



# AXIOS HQ

Smart Brevity® for Presentations | BCBS-MA | March 2026

# Agenda

## Smart Brevity for Slide Decks:

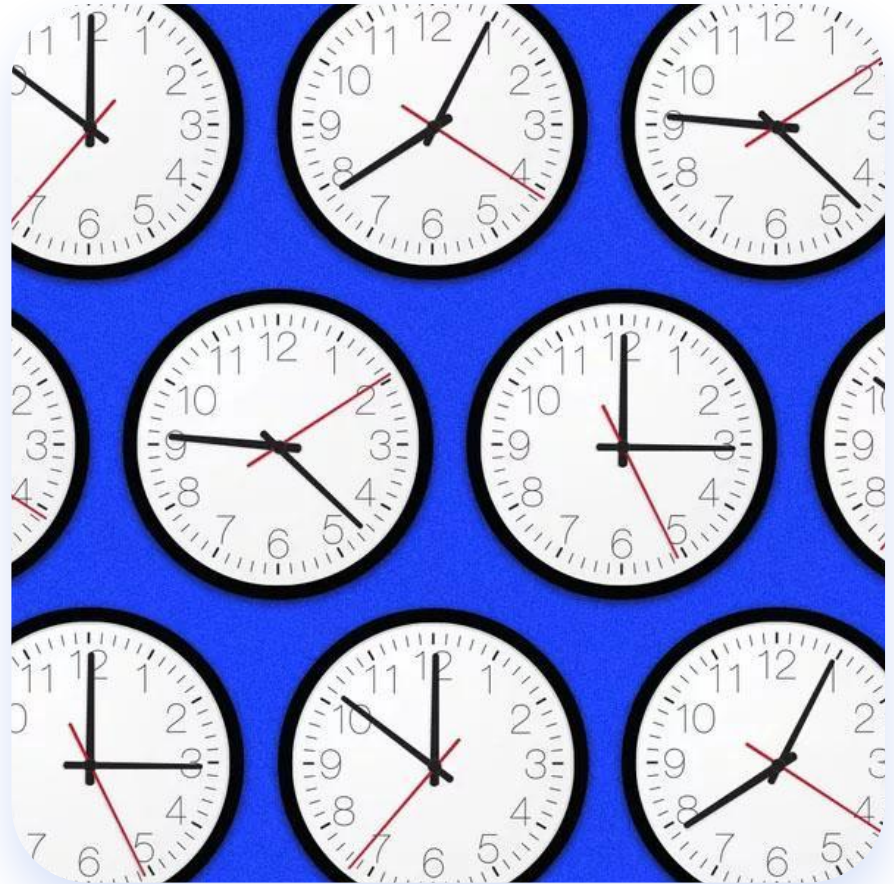
An overview of our best practices, tips and tricks, including:

- Structure
- Design
- Font

*45 mins*

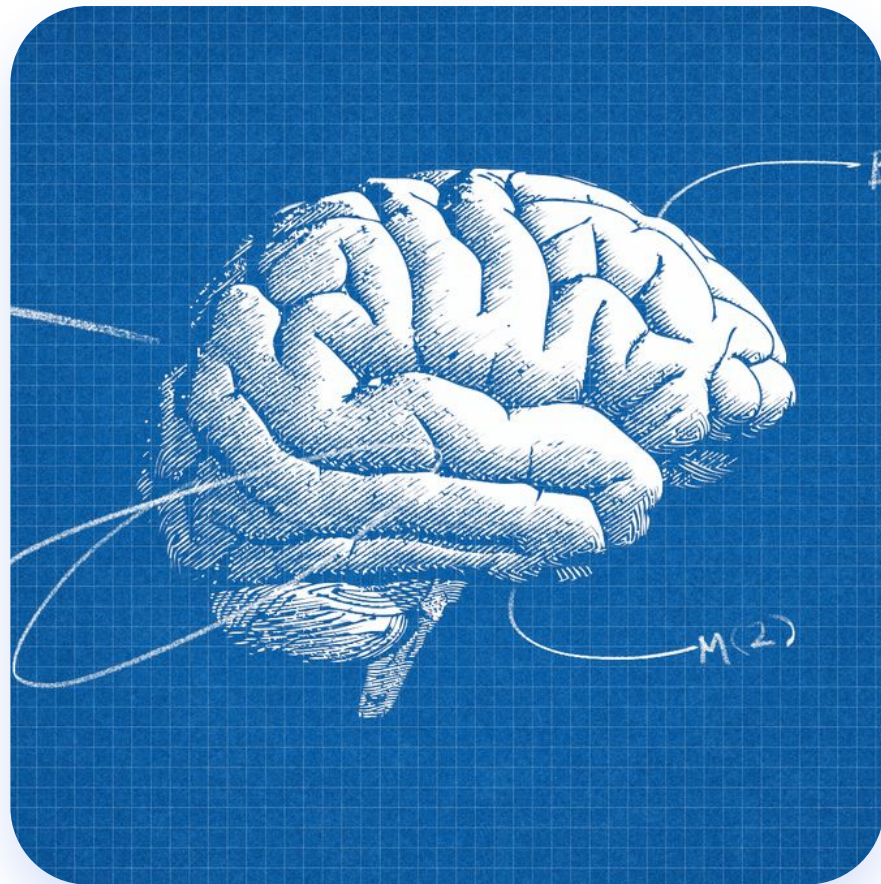
## Q&A:

*15 mins*



## You'll learn how...

- / **To adapt** the Smart Brevity principles to slide decks.
- / **To find** your story and create clear, impactful slides.
- / **To deliver** an effective presentation.

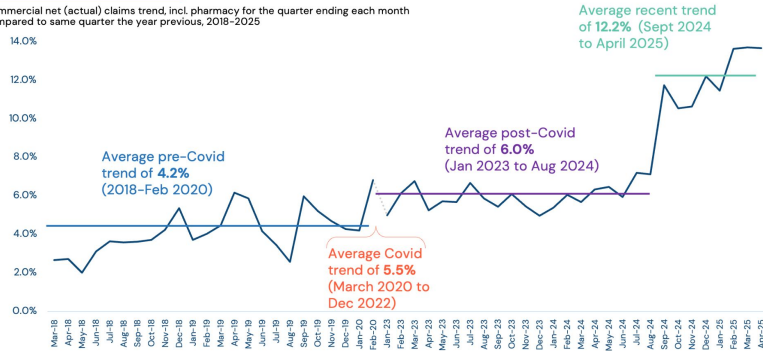


# Before

But our 2025 trend is emerging even higher than the already high trend we had projected and planned for this year, which will increase our 2025 loss and set back the starting line for 2026.



