

THE BIG IDEA

Most conversations fail before they really start. The first 10 to 15 seconds are the whole game. If you don't frame **Topic**, **Intent**, and your **Key Message** right out of the gate, you're handing the other person's brain a puzzle and they'll spend the rest of the conversation trying to solve it instead of listening to you. **Chris Fenning's First Minute Framework** gives you a dead-simple, three-part system to get the other person's attention, set the context, and make sure every word you say after lands.

THE GOLDEN RULE

You are not the center of the conversation — the other person's brain is.

Every framework in this episode is built around one truth: the listener's brain is doing a job. If you don't give it the right information upfront — the topic, the reason, the headline — it will fill in the blanks on its own, get it wrong, and you'll spend the next five minutes cleaning up the mess. The frame is a gift you give the other person so they can actually hear you.

THE FRAMEWORK

THE SETUP · FRAMING FRAMEWORK	THE DEEPER LAYER · EXECUTION TOOLS
FRAMING The opening move. The first 10–15 seconds where you set the context, state your intent, and deliver your headline — before any detail.	STRUCTURED SUMMARY A 20–45 second overview that comes after framing. Goal, problem, solution — in that order. It gives the listener the map before the road trip starts.
TOPIC What the conversation is about. A simple, direct 5–7 word statement that clears the other person's mental whiteboard and aligns you both from the jump.	TIME CHECK Ask before you assume. After framing, confirm the other person has the right amount of time to have the conversation — and give them a real estimate, not "a minute."
INTENT An instruction for the listener. You're telling them what you need them to do — answer a question, hear a heads-up, or weigh in on a decision.	VALIDATION CHECKPOINT Confirm two things: are they the right person (ability), and are they ready right now (availability)? Both matter. One without the other can derail the whole exchange.

• CONCEPT DEEP DIVES • WHAT EACH PIECE ACTUALLY MEANS IN ACTION

01 FRAMING IS NOT AN INTRO — IT'S A CONTRACT

Most people start a business conversation by diving into detail. Framing flips that. It's the 10–15 second agreement between you and the other person about what you're here to talk about, why it matters, and where you're going. Get this wrong, and everything that follows costs double.

ELITE MOVE:

Open every conversation with a single sentence that covers Topic, Intent, and Key Message — in that order. Say it before context, before backstory, before anything else. It literally clears the other person's mental whiteboard.

"Hey, can I talk to you about next Tuesday's client meeting? I've got a couple of questions — I'm not sure on who's coming or the venue."

02 YOUR TIME ESTIMATE IS YOUR REPUTATION

Saying 'Do you have a minute?' when you mean ten is not just inaccurate — it's a slow trust killer. Every time you underestimate, you're telling the other person you don't understand your own material and you don't value their calendar. Repeat that enough, and they start avoiding you.

ELITE MOVE:

Before you walk up to someone, clock the actual conversation in your head. Then ask for slightly more time than you think you need. Giving a honest estimate — 'I think this'll take about seven minutes' — shows respect and builds credibility every single time.

"Hey, do you have about seven or eight minutes? I want to run something by you about the Everest project — might take ten."

03 ABILITY AND AVAILABILITY ARE NOT THE SAME THING

Someone can be the right person to have the conversation — but completely wrong to have it right now. Ability is about whether they can solve the problem. Availability is whether their head is in the right space at this moment. Missing this distinction traps people in conversations they can't fully show up for.

ELITE MOVE:

After framing, ask two distinct questions: first, are you the right person for this? And second, is now a good time? Give them a graceful out on both fronts. If either answer is no, propose a time and move on — don't force the conversation.

"Just want to make sure — are you the right person to talk about this? And if so, do you have the bandwidth to dig into it now, or should we set something up later?"

3 ACTION ITEMS

1 NAIL YOUR NEXT OPENER

Before your next meeting or conversation, write out your Topic, Intent, and Key Message in 3 bullet points. Practice saying them aloud in under 15 seconds.

2 KILL 'DO YOU HAVE A MINUTE?'

Replace it with a real estimate. Before you approach someone, clock out how long it will actually take — then ask for that time. It earns you instant credibility.

3 RUN THE CHECKPOINT

After framing your next conversation, pause and ask: 'Are you the right person for this, and is now a good time?' Make it a habit, not an afterthought.



"Don't start with the detail. Give me the summary, tell me where we're going, and then we can get into the detail. Otherwise, it doesn't make sense."

Chris Fenning



CARRY FORWARD QUESTIONS

1. Have I stated my Topic, Intent, and Key Message in the first 15 seconds?
2. Did I ask for the right amount of time — and confirm they're the right person to have this conversation with right now?

• BONUS DEEP DIVE · THE SCIENCE BEHIND COGNITIVE FRAMING

Chris Fenning briefly mentioned that there is real neuroscience behind why framing a conversation in the first 10–15 seconds matters. He's right and the research backs it up hard. When listeners don't know the context of an incoming message, their brains waste cognitive resources on prediction and error correction instead of comprehension. Here's what the science actually says about what Chris taught.

1 Predictive Coding & Top-Down Processing: Friston's foundational work on predictive coding shows that the brain constantly generates predictions about incoming information. Without a clear topic frame, listeners spend neural resources generating and correcting wrong predictions — exactly what Chris described when he said "you've gone a different direction because you're trying to figure it out." Friston, K. (2010). The free-energy principle: a unified brain theory? *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 11(2), 127–138.

2 Working Memory & Cognitive Load: Sweller's cognitive load theory demonstrates that when incoming information lacks structure, working memory becomes overloaded — reducing comprehension and retention. Chris's Topic-Intent-Point framework reduces extraneous load by front-loading structure before detail. Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on learning. *Cognitive Science*, 12(2), 257–285.

3 Discourse Comprehension & Context Priming: Research by van Dijk & Kintsch established that listeners build "situation models" — mental representations of what a conversation is about. Without a clear opening frame, listeners construct incomplete or inaccurate situation models, leading to the exact confusion Chris illustrated with his "event next week" example. van Dijk, T. A., & Kintsch, W. (1983). *Strategies of Discourse Comprehension*. Academic Press.

FEATURED RESOURCE

Fenning, C. (2020). *The First Minute: How to Start Conversations That Get Results*. This award-winning book is a step-by-step guide for clear, concise communication in everyday work conversations. Being concise is not about trying to condense all the information into sixty seconds. It is about having clear intent, talking about one topic at a time, and focusing on solutions instead of dwelling on problems. Available in print, digital, and audio.

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ALSO BY BRYAN BUCKLEY

THE 1ST 5 MINUTES

The companion to this episode. Bryan's framework gives you the tools to own those critical 1st 5 minutes of any new connection — where trust is either built or lost for good. Pair it with Chris Fenning's First Minute framework and you've got a complete system: from the moment you walk in the room to the moment the real conversation begins.

[Get the Book → bryanbuckleyspeaks.com](https://bryanbuckleyspeaks.com)



TURN YOUR 1ST 5 MINUTES INTO YOUR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE — LEVERAGE OR LOSE IT.

Bryan Buckley is the leading authority on the 1st 5 Minutes of a business conversation — 5X author, speaker, corporate trainer, and podcast host. He helps sales professionals and leaders develop, deepen, and master their business communication skills so every conversation counts.

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