Pitch Anything
An Innovative Method For Presenting, Persuading, And Winning The Deal

By Oren Klaff
Whenever you’re trying to sell an idea, a product, a deal or a service, there’s actually something that could be even more critical to success than what you’re pitching. It’s the way you connect with and control your audience.

And the hard truth is that most of us get that all wrong.

Why? According to Oren Klaff, it’s because of a fundamental disconnect between your brain and the brains of the people you’re pitching to.

You’re using your higher-level intellectual gray matter, while your listeners have engaged their primitive, reptilian or crocodile brains that thrive on emotion and basic instincts.

Klaff has spent years perfecting a solution to this problem while making a living pitching investment deals as Director of Capital Markets at investment bank Intersection Capital. He has the evidence to
prove it works. He raises an average of $2 million a week for business ventures involving companies like Marriott, Hershey’s and Citigroup.

“From the outside,” he explains, “the reasons for my success seem simple: I offer wealthy investors profitable deals that involve Wall Street banks. But others do that too. Yet I raise a lot more money than they do.”

He’s shared his solution in a hugely popular Pitch Mastery Course and, now in this book.

He calls his technique the STRONG method:

S for Setting the frame
T for Telling the story
R for Revealing the intrigue
O for Offering the prize
N for Nailing the hookpoint
G for Getting the decision
However, this book isn’t structured around that framework but the basics of Klaff’s success formula are conveyed throughout.

Let’s begin by discussing the first big thing we need to understand, and that involves our brain.

**Brain Power**

The fundamental basis for Klaff’s approach is what he calls neurofinance: “an idea that combines neuroscience - how the brain works - with economics.”

In simple terms, he suggests brain activity occurs at three physical levels:

- The crocodile or “croc” brain that gave primitive humans their fight-or-flight instinct, which still largely drives many of our behaviors,
- The midbrain that deals with meanings and social situations, and
• The neocortex, our higher-level, more recently evolved part of the brain, responsible for problem-solving, analyzing and weighing up complex issues.

The trouble is that messages created and transmitted by your neocortex are first filtered by everyone else’s croc brains. Instinctively, the croc brain tries to eliminate non-urgent ideas to prevent the brain from overloading.

“As you are pitching your idea, the croc brain of the person sitting across from you isn’t ‘listening’ and thinking, ‘Hmmm, is this a good deal or not?’” Klaff writes.

“Its reaction to your pitch basically goes like this: ‘Since this is not an emergency, how can I ignore this or spend the least amount of time possible on it?’”

You have to breach this defense using control, humor and novelty. And your key weapon is the
use of Frames.

**Frame Control**

We usually think of a “frame” as our perspective, the way we see and interpret things. And it’s common knowledge that we don’t all see things the same way.

But Klaff takes the concept a step further, using the term to also describe behaviors rooted in these different perspectives.

The moment your way of looking at things makes contact with the frame of the other person, they clash, battle, and grapple for dominance.

If you win this frame collision, you will have frame control, where your ideas are much more likely to be accepted and your pitch will be positioned for success.

Klaff categorizes a number of frame types according to their purpose and how they can be
used.

First, there’s the Power Frame. It’s what you’d expect it to be. Each participant wants more status and power.

To seize control of the power frame, the upper hand if you will, you have to instigate a frame collision via what Klaff calls a mildly shocking but not unfriendly act, using defiance and light humor.

For example, you might place a folder in front of the person you’re pitching to with their name and the word “confidential” on it.

When they reach for the file, you grab it back and say “Uh-uh, not yet. You have to wait for this.”

Now you’re in charge of proceedings; you have control of the power frame.

“This is a quick tease followed by a strong denial, and it is massively disruptive to the target’s croc brain,” the author says.
The Time Frame, the second main frame type, is used when your target tries to hurry you along by suggesting he’s running out of time. (around 4:13) He asserts time frame control by saying something like: “I’ve only got 15 minutes left.”

You respond to your target’s statement by saying, with a smile: “That’s okay. I only have 12.”