Commercial net (actual) claims trend, incl. pharmacy for the quarter ending each month compared to same quarter the year previous, 2018-2025



# After

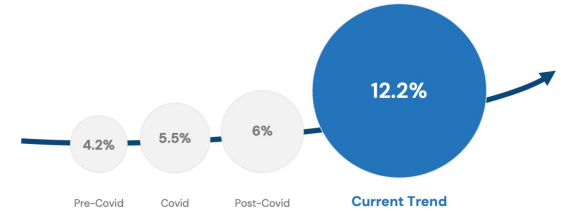
Claims trend keeps climbing



**Latest trend: 12.2%**

(Sept '24-Apr '25)

- That's +2pts above 2025 Plan
- The impact drives a \$67M hit to 2025 operating income

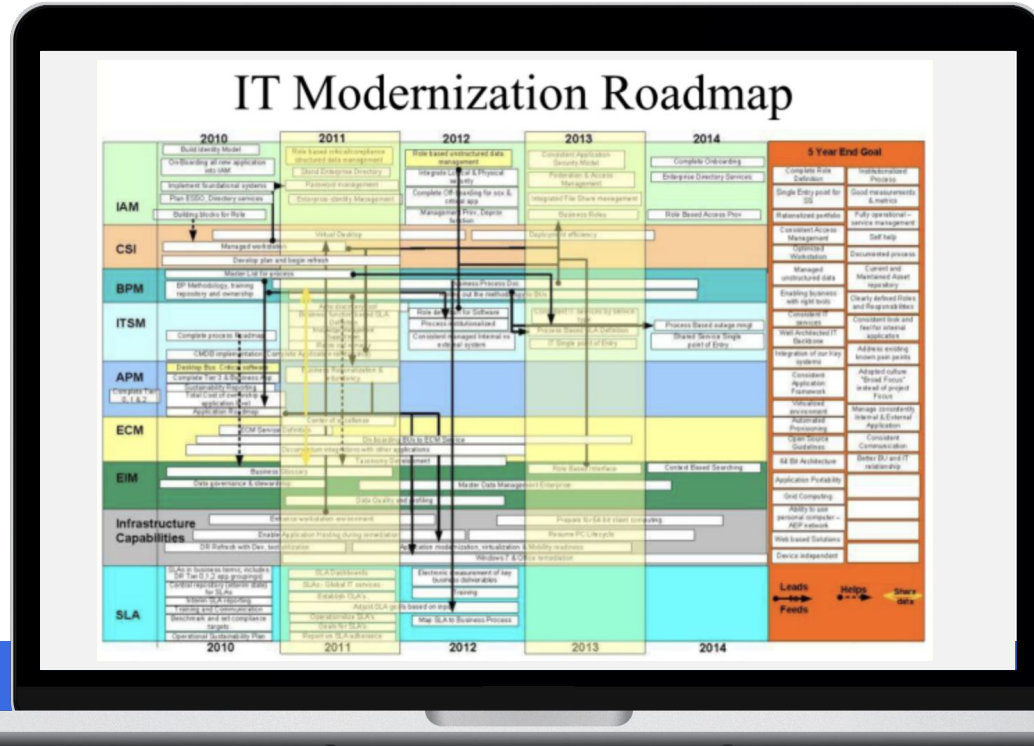


**“ The world needs a  
PowerPoint intervention.”**

– Axios' founders

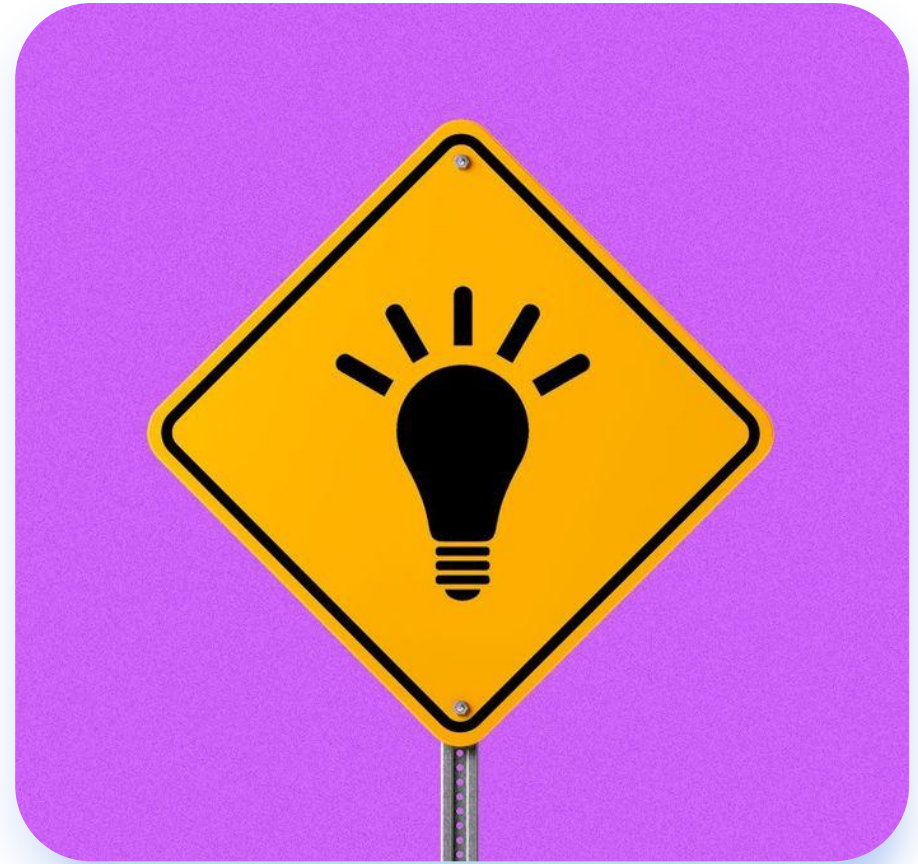
# Many slides are

too crowded, too confusing, misthought



# Pro tip: We only use slides to present

- **We use memos** for leave-behinds.
- **“The problem with PowerPoint** is it’s easy for the author and hard for the audience. And a memo is the opposite.” – Jeff Bezos



# Disorienting

## Cross-division, cross-function group uses Agile to modernize compliance controls

- Congratulations to our first Agile Pilot Team on successfully completing their work using the Agile methodology! This cross-functional team included members from the Technology Services branch and the Compliance and Internal Control function, with support from Board IT. The team was tasked with modernizing compliance controls, which are internal processes designed to help protect an organization and minimize risk.
- Over 14 weeks, members approached their assignment using the Agile Kanban technique, which included creating a Kanban board in SharePoint to manage the work and meeting for 15 minutes twice per week to discuss the progress of each of their "user stories" (defined pieces of work).
- The team broke down the work of three compliance recommendations into 12 smaller user stories that were worked on and delivered quickly through multiple cycles of design, development, and testing. Using this approach, the team was able to take a broader view of the work required and build out more improved solutions. The team learned to collaborate on each of the stories to bring a common understanding of the request, as well as the acceptance criteria needed to implement the improvements.
- The value delivered through this process was recognized by leadership, and it represents progress toward our goal of driving the increased collaboration and mutual accountability that is needed to be successful with the two divisions' transformation work. Two more Agile Pilot Teams recently kicked off and are learning to adopt the Agile mindset through hands-on delivery efforts that produce value for our divisions and our customers.

**What is Agile?**  
Agile is a set of iterative methods and practices that allow solutions to evolve through frequent design, build, and deploy cycles. Agile is a means for delivering value to users early, delivering often, and learning from each delivery to make the next one even better.



# Clear

## 1. Agile Pilot Team modernizes compliance controls



The cross-functional, cross-division team completed their project using the Agile methodology this week — congrats!

- MGT's Technology Services branch, DFM's Compliance and Internal Control function, and Board IT all played key roles.

**Why it matters:** The team modernized our compliance controls to protect the organization and minimize risk, and proved that the Agile methodology works.

**How they did it:** Members used the Agile Kanban technique to break down three compliance recommendations into 12 smaller user stories, letting them take a broader view of the work and come up with better solutions.

- **The team collaborated** on each story to get to a common understanding of the request and the necessary acceptance criteria.

**Leadership recognized** the value this process delivered for bringing us closer to our goals of increased collaboration and mutual accountability.

**What's next:** Two more Agile Pilot Teams recently kicked off and are learning to adopt the Agile mindset through hands-on delivery efforts that produce value for our divisions and our customers.

- **Go deeper:** Learn more about the [Agile Methodology](#).

