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Peter: [00:00:34] Welcome to change your mindset podcast, formerly known as improves is no joke, where it's all about believing that strong communication skills are the best way in delivering your technical accounting knowledge and growing your business. An effective way of building stronger communication skills is by embracing the principles of applied improvisation. Your host is Peter Margaritis, CPA, aka the accidental accountant, and he will interview financial professionals and business leaders to find their secret and building stronger relationships with their clients, customers, associates, and peers, all the while growing their businesses. So let's start the show.

[00:01:19] [music]

Peter: [00:01:19] Welcome to Episode Four and my guest today is Dr. John Molidor, who is a professor and community assistant dean at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine and past president of the National Speakers Association board of directors. Our conversation focuses on how you design your PowerPoint presentation so that it's easier for your audience's brain to process this information. John came to the NSA Ohio chapter in February 2017 and delivered his presentation, which blew me away, along with other chapter members. When I first started teaching back in 2000, I was that person who filled the PowerPoint slide with bullet points and words and with no pictures. Over eight years, I've been moving in this direction, just a few words on a slide with a picture. However, the information that John provided about how the brain reacts during a PowerPoint presentation - For me, it was absolutely life changing. In my upcoming book, Taking the Numb out of Numbers: Explaining and Presenting Financial Information with Confidence and Clarity, I write about this approach and the impact it will have on your audience. So without further ado, let's get to the interview with Dr. John Molidor.

[00:02:41] [music]

Peter: [00:02:42] Welcome everybody and a very special welcome to my guest today Dr. John Molidor, and he's a very busy guy and I greatly appreciate you taking time out of your schedule to have a conversation with me today on my podcast.

John: [00:02:54] You're welcome. Excited to be here.

Peter: [00:02:57] And I'll say this. I will probably say this in the intro and I'll say this now. When you came to our chapter of NSA in February of 2017 and did the presentation about the brain and how it works with PowerPoint presentations. I mean that was the biggest game changer in my professional speaking career. And I was heading in that direction. But man you just - spot on. And that'll be the basis of our conversation today. But can you tell the audience a little bit about yourself and your background before you get into the nuances of the conversation?

John: [00:03:34] Sure. First and foremost, one that qualifies me fairly well is I'm a professor of psychiatry at Michigan State University College of Human Medicine. I'm the immediate past president of the National Speakers Association. And when I presented last year then obviously I was president of the National Speakers Association. Always been interested in the brain how it works, how people are influenced by different things in their life and how the brain processes that. So I knew during my year of service as the president of NSA, I'd be invited to go to the chapter. I thought well what would chapters and obviously its members want in terms of a presentation? So I thought about it and then decided to hit upon doing a little research and the area of neuroscience. So I looked at about 40 neuroscience principals, chose seven that I think really stood the test of time and would be applicable to speakers. There's a bunch of other principles we could have used that have stood the test of time, but I don't think speakers would be like I don't know that I really care about the hippocampus. So I was like can I find principles that literally one could walk out of that session and go You know I can apply this.

Peter: [00:05:09] Oh and you did.

John: [00:05:11] And I wanted to make it simple but I didn't want to dumb it down. I wanted to honor the science. But at the same time, the sub-agenda, if you will, was how can I also help individuals try to figure out what was going on in the minds of their audience, whether it was a one-on-one conversation, whether it was a small group or even large group presentation? And so that's kind of how I started putting the plan together. So you saw in your experience the result of that session.

Peter: [00:05:49] I love what you just said. You put it in the mind of the audience and what they're experiencing. And and I've been using that as well. It's like when we think about do you know your audience, what does that really mean? And they go Well you know we're profession. But we also need to understand how their brain works and consumes information and processes it because that'll just help us and our getting our message out.

John: [00:06:16] Absolutely. One of the things that I noticed is that a lot of time presenter, speakers, or even in a conversation, one on one conversation with your partner, you can get in your own and try to figure out oh this is what I want to say. This is what I want to do, how I'm going to organize it. And not so much what's going on in the head of the person that is going to hear or see or feel the information, and one of the things we did discover, and I think it's it's important, especially in the communication process, is that-- so here's here's probably the the lay person's way of saying it. Is that your cells will eavesdrop on what you're sending your brain. So if you're sending your brain sort of this negative information or positive information, your cells tend to pay attention to that, which then can cause a chemical reaction, whole cascading then of chemicals being dumped, either for the good or for the bad, in certain instances. So one of the things that we try to tell people when they're communicating or present is, to a certain extent, get out of your head. Because if you keep sending that message, your brain and body are going to react probably in that same way.

Peter: [00:07:43] How do you get out of your heads though? I mean a lot of us we live in there all the time and sometimes we can't get out of our own way.

John: [00:07:51] I know. It's one of the things is like like if I know I'm about to present or I know it's an important presentation, again whether it be my board, whether it be to a loved one, or to a chapter let's say, one of the things I try to do is set - I'm going to call it a mantra if you will - before I speak. I will tell myself all I can really do here is share what I know. That's so much easier for me to go I'm just going to share versus I hope they like it or not. Or are they getting it or oh you know I'm not getting the reaction that I wanted or oh what's going on - and so then if I'm in my head, I can mess I can mess it up. My job is just to share. So when you and I are talking, again, my mantra will be you know can I just share with Peter? That's all I can do is share. And I'm not perfect, I'm going to mess up, I'm going to make mistakes, but in the end it's like am I sharing it and am I doing it in a way that's real? You know I'm not judging myself as I do it.