The Analyst Frame is an attempt, intentional or not, to disrupt your momentum by interrupting your pitch to ask factual questions or request technical details when you’re in mid-flow.

This frame will kill your pitch, Klaff warns: “Once you give their neocortexes something to calculate, they will go cold.”

Answer the question directly, but briefly and quickly, saying you’ll return to it later, and then redirect attention back to your pitch.

An effective way to trounce the Analyst Frame is to
counter with what Klaff calls the Intrigue Frame, a brief story or narrative that’s relevant to your pitch and refocuses attention on you.

Begin with something like: “That reminds me….,” And then, tell an intriguing story.

People love stories and you need to craft a couple of these in advance.

The secret to the success of the Intrigue Frame is that it has to involve some kind of time-pressured drama involving you that immediately grabs your audience’s attention and banishes their analytic inquisitiveness.

And then you only tell part of it, leaving the conclusion hanging.

For instance, when meeting officials from a local airport, the author told them a story about how he saw the pilot and co-pilot apparently fighting in the cockpit of a private jet he was using, even as the plane went into a nosedive.
But then Klaff switched back to his pitch without explaining what was going on, but knowing that he’d shocked his audience out of their Analyst Frame and kept them hanging onto his words. He left the rational explanation as to what was happening in the cockpit - a struggle to control the auto-pilot - until the end of his pitch, ensuring he kept his audience’s attention throughout.

Finally, there’s one more frame that can be useful for countering the Power, Time or Analyst Frames. This is the Prize Frame, a tactic which turns the tables on your target by establishing their need to win you over, rather than the other way around.

You have to convey to your audience that if they wish to get any more information from you, they’ll have to earn it.

The example given earlier, of taking back a confidential report from its intended recipient, could be part of a Prize Frame.
Another example would be an unexpected response when you’re told that a key member of the audience will be late.

Klaff’s reply is usually something like: “I can wait 15 minutes, but then I have to leave.”

Of course, it goes without saying that you must be prepared to do exactly that, insisting that any future meeting will have to be on your home ground. You’re the prize they must pursue.

However, chances are that efforts will be made to track down the key person and make sure he gets to the meeting.

**Establishing Status**

A common thread running through the framing tactics is the need to take the upper hand in your pitch.

“How others view you is critical to your ability to establish the dominant frame and hold onto the
power you take when you win the frame collision,” the author declares.

Often, status is implicit in relationships due to factors beyond your control, like social class, wealth and authority. You may think you can do nothing about that, but it’s possible to temporarily seize what Klaff calls situational status or local star power.

For instance, the President of the US may be regarded as holding the ultimate status high-spot, but he has to surrender this when he sees his doctor - and take his clothes off when he’s told to! A leading brain surgeon may enjoy higher public status than a humble golf pro, but not when he’s taking golf lessons, where the pro is in his own domain with local star power.

Klaff recounts the story of a dinner he hosted at an exclusive French restaurant.

Anxious to impress his guests, he selected an
expensive wine only to be challenged by the waiter who asked guests which meals they would likely be ordering, and then suggested a much more appropriate wine.

The lower status of the waiter was reversed due to his expertise and the fact that he was in his own domain. His situational status enabled him to achieve local star power.

Klaff calls attempts to reduce your status as beta traps, a reference to the use of alpha as a label for the “top dog.”

These traps are all over the place and you can’t always do a lot about them beyond being aware of their existence and trying to avoid them.

A simple example would be your target in a pitch trying to take away your status before the meeting even starts. This could include having the receptionist treat you poorly, then being made to wait with lots of other people to show that you’re
just one of the crowd. Finally, he could have a low-ranking lackey bring you to the pitch to underscore your lack of status.

Another beta trap would be the example mentioned earlier of learning that the key person you’re presenting to will be delayed or may not even attend, which is why you have to stand firm and threaten to leave.

**Elevating Status**

Frames are your key weapon in elevating your status and since first impressions count, it’s important to use your framing tactics as quickly as possible.