# 1. Find your story



# Audience first!

- Picture an informed reader in the middle of your audience.
- Let them guide every decision.



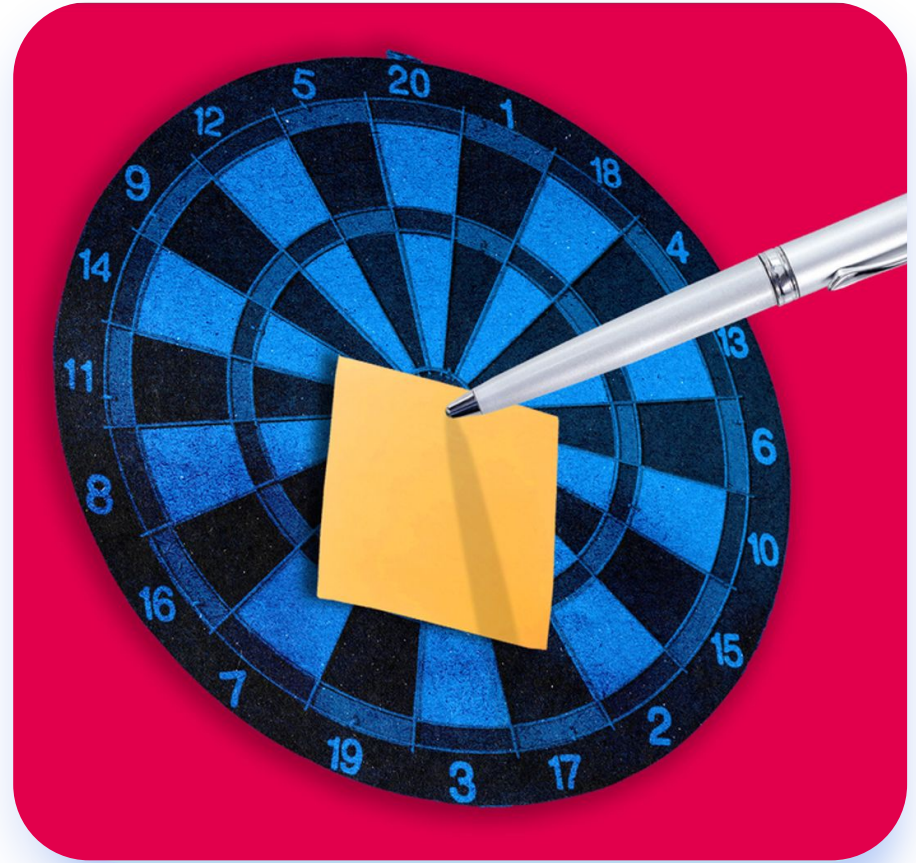
# Be worthy of their time

- Fight the urge to overshare.
- Distill and tighten.



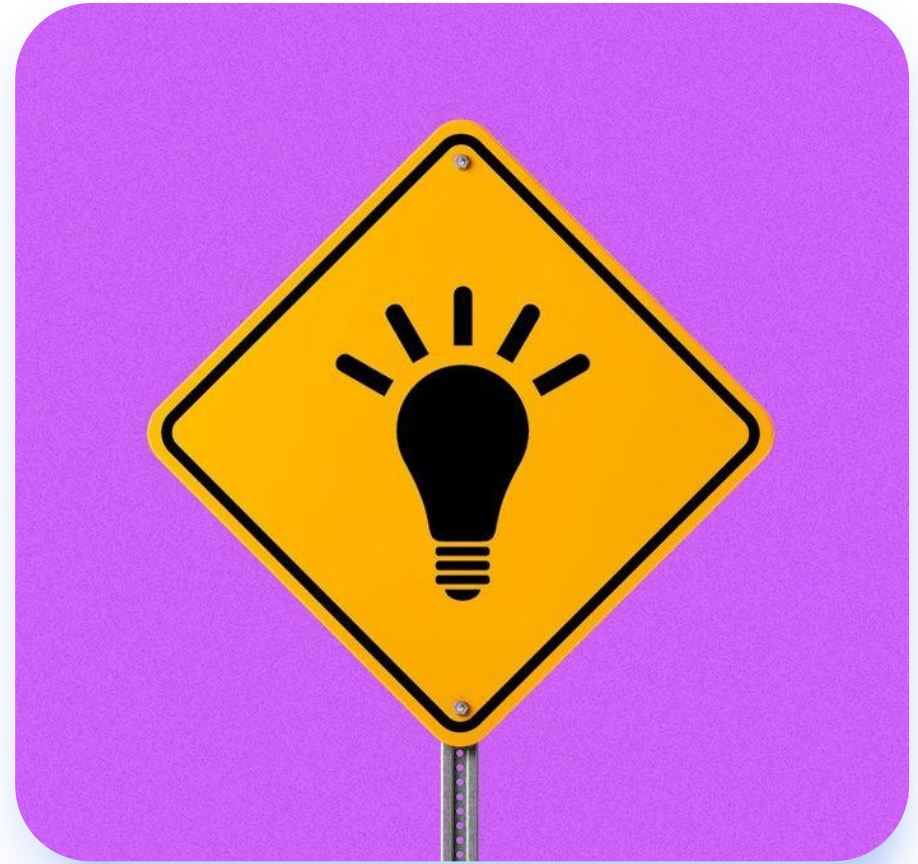
# Identify your big takeaway

- Then determine Why it matters.
- Follow with 3-5 supporting points.



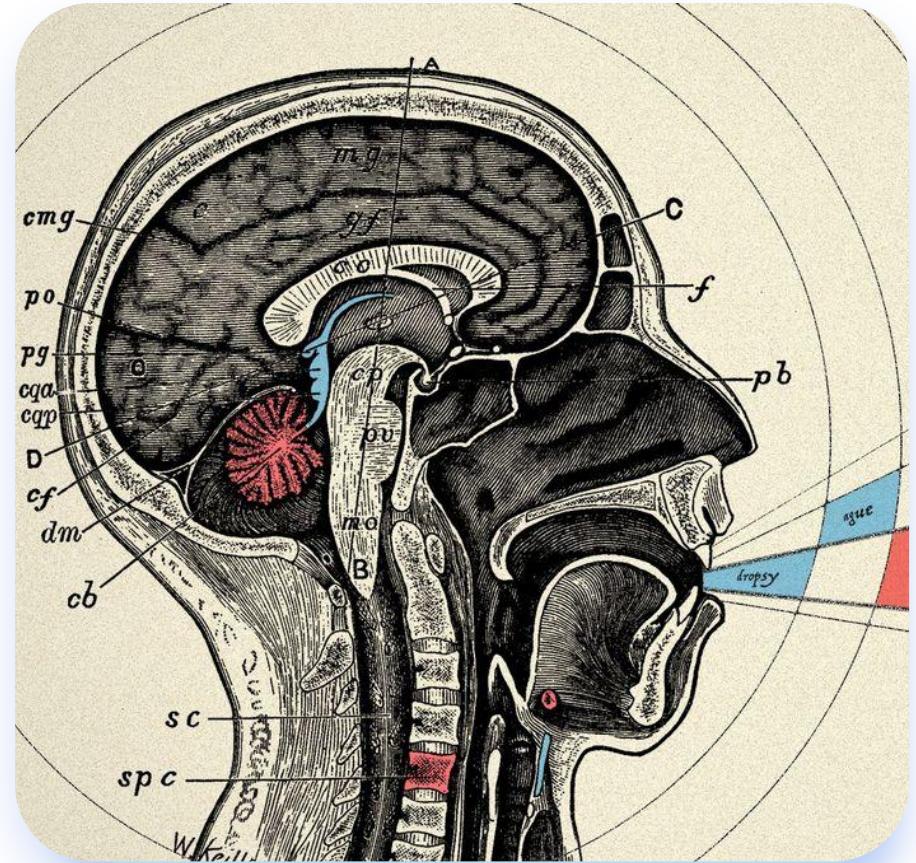
## **Pro tip:** Provide a roadmap up top

- Research shows it improves learning.



