



free-range THINKING™

free-range thinking™ is a monthly journal of best practices, resources and generally useful stuff for public interest communicators who want to reach more people with more impact



The Vision Story and the F-Word

When we help organizations capture and refine all the stories they have to tell, there's one category in particular that tends to generate pushback: Vision Stories. These are narratives that depict in realistic, ground level detail the impacts the organization's work will have in a year, a decade, or however far ahead they can reasonably project. Told well, Vision Stories inspire support by literally showing the audience a world they will want to live in.

And yet, when it's time to work on these stories, that's when we hear the F-word. "But wait," the organizations will say, "That's *fiction*. You're asking us to make up stuff." Yes, to some extent we are, but if you really stop and think about it, a Vision Story is no more fictional than a strategic plan. It's simply another way of talking about the future, and a well-told story can be far more compelling than even the most rigorously crunched numbers.

Amy Webb, a professor at the NYU Stern School of Business and founder of the Future Today Institute, elaborated on this difference recently in an [interview](#) with Slate. "It's hard to get emotional about a set of numbers," she said. "However, if those numbers are included in a story with many more details - that's much more descriptive, that explores what all of the plausible outcomes might be - then it's a bit easier to develop strategy and to feel a sense of urgency."

So how do you tell an inspiring Vision Story about your work? An excellent example was released just last month by the Intercept, and you may have already heard about it because the 7-minute film created quite a stir on social media. The title alone was clickbait, because who isn't curious to see a "Message from the Future"? [Read more](#). Please note: Apple Mail users may need to scroll down manually.

The Vision Story and the F-Word (Cont'd)

The full name of the [film](#) is "A Message from the Future with Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez," which is fitting because the first-term Congresswoman co-wrote it (with Avi Lewis), narrates, and is featured in animated form throughout. In a little over seven minutes, Ocasio-Cortez takes us from the present, back into the 1970s, and finally ten years into the future, all to make the case that the Green New Deal is not, as critics would have it, a pie-in-the-sky dream of liberal tree-huggers.

"People were scared," she says in the film. "They said it was too big, too fast, not practical. I think that's because they just couldn't picture it yet." So after explaining how we got ourselves into our current environmental predicament, Ocasio-Cortez offers a Vision Story with the missing pictures filled in by the beautiful artwork of Molly Crabapple. The story begins at the 4:07 mark of the film and runs for slightly over three minutes. Here is the complete text of this glimpse into the future:



Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

The wave began when Democrats took back the House in 2018, and then the Senate and the White House in 2020, and launched the decade of the Green New Deal, a flurry of legislation that kicked off our social and ecological transformation to save the planet. It was the kind of swing-for-the-fence ambition we needed. Finally, we were entertaining solutions on the scale of the crises we faced, without leaving anyone behind. That included Medicare for all, the most popular social program in American history. We also introduced the federal jobs guarantee, a public option including dignified living wages for work. Funnily enough, the biggest problem in those early years was a labor shortage. We were building a national smart grid, retrofitting every building in America, putting trains like this one all across the country. We needed more workers.

That group of kids from my neighborhood were right in the middle of it all, especially this one girl, Ileana. Her first job out of college was with AmeriCorps Climate, restoring wetlands and bayous in coastal Louisiana. Most of her friends were in her union, including some oil workers in transition. They took apart old pipelines and got to work planting mangroves with the same salary and benefits. Of course, when it came to healing the land, we had huge gaps in our knowledge. Luckily, indigenous communities offered generational expertise to help guide the way. Ileana got restless, tried her hand as a solar plant engineer for a while but eventually made her career in raising the next generation as part of the universal child care initiative. As it turns out, caring for others is valuable, low-carbon work. And we started paying real money to folks like teachers, domestic workers and home health aides.



Still from A Message from the Future

Those were years of massive change. And not all of it was good. When Hurricane Sheldon hit southern Florida, parts of Miami went underwater for the last time. But as we battled the floods, fires and droughts, we knew how lucky we were to have started acting when we did. And we didn't just change the infrastructure. We changed how we did things. We became a society that was not only modern and wealthy, but dignified and humane, too. By committing to universal rights like healthcare and meaningful work for all, we stopped being so scared of the future. We stopped being

scared of each other. And we found our shared purpose. Ileana heard the call, too. And in 2028, she ran for office, in the first cycle of publicly funded election campaigns. And now she occupies the seat that I once held. I couldn't be more proud of her, a true child of the Green New Deal.

When I think back to my first term in Congress, riding that old-school Amtrak in 2018, all of this was still ahead of us, and the first big step was just closing our eyes and imagining it. We can be whatever we have the courage to see.

