

Persuade with Visuals: The Cuba Map Strategy

In spring 1962, General David Shoup walked into a meeting at the White House with two transparencies and one point to make. This was a year out from the disaster of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba, and there was discussion inside the Kennedy administration about what an invasion of Cuba would look like.

As the meeting dragged on, General Shoup pointed to a map of the USA and pulled out his first transparency. It was a map of Cuba, and he laid it over the United States. Cuba stretched from Washington, D.C. past Chicago. You could see the surprise on the faces in the room as the general explained the size of Cuba. People thought of it as just a small island nation when in reality it was over 800 miles long.

General Shoup didn't stop there. He laid down the last transparency, a dot, on top of the map of Cuba and the United States. He said this dot represented the tiny two-square-mile island of Tarawa, which took 18,000 Marines three days to conquer in World War II. Shoup wasn't referencing some obscure battle. He had commanded the Marines at Tarawa and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his actions.

Those two visuals showed more than a thousand words. It took invading Cuba from this practical-seeming idea to a sobering reality. It would cost hundreds of thousands of American troops to make that happen.

What General Shoup did here is what I like to call the Cuba Map Strategy.

When you want to persuade with a visual, sometimes breaking it into three parts makes it more effective.



Anchor

You start by first anchoring the audience on something they know. The map of the United States. The reaction you're going for is "Huh? What's the point?"



Reframe

You want to reframe it. That's when the General laid down the map of Cuba. You want the emotion to be "Whoa, didn't realize that."



Reveal

You want to reveal, drive home the main point, like he did with the dot representing Tarawa. The reaction you're going for here is, "Oh no. That's not good."

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So if you want to create your own Cuba Map Strategy, the key is actually to work backwards:

- 3




Start with thinking about your reveal: what’s the emotional punch you want to make?
- 2

Work back to the reframe: what’s the item or image that reframes the discussion?
- 1

Lastly, what’s your anchor?

By starting where you want to end up—with that “oh no” emotion—you can build the 1-2-3. The challenge with the Cuba Map Strategy is it usually takes several times to figure it out.

Example: Making A Trillion Dollars Feel Real

<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="background-color: #1a3d54; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 40px; height: 40px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-right: 10px;"> 1 </div> <div> <p>ANCHOR</p> <p>Start with: “We all have trouble imagining how big a trillion dollars is.”</p> </div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  </div> <div style="background-color: #e6f2ff; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><i>“But I want you to see this dime. It represents a million dollars.”</i></p> </div>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="background-color: #1a3d54; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 40px; height: 40px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-right: 10px;"> 2 </div> <div> <p>REFRAME</p> <p>Then pull out a hundred dollar bill.</p> </div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  </div> <div style="background-color: #e6f2ff; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><i>“The difference between this dime and this hundred dollar bill is the difference between a million and a billion.”</i></p> </div>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="background-color: #1a3d54; color: white; border-radius: 50%; width: 40px; height: 40px; display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-right: 10px;"> 3 </div> <div> <p>REVEAL</p> <p>Show an image of a hundred thousand dollars in cash.</p> </div> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  </div> <div style="background-color: #e6f2ff; padding: 10px; margin-top: 10px; text-align: center;"> <p><i>“The difference between this dime and this hundred thousand dollars is the difference between a million and a trillion.”</i></p> </div>
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The Bottom Line	Anchor, reframe, and then reveal. By the time you get to the third number, your audience is both feeling and seeing the difference.
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