# Sound like a human

- Be conversational: Short, simple words have more energy and impact.



Imagine we're building a slide deck on the importance of internal communication.


### **Enhancing Collaboration and Success Through Effective Internal Communication Strategies**

An organization's success, efficiency and profitability have a direct tie to how effective internal communications are.

Let's start with a cold fact: Ineffective communication wastes time and money. How an organization spends its time is also how it spends its money — and 57% of all payroll covers the cost of sending emails, responding to IMs, and sitting in meetings, according to Microsoft. Let's take an average worker — making \$100,000– \$150,000 per year, working 8-hour days, 5 days a week, 52 weeks per year. They lose 46 workdays per year, wasting \$22,360 in salary per year.

The more senior a person is, the more time they're losing every day dealing with the avoidable impacts of ineffective communication, like searching for information they need to do their jobs, chasing a timely response, or clarifying context in a

# Big takeaway + Why it matters



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Title slide distills the topic.

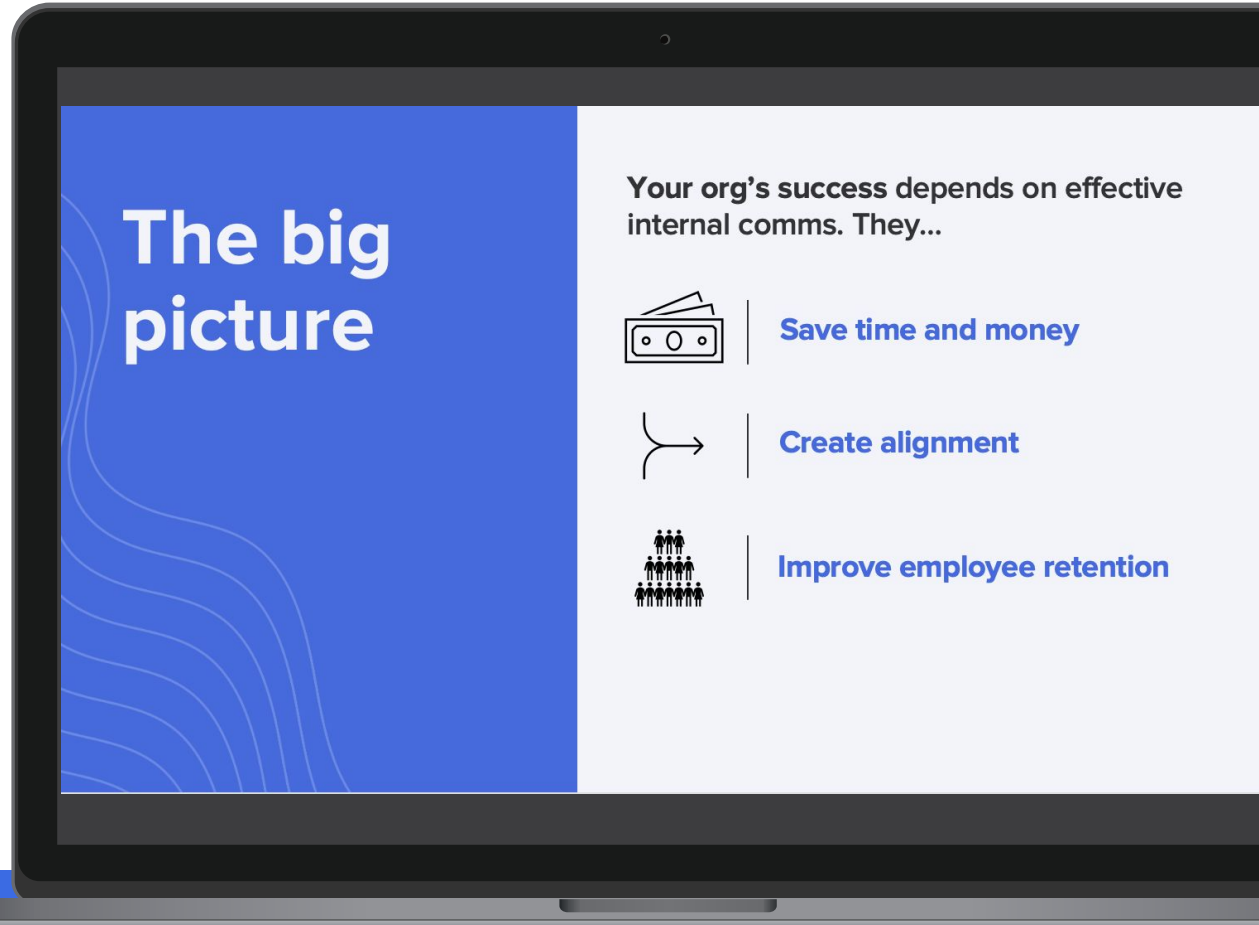
# The Value of Internal Communications



Reed Tucker  
Trainer and Editor, Axios HQ

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Follow-up slide  
builds on the story.



# The big picture

Your org's success depends on effective internal comms. They...



Save time and money



Create alignment



Improve employee retention

# Simplify to exaggerate

**Destroy everything** that detracts from your central point.

- Fewer words. Fewer visuals. Fewer slides.



## 2. Build your deck



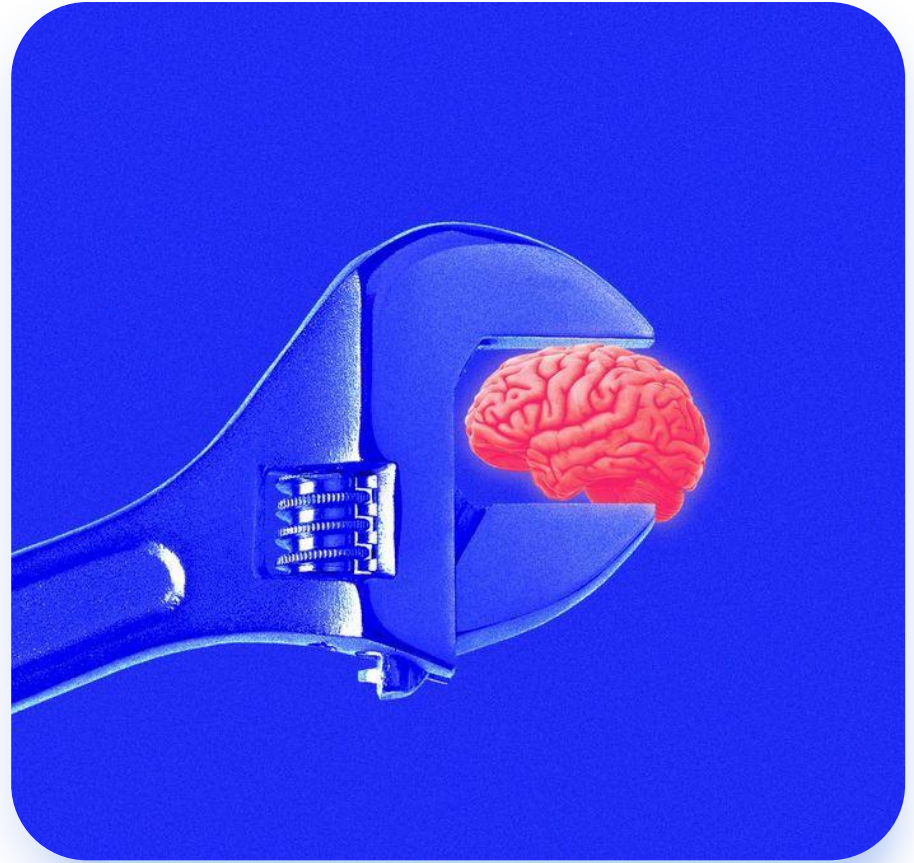
**“Presentations are a glance media –**  
more closely related to billboards than  
other media.”

