Communicating for a Change by Andy Stanley
Book Review by Peter Bowden

[ The review here is by a pastor. The principles in the book work well for all kinds of communicating- not just preaching/teaching. ]

I’ve been speaking with a number of clergy colleagues about approaches to sermons. On the table has been the question, “How do I make sermons more relevant so people come to church?”

First, I always say that the best way to make church relevant is to make sure people have friends there. Want to grow your congregation and Unitarian Universalism? Get serious about small groups and creating friendships.

When you do it right, groups grow relationships, and relationships grow churches. Need help with that? Contact me for training or purchase Building Small Group Ministries that Work for an audio crash course.

Assuming you have the relational part down and want to work on your messages, I highly recommend reading Andy Stanley’s book Communicating for a Change: Seven Keys to Irresistible Communication.

Stanley offers a very practical approach to structuring messages/sermons. He calls it the “I, we, God, you, we” structure. Since our congregations are more pluralistic you can use “teach” in place of God.

Here’s an overview of the structure: Seven Keys to Irresistible Communication

1. I - Start with some story or introduction that allows people to connect with you personally. If you don’t connect as a human being, no one is going to care about what comes after. Use “I” statements.
2. WE - Identify the situation “We all face...” What is the issue you will be addressing? Makes it crystal clear how your sermon is relevant. Make sure to use “We” language.
3. TEACH- Offer the core teaching that is relevant to the subject at hand. What’s the lesson? What’s the point? Make sure you have a single point, not a series of them. Stanley suggests that if you have more than one key point you should make it a sermon series.
4. YOU : Give people a specific personal challenge or guidance using “You” language. “When you encounter..... try and ....” or “Sometime this week, create time when you can...” Make it crystal clear how people can apply your teaching in their own lives.
5. WE : Wrap up with vision casting. “When we all [personal challenge] the result will be [larger vision]. As a community we can ... “ Your dismount is always vision casting. Speak both to the impact of all present implementing teaching and the role of the congregation.

That’s the quick formula. If you preach extemporaneously, as I do, this is particularly helpful as it gives a nice structure to move through, including using “I” and “you” and “we” language. After using this approach for a number of years I find my sermon prep time has been reduced significantly.