Note how Ocasio-Cortez introduces a character, Ileana, in the second paragraph. That's smart storytelling, because audiences need people to identify with if they're going to be drawn into any story. Large-scale, systemic change may be the ultimate goal in this narrative, but human beings do not identify with systems, policies, or initiatives. If we cannot see and feel the changes at ground level - through the eyes of one human being - we simply cannot relate, but Ileana provides that crucial connection.

The story also gives us the bad along with the good - floods, fires, and a hurricane that drowns sections of Miami permanently. As optimistic as human beings like to be, we all know the future will be a mixed bag, so acknowledging the hard times to come adds authenticity to the narrative.

Above all, the story is optimistic and empowering. Take another look at its final line: "We can be whatever we have the courage to see." That sentiment provides a nice bookend to the opening when Ocasio-Cortez speculates that people are afraid of the Green New Deal because they couldn't "picture it yet." From start to finish, the film is very clear on its purpose: to visualize a world people will want to live in.

The Green New Deal remains a target of vitriolic criticism, but Ocasio-Cortez and many others are not giving up, and this film is only the latest volley in an ongoing battle for hearts and minds. With over a half million views on YouTube already, it's clearly finding an audience. Should the Green New Deal eventually become reality, we may look back and acknowledge that this ambitious plan began finding traction thanks to a little fiction.

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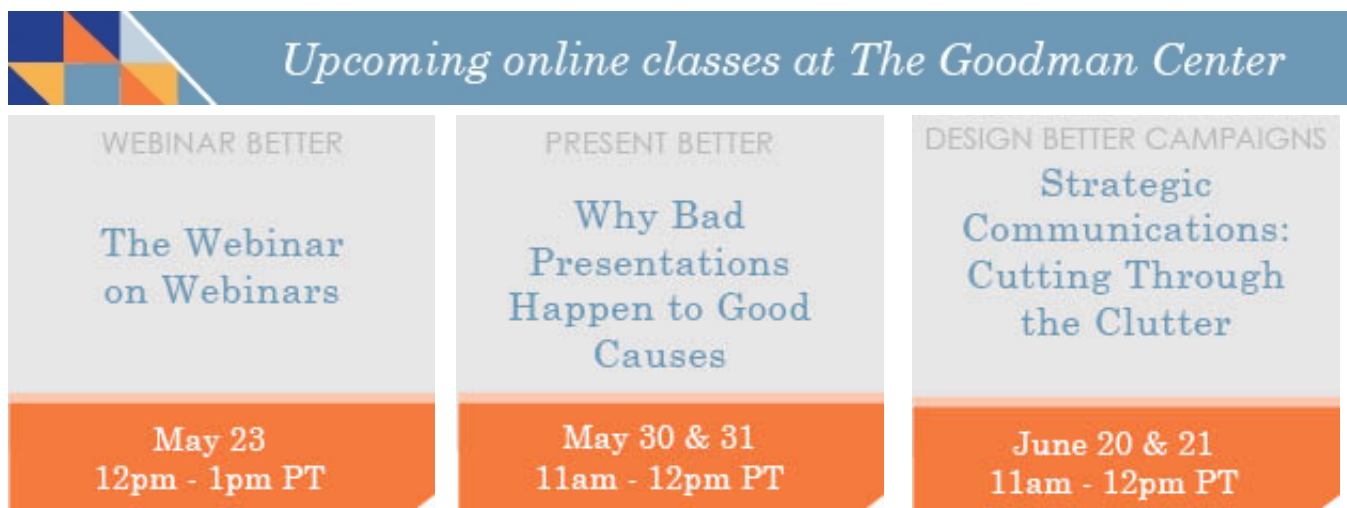
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We can also design visually striking slides and presentations that support your brand identity and messages at events, meetings, and workshops. Our services can include:

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- Custom illustrations
- Animations within slides

For additional details about how we might work together, please call us directly at 323.272.4737. Check out some sample designs [here](#).



The banner features a blue header with a geometric pattern of orange, yellow, and white triangles on the left. The text "Upcoming online classes at The Goodman Center" is written in a white, italicized serif font. Below the header are three vertical cards with a light blue background and an orange footer. Each card contains the title of a class, the date and time, and the category name.

Category	Class Title	Date & Time
WEBINAR BETTER	The Webinar on Webinars	May 23 12pm - 1pm PT
PRESENT BETTER	Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes	May 30 & 31 11am - 12pm PT
DESIGN BETTER CAMPAIGNS	Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter	June 20 & 21 11am - 12pm PT

About Us

free-range thinking is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit www.thegoodmancenter.com.

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