**– Nancy Duarte**

# Don't overwhelm your audience

- **Too much text** and unnecessary visuals overload the brain, reducing comprehension.\*

\* Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory



## Supporting point #1

Let's start with a cold fact: Ineffective communication wastes time and money. How an organization spends its time is also how it spends its money — and 57% of all payroll covers the cost of sending emails, responding to IMs, and sitting in meetings, according to Microsoft. Let's take an average worker — making \$100,000– \$150,000 per year, working 8-hour days, 5 days a week, 52 weeks per year. They lose 46 workdays per year, wasting \$22,360 in salary per year.

The more senior a person is, the more time they're losing every day dealing with the avoidable impacts of ineffective communication, like searching for information they need to do their jobs, chasing a timely response, or clarifying context in a communication they've received.

As more stress lands on operations, the more cross- C-suite, President, or Owner VP or Senior leader functional the problem becomes. Systems slow down, productivity stalls,

## Supporting point #1

First slide



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Second slide



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# Before

At both an employee and a leadership level, a lot of time and money is getting lost.

- How an organization spends its time is also how it spends its money — and 57% of all payroll covers the cost of sending emails, responding to IMs, and sitting in meetings, according to a study from Microsoft.
- Let's take an average worker — making \$100,000– \$150,000 per year, working 8-hour days, 5 days a week, 52 weeks per year. They lose 46 work days per year, wasting \$22,360 in salary per year.
- We need to capture, channel, and redirect that cash, but it requires leaders to first understand how much time their organization is losing

The cost of ineffective communications across an organization

Annual salary	Average hours lost per year, per employee	Average salary lost per year, per employee
\$10,000 – \$50,000	277 hours	\$3,900
\$50,000 – \$100,000	282 hours	\$10,140
\$100,000 – \$150,000	368 hours	\$22,360
\$150,000 – \$200,000	390 hours	\$32,760
\$200,000+	507 hours	\$54,860

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# After

## Ineffective comms waste time and money

**57%**  
of payroll covers sending emails and sitting in meetings.



**46 days**  
lost by the average worker to bad comms.



**\$22,360**  
On average an org loses per employee, per year.



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# Stick to one point per slide

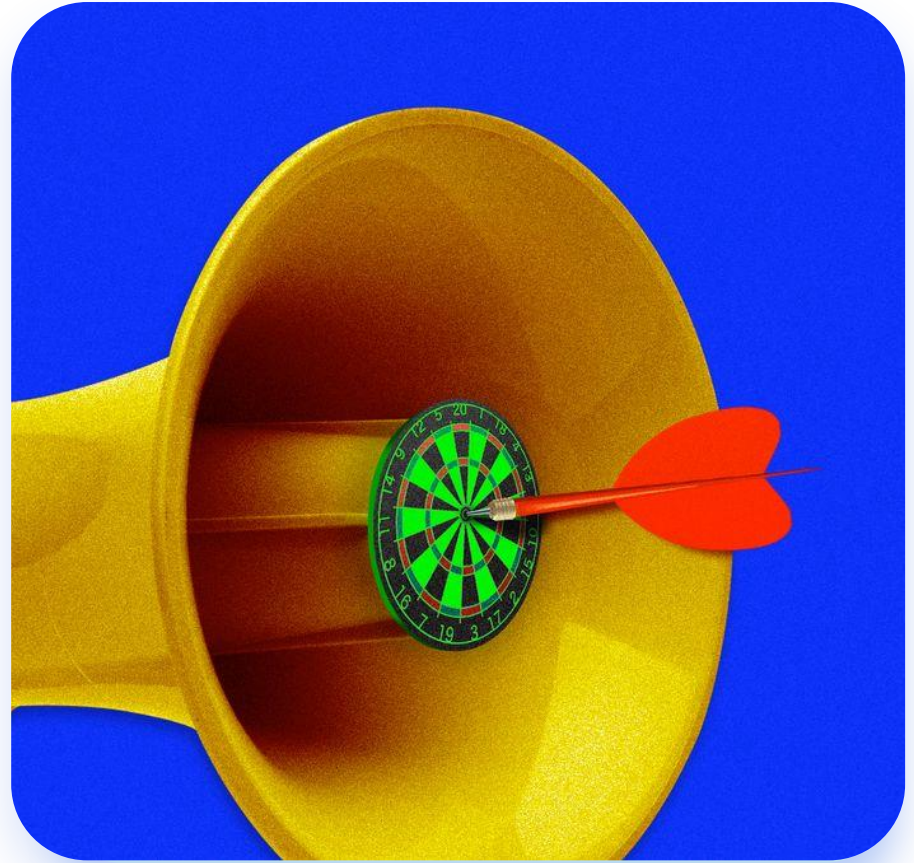
- **Less clutter**, more impact.
- **The big picture:** We aim for 12 or fewer slides on average.



# Make your headline specific

Then **expand** the story...

- **3-4 bullets** per slide.
- **5-6 words** per line.



## Supporting point #1

First slide



Second slide



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# Vague

The impact

-

-

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# Focused

Senior leaders are hurt the most

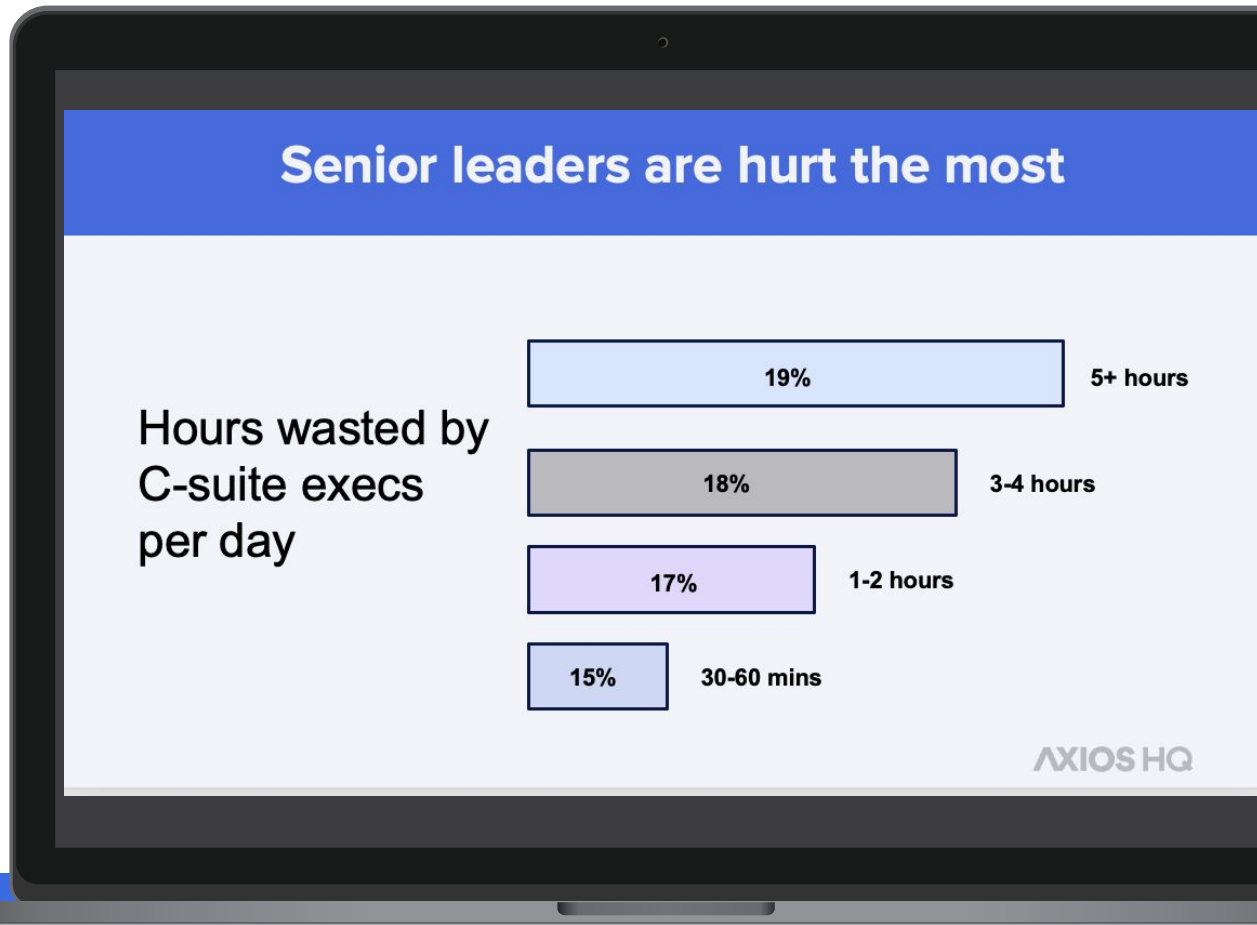
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# Enrich with visuals

