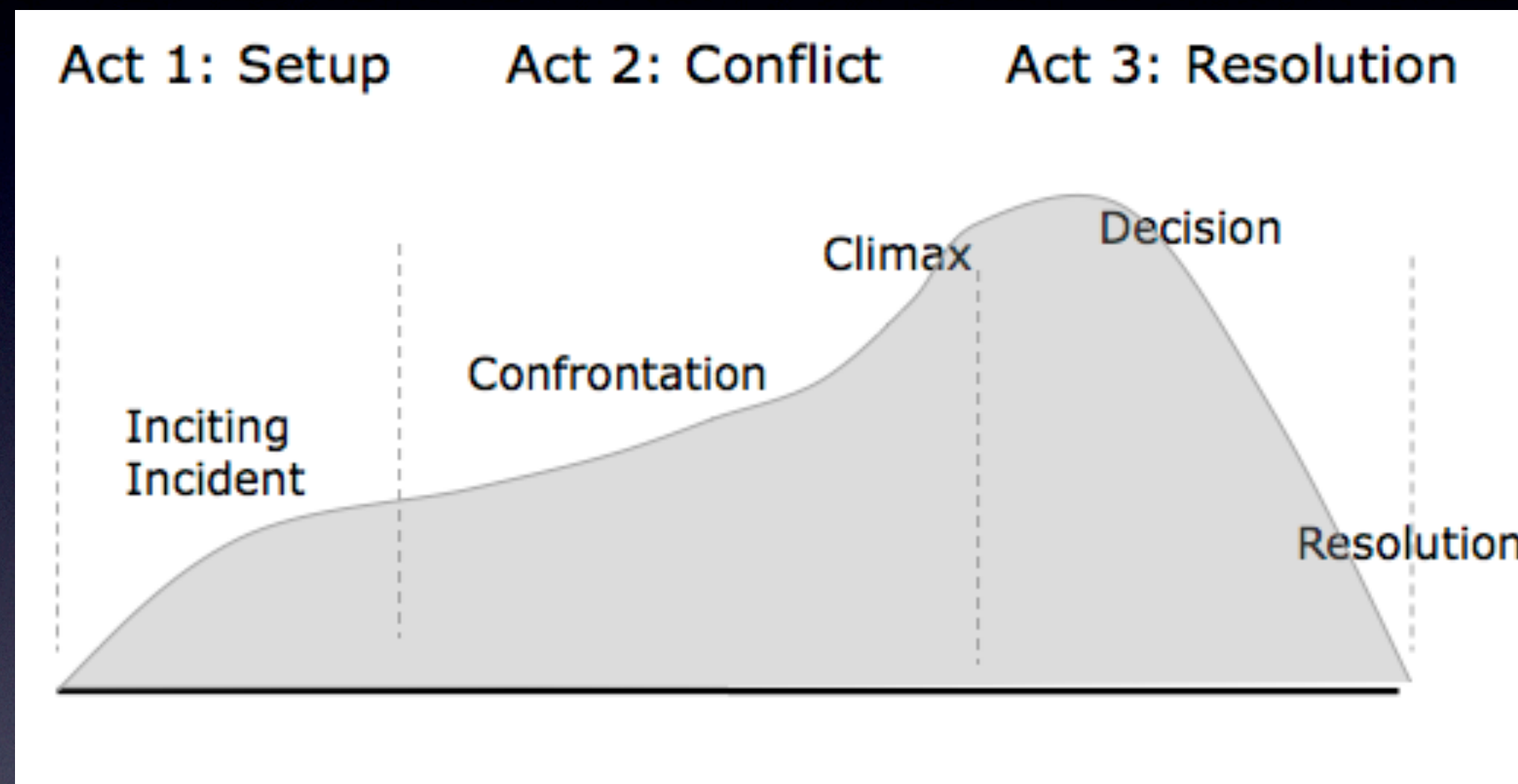
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