

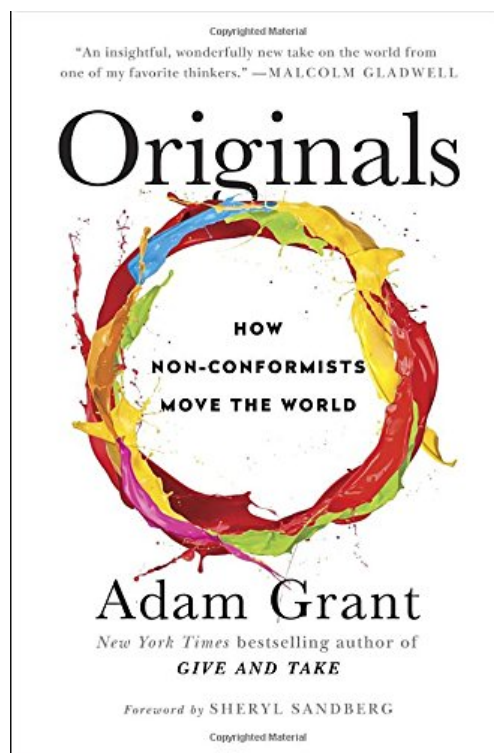
## Push not tear the envelope

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**Date :** August 8, 2016



**Adam Grant's advice for presenting an original idea**



Have a groundbreaking idea that you want to introduce? My caution to clients: don't be a bull in a china closet when trying to communicate an original concept. Attempting to push your ideas through without strategic positioning usually results in strong resistance that can risk your reputation, relationships and perhaps your career.

As Disney filmmaker Rob Minkoff advises: "The goal is to push the envelope, not tear the envelope."

What can you do to craft your message, gain acceptance of your vision and drive change? In his book, ["Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World."](#) **Adam Grant** offers inspiration to change the world with powerful strategies to disrupt the status quo and champion new ideas.

Here are three highlights that resonated with me, as they validated my experiences coaching clients for high-stakes presentations.

## 1. Use status rather than power to drive change

Let's face it: championing something new takes courage. What if you speak up and no one wants to hear what you have to say? According to Grant, one way to encourage people to hear you and be open to your idea is to build your status, which he defines as earning the respect and admiration of your audience. That's different than relying on a position of power.

Power is the 'ole "my way or the highway" mentality- exercising control and authority over others. And we all know that people respond to power only when obligated to do so. That's why power doesn't influence attitudes or change behavior; the authority figure can't always be watching. Instead, try winning the respect of others by listening to their point of view.

The most successful catalysts for change, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and more recently, Sheryl Sandberg or the co-founders of Warby Parker (Neil Blumenthal and Dave Gilboa), made a habit of **socializing** their ideas, gathering diverse opinions and gaining support from stakeholders.

**Professionally Speaking tip:** Before you present your idea, do your homework. Listen and learn from your audience, and encourage dissent. That not only builds your status, but shows you the common ground where people can open their minds and hear your message. Learn more: ["Finding Common Ground with your Audience"](#)

## 2. Strategically procrastinate

You probably did a double take when you read this heading. Would I really recommend procrastination? I certainly don't recommend putting off preparing for your presentation! The key word here is "strategic." It's about being open to the idea that presents itself in the moment, after you've carefully crafted your content and know where you're going.

Do you find yourself revising your presentation the night before, or even in the moment on stage, when your ideas gel and you're inspired with the right phrasing or anecdotes? I know I do. Grant calls this "strategic procrastination" and it's a hallmark of original thinkers.

Did you know that although MLK thoroughly practiced his "I Have a Dream" speech, he improvised liberally? Here's one line [he extended at the podium](#) to emphasize racial equality: "a promise that all men --yes, black men as well as white men -- would be guaranteed their unalienable rights." Strategic procrastination at its best.

**Professionally Speaking tip:** Remember, developing a talk is an iterative process. The key is to allow for strategic procrastination, giving yourself the time to think through what you want to say and how you want to say it. The better prepared you are, the greater your ability to adjust in the moment and respond to the emotions and needs of your listeners.

### 3. Use optimism or pessimism for managing emotions

Movers and shapers inspire strong emotions not only in their audience, but in themselves. As Grant points out in "Originals," while [catalysts](#) for change can come across as beacons of conviction and confidence, they often face inner turmoil, doubt and even outright fear about the outcome.

Why not use that fear to your advantage? Grant calls this “defensive pessimism,” and in my experience, it’s an effective strategy for handling the emotional drama that comes with going against the grain. The defensive pessimist expects the worst and imagines every catastrophic thing that can possibly go wrong. That intense anxiety can be transformed into a powerful motivator for preparing strategies that allow you to succeed.

Another common emotional response of original thinkers is what Grant calls “strategic optimism.” Unlike the pessimist, the strategic optimist expects everything to go her way. When you firmly believe that you will reach your goals, use that drive to set the highest expectations for yourself. Then prepare accordingly to ensure the results you’re after.

**Professionally Speaking tip:** Are you an optimist or a pessimist? Either way, you can use those pre-presentation ruminations to help you succeed. Evidence shows that defensive pessimists and strategic optimists perform equally well. Practice a prime-time ritual before you step up to speak to boost your confidence and improve your delivery.

“Vuja de” is the phenomenon of facing something familiar, but seeing it with a fresh perspective. Grant’s book allowed me to gain a new perspective and insight about effective strategies for presenting groundbreaking ideas.

*This article first appeared in [www.smartbrief.com](http://www.smartbrief.com)*