- Simple charts, graphs and images improve retention.

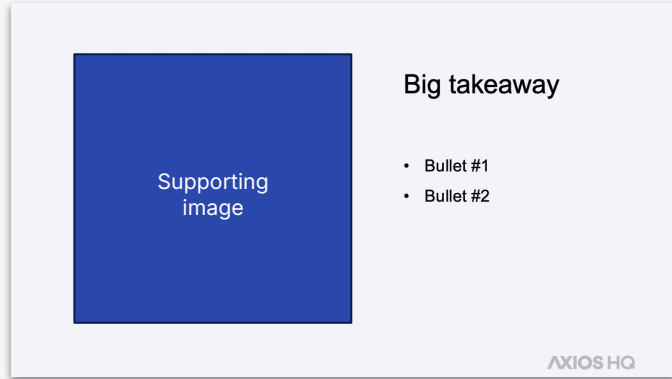


# Place images with purpose

- **Correlate importance** with prominence.
- **Templates** help consistency.
- **Use** The Rule of Thirds.



# Consider information flow...

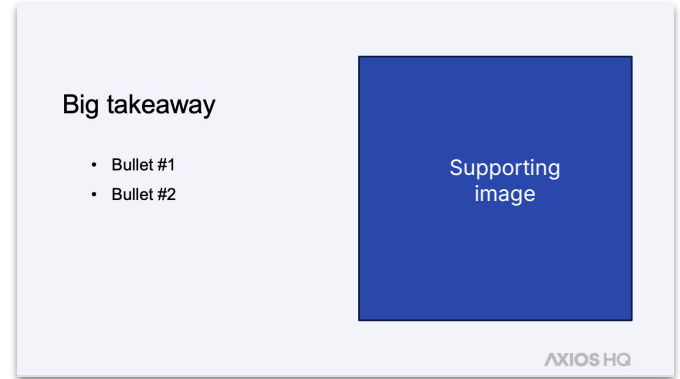
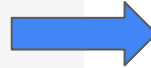


Supporting image

**Big takeaway**

- Bullet #1
- Bullet #2

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**Big takeaway**

- Bullet #1
- Bullet #2

Supporting image

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# Ensure readability

- Use **DM Sans** for your primary content. Ideally 22-point or larger.
- Reserve **Bebas** exclusively for brief, impactful titles. Do not use it for long sentences.
- Ensure **high contrast** between the text and the background.
- Avoid **ALL CAPS** for body text or long sentences.



## Supporting point #2

They also affect goal alignment. Data shows a direct correlation between how effective an organization's internal communications are and how aligned its employees stay. And when alignment breaks down, leaders say they see internal divisions, team conflicts, and demotivated employees. 85% of leaders think their internal communications are helpful, relevant, and have the context teams need to do their jobs, but only 45% of employees agree.

Employees ranked a list of topics according to how critical they are to doing their jobs well: The irony: The two topics employees say are least critical to staying aligned with their leaders are also the two topics they receive updates on most often — while the topics they value most arrive a few times a month or even less frequently.

The big takeaway  
+  
Why it matters



Supporting data



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# Edit your rough draft...

Data shows a **direct correlation** between how effective an organization's internal communications are and **how aligned** its employees stay. And when **alignment breaks down**, leaders say they see internal divisions, team conflicts, and demotivated employees.

- 85% of leaders think their internal communications are helpful, relevant, and have the context teams need to do their jobs, but only 45% of employees agree.
- Employees ranked a list of topics according to how critical they are to doing their jobs well: 1 Operational changes, like process and policy 2 Organization goals, plans, and new initiatives 3 People operations, like benefits and DEI initiatives 4 Culture and values 5 Business updates, like project, product, or client updates 6 Personnel updates, like team hires and departures 7 Competitive insights, like industry news 8 World updates, like the Middle East and Ukraine
- Employees rated the top ways their leaders can improve: • 37% want them on a more consistent cadence. • 36% want the opportunity to provide feedback. • 35% want more thoughtful and insightful details. • 34% want to receive updates more frequently. • 33% want to receive more relevant topics.

**We asked employees:** How often do you get updates from leaders on key topics?



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# Unreadable...

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# Distill your big takeaway and Why it matters...



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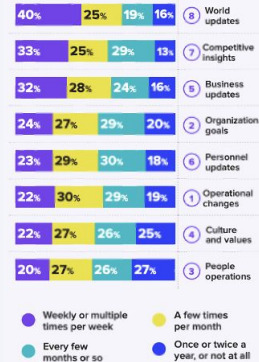
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Effective comms are crucial for alignment. Lack of alignment leads to division, conflict and demotivated employees.

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# Identify your supporting facts...

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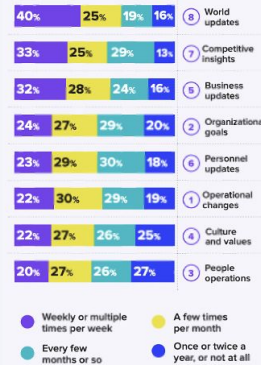
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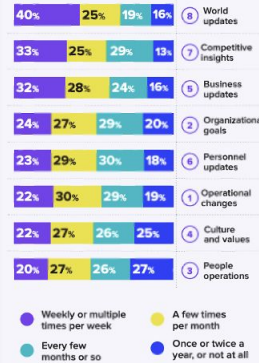
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# Evaluate your visuals...

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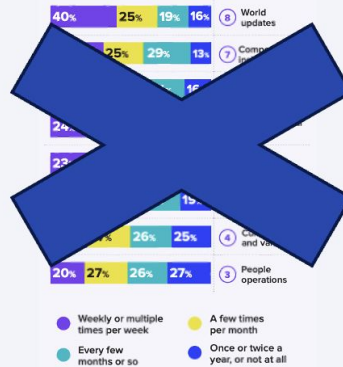
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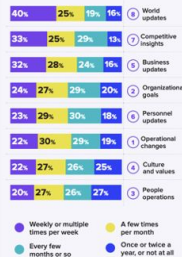
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# Ugh.