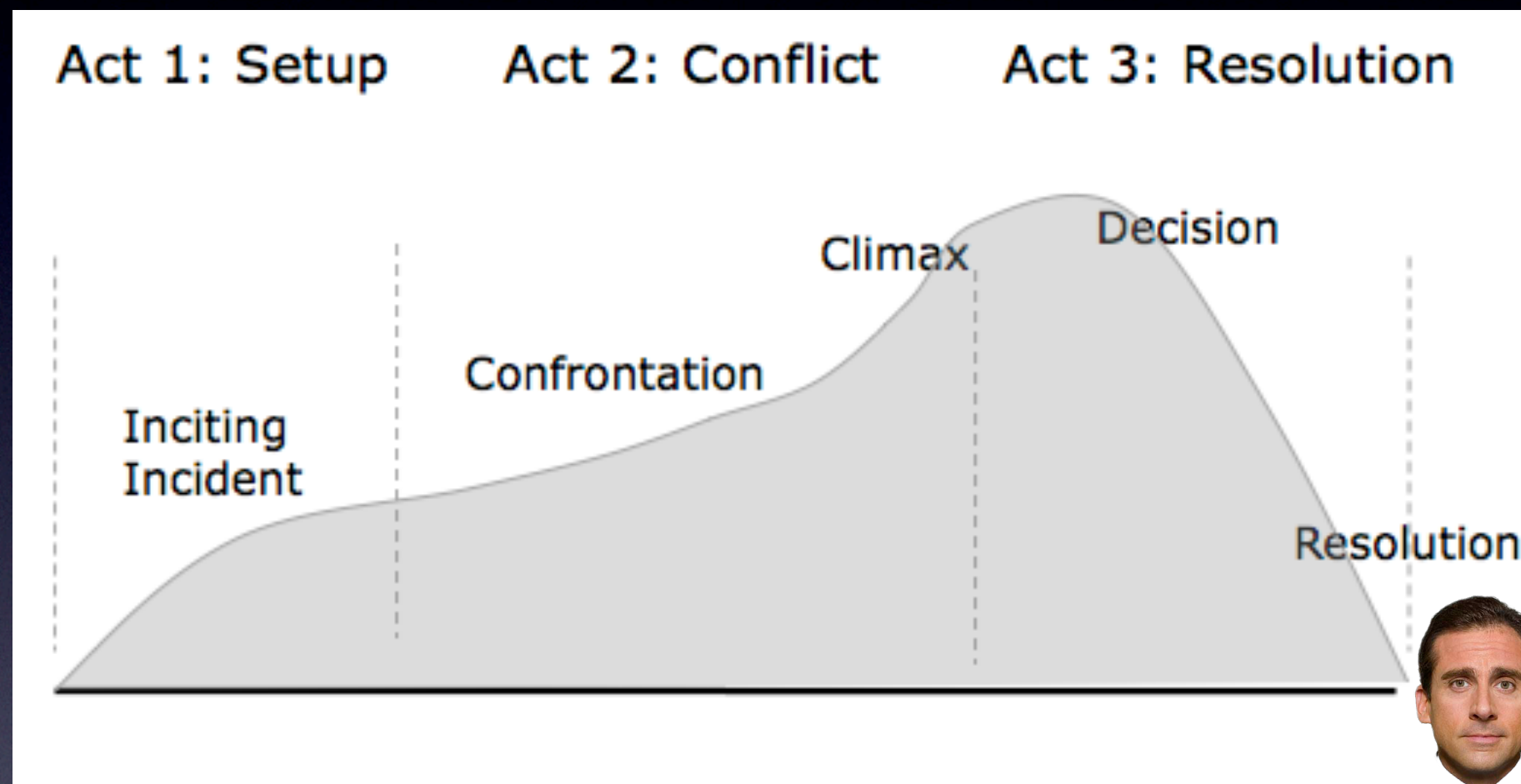


