

THE BIG IDEA

The last minute isn't about closing the sale. It's about **diagnosing the real problem** before you ever reach a solution. Anyone can pitch a product — only an elite business connector has the humility, patience, and curiosity to uncover the real problem first, at the right time, in the right way.

THE GOLDEN RULE

Trade the prescription pad for the stethoscope.

Most people default to writing the solution before the exam is even finished — it looks efficient and confident, but it's business malpractice. You have to wait, lean in, and listen for what's happening underneath the surface before you ever reach for a fix.

FRAMEWORK AT A GLANCE

LEVEL 1 • THE SETUP	LEVEL 2 • THE DEEPER WORK
Prescription Pad Defaulting to the solution before the exam is even finished — it feels efficient, but it's malpractice.	Stethoscope Leaning in close enough to hear what's actually going on underneath the surface before you prescribe anything.
Assumption Believing you already know their problem because you've seen it a hundred times before.	Bridge Questions Curious, low-pressure questions that open the door to the real issue without ever feeling pushy.
Cold Hard Seller The crossroads moment where connection turns into a pitch, and trust drains out in seconds.	Two-Step Approach Repeat the problem back in their words first. Then, and only then, transition to the solution.

■ CONCEPT DEEP DIVES

01 IT'S NOT LISTENING TO REPLY, IT'S LISTENING TO DIAGNOSE

It's not nodding along while you plan your next sentence, and it's not confirming what you already assumed walking in. It's leaning in close enough to hear the sound underneath the sound — the frustration, the gap, the pain point that doesn't show up on the first pass. A good doctor doesn't hand over the prescription just because the assumption feels right; they wait, then listen.

ELITE MOVE:

Before you say another sales-oriented word, ask yourself which tool you're holding — pad or scope. Sit in the silence one beat longer than feels comfortable and let them keep talking.

"Tell me more about that — what does that actually look like day to day?"

02 DON'T BLURT IT OUT, BUILD A DOOR INSTEAD

It's not asking "so what's your problem?" point blank — that's clunky at best, rude at worst. It's also not sitting back hoping they volunteer the detail unprompted, because most people never will. It's a curious, low-stakes question that invites them to reflect and hands you the real issue without ever picking up the prescription pad.

ELITE MOVE:

Keep three bridge questions in your back pocket and rotate them based on the conversation's tone.

"What's been the most frustrating part of your role lately?"

03 REPEAT FIRST, THEN AND ONLY THEN TRANSITION

It's not rushing from friendly to forceful in the same breath — that's the Jekyll-and-hide move that kills trust in seconds. It's a smooth gear shift, not a gear grind: first you repeat their problem back in their own words, then and only then you move toward the solution.

ELITE MOVE:

Before you say one word about your product or service, say the problem back to them verbatim and wait for their nod.

"If I'm hearing you correctly, the problem you want solved is ____."

3 ACTION ITEMS

1 Retire the Prescription Pad.

In your very next conversation, make a rule: no solution language until you've repeated the problem back word for word.

2 Build Your Bridge Questions.

Pick one of the three bridge questions from this episode and have it ready before your next meeting.

3 Practice the Two-Step.

Repeat the problem, then transition with a gear shift, not a gear grind. People need to be heard before they get sold.

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CARRY FORWARD QUESTIONS

1. Am I reaching for the prescription pad, or am I reaching for the stethoscope?
2. Have I repeated this problem back in their own words before I say one word about my solution?

BONUS DEEP DIVE • THE SCIENCE OF PROBLEM OWNERSHIP

Bryan mentions in passing that research from the Journal of Applied Psychology backs up why repeating a problem back in someone's own words works. It's worth a closer look: across psychology and behavior-change research, people commit more fully to a fix when they put the problem into words themselves, rather than having it diagnosed and handed to them.

- 1 Self-generated arguments stick.** Research on self-generated persuasion finds people are more convinced by a case they build themselves than one someone else builds for them — the same mechanism behind letting a customer state their own problem out loud.
- 2 Change talk predicts follow-through.** A review of motivational interviewing research finds that when someone voices, in their own words, their reasons for change, that language is one of the most consistent predictors of whether they actually follow through — the clinical cousin of Bryan's repeat-the-problem step.
- 3 Ownership drives commitment.** Consumer research on psychological ownership shows that when people feel ownership over something — including a problem they've named themselves — they invest more effort and care in seeing it resolved.

REFERENCES

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- 4 Magill, M., et al. (2018).** A meta-analysis of motivational interviewing process: Technical, relational, and conditional process models of change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 86(2), 140–157. [View Source →](#)

BY BRYAN BUCKLEY

THE 1ST 5 MINUTES

This episode lives entirely inside the fifth and final minute of the framework laid out in The 1st 5 Minutes — the moment where most business conversations quietly fail. The book breaks down, minute by minute, exactly how to move from personal connection to professional credibility to a clearly diagnosed problem, without ever picking up the prescription pad too soon.

If this episode's two-step approach resonated, the book gives you the other four minutes that make it possible — the groundwork that earns you the right to ask the problem question in the first place.

Get the Book → 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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