Peter: [00:09:06] Wow that's great advice because I've had speakers come up to me because I know a lot of my audiences are financial professionals, CPAs and accountants, and their body language during their presentation is very much introverted. There's not a whole lot of of of... it's just kind of there and they get inside their head think oh my god I'm dying. I'm bombing. This is-- And then after they're done, everybody comes up and sharing with them how great they were. And so to the point the speaker's in their head versus I'm here to share. And they'll react as they do.

John: [00:09:45] Absolutely and so we know then from the research that's out there and the extroverts and introverts that the extroverts give much more of... whether it be the body language, the gesture Jermichael or whatever. And so if you judge it on an external basis, you're going to go in one direction, whereas if your audience or the individual you're talking to is a little bit more introverted, keeping the energy a little bit closer, you can't then compare the two and then draw different conclusions. Like you just said oh they're not liking it or they're not getting it. Not at all. What it really is is how they will manifest the expression. And that's why I think it's great advice not to judge your audiences by what you're getting, versus again reminding yourself you're just you're there to share. Now you need to create a safe environment, with the mantra I do I try to create a safe environment, and then I invite people into that environment. And if someone doesn't want to be invited in, that's okay and I don't have to sit there and get down on myself for judge myself wow they hate it or you know they seem to be

resistant. Well I don't know. All kinds of stuff going on in their life and so why should I expend energy figuring out where my job is to share and to create that safe environment?

Peter: [00:11:14] It's amazing how much we will focus on the one person that we don't think like us and forget about the 50 others who do. Yes that's always been kind of backwards but you know I guess people want to be perfect, we want everybody to like us. But you don't know if you're going through a divorce, they had a bad day, they had a flat tire coming into work. You just don't know.

John: [00:11:39] Exactly. So one of the things too is that you know when we talk about our audiences, you'll hear a term that's out there that from a neuroscience perspective we don't use anymore. So let's take the accountants let's say or engineers. They typically are tagged in this way. We say oh they're a left-brained audience.

Peter: [00:12:00] Hahaha

John: [00:12:01] Or health care providers or social workers, oh they're right brain. Like you know it's like you know left brain is analytical, numbers and well right brain is like oh heart and emotion. No. So one thing we would say to presenters or speakers is you know we don't refer to people anymore as left or right brain. We refer to people being as hemisphere. So that's. As you might recall that was the first principle that we talked about because that sets the baseline for the brain is that brains are hemisphere. They have both right hemisphere and left hemisphere. They have both. And then there's also redundancy. So although if I gave you a number problem or an accounting problem or something that requires a lot of detail work, yes your left hemisphere with light up if we did a functional MRI. So would a part of your right hemisphere. So it's amazing the redundancy that's built into the brain and we think oh I can I should only talk to the left hemisphere or only talk to the right hemisphere. We would say you're wasting real estate, you're wasting opportunities. Talk to both hemispheres. Tell the story. Show the emotion. Give the data. Give the numbers. Both of them the brain processes, and it actually would like to have both. So maybe it means more toward one or the other, but doing both actually is a smart move in terms of presenting and communicating.

Peter: [00:13:44] Yeah I watch a lot of TED talks and a lot of that delivery of the story whatever talking about whatever which connects with the right hemisphere, But they have to follow it up with the data because it has to match. And there's a lot of great storytellers out there that are frauds. Elizabeth Holmes who started that company Theranos, and it's just a fraud and then you get the whole Enron and all of this. I could keep saying it but the data and the emotion have to line up. If not, don't get caught up in that emotion.

John: [00:14:21] Exactly the brain actually has sort of a mechanism that it detects that when there is there is a incongruity or a disconnect, and then it doesn't feel right. And another thing we mentioned was that given your audiences today, since either clipped to their belts or in their pocket, they bring out their phone and their smartphone and they can fact check you on the spot.

Peter: [00:14:49] Yeah.

John: [00:14:51] So if you're saying something that doesn't quite feel right. Lot of people nowadays will sort of surreptitiously you know take the phone out, stick it underneath the table. You know what we call smartphone prayer. So you know the phone comes out, hand comes together, the head bows, and the thumbs are clicking away you know and it's like they're checking you out. And the moment they get information and they go you know this isn't right. I think you're kind of toast as a as a presenter because it's like wow if he didn't tell me or she didn't tell me the truth on that, what about the other stuff? So again. I love your idea that congruity, or the consistency between the story and the data. They go hand in hand. That I think not only makes you strong as a presenter, but it becomes very brain friendly.

Peter: [00:15:48] And we want our we want our audiences brains to not work as hard so they can grab this information, process it, and then as as John Medina in his book Brain will says... Post-it notes so we remember that and can and can work immediately.

John: [00:16:07] Exactly and one of the principles where we talk about is this and contextual cueing. So the brain wants to know, it's looking for this consistency, and so as a presenter we would talk about not only if you're doing in your slide deck but maybe how you position yourself on stage or your floor or whatever you have platform wise. It wants this consistency, and where a lot of times I see speakers or presenters, they go you know I'm getting bored with it. I think I'll change it up for me to make it look different. Well from your audience perspective, you've just sort of messed them up. They're kind of going Well why did he do this and why is he changing the font or the size or why-- Why is he telling the story now from over here when he should be on this side and tell the story. So the brain likes that consistency and looks for it. So one of the pieces of advice that we would give presenters is think about this contextual cueing because you're sort of teaching the audience hey when you see this symbol, this is going to happen, or my font is going to stay the same font and the headers are going to be the same font size. You know right down to I'm going to shadow the text in a certain way. All those, the brain goes hey this is pretty cool. And now I can listen to and focus on what the presenter is saying because now you have cued them 'when you see this, you're going to get that.' Soon as they see it, the brain goes ok give it to me. They're receptive to it versus eliminate the distractors.