Data shows a **direct correlation** between how effective an organization's internal communications are and **how aligned** its employees stay. And when **alignment breaks down**, leaders say they see internal divisions, team conflicts, and demotivated employees.

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# Oh!

Lack of alignment leads to division, conflict and demotivated employees.



85% of leaders think their comms are helpful.

45% of employees agree.

The least critical topics to employees receive the most updates.

## Effective comms are crucial for alignment

# Deploy thoughtful design

- **Use our primary brand colors** as the foundation of your presentation.
- **Need more colors?** Select from the approved secondary palette to maintain a unified color scheme. 
- **Align images and text** to create  a strong visual connection and a clean, professional look.



# Here's the same slide with different colors

- ➡ **Bright colors distract.**
- ➡ **Lack of unity creates chaos.**



## Supporting point #3

A few direct lines are emerging in employee data. Internal communications also play a herculean role in employee retention.

Breakdowns in communication — and alignment — start to draw a less exciting line:

- 49% of unaligned employees plan to leave their job in the next two years.
- 44% of unmotivated employees plan to leave their job in the next two years.

Communication is a force multiplier. It keeps people on the same page prioritizing work that's valued by leaders and valuable to team success. It's also one of the most critical ingredients in helping hybrid staff feel aligned, motivated, and connected with the organization.

The big takeaway  
+  
Why it matters



Supporting data



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# Embrace white space

Aim for 25% of your slide.

Internal  
comms  
improve  
employee  
retention

Communication breakdown sends employees to the exits.

**49% of unaligned** employees plan to leave their job in the next two years.

**44% of unmotivated** employees say the same.

 Especially important with hybrid work.

# But where does all that extra detail go?

---

## You have options!

- Pre-read memo
- Well-organized appendix slides
- Post-presentation sendalong

**This allows the audience for your live presentation to actually read your slides and, crucially, listen to you.**

# In practice

---

A pre-read memo in Smart Brevity feels:

- Clean
- Inviting
- Easy to read

## Updated 5-year financial plan: Our new path forward

**The overview:** At our last retreat, we laid out a plan to get us to breakeven net income in 2026 and breakeven operating income in 2027.

- **Yes, but:** A new, higher-than-expected claims trend – about two points above plan — emerged this spring, deepening 2025 losses and delaying recovery.

**Why it matters:** The new claims trend has forced us to revise our previous plan. We've spent the past several weeks reassessing every financial lever, and we have a refreshed plan to share that will reduce our financial losses in 2026 and achieve breakeven net income in 2027.

### 1) A deeper dive into trends

**We had projected high** for the year, but the trend is expected to be two points higher than even the generous 2025 Plan.

- **Latest trend:** 12:2% (Sept. '24- April '25)

**The impact:** This unforeseen trend will drive a \$67M unfavorable swing in operating income, even with favorable revenue.

**The background:** This is just the latest phase of hard-to-predict trend dynamics since COVID.

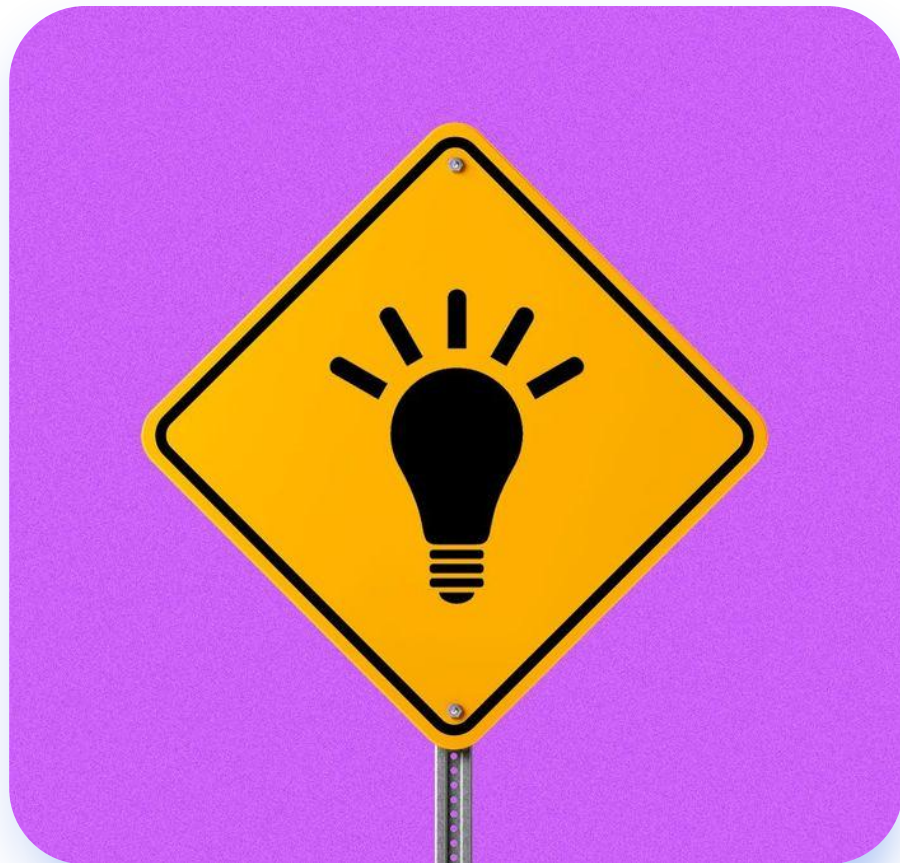
- **Current trends are the highest** we've seen going back 20+ years — as far back as our data goes. The closest was 2007.

**The main drivers:** Unlike in years past, when provider price increases drove trends, today the biggest factor is complex variations in the severity, mix, and utilization of care. Specifically:

- **Increases in severity**, especially in cancer. The increase possibly stems from patients | avoiding care and screenings during COVID.
- **Upcoding.** Providers are more aggressively documenting the complexity of care to boost revenue. They may be using AI and other tech to help.
- **Primary care shortages** in some areas may see providers driving patients to specialty services to boost revenue.

# Pro tip: Leave them with the big takeaway

- **The final slide** should reinforce it.
- **Distill this thought:** I created this deck so I can get \_\_\_ or teach you \_\_\_.