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Know Your Story

too much text = too much work
images = visual, fast story telling
irrelevant images = not effective
<http://bit.ly/171q7LP>

brain info

People think using pictures. John Berger, media theorist, writes in his book *Ways of Seeing* (Penguin Books, 1972), "Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak." Dr. Lynell Burmark, Ph.D. Associate at the Thornburg Center for Professional Development and writer of several books and papers on visual literacy, said, "...unless our words, concepts, ideas are hooked onto an image, they will go in one ear, sail through the brain, and go out the other ear. Words are processed by our short-term memory where we can only retain about 7 bits of information (plus or minus 2). This is why, by the way, that we have 7-digit phone numbers. Images, on the other hand, go directly into long-term memory where they are indelibly etched." Therefore, it is not surprising that it is much easier to show a circle than describe it.

So visuals are processed 60,000 times faster than text, graphics quickly affect our emotions, and our emotions greatly affect our decision-making. If most of our decisions are based on relatively quick intuitional judgment and emotions, then how many decisions are influenced by visually appealing, easily digested graphics? The answer is no secret to advertisers.

Professional, visually appealing graphics increase your likelihood of reaching your audience by 43% (3M-sponsored study at the University of Minnesota School of Management). Research at the 3M Corporation concluded that we process visuals 60,000 times faster than text.

<http://bit.ly/15V5DTZ>

<http://bit.ly/17a15yN>

1) 90% of information transmitted to the brain is visual, and visuals are processed 60,000X faster in the brain than text. (Sources: [3M Corporation](#) and [Zabisco](#))

2) 40% of people will respond better to visual information than plain text. (Source: [Zabisco](#))

3) 46.1% of people say a website's design is the number one criterion for discerning the credibility of the company. (Source: [Stanford Persuasive Technology Lab](#))

4) Publishers who use infographics grow in traffic an average of 12% more than those who don't. (Source: [AnsonAlex](#))

<http://bit.ly/1b4fQFB>

Tests have demonstrated increased neural activity in parts of the left hemisphere when subjects are using language. The same type of tests have demonstrated that artistic endeavor draws normally more heavily on the neurons of the right hemispheric cortex.

Takeaways

1. See your presentation as a theatrical experience. It IS.
2. Use the power of an image to communicate for you.
3. Find the balance: you demonstrate your worth when presenting. Don't go over the top.
4. Describe the specific benefits from following your offered solution
5. state some call to action.

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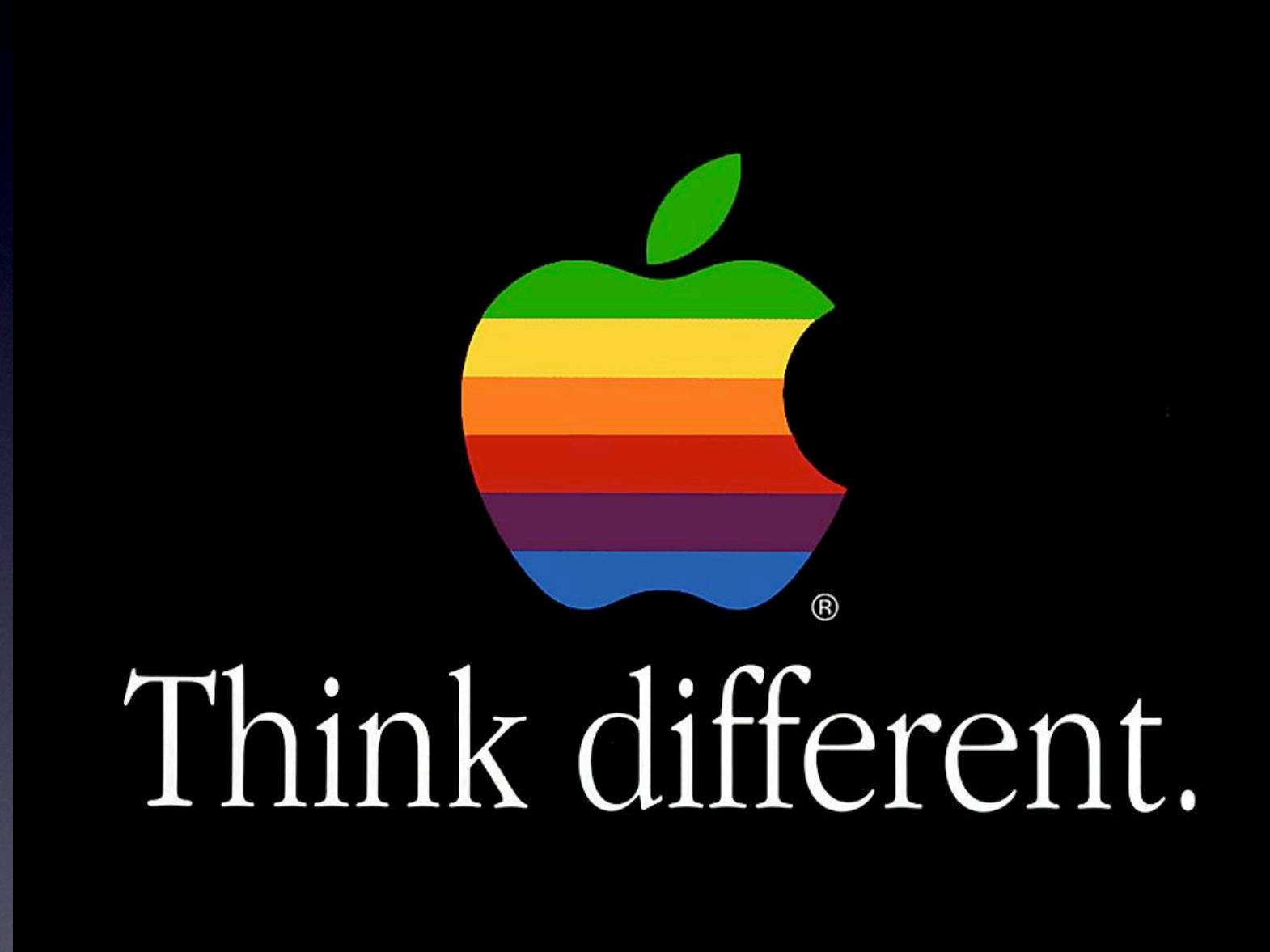
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Here's another that uses four.