Peter: [00:18:00] So you know with confessional cueing here, I have in my notes from your session you say the eyes follow the F pattern.

John: [00:18:09] Yes a big capital F, so again in terms of the F pattern. Probably because remember the right hemisphere is going to be kind of more of the visual, and so the eyes cross in the back to the brain. So when we do these eye tracking studies, what we found is that the eye tends to look first on the left because up and down, and then it starts moving over to the right. So even if I shift a little bit - so it's going to then look up and down and then it's going to look over here. So this is where we put text into that space because the eye will go this way and then that way. I see a lot of people now again for our purposes, we're a little bit more centered although I always try to be a little bit off center. I mean a little bit to my left. OK. And that's why then in terms of then what's here, there's nothing hopefully distracting to us and then what will happen is the

eye will then follow that person. The other thing that it does is it looks to read stuff. So I can see behind you the influence.

Peter: [00:19:34] Yes.

John: [00:19:34] Because that's set up. And so the eye is also always scanning then to say is there any information I need to pay attention to. And so whenever you present, you want to make sure you know what's behind you. And that it's not going to distract the reader. But this F pattern, eye goes up and down on the left then it goes over to the top then in the middle. So I'm always trying to have them raised by text a little bit higher and try not to be in the lower part of the slide. The other thing that's good is when you project, you usually have to look over somebody's head. It's already up there. Again it's what we would call is it's kind of brain friendly. Will it make a huge difference when we looked at the amount of time it take to read? Not really, but the brain quickly picks up on are you making me work or are you making it easy. The capital F pattern is pretty cool.

Peter: [00:20:36] And just so you know my audience knows, you live this because when you came to present, on your Mac, your deck, which most people have at the bottom of the app, you had your deck on the on the left side of your computer.

John: [00:20:54] Correct.

Peter: [00:20:54] And I think I asked you the question is that because of the F pattern as you explained it and you said yeah that's exactly why.

John: [00:21:01] Exactly. So again trying to kinda role model or be consistent. You know it's kind of like if I was teaching you something, and again that inconsistency we talked about.

Peter: [00:21:10] Right.

John: [00:21:11] If I'm teaching and then-- if I'm facing the audience, I'm going to put the projector and screen to my right when I can. And so that's again it's going to be

crossing over. My right accessing your right hemisphere as an audience. I'm forcing the eye to look over that way. So there's little things that you can do in terms of the setup that we would say are more brain friendly.

Peter: [00:21:47] Right I've always been told that I should always stand on the left side of the screen because that's where people start. That's how we read. We start with a left to right. And I remember I was at one conference and I couldn't. And I had to stand on the right and internally I was so uncomfortable that I had this weird feel like I'm getting them all confused or something here.

John: [00:22:13] The brain will adjust though. So even within that you can be on the right, but you move a little bit to the left and then a little bit to the right. I had a presenter talk about they said well you know I teach yoga and all I do is my staging. I just have them bring out a table and I sit on the table in the middle. So how can I do this stuff? It's like well gesture with your left hand for data or facts or numbers, gesture with your right hand for maybe the story or the emotion. And so you can move people from that spot because as you know, we often get whatever they have in terms of how they designed or set up the room.

Peter: [00:22:58] Right. Right. Right. And and in doing this because we're talking about emotion and stuff, and so people ask me how do I put a story-- How do I make my data come alive? Because it's just data. And I've always said Well there has to be something that's causing that data to react. Why that number's being placed. So it's getting behind that data. Trying to find out what's that human factor there that caused that data. There's your story, there's your emotion.

John: [00:23:31] You could repeat what-- you know again you probably want to find the research and what was the research question that they asked. And so so one way to do this and you might go all right I'm going to go read the original research. What was their hypothesis. What was their thinking. Did they believe that it was going to be this trend or that trend, and then it's like so here's what they did. And so they gathered this and then then they came up and then you're just telling a story in some ways what they did. Now if you had a client or someone that took that information and implemented it. Then that's

another story. So I did this, presented this, that person took it, you know they increased their sales by 30 percent or 33 percent. And then they took this here and then they actually modified it even more. Now it's kind of the story and people-- we think you know one of the principles that we talk about is that we would say the brain loves stories, and it's probably because we grew up with the oral tradition. That's how your history, your mores, your behavior. That's how people communicated because it was a little bit easier for people to remember in a story than it would be that 42 percent of teenagers you know da da da da. You know it's like really, you know versus you tell the story of the young boy trying to become a man and what the trials and tribulations and the success and the wisdom then that they brought to the community. So probably we have a propensity. I wouldn't say that we're hard wired for. But it's been part of how the brain structure, if you will, has evolved over time is the power of story. The other thing too on the story is that the brain actually places then the parts of the story in different parts of the brain. It's not you have to go access one piece, you're actually going to access other parts of the brain. And in doing that, the brain actually is more activated. And when you do that, we probably have a higher probability of things being remembered.

Peter: [00:26:04] I agree. I agree wholeheartedly. I think the challenge is when you say the word story, it has a different connotation in people's mind. Like you know once upon a time or that versus-- you know you're just narrating what happened, you're just-- you are humanizing the event.

John: [00:26:27] Yes. And again one of the stories I told you guys was the you know the first x ray, and I called it a love story. And people are like What is this? Well it's the first known X-ray, you know William Renton did it and you know and he asked his wife. So it actually, the X-ray shows a ring and the x ray, well it was his wife's hand and as you may recall the X stood for unknown. He didn't even know what it was.

Peter: [00:26:57] Oh that's right.