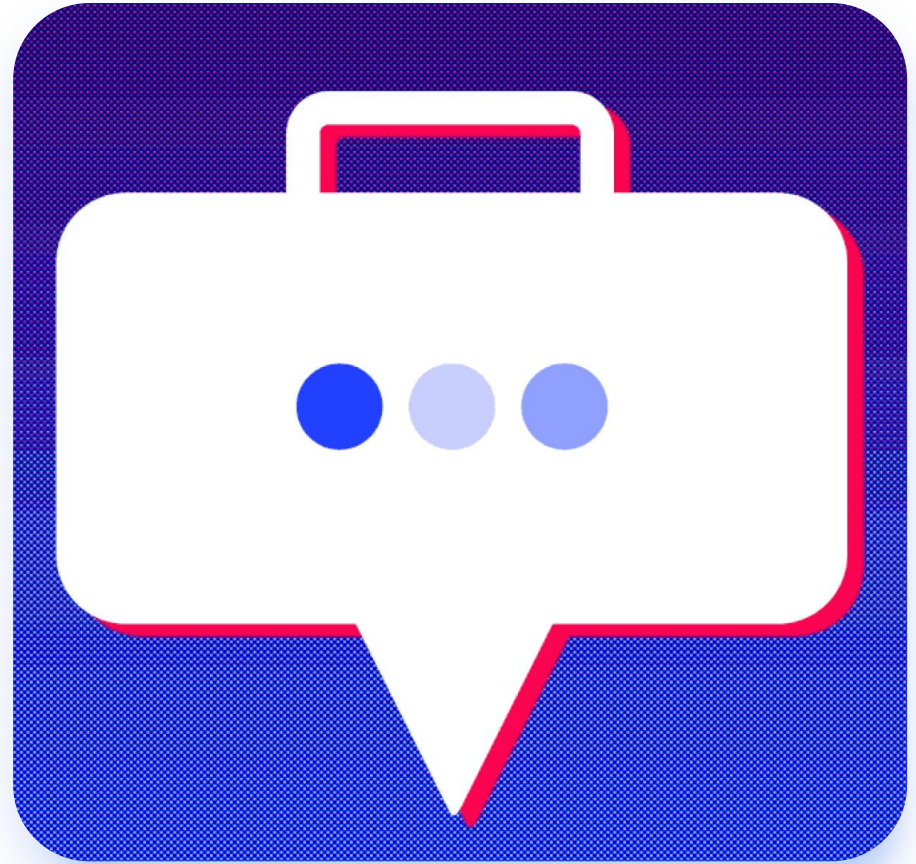


### 3. Deliver your presentation



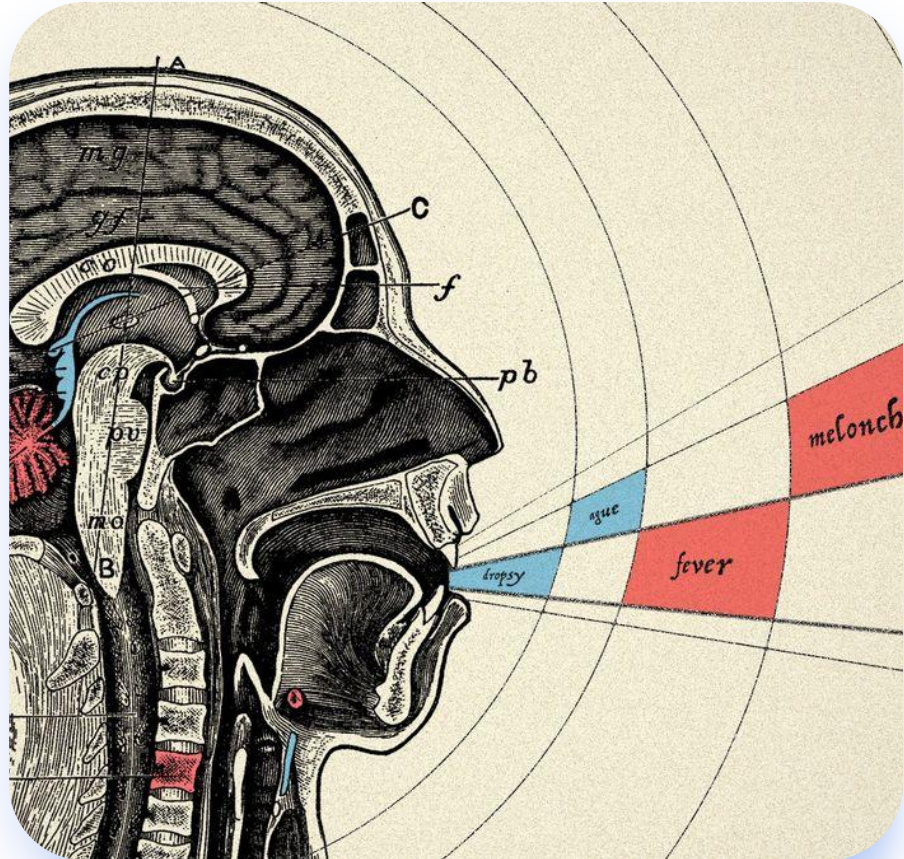
# Win before you begin

- Plan. Sharpen your main point.
- Sharp ideas and articulation reflect smarter thinking and strategy.
- If you bore yourself, you don't stand a chance with your audience.



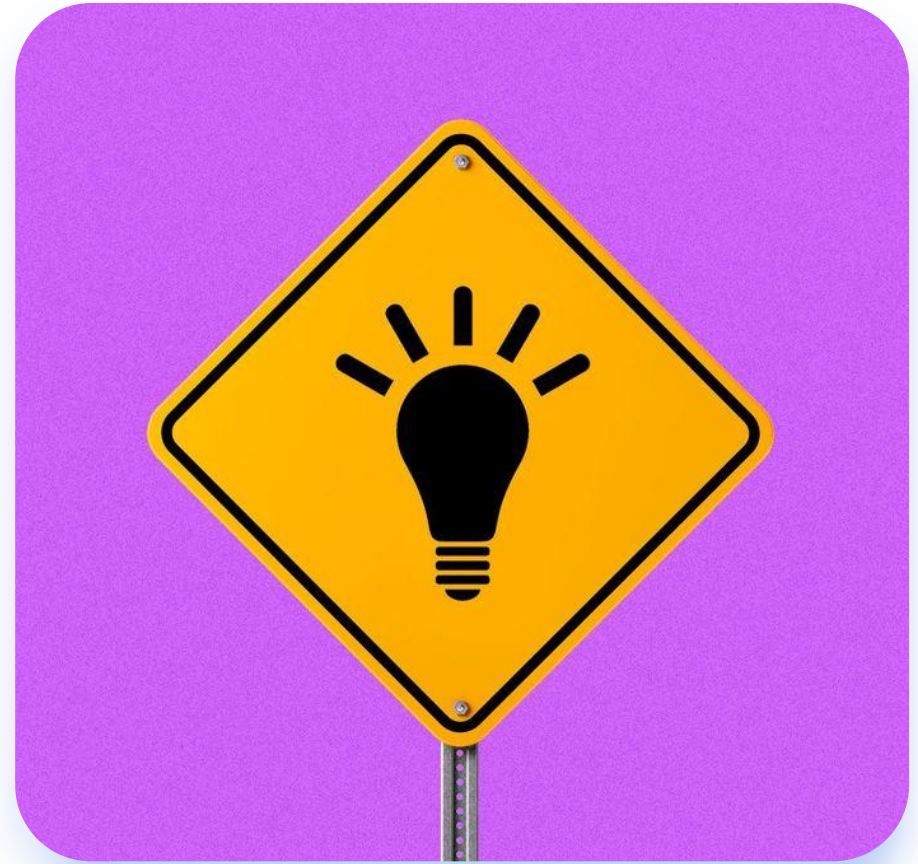
# Structure your speaking like your writing

Build your story around the same essential elements...



## Pro tip: Don't simply read your slides

- **The talk track** should supplement the deck.





## Virtual presentation tips

- **Light matters.** You'll look best in natural sunlight.
- **Position your screen** at eye level.
- **Clean** your camera lens.



# Questions?

- **Target** your audience.
- **Identify** your big takeaway and Why it matters.
- **Add** supporting points.
- **Keep** your slides spare.
- **Enhance** with a compelling talk track.



The image features a white background with decorative wavy lines in the corners. On the left, several light blue wavy lines curve upwards from the bottom-left corner. On the right, several light blue wavy lines curve downwards from the top-right corner. In the center, the text "AXIOS HQ" is displayed in a bold, sans-serif font. "AXIOS" is in black, and "HQ" is in blue.

**AXIOS HQ**