Follow these six steps to swiftly raise or maintain status:

1. Avoid small talk and deferential behavior at the outset. It hands status to the other person.
2. Mentally condition yourself to be unaffected
by your customer’s projected status. Don’t allow yourself to think of them as being superior.

3. Look for chances to perpetrate small denials and defiances (as with the withdrawal of the confidential report).

4. Use this power to quickly move into the area where you’re the expert, where your knowledge is unassailable (as with the wine waiter).

5. Look for a chance to create a prize frame. In other words, make the target feel it would be a privilege to get to work with you. You can use tactics like questioning whether the customer is the right fit for you.

6. Confirm your alpha status by making your customer acknowledge your higher status. For example, you might ask: “Have you ever done a deal this large before?”
If this sounds easy, the truth is that it’s a high-wire act. You must strike the right balance between the firmness of your framing and the need for a playful, humorous approach so that your target isn’t offended.

**The Pitch**

When it comes to actually delivering your pitch, it’s important to bear in mind the limited potential of the croc brain to maintain concentration.

The key is brevity. Start by reassuring those croc brains that this is going to be brief and then aim to get the whole thing done in 20 minutes.

Here’s how:

**Phase 1: Introduce Yourself And The Big Idea**

Allow yourself only 5 minutes, 2 of which should cover your most successful projects.

Spend the remainder of time talking about why
your idea/project/service is essential right now. Klaff calls this the “Why Now?” Frame and it answers three questions:

- What has changed financially in the market to make your big idea timely?
- What is changing in people’s behavior to also make the timing right?
- How are technological forces driving change in a way that supports your idea?

“Movement is a critical element in the “Why now?” frame,” the author tells us. “Your target needs to understand the forces that are pushing your deal. A huge part of the brain is devoted to detecting movement.”

But remember, this is only headline-level talk. No time for detail.

The same goes for actually explaining your big idea. Klaff gives us a formula for this part of the
pitch that he calls the introduction pattern, which goes like this:

“For [target customers] Who are dissatisfied with [the current offerings in the market]. My idea/product is a [new idea or product category] That provides [key problem/solution features]. Unlike [the competing product]. My idea/product is [describe key features].”

And he provides this example: “For companies with large buildings in California and Arizona Who are dissatisfied with their aging solar panels. My product is a plug-and-play solar accelerator. That provides 35 percent more energy from old panels. And unlike the cost of replacing panels, My product is inexpensive and has no moving parts.”

**Phase 2: Deliver The Heart Of The Pitch**

You now have 10 minutes to grab your audience’s attention and get to the heart of your pitch.

Klaff explains that attention is controlled by
a balance of brain chemicals: dopamine, the neurotransmitter of desire; and norepinephrine, the neurotransmitter of tension.

Your job is to strike the right balance.

Novelty can trigger a dopamine release and you can show novelty with a short product demo, or if you’re pitching something complex you can use simple metaphors.

Creating tension is a little more challenging and relies on a tactic called the Push-Pull Pattern, in which you give something and then take it away.

For instance, you might say: “There’s a real possibility that we might not be right for each other.” That’s the Push.

Then you say: “But then again, if this did work out, our forces could combine to become something great.” That’s the Pull.

Create tension, then resolve it, Klaff advises.
“There’s a two-way connection between pushing and pulling that, when it operates simultaneously, introduces enough tension to create alertness.”

Once you have that alertness, you can give them the financial numbers and projections, but emphasize your budgeting expertise rather than the financial forecasts.

Showing that you’re good with numbers is much more convincing than predictable value statements meant to impress, such as the budget being “conservative” or offering absurdly aggressive and optimistic projections.

Next, discuss possible competitors who might be able to provide a product or service like the one you’re offering.

For example, when pitching for a contract to raise capital for a development project, Klaff spent time describing the strengths and weaknesses of his competitors.
In this pitch to developers, Klaff pointed out that although one of his competitors was much bigger and more experienced, its size would make it much less agile and more bureaucratic, with correspondingly higher costs. (He won the contract.)