John: [00:26:59] That X was there that mathematical unknown and he didn't even know so he called it x ray. And the love story part was hunny, would you be willing to stick your head into this machine? I don't know what it does. No idea, in fact I'm going to call

it an X-ray. But would you be willing to stick your hand in there for me? And she did. And that sort of started the foundation of all the stuff we're doing now when we can do the MRI, the functional MRIs, the PET scans, all this information to look into the brain.

Peter: [00:27:36] Yeah that is true love to say I'll put my hand in this unknown thin that I might take my whole hand off or electrocute me or whatever, and I do. I do remember that story about the X-ray. And talking about story, you also, you talk about giving your audience a commercial break.

John: [00:27:59] Yes. So the brain -- Everybody's searching for kind of the optimal time to learn. And to a certain extent we probably have programmed that into people because, depending on the school curriculum we went through with 50 minutes and then you have 10 minutes to get to your next class of 55 and 5. So there's all kinds of different timetables. Is it an hour and a half. So we're still learning what that maximum time was. But what we do know is that the brain craves the oxygen, it craves stimulation, and if it's not getting it, the brain actually starts to a resting spot, if you will. But let's say I'm putting out a lot of info, well then you have to give the brain a break so they can process it. So one of the things we do know in terms of learning, if we want to or if you want to increase your learning, is if you learn something, you take a short nap. The brain then actually, in rest, it processes the information and then you go back to do it. Most of us know, especially from university years, it's like oh test, let's do the all nighter, let's just cram, pound. Actually we would have been much better off studying a little bit, take a nap, study a little bit more, take another nap. And short naps. But it allows the brain to process that information. So in a presentation, what I try to do, and again is pry more a function of what's happening on TV, I'll say commercial TV, is every eight to 12 minutes, there's a commercial. So this is a break if you will. So you go to the bathroom, you get something to drink, you can have a snack, you can rest your eyes, you can zone out, and then the program comes back on and now you have to attend to that information. So partly the brain mechanism, also partly because that's how we've trained a generation of learners, us included. Might as well just building in your presentation. So what I did for this one is remember I put something up there and you had to scream out if it was a fact - And again we will be will be PC here - or not a fact.

Peter: [00:30:42] So I'll let the audience know, it's fact or crap. I mean just that-- just saying crap it also wakes people up.

John: [00:30:55] It woke them up. The other thing is you might remember is that each info item that I had was on the brain it was related to the brain. So they were still learning, although know there is no pressure then to get the information was just like a statement and then a title, you know fact or crap. Then they yell it out. And if he got it right then you pride your brain privately released a bunch of endorphins going I'm so smart, I'm so good. You know and then if you didn't you were like crap you know. And so you-- it's a way to kind of weave into a presentation because most of us like okay you have a two hour presentation. We're going to give them your two hours but I would suggest break it into modules and then have these little breaks that allow the brain to rest to process the information because as soon as that segment was done, I went to a new principal. Again, contextual cueing, You knew that once I was done with that break, we were back into it.

Peter: [00:32:05] So showing a video related to the subject. Would that be considered a break?

John: [00:32:13] Absolutely so great story. Even something like... here's here's a headline that I read in the past week that deals with -- and again depending on your audience, so a financial audience -- here's here's a bonehead mistake that you know blah blah blah made. Again it's just it's putting it out there, it just allows the brain to go Oh OK. I don't have the process that he's just give me some information. Refreshes the brain. By shouting out again the other principle was brains love oxygen. So again if you're going to shout it out, you have to then by nature then inhale more. You just going oxygenating the brain which is always a good thing.

Peter: [00:33:00] Yes it's always a good thing. And you also talk about-- well I when I first started this business years ago when I was present and I had one of the one of my colleagues at The Ohio society of CPAs, one of the members who did a lot of presentations, said that his wife suggested that he put pictures on his slide and he goes why? Why do I want to put pictures in my slides? And because they help. In

remembering, it's this nice visual aid that I could see versus all this text. And I think that's always a challenge. I think a lot of people who speak at conferences and stuff will still see a whole lot of data, very little pictures. Can you speak to that?

John: [00:33:52] You know so because remember the hemisphere is that because the visual the visual cortex in the back your brain is a huge huge amount of real estate. So if you're only just throwing letters at it, again the eye is going to get fatigued. Your brain's going to get fatigue. Versus if there is an image. Now you have to make sure the image matches the text. So it's like if I'm talking about the brain I put up a tractor truck. The brain's going to be like what. You know you took a picture of your kids there your granddaughter's you know trucks. So you want to make them congruent because then again and remember you're hitting both hemispheres. Also you're hitting both visual you're hitting the whole visual cortex and it's activating the brain. So that's what you're trying to do. So the strong image- Do you need an image on every single slide? No, but to a certain extent it helps. And so let's say you had four segments that you wanted to cover in your presentation. I would pick one picture or image and introduce you know segment 1. Same picture and then I'd say segment two. So the brain starts going oh whenever you're showing this, I know I'm going into a new segment. So I love visuals. My thought is make the visual fit with the words. That'd be first. Then another cool thing you can do is you can sample a color that's in the visual and make the text that same color. So let's say there's a dark brown or a rich black, although black is easy because black is usually the default for text but maybe a red or something. I could sample that color. And then I make the text the same color. Now I'm looking at the image I get it and the text the same color, and brains going Oh. That's pretty cool. He kept it the same, or he kept it similar or I can pull the color through from the image. So that's another little technique that you can do.

Peter: [00:36:19] That's cool. I forgot about that one. And as you were describing the images and stuff the thought came into my mind is putting an Excel spreadsheet up on the screen that is not an image. That's not a picture.

