



MAKING NUMBERS COUNT

Data and numbers can (and should be) be made emotional to evoke action.

We know that numbers and data are important. Without them, there can be no transformation. But for data and numbers to fuel change efforts, they must be presented in a way that creates emotion because emotions are what drives us to act.

Ten ways to translate data and numbers into messages and visuals that create emotion:

- 1. Avoid numbers:** Put data in an emotional context without using numbers.

| The standard way | Translation using this technique |
|--|--|
| A very small percentage of Fortune 500 CEOs are women. | Among Fortune 500 CEOs, there are more men named James than there are women. |

- 2. Focus on 1 at a time:** The higher the numbers get, the less accessible they become. Translate numbers into the basic unit of 1 (as in 'one person,' 'one business,' 'one day,' 'one scenario')

| The standard way | Translation using this technique |
|--|---|
| The U.S. national debt is \$27 trillion. | The U.S. national debt is \$27 trillion - \$82,000 per citizen. |

- 3. Favor user-friendly numbers:** Convert complicated numbers (e.g., percentages, decimals, fractions, ratios, precise numbers, etc.) into simple ones.

| The standard way | Translation using this technique |
|---|--|
| 40% of U.S. adults do not always wash their hands after using the bathroom at home. | 2 out of every 5 people you shake hands with may not have washed their hands between using the toilet and touching your hands. |

- 4. Use familiar comparisons:** Communicate messages and numbers through easily imagined comparisons with as little math as possible.

| The standard way | Translation using this technique |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Turkey is 783,000 square kilometers. | Turkey is just over twice the size of California. |

- 5. Convert numbers into real objects:** Translate abstract numbers into objects that are concrete and familiar.

| The standard way | Translation using this technique |
|--|--|
| The amount of meat recommended as part of a healthy meal is 3 to 4 ounces. | The amount of meat recommended as part of a healthy meal is 3 to 4 ounces, which looks about the same size as a deck of cards. |



- 6. Recast numbers in different dimensions:** Express numbers in quantities people can comprehend better.

| The standard way | Translation using this technique |
|------------------------------|--|
| A single M&M has 4 calories. | In order to burn off the calories in a single M&M, you'd have to walk 2 flights of stairs. |

- 7. Translate numbers to human scale:** Frame numbers and messages in ways that people can imagine, feel, or see.

| The standard way | Translation using this technique |
|--|---|
| If the world's water were put into an Olympic-size pool, humans would only be able to drink 46 gallons of it – roughly the amount that can be contained in a standard bathtub. | If the world's water were put into a gallon jug, humans would only be able to drink less than 20 drops of it. |

- 8. Create associations:** Use figurative language (e.g., comparatives and superlatives) to make numbers and messages persuasive and memorable.

| The standard way | Translation using this technique |
|--|---|
| In terms of economic prowess, California leads all the other 49 states in GDP. | If California were a free-standing country, it would be the 5 th largest economy in the world. |

- 9. Avoid dry statistics:** Appeal to emotion to help people feel something about numbers.

| The standard way | Translation using this technique |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| We had 600 deaths per 1,000 troops. | We had a rate of mortality which exceeds that of the Great Plague of London. |

- 10. Make it personal:** Get attention by evoking the feeling “this affects you.”

| The standard way | Translation using this technique |
|--|---|
| There's a 20% chance of experiencing a mental illness in a given year, and a 50% chance of being diagnosed with a mental illness in your lifetime. | For every 5 people, 1 of you will be diagnosed with a mental illness this year. At some point in your lifetime, either you or the person across from you will be diagnosed with a mental illness. |