You can then go on to explain your competitive advantage. So, if there is competition, you can demonstrate why you can beat it.

“In almost every pitch situation, you need something special,” Klaff points out. “Briefly describe it as your ‘secret sauce’ - the unfair advantage you have over others.”

**Phase 3: Offer the Deal**

Don’t waste time here. In just 2 minutes tell your audience clearly what you’ll deliver, when and how.

Don’t drill down into a lot of detail - that’s neocortex stuff - just provide a summary of key
Phase 4: Use Frames For Hot Cognitions
In the final few minutes, you must push all the buttons that get your audience excited and anxious.

The objective is to get the dopamine flowing by talking about and showing them things that turn them on.

For instance, telling inspiring stories and painting pictures of success can drive their desire for your offer - an emotion psychologists refer to as “wanting,” a feeling of desiring something before you even fully understand what it is.

Klaff uses the term hot cognition to describe the process of creating this “wanting.” You achieve the effect by using frames.

For instance, by using the Intrigue Frame,
audiences can become excited by dramatic stories and imagery associated with the deal.

When pitching a contract to raise funds for a new airport, Klaff used stunning visuals of aircraft, and told stories about the aspirations of the local community.

He even brought a community member along to the presentation to talk about his memories of the airport site, injecting a powerful human, emotional touch.

Using a Prize Frame enables you to position yourself as the most important person in the deal. “The prize frame is a hot cognition that signals the target’s croc brain that you are strong, you are not needy, and you are not going to supplicate for a deal,” he says.

You can also use a Time Frame in which you warn of the potential loss of the deal if it falls outside a certain timeframe.
The point at which your audience becomes emotionally engaged is what Klaff calls the hookpoint. You’ve got them!

“To create a desire in the target’s mind and to go on from the pitch to the hookpoint, every presenter has to use hot cognitions to create wanting and desire,” he says.

Eradicating Neediness

The one thing you don’t want to do in your pitch is to appear in any way to be desperate for the deal. To the croc brain, neediness is a threat.

Klaff explains: “(G)iving a hint of neediness or any sign of desperation, plainly put, is like saying, ‘I’m holding a bomb that could go off at any minute.’ Everyone will respond by going on the defensive. Their first reaction is - Run!”

Even so, it’s natural to feel needy if you think your pitch isn’t going well or the audience is losing
interest.

If you allow these feelings to show - for example through submissive behavior or by implicitly asking “How am I doing?” - you’re heading for disaster.

Instead, says Klaff, go into your pitch with a strong Time Frame established at the outset of the presentation. You’re implying, up front but without being cavalier about it, that you don’t need this particular deal; you have other appointments.

Support this attitude by following three crucial rules:

• Suppress your feelings that you have to succeed. Don’t yearn for things. Accept that sometimes you have to let them come to you and you don’t need to chase them.

• Be excellent in the presence of others. Don’t be intimidated or overwhelmed. Instead select one thing that you are very good at and demonstrate that.
• Withdraw. At a crucial moment, when people are expecting you to come after them, pull away. Use the Time Frame or Power Frame to assert control.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, Klaff’s technique is about four things:

1. Using frames to dominate and excite your target audience.

2. Using frames and your expertise to temporarily assert higher status.

3. Keeping your pitch brief by focusing on the high level points and emotional or inspirational issues.

4. Avoiding any sense that you’re desperate for the deal.

But there’s one other key element that underpins much of his approach - employing humor and a light touch, even when you seem to be asserting
power or even making implied threats.

“Humor, fun and light-heartedness are crucial components of every pitch,” he explains.

“Importantly, the humor is not there to relieve tension. Instead, it’s there to signal that although the tension is real, you are so confident that you can play around a little.”

Klaff admits that it has taken him years to perfect this technique, in effect to become a frame master.

“Becoming a frame master isn’t easy,” he adds. “It takes thought, effort, and will, but the rewards are substantial. The good news - this is a journey that is fun from the very start, and if you are doing it right, it remains fun.”