John: [00:36:31] Yeah. So again you can play with some of the charts. You know you might say right here here's here's here's the standard way but it can be converted easily

with most of the software, whether it be PowerPoint or keynote or Prezi, you basically then here's what it would look like in a in a pie chart or here's what it looked like-- And then you actually can animate sections of it. So it's like we're going to we're going to look at this column and then you you actually pulls the column out. You make that massive. And then you could bring in an image if you want it. So usually people just slap everything up there, from my experience. They put everything up there and then they go as you can see from this chart. No they can't. So you have to direct the eye. Let's go to column mark this, and as you move down the column you'll see the numbers trending and then you can bring in another slide or a graphic showing the trend lines. So there's a lot of things in PowerPoint and keynote that most of us don't know exist. And it's actually it's it's pretty powerful stuff, and you can make them three dimensional, you can convert them, you can show them in different ways. So I would again my suggestion is keep diving in there and just play with it. That's how I typically have learned some of these things or go to youtube and find a tutorial. They'll teach you pretty much anything you want in the universe.

Peter: [00:38:10] Yeah that's what I tend to do a lot as I go to youtube and watch a video versus going to Apple and trying to read the text and try to convert that text and apply it because usually I get something wrong in doing that. I mean you mentioned colors. Now I'm partially colorblind. Greens and browns and I don't see very well but color is important and the text color is important, the background color's important. It has a big impact in a presentation. But most of us don't think about the color or the color we're using.

John: [00:38:49] Exactly. So a lot of times you have to be careful because in the different programs there is a default setting. So I use keynote. I did PowerPoint for a number of years. I use keynote now. So what I'm starting to do is create just a blank canvas and I think of designing each slide deck or each slide in a certain way in my slide deck. You can do the templates so that you can have the standard fonts and set that up. But one of the things that we would say - because there is a high degree of colorblindness - the white background or a little bit of off white is probably better. I keep my slide decks and I go back and I look at some. A long time ago I decided that since everybody else was doing a white background I was going to do lack backgrounds and

then maybe orange letters. Outside of make it look like a Halloween year round. I look and I go What was I thinking? I wasn't. I was thinking of myself versus the audience so we say because of the high degree of color blindness, a white or white background, minimum text. If I'm going to use color, I'm going to go to a darker color. So even though you might have a high degree of color blindness for the brown, I could go to a chocolate brown or even a green. I will I will lean more to making it a darker against the white. You may recall. I'm I'm pretty strong on that you do a slight shadow to pop the text from its background because of the pop the text. It just gives a little bit more of that three dimensional quality. The brain that versus if it sits and its flat. And that's the other message you're sending. This is flat. I want it to pop. Now can you do that on Excel? Yeah you got to dig into it. I probably wouldn't because there's too many numbers. I don't overshadow. I've had people tell me I've done it for illustration purposes. So for some people it gives them a headache. Again if you don't have a strong bulb in the projector, if it starts the flicker.

Peter: [00:41:36] Yeah.

John: [00:41:37] People start going I can't look at this anymore. So it's just a slight shadow, offset it. Unify that image, I bring the color through, it matches it up nicely, and then as you also recall, as few words as possible on the text. We've seen that experiment. I am pretty sure I did it with you guys where I show a passage. As the first letter and the last letter of the word are correct, the brain will decode it even though it's spelled wrong. First letter last letter are correct. So if I said please and I spelled it P E L A S E. The brain actually when it says it will go it's Please. So the brain doesn't look at every single letter, it looks and tries to grab the word. It's not quite. It decodes then encodes it and then you go oh it's please. So I'm experimenting now. Well first of all I don't use the word the, a, and. I don't put the any of those in there because the brain you actually put those the in and I have fewer words. I'm now experimenting taking verbs out to see if people will put the action verb in on the slide. So if I have results show that I may get results are-- I would get results and then I give the results because the audience goes I know these results are shown and blah blah blah.

Peter: [00:43:31] Ohh. I got it in my notes about that but I forgot -- Why are you taking verbs out? Why would you take them?

John: [00:43:41] So what that's the newest one since we last talked, and playing with it to see will the audience still get it. And again if the verb's implied, here's the other cool thing: I'm taking the audience member and I'm actually pulling them toward me because now they are an active participant in what's going on. Again I'm experimenting.

Peter: [00:44:08] I love that. I'm going to start applying that because the one thing I did take, one of the things I took away from your presentation is now-- because I remember when I was helping you set up I went this is like a two and a half hour presentation, he's got to have over 300 slides. You know what the heck? But one idea, few words as possible, and an image to relate so you can talk about it. And I was moving in that direction. You just helped me get there a lot quicker with that.

John: [00:44:44] For a lot of people, especially presenters, what's nice... I think many of us go through this progression as presenters, especially as professional speakers, like oh what am I going to say? I have this chunk of time what am I going to say? And I better put it on the side because then I'll remember what to say and it's. And then we do the proverbial death by bullet point you know. I'm going to put everything up here or I know or I'm going to have these massive notes section underneath the slide to help me remember. Well choose the right image. Couple key words. Your brain will fill it in and then you just talk to it and then I think you're much more present than with the audience. If you need to sort of move in this direction with the audience you can, versus I've seen people get all messed up because they have all these words up there or they have all these notes and then they don't mention part of it and then they like oh you know I forgot to tell you this. Well the audience didn't know you forgot to tell them this.

Peter: [00:45:50] Right.

John: [00:45:50] And then you planted a new seed. What else did you forget to tell us?

Peter: [00:45:56] Yeah yeah. I had someone ask me should I use note cards during my presentation? Well are you using PowerPoint? And they went yes. I said that's your note card. It's just up on the screen and you just make it appealing to the audience's eyes and do all the right things and you just like you said just talk. Have a conversation with the audience. Don't lecture.

