

BUSINESS PRESENTATION SKILLS

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In the Book of Lists, you will find that the number one fear of most Americans is speaking in public. 42% fear speaking in public more than anything else. As a basis of comparison, only 9% fear death as their number one fear! As you find yourself more and more into the position of a business leader, it is important that you develop your business presentation skills.

This article is designed to help you improve your business presentation skills by looking at the presentation from the point of view of the purpose, the preparation, the organization, the support and the delivery.

PURPOSE OF THE PRESENTATION

- Determine the objective/purpose of the presentation
 - General purpose
 - * Informative-Transfer of information from speaker to audience
 - * Persuasive-Attempt to change attitude, belief, or action
 - Realistically define the results expected:
 - * Realistic in scope
 - * Realistic in view of receivers' knowledge, culture, status, etc.
 - * Realistic in view of possible actions by receiver
 - * Realistic in terms of what you can reasonably expect to accomplish
 - Specific outcomes you desire from the communication Very specifically complete the following: When the presentation is finished, the audience will:
 - Hidden objectives of the presentation that the presenter is aware of but does not share with the audience. Sometimes the presenter has objectives that the presenter chooses not to share with the audience. It is important that the presenter is aware of them and prepares the speech accordingly. For example, if you were training on a safety procedure. You might have as your obvious purpose to inform the audience about the safety

procedure. Your hidden objective might be to persuade the audience to follow the new safety procedure.

- **Determine and analyze the audience, occasion, and credibility** Before beginning the writing of the presentation, there are some things that need to be considered. Advanced analysis by the presenter can make a huge difference in the outcome of the presentation.

- Audience Analysis

- * In analyzing the audience ask some of the following questions:

- Who are the **key people** in the audience? (Decision makers, etc.)
 - What **knowledge** does the audience already have concerning the subject of the presentation?
 - What do you know about the **language level** of the audience?
 - * In general?
 - * In relationship to this subject?
 - What are the cultural similarities between the audience and presenter?
 - What are the **cultural dissimilarities** between the audience and presenter? What can the presenter do to minimize these?
 - How does the **status of the audience** compare to the presenter?
 - What are the **status relationships** within the audience that might affect understanding?
 - What **attitudes do the audience members** hold toward:
 - * The subject?
 - * The speaker?
 - What **positive attitudes** does the **presenter** have toward the audience? What can the presenter do to highlight those attitudes?
 - What **negative attitudes** does the **presenter** have toward the audience? What can the presenter do to de-emphasize those attitudes?
 - What is the **age** of the audience and what effect will it have on the presentation?

- What is the predominant **gender** of the audience and what effect will it have on the presentation?
- Occasion Analysis
 - * Do I have a choice on the **time of day**?
 - If so, what would be the best choice?
 - If not, what can be done to turn the time of day into an advantage?
 - * What is the **location**?
 - Advantages of that location?
 - Disadvantages of that location?
 - * Will there be **interruptions**?
 - What can be done to eliminate the interruptions?
 - What can be done to reduce the effect of the interruptions?
 - * What is the **physical layout** of the front of the room?
 - What effect will the layout of the room have on the presenter's notes?
 - What effect will the layout of the room have on the presenter's visual aids?
 - Can the room be rearranged to improve the presentation? If so, how?
 - * Is the speaking occasion a **special occasion**? If so, should it be emphasized or de-emphasized?
 - * What can be done by the presenter to emphasize the occasion?
 - * What can be done by the presenter to de-emphasize the occasion?
- Speaker Credibility
 - * What does the **audience know** about the presenter's credibility in the **subject area** of the presentation?
 - * What does the audience know about the presenter's credibility in **other** subject areas, other than that of the presentation?
 - * What can the presenter do to enhance his or her credibility **before the day of the presentation**?
 - * What can the presenter do to enhance his or her credibility **right before the beginning** of the presentation?
 - * What can the presenter do to enhance his or her credibility **early on in the presentation**?
 - * What **clothing** would enhance the credibility of the presenter?

ORGANIZATION OF THE PRESENTATION

- **State main ideas or concepts the audience must get if objectives are to be met** Review the objectives of the presentation. In order to attain those objectives, what aspects of the subject must be covered by the presenter? What must the audience know in order to attain those objectives?
- **Develop the main points of the presentation** Organize the material that must be covered into a limited number of main points. Remember that in a presentation you can seldom cover an entire subject. Therefore, you must determine what aspects of the subject must be covered in order to reach your objectives.
- **Clear preview of what you want to accomplish in the presentation** A sentence that clearly previews for the listener what you are going to cover in the presentation helps the listener focus during the presentation. This sentence should be stated early in the presentation, at the end of the introduction. It helps the speaker stay focused on the aspects of the subject that are going to be covered in the presentation and does the same for the listener. This is the single most important sentence of the entire presentation
- **Determine, gather and group together the main points you want to communicate** Group your ideas into 3, 4, or 5 main points. Don't have a long list of main points. It is more difficult for you and for the audience to remember 10 main points!
- **Determine the presentation theme or tie your presentation to the theme of the program** If you are a part of a program that has a theme, tie your presentation theme into that of the program.
- **Arrange main points in a logical order** Think through the best way to arrange your 2 - 5 main points. Some possibilities are: chronological (time ordered), topical (by topic), spacial (by place in space, e.g. top to bottom), difficulty (from the simplest concept to the most difficult), etc.

- **Prepare introduction and conclusion** Beginning the preparation of the speech with the introduction is difficult at best. The introduction and conclusion of the presentation should be prepared only after the main part of the presentation (the body) has been somewhat developed. There is frequently unnecessary frustration caused by beginning the presentation preparation with the introduction.
- **Selection of supporting material** Back when we were in school, we went to the library to gather supporting material for a presentation. In the business world, the support you need is frequently at your finger tips or right within your organization. Don't overlook the use of trade journals.
 - Find appropriate arguments to support your main points. For each of your main points you must develop the reasons that substantiate that point. Just saying something does not make it so. You need to back up your ideas with arguments that support them.
 - Select appropriate language choice
 - * Use proper grammar
 - * Avoid technical language that the audience may not be familiar with
 - * Avoid jargon (language specific to a profession or field, including acronyms)
 - * Avoid fillers (e.g. ah, um, you know)
 - Evidence as support - Whether the presentation is informative or persuasive, you need to support your main points with evidence.
 - Sources of evidence
 - * Fact
 - * Example, real life or hypothetical
 - * Authority, experts
 - * Statistics
 - Visual Aids as resource material
 - * Think through the various kinds of visuals that are available
 - * Size of visuals - If the visual is too small, do not pass it around

during your presentation. It will serve as much more of a distraction than an aid.

- * Handling of visuals - Plan in advance how you are going to handle your visual, when you will pick it up, how you will display it, etc.
- * If using a presentation software, be careful to fight the tendency to put too many words on the screen at a time. The audience will tend to read the screen instead of listen to you.
- * Determining factor in decision to use visuals – is the presentation better with the visual? If not, do not use visual.

▪ DELIVERY OF THE PRESENTATION

- **Influence of non verbal on overall communication** More than half of what you communicate is communicated non verbally. You must make sure that your non verbal messages do not conflict with the words you say, otherwise your words will lose most of their effect. In preparing for your presentation, think about your non verbal as much as you think about the words you are to say.
- **Dealing with nervousness**
 - * Accept that nervousness is very natural. Even the most trained and experienced speakers and entertainers have some level of nervousness.
 - * The key to nervousness is to have it work for you not against you.
 - * Use nervousness to your advantage. Nervousness causes our body to produce extra adrenalin and therefore pumps us up for the presentation. Without nervousness you would not do as well as you can with nervousness.
 - * The difficult part is to make that nervousness work for you. Become aware of how your body responds to the nervousness and learn to control any negative effects of the nervousness. If, for example, you get extra energy that causes you to walk all over the place during your presentation, become aware of that nervous movement, control it and turn it into meaningful movement. Use it to help display enthusiasm about your subject.
- **Speaking notes** It is strongly advised that you do not write out your speech word for word. It is usually most effective for you to work from

an outline of what you want to cover. When you write your presentation out word for word, you have a tendency to read it, believing that what you wrote is the very best way to say it. You may very likely find yourself reading from your notes when you know the subject very well.

- **Eye contact** One of the most important aspects of delivery is direct eye contact with the listeners. You should be looking at your audience at least 3/4 of the time. Keep your focus on your audience and glance at your notes instead of the reverse of that.
 - * Eye contact is a wonderful tool for getting feedback from your audience. An audience will communicate much to you if you are looking at them and reading their non verbal messages.
 - * Another advantage of eye contact is that it communicates to the audience your desire for them to pay attention to your presentation. It also makes paying attention to you much easier for them. Attention is much easier to pay to a speaker who is maintaining good eye contact than to a speaker who is looking away from the audience.
 - * If you were ever taught to look at the back wall, above the heads of the audience, forget that! Look right at the audience.
- **Handling of notes**
 - * Plan in advance where you are going to place your notes, how you are going to handle them.
 - * DO NOT staple your notes together. In doing so, you make it almost impossible to discretely get from one page of your notes to another.
 - * If you have more than one page of notes, number them. It is easy to get pages mixed up before the presentation. Numbering them gives you a quick way to check that they are in the right order right before you go to give your presentation.
- **Gestures** You should not plan your gestures, or they will look planned. Instead, keep your hands about waist height so that they are free to gesture and then relax and see what happens. You might be surprised to see that you naturally gesture. And if you don't, then as long as you keep your hands relaxed and don't do something distracting with them, they will not take away from the presentation.

- **Posture** Good posture is important but avoid stiff posture. Stand straight on both feet (which makes nervous shifting back and forth from one foot to the other impossible to do).
- **Movement** Movement is good but only if it is natural for you. Be careful to watch for nervous movement that is very distracting to the audience. Continuous pacing back and forth makes it difficult for the audience to listen to you.
- **Vocal quality** If you have ever listened to a monotone speaker, you do not question the need for vocal variety! Without vocal variety, it is difficult for the audience to listen and more difficult for them to believe that you are excited about, or even interested in, the subject.
- **Practice, practice, practice!** Practice may not make perfect, but it does increase the chance of success. When you do practice, try to create a similar physical environment to what you will have on the day of your presentation. For example, if you are going to do your presentation standing up behind a lectern, don't practice sitting in a chair.
- **Think through the possible reactions of the receiver and then practice your reaction to the various receiver reactions** Compile a list of the possible reactions of your listeners. Then, plan how you are going to react to them. If you do practice, you may still be surprised by a reaction or question from the audience but you will be more prepared to respond to it. Just planning your reaction to certain situations will help you react to those you did not even think of.

▪ **Handling of question and answer period**

- Restate question: Restating buys you a few seconds to think about your answer to the question.
- Clarify vague questions
- Answer questions directly but keep in line with your presentation objectives
- Choose wisely questions to be answered privately, after the presentation

▪ **Time speaking is only one part of the presentation**

- Pay close attention to the way you are approaching and leaving the front of the room. Carry yourself with confidence even if you don't feel confident.
- Think about your verbal and non verbal cues when not speaking. Be aware of the tremendous impact on your presentation that your non verbal cues can have on the audience.

While reading this article on business presentation skills may not prevent you from being one of those 42% of Americans who list speaking in public as their greatest fear, it is my hope that you have acquired some tips on how to use that nervousness in a constructive manner.