Know Your Story



Stories have a three act structure that looks like this: **(CLICK)** There's a 1st, 2nd & 3rd act: a beginning, middle and end. Your performance should tell a story? If you don't know what your story is: take the time to find out. **(CLICK)** Keynote and Powerpoint have some great charts and graphs, but nobody ultimately cares about facts and figures: they care about story and what it means to them. So identify your story. Here's what my story looked like in keynote before I refined my message and found a way to tell it visually. **(CLICK)** Use whatever method works best for you, even bullet point. Just never show that crap to your audience.

Then, structure your story with a beginning, middle and end.

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Remember: You're a performer telling a story. And performers need to rehearse. In theatre, the general rehearsal rule is:

you do one hour of rehearsal for every page of dialog. if that seems like a lot, that's because it is. **Shit goes wrong with your performance when you start to stand it up.** That's why everyone rehearses. EVERYONE. (CLICK)

Even a well-oiled machine like Apple, still rehearses each and every keynote. (CLICK)

But the best part about rehearsal: it's where you get to work on yourself. On your fear. (CLICK) The rehearsal process allows you to get comfortable doing something uncomfortable. It's the training wheels of performing.

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When all is said and done, and you still don't think you're the right person to present? FINE. Then don't present. Maybe you're not the right person for the job. Here's a picture from 1976 that perfectly demonstrates the point. **(CLICK)**

Woz was a visionary programmer, not a telegenic personality. But he partnered with Steve Jobs, an obsessive control freak/visionary salesman and futurist. Separately, who knows? Maybe these two men might not have made much of an impact on the world. But together, they literally changed history.

If you're a dev or a sysadmin who prefers to avoid the limelight and just code and drink coffee, then so be it: accept that and love what you do! Just don't be afraid to find your front men or front women and then partner with them.

The right partnerships can change history. **(CLICK)** Mine certainly did. Here's the wedding invitation my wife and I sent out before we got married last October. Don't oooh and ahhh: look at it. There are no words. But that doesn't matter. It still tells a pretty amazing story about both of us, our families, our values and our partnership.

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...thank you



Q&A & BrainLab