John: [00:46:22] Yeah I like that about the conversation. Circling back. That's why I'm trying to play around with this leave a verb out to see if the conversation then is actually going to be in their head. But I'm drawing them to me because it's like oh - because I may say the word, it is just not on my slide and their brain might go yep that's the word I would use. It's kind of a strange way of... you get this congruity and you go I'm connected now. Oh I knew that. And people like that when they when their brain oh yeah I got that.

Peter: [00:47:06] And I'm glad you said that last part that you may not have the verb on the on the screen, on your slide, but you use it.

John: [00:47:16] Yeah probably should have been should've been clear. I don't I don't give a presentation where I don't use any verbs any more. That's a good catch. Yeah.

Peter: [00:47:31] And knowing my audience, they would they would go wait wait wait why don't you have any verbs? Are you against verbs? Did they assault you, insult you? What's going on why don't you like verbs? And you also this sixth principle that you talk about it's your brain loves oxygen and you've talked about this a number of times. But why is that, in essence, its own principle.

John: [00:48:06] So it's its own principle because when we look at the structure of the brain if you will. We also know that a brain-- if it does not have oxygen for five minutes, it causes brain damage. And so what you want to do is keep the brain as oxygenated as possible because basically then it's bringing in-- well basically it's bringing oxygen to the brain and the brain needs that oxygen. If you starve the brain of oxygen, you have brain damage. So again everything starts to acclimate, the body tends to go at rest. Attention tends to drop down. When you then oxygenate it, all of a sudden there's going to be

you're getting the richness of the oxygen flooding to the brain. Everything you know functions better in terms of having the rich oxygen. Now I would say this for myself - I'm not a big fan of everybody stand up. Now and again maybe your accounting audiences is like hey everybody let's let's face to the right let's let's massage the person. Now if there is a way for you unobtrusively to weave that in, depending on your audiences. Now again it's a very expressive audience, they probably no-- So if I'm doing something with individuals that do cross training or do weight training nor do this, I can probably get them up and have them do squats. I can have them-- all you're really trying to do is bring blood to the brain, and since it's sitting in the chairs and the blood is pooling in your rear end, you want circulate that. But but I try to do it because it fits with my style different ways to bring in oxygen. Fact or crap or commercial break, having them yell something out. That's one way. Laughter is another way because when you laugh, you tend to have to inhale and gulp if you will. So anything that would do that unobtrusively is one way and depending on your audience you can be totally obtrusive, you can just say everybody up you know stretch, do the jumping jacks, that would work. I-- If I'm talking about the brain, that's just I figure out another way. But that's me. That's my style and I want to be congruent with me because if all of a sudden I'm doing some exercise or I'm doing something that doesn't feel congruent, I think the audiences pick up.

Peter: [00:51:12] Oh yeah big time. When I used to teach at the college level, and if I'm doing an all day workshop, there's times I can tell that you know this is a scheduled break, but it needs to happen sooner. And I always tell them to take a break because my teaching philosophy has always been the mind can only absorb as much as the butt can endure.

John: [00:51:32] Exactly. And so the other little trick that you can do is you can embed into your slide - So again let's say you have a slide deck, let's round it say a slide deck of 100 slides. And you think at slide 25, 50, and 75. Those are going to be little breaks. You can actually embed, and it's hidden away, although you put it in a certain place say the lower right hand corner for example. So it would be invisible to the audience. But you know in the lower right hand corner of your slide-- so let's say you get to Slide 20 and you go you know, they need a break. You can actually take your cursor you move it over to that spot in the lower right. You click on it and then immediately a slide will pop

up. It takes you then to another part that says it's time for a break, or it's break time, and it immediately shows up and shows like you planned this perfectly. It's it's actually pretty cool. Another version of that is let's say you are citing a fair amount of data. And you have given it in the past people are like well where is that study? You actually can embed that too and say that lower left, you take the cursor over and again, it looks like you're just moving the cursor over to a blank part of your slide. But actually since it's invisible to the eye, you click in that area and it immediately shows who the researchers are in the publication of it. So it may never be asked, but you will look so cool.

Peter: [00:53:15] I'm going to have to try that, especially when it's time for a break in just by chance-- being able to read the audience and go man they need a break. And I'm actually-- I did this once in a class, it was not an auditing class and I called it an hour early. I said we're done. I said I'm boring myself I know what I'm doing to you guys.

John: [00:53:42] Yeah. So what I did it I created an avatar that then-- so the avatar comes up and it's like a mad professor, you know the hair... and then I wrote the script which is very simple you just type in the script give it a voice. And so basically it goes Dr. Molidor, don't you think these poor souls need a break? And so of course everybody's riveted because it's this animated. You know Avatar saying like give these people a break right now. Then All right everybody let's take a break. It's it's kind of cool.

Peter: [00:54:24] Ok so how did you do that? Is that something you can do in keynote or is that another program that you had to use?

John: [00:54:31] Yeah. So that'd be a software. So again I'm not-- I don't get anything for this. There's no endorsement that I use, and it's called crazy talk.

Peter: [00:54:40] Crazy talk.

John: [00:54:41] Crazy talk, and it's very simple I think you get like 12 avatars and you type in this script and then the avatar and the mouth the eyes everything moves. You can give it an accent, not accent. Speed it up, slow it down so you can play with it. I would say within 15 minutes you're up and doing the stuff.

Peter: [00:55:03] Wow. I'm going to have to-- actually I think the iPhone 10 is able to do that because a friend of mine for my birthday sent me a picture of their dog and the dog was talking.

John: [00:55:15] Exactly. So exactly. So all they're doing is taking that, and then depending on the-- There's different types of software and then you draw lines say around the mouth and then the mouth moves to the words that you've typed or that speaks. Just kind of Google that, you know simple inexpensive avatars that you can use.

Peter: [00:55:41] Oh that's fun. I'm going to go get crazy talk and have some fun this afternoon.

John: [00:55:47] Yeah yeah.

Peter: [00:55:49] So as as we begin to wrap up, I want to hit this last principle. But before that, I remember you asked this question to all of us because we were talking about you know patterns and habits and whatever you said how many days use it take to start a habit? And the answer out there that I hear all the time is 21 days. And you you immediately pooh poohed that and said no if you look at the research, it's actually 66 days.

John: [00:56:28] 66 days out of research in the U.K. where they studied individuals to see how long it take to form a habit. Again, even that research I think it range and I don't have the numbers off the top of my head but I think it's like 18 to 250 days. I mean it's incredibly variable, so then I thought how did this 21 days come to be? Why is it out there? Why is it so prevalent? So what I think I was able to find, again there could be a source further back, but the one I saw was Maxwell Moulson, psycho cyber genetics, talked about-- he was a surgeon that was working with veterans who had lost a limb in war and he noticed on average it took about 21 days for them not to have what they would call phantom limb movement.

Peter: [00:57:30] Oh okay

John: [00:57:30] Well in some ways when you think about it was 21 days to lose a habit not get a habit, but somehow the 21 days got into literature and then everybody started saying it. The other thing is that it's much sexier or has a greater cachet to say hey I can change your life if you're willing to give me twenty one days. Versus Peter I can change your life if you're willing to give me 66 days. Now that would be two months and five days or whatever. Are it's like two months. Holy crap I don't think so. But 21 days? So that caught on, then as you know it sort of morphed into 28 days, which I've been able to find I think it's because that's typically how much insurance companies will pay for rehabilitation. I think once it hit 28 they say well let's round it to 30, well for 30 might as well say it takes a month. So 21 to 30... can't find anything out there. And then here's the other one. I think it pays to be very skeptical, especially in this era where people put stuff out there that are opinion but often presented as facts. And I think we have to be very skeptical. We know that we can form a drug habit on certain drugs, after one attempt we can addict somebody.

Peter: [00:59:10] Wow

John: [00:59:10] 21 days to get somebody addicted? No. Some it will but we know others it'd be one. And yet-- so when I hear stuff like that, my brain starts to go how could I disprove? So here's the other thing I strongly suggest to people - if you put in 21 days habit because that's the key words of that statement. And then you put myth after it. Or you put false. And then you actually get all the stuff that says it's a myth and then you read their research and make sure it's good research. But if you just put it in it takes 21 days to form a habit. You know you get thousands if not millions of hits.

Peter: [00:59:57] Yeah.

John: [00:59:57] Confirming that and then what we do is we do crazy things. We perpetuate. Oh I heard Peter say this and I respect Peter and he does his homework. So I'm going to say it. And after a while I no longer give you attribution and I start saying it and then it gets out there then I get quoted and probably not a good thing.

Peter: [01:00:20] Exactly. But I have this in my notes right next to this principle number seven. The brain looks for patterns. And the whole thing with the habits the brain is looking for that pattern in order to create that. So that explains why my golf swing is terrible because I haven't done the pattern of doing it correctly and consistently.

John: [01:00:45] Right. And so the other thing. And here's the thing. So the brain is always seeking to understand, it always wants to figure stuff out. So when we are given images where there's like total chaos, there's no pattern, the brain actually will try to impose a pattern even when there is no pattern. You have to be careful about that because-- so the example I gave you guys was I took two random events that had no connection whatsoever. There was a video and there is an audio. The video had like a sine wave going on. I did an audio which I just created in garageband. There was nothing to do with the video. And when I play both of them, the brain started to impose a pattern, it started to look for a pattern going Well of course the symbol here. That's why that sound wave on that video went up. And so the brain actually started to make up stuff to try to figure out what was going on. And as you may recall, I also said the one segment in the audience that was probably getting disturbed were the musicians because the musicians intuitively knew through habit, patterns, whatever. No cymbals wouldn't make that big spike. You know it should be just a little sound over here. But for most of us we impose the pattern even though there's no pattern there. So the summary that I try to put together is then to say what are the patterns in your presentation that would then help the audience to actually figure it out? So as you may recall, whenever I gave a principal, it was the same slide. Now it said with the new principle was but to say identical slide for all of the patterns. There's a group of people holding a sign.

Peter: [01:02:50] Okay. Right. Right.

John: [01:02:52] The fact or crap was sort of the pattern. You knew as soon fact or crap came up it was like hey I'm turning my brain off. I don't have to pay attention. And I had brain facts and I told you if you saw this person or it was a male or this person a female, you're going to get a brain fact. And so that was a way to start laying out patterns because we know the brain is always looking for them, and similar to that contextual

cueing. But it's also taking it-- So I'm trying to figure out other ways where maybe I can weave in music or weave in graphics. So a hot one out there called Cinema graphs, and a cinemagraph is like a still picture but one part of it is actually moving. So let's say you have a person sitting at a desk and it's a still photograph, but the fan is moving. It's looking at and going oh this is nice still. And then the fan moves. You're like whoa. So what's it doing? It's activating the brain. So now it starts to look for patterns, so that's going to be my new area that I'm going to be trying to figure out. You know how do we weave that in.

Peter: [01:04:14] Yeah that's that's-- so a pattern. And I think you talked about this with the contextual, is you want your fonts the same, placement the same. You don't want to use the new times on three slides then go to a comic sans over here and shifting and, and even the way you setup your your slide, that consistency should always be there throughout.

John: [01:04:42] Right. And the only time I break it is when I want to make a point because then it's like it's purposeful, rather than I'm getting bored. I think I'll change it up versus no I'm going to change this up because this is the most important weight of five points or something. I really need them to know that one because the other ones get trumped or get messed up if you put in this-- and I might I might flip it for the contrast effect. But I'm trying to be much more purposeful, rather than Oh that looks nice.

Peter: [01:05:22] Yeah I always say you want your slides appealing to the eyes of your audience, but with purpose.

John: [01:05:31] Exactly. Exactly. And the pattern I'm playing with video and music and imposing two to see again for those out there - garageband is part of the keynote suite if you will. I'm not musically inclined... mathematically inclined. So what I do is I'll lay down tracks that have the same beat, the same tempo, and then I experiment by bringing in different instruments, and then the beauty of that is since I created it, I own the rights to it. I don't have to pay any royalties to anybody. Don't have to worry about hey don't use that song. It's like it's new music that I created for my purposes, since it didn't need to

be great music and that worked out well. But that's the sort of stuff that I think as professionals we need to be tuned into. And again if I'm creating that, it's mine.

Peter: [01:06:42] Right. And through this whole conversation it keeps coming back to me: it's not about you, it's about the audience. And when someone when someone says I don't have time to do that, I say it's not about you because you used the word I. And I think a lot of times we forget as presenters, from an audience, of being in a seat and having that one whoever speaking boring us to death and overkill with the slide. But because it's about me. I don't think about the audience. I don't put myself in their shoes. And all the stuff that you've talked about is absolutely-- Like I said I'm glad we're talking because I forgot about some of the stuff that I can go back and implement. But it does make a difference to those who are sitting in your audience.

John: [01:07:42] Absolutely. And I think the progression of most of us in the profession is that sense it is hard to be standing in front of an audience or in front of a group, because in essence you're saying I'm vulnerable, I'm open. You start to understand why people like to stand behind the podium. It's like there is there is now something that's protecting you, and then to be out there in front is to be vulnerable. So I think when we start, we are in our head. I know what I want to do this or I need to do this. And again you asked me you know how do I sort of get out of my head that goes back to the mantra to say all right. It is in my head - my job is to create a safe environment, invite people in, and then share what I know. That's all I can do. I can't be responsible for someone else's mood. I can't be responsible for someone else's learning. But I have to be responsible for setting it up in the easiest, brain-friendly way to get feedback. So again, how do we ask for feedback? When I ask people, and I do this and people do that know me well know I do this all over in every area, is I asked people what worked well for you know, what would have worked better for you in the future. And so again I'm moving them-- And to hear the feedback it's much easier for me is what would work better for you in the future. Versus what would work better for you period. Then it's judgey. I can't do anything about it in the past.

Peter: [01:09:22] Right.

John: [01:09:23] I can do something in the future so if I said to Peter What worked well for you. Tell me to google what would work better for you in the future. And you said you know I didn't quite get this. I would have liked you know if you could-- Now I can take that and move forward rather than most of us: oh he judged me and he didn't like he doesn't like me. Get out of your head. Get out of your way. Versus hey that's a good idea or here's what I like is you may say you know that would work better for me in the future blah blah blah and I may go yeah, not for me - and that's OK. But then you get your say, I get input, and I can revise for the future.

Peter: [01:10:05] I like that. I like that. And I'm going to actually - this group that I do a lot of work for, I'm going to have them put that in their evaluations that they sent out because what would have been done better today. Yeah I'll have them get put What can we do better future. And see how those response are.

John: [01:10:24] And people are actually I think more likely to tell you what would worked better in the future. Like ok I can project out and it moves us from oh jeez am I going to hurt his feelings if I judge him or her now versus hey this will work better, and then you is the recipient can go you know I think I'm to stay with this, you know like a crazy one. But as you know I gave this to a bunch of chapters and when one chapter said you didn't number your principles. You said principle and then named it. So somebody said it would work better for me. You know it's pretty minute font size so that one was easy. Principle number one. Then I am to do is remind myself if I move them in order to keep them in the right sequence. But that one's pretty straightforward.

Peter: [01:11:27] That's cool. John I can't thank you enough. I literally could probably talk to you for another three hours on this topic because I just am completely fascinated by it and I'm selfishly thank you for coming on because you reminded me some stuff that I had forgotten or I hadn't done. So this is like I can go back to this episode and listen to it. What did he say? And actually those of you who are listening or watching this, you might want to go out and I just you go out to the Web website where this episode is on my Website and download the full transcript of this conversation so you have it. So if you need to refer to it, that might be another way of doing that. I thank you so much. I appreciate your knowledge your wisdom your advice and taking time out of

your schedule to spend some time with me. I'm-- I think I'm trying to get the afternoon off. I'm full.

John: [01:12:25] Thank you Peter. Thank you for having me and hosting this. It was a great conversation. I enjoyed it very much. Hope your audience is getting a couple ideas or tips to move forward in their presentations.

Peter: [01:12:37] Oh there's there's a lot of tips for them to be had. Thanks again John.

John: [01:12:45] You're welcome.

Peter: [01:12:45] I would like to thank John again for sharing his knowledge about how to prepare a PowerPoint presentation that takes your audience's brain into consideration and provides a richer learning experience. In episode five, my guests are Rich Stang and Brad Hoffman, who are partners in the Maryland accounting firm of Deleon and Stang. This episode will be available on Monday, June 25th. Thank you for listening. And begin the process of changing your mindset and getting out of your comfort zone and develop new skill sets to become a more future ready CPA. The ability to present financial information in a manner that is engaging and impactful will make you more future ready. Remember this process requires daily application with a big dose of applied improvisation.