

Negotiating to Save Time, Reduce Costs and Increase Profits



Persuasive Presentation Skills

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“Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I will remember. Involve me, and I will understand.”
Confucius

Let's demystify the longstanding fuzz around public speaking. It is both Art & Science. Here, I will address the problem, the solution, and the benefits you will enjoy of changing your approach.

The Problem

Reading this, chances are that you have either sat through numerous dull, boring presentations, or you may even admit to having been the culprit producing those dry reportings once or twice.

The primary mistake most professionals make is that they deliver a presentation that is all about their product/company, *and not about their audience*. This is without doubt the most common pitfall.

Your audience is not terribly interested in your board of directors or your company's history. They don't really care how many staff you have, what policies and missions you subscribe to, and what you think about the status quo. What they *do* care about, is what value – if any – your product/company/recommendations can add to their business.

This is your remit: to articulate in an accurate, professional, relevant and enjoyable manner, the significant value that you can bring to your audience. There are of course times when you will not be selling your value proposition, but perhaps just educating or motivating or sharing ideas. Nevertheless, we continue to make the same mistakes. Here are some examples:

- We make massive assumptions about our audience, showing a lack of understanding of their needs or challenges.
- We talk at them rather than have a conversation with them.
- 'Death by PowerPoint' (as first coined by Edward Tufte) is a cringe-worthy experience of how our slides cripple and restrict us, rather than guide us through our content. Full sentences and data dumping have no place in presentation slides. They belong in documents.
- And one of our biggest crimes, we are often as presumptuous as to tell our audience what's good for them!

These are just some examples of many that cause the anxiety and frustration experienced by both presenter and audience alike. It's little wonder that many presentations do not enjoy the conversion to new business opportunities and improved stakeholder relationships.

We are a demanding audