15. George Patton [Planning]
Take calculated risks—that's a lot different from being rash.

16. Winston Churchill [Expediency]
There are two kinds of success—initial and ultimate.

17. Robert Frost [Change]
Ah, when to the heart of men was it ever less than treason to go with the drift of things?

18. Mark Twain [Change]
Loyalty to a petrified opinion never broke a chain or freed a human soul.

19. Winston Churchill [Leadership]
There is a precipice on either side of you—a precipice of caution, a precipice of over-daring.

20. Winston Churchill [Challenge]
No one can make you inferior without your consent.

If one of these wallet stuffers fits your format, then adopt it; make it your own. Emphasize it, enhance it, empower it.

Pick and present a famous Power Quote that will magnify your message.

7

Power Stat

A statistic should tell a story.
—Margaret Thatcher

In 1990, I sat with former president Ronald Reagan, who was the featured speaker for a dinner address. Reagan ate none of the food served—instead, two chocolate chip cookies were delivered to him in aluminum foil, which he downed with plain hot water. He said, "I learned that from an old preacher friend [Billy Graham] and a singer friend [Frank Sinatra]." The hot water was to loosen the vocal chords (cold water may constrict), and the cookies were for a dose of sugar energy.

Then Reagan carefully put in contact lenses—one to correct nearsighted and the other farsighted vision. In other words, one to read the text before him and the other to look at the audience.

Statistics are like Reagan's two contact lenses. Some statistics are cited precisely and up front to obtain immediate credibility; others are framed more roundly to be remembered by the audience.

When you read a statistic such as "123,411 new customers last year" from a card or notes, you cite that precise

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statistic to gain immediate credibility. But when you add an explanation such as, "That means we have doubled our sales in a year," you ensure longer range memorability.

A statistic is a numerical abstraction, which is the most difficult abstraction to etch in your listener's memory. The challenge for speakers is presenting the statistic in such a way that the audience can grasp it.

To the Moon and Back

In 1958, the deficit of the United States had ballooned to a billion dollars. For the first time, the U.S. deficit had reached ten figures. The astronomical statistic, however, was only an abstraction for Americans—a statistic that did not engage the senses, a number too enormous to assimilate and absorb.

President Eisenhower, who managed to balance six of his eight budgets, was aghast. His treasury secretary, George Humphrey, warned of a depression that would "curl one's hair" if the hemorrhage of deficit spending was not arrested. Eisenhower was searching for the graphic image of the billion-dollar deficit that would resonate with Americans.

He remarked to speechwriter Kevin McCann, "If you took a billion dollars and put each dollar end to end, would it go to the moon?"

McCann called the Commerce Department and put their statistician to work on the measurements. In a speech weeks later, Eisenhower said this:

> To understand the billion-dollar deficit, imagine taking all the one-dollar bills in a billion and laying them out end to end. Why, it would more than go to the moon and back again!

Too Many Numbers Numb an Audience

In the late 1920s, Eisenhower caught the eye of General Pershing through the lucid prose descriptions of World War I battles he'd written for cemetery memorials for the dead of the Allied Expeditionary Force. One thing General Pershing liked about Major Eisenhower was that he didn't overwhelm his readers with too many statistics in his reports.

LISTENERS CAN BE AS SKEPTICAL OF NUMBERS CITED AS THEY ARE OF ADVERTISING CLAIMS.

It is a lesson that CEOs should take to heart. Too many corporate executives seem to believe as an article of faith that profit and production statistics are proof, much like geometry solutions. Listeners can be as skeptical of numbers as they are of advertising claims.

Rely On or Remember?

When reading off numbers to prove a point, ask yourself what are you seeking: *credibility* at the time of your talk, or *memorability* that will stay in your listeners' minds for at least the next week?

For maximum believability, cite one statistic as you would a Power Quote—by pulling out a three-by-five card, putting on your spectacles, and reading it. For example:

> This year's profits are up by 17.2%.

or

> Last year witnessed 103,133 new airfare passengers.

or

> Some 814,221 employees are settling into new cities and towns after relocating for their jobs last year, according to the *Wall Street Journal.*

Perhaps listeners won't remember the number you read off the card the next day, but they will believe in its accuracy as you recite it. So, to have the best of both worlds, cite the statistic off a card *and* put it into a picture.

For any presentation or talk, you'll be wise to observe what I call the three R's of numbers: Reduce, Round, and Relate.

Reduce Your Statistics

First, *reduce* the number of statistics you cite. Surveys show that one statistic is the most listeners without a pen and notepad can take away with them from a presentation. Rather than citing two statistics to prove the same point, follow Winston Churchill's advice about picking cigars:

> Pick the strongest and the finest.

SURVEYS SHOW THAT ONE STATISTIC IS THE MOST LISTENERS WITHOUT A PEN AND NOTEPAD CAN TAKE AWAY WITH THEM FROM A PRESENTATION.

For example, if you say that "71% of newlyweds cannot put out the capital for a down payment for their first house," don't add that "Only 32% of American families in their twenties purchase their first home."

The use of two statistics confuses and confounds listeners. The impact of the first statistic becomes muddled and muted when you cite the second.

Round Your Statistics

Second, *round* off the statistics you use. The *London Times* on July 5, 2000, included these two lines:

> By the end of the year, six out of ten British, including children and pensioners, will have their own mobile phones.

and

> [The British] are purchasing 38,000 mobile phones a day.

If the article were to be delivered as a talk, "six of ten" would be remembered a lot better than the statistic about how many phones are purchased each day.

Another example comes from the *Herald Tribune* on that same July 5 about the changing demographics in California. The article rounded statistics when it reported that "three out of four death notices are whites but two out of three birth registries are non-whites (Hispanic and Asian)."

The article later stated that "51.2% of California's population in 2001 will be non-Caucasian." If you were using this statistic in a talk, you would have added "in other words, a little over a half," thus effectively rounding the figure to something both comprehensible and memorable.

The Arabic number system uses the base of ten. Earlier Middle Eastern civilizations, including the Sumerians, used a base of six. The number of digits on our hands, however, proved easier to process. Today we think in terms of ten, so relate some of your figures to our number of fingers.

Rather than say "21.2% choose decaf coffee for breakfast," say "one out of five." We can easily remember three out of four, four out of five, or seven out of ten.

We also more easily remember fractions involving the first ten numerals. We readily grasp one-half, one-third, two-thirds, one-fourth, two-fifths, and so on. So don't say "59.4% of vehicles in Colorado are SUVs." Try just "three out of five" or "three-fifths."

Simple statistics can be presented in the form of pictures for even greater impact. A full-page spread in the *London Times* featured three naked baby girls sitting on a bench, their backs to the camera. From left to right the captions, one above each of the little girls, read:

DOCTOR AUTHOR CANCER

That's painting a picture of statistics—an eye-compelling statement that 32.4% of women will die of cancer.

Relate Your Statistics to Your Listeners

The third R is to *relate* a statistic to a story. I once heard an actuary describe the odds of one in a quadrillion. He likened that astronomical figure to one human hair among all the heads of the world.

SIMPLE STATISTICS CAN BE PRESENTED IN THE FORM OF PICTURES FOR EVEN GREATER IMPACT.

Sometimes all you have to do to find an appropriate statistic is refer to your *New York Times Almanac.* Ralph Nader probably did so when he rallied against big business, saying the entire country of Mozambique has 20 million people with 15 billion GNP, while Morgan Stanley has about the same GNP, with 200 partners instead of 20 million sharing it.

A writer for the *Wall Street Journal* painted the magnitude of Microsoft titan Bill Gates's affluence in this way: If Gates were to pay the same percentage of his wealth to take his spouse to a movie that the average person does, it would cost him $19 million for the film tickets.

Speaking of billionaires, I remember this story that I heard about Andrew Carnegie, the steel baron:

> A man came to him and said, "Mr. Carnegie, you are the richest man in the world. Don't you think you should share some of that?"
>
> "Yes," said Carnegie, surprising the man.
>
> Carnegie then sent a note to his male secretary, who appeared in a few moments with a check for the caller in the amount of 32 cents. That number was derived by taking Carnegie's wealth of hundreds of millions and dividing it by the population of the world.

My father used to tell of his first day in the jurisprudence class of Dean Roscoe Pound at Harvard Law School:

> The eighty-year-old white-maned Pound would stride to the lectern. He then would pause as he looked his class over.
>
> "Will each of you turn to look at the student to your right?"
>
> When they had done so, he would then say, "Now will each of you turn to the student on your left?"
>
> After they had all looked, Pound would intone, "One of those students you just looked at will not be returning to Harvard next year."

He took the statistic of a 32% attrition rate and made his listeners personally experience it.

Chairman and CEO David Kearns used the same technique when he told his luncheon banquet audience this:

> I can see that all the tables seat eight. Well, consider that two of you at each table are going to go back to your office and work to correct the other six's mistakes.
>
> In other words, that's one out of every four in American industry who work just to correct errors.

Compare to the Familiar

Henry Kissinger, the former secretary of state, spoke to the Union League in Philadelphia in 1998. I heard him say this about that troubled area in the Balkans, Kosovo: "Kosovo is about 5,000 square miles—in other words, about the size of Connecticut."

Five thousand square miles is hard for any listener to grasp and process, but Kissinger's audience could easily picture the size of Connecticut. Most had, in fact, driven through the state.

In another situation, I heard Jeff Dewar of Quality Control Internal argue for Zero Defects Goal this way:

If we accept 99.9% perfect as our goal, we'd have to accept these conditions: two unsafe landings a day at Chicago's O'Hare Airport and 15,000 pieces of mail lost by the U.S. Post Office every hour.

Today politicians press their speechwriters to come up with "sound bites"—catchy phrases or facts that are designed to be remembered by listeners.

During his presidential campaign, Vice President Gore skewered Governor Bush on his tax proposal (even though he used egregiously inaccurate statistics) with this line:

What will this tax cut give you? About enough for a working family to buy one can of Coca-Cola.

Senator Phil Gramm once underscored the amount we pay in taxes by saying:

We ought to make May 15th instead of April 15th the deadline for income tax filing—because until May 15th every dollar we make goes to the Federal Government.

That statistic sticks in your mind.

Ken Burns stated in his PBS documentary that 623,000 soldiers were killed in the Civil War. But what is more remembered is that the dead of the Civil War exceeded the lives lost in all other wars the United States has fought: the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, the Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and Desert Storm.

Use an Odd Number

Comparative statistics can surprise, even shock listeners. For example, I once heard one speaker at a National Chamber of Commerce meeting say this:

The Lord's Prayer has 66 words, the Ten Commandments 179 words, the Gettysburg Address 282 words. But do you know how many words are in the U.S. government's regulations on the sale of cabbage? 26,911 words!

Listen to that number. If you wanted your audience to remember the gist of that number "26,911," you might say "over 25,000."

A couple of thousand years ago the Roman philosopher Cato the Elder wrote "Why do people better believe more in odd numbers?" The more specific the figures, the more convincing they seem to be.

I can tell a story that demonstrates the power of "odd" numbers.

My friend Philadelphia councilman Thacher Longstreth ran as a Republican for mayor of Philadelphia. He often had to debate Richardson Dilworth, the Democratic mayor.

After his defeat, Longstreth asked Dilworth, "Dick, how did you remember all those statistics in our debates like "crime has gone down 31.2%" or "Philadelphia has landed 8,146 new jobs?"

"Hell, Thach, I just made them up on the spot! Sounded good, didn't they?"

HAVING THE EXACT FIGURE IN WRITING CONVEYS THAT YOU'VE DONE YOUR RESEARCH AND HAVE THE FACTS AT HAND WITHOUT RELYING ON MEMORY.

So if you're more interested in having your audience rely on the credibility of your number than remembering the statistic, draw the figure from your pocket and read your statistics, including "26,911 words in the Federal Regulations that tell us how to run our business." Having the exact figure in writing conveys that you've done your research and have the facts at hand without relying on memory.

Figures Lie and Liars Figure!

Remember Prime Minister Disraeli's comment on the three things he disliked most about speeches.

Lies, damned lies, and statistics!

A problem today's politicians face when they cite numbers as authority is cynicism from the audience. Many listeners believe that the old adage "figures lie and liars figure" contains some truth. Remember that the word "statistics," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary,* comes from the Latin word for politician: *statista.*

If unfavorable statistics about your company appear in the newspaper, or if a questioner cites some seemingly damaging figures, you may want to tell this story:

> Some years ago while driving to Florida, I stopped at a MacDonald's near Myrtle Beach. There I witnessed a nine-year-old boy approach an elderly man in shorts and a sports shirt who was nursing an iced tea.
>
> The boy said, "Hello, Mr. Man, where are you from? We live in Ohio."
>
> The man disgruntledly replied, "I live here."
>
> "That's neat. I'm going to be ten in two weeks. How old are you?"
>
> "I'll be eighty next week."
>
> "That's really neat. My dad told me that for every eighty-year-old man there are seven women."
>
> "Son," the oldster replied, "that's the most meaningless statistic I've ever heard."

There are no doubt many meaningless statistics. But some numbers are noteworthy. Some figures can add force to your point. The right statistics can tell a story that your listeners will believe and remember.

It's all in your presentation. So reduce, round, and relate any statistic you use to make it a true Power Stat.

8

Power Outage

Too many slides make audiences sleepy.

—Richard Nixon

Winston Churchill never used visuals. Franklin Roosevelt never put up flowcharts. Ronald Reagan never employed overheads. Leaders know they can't turn their voice over to visuals. You can't yield the lectern to projection equipment, or the power goes out. You can't delegate leadership to slides, or the generator dies.

LEADERS KNOW THEY CAN'T TURN THEIR VOICE OVER TO VISUALS.

Yet why do so many top corporate executives make the mistake of demeaning themselves by deferring to their visual aids? Well, one could say that Americans—particularly in the business world—have a naïve faith in anything mechanical. They are suckers for any new gadget or contraption they think will do their work for them. But there is a more basic reason: fear. The fear of getting up before an audience to speak has even top executives avoiding the limelight.

Oh, they don't admit it. When I visit ranking executives as a communications consultant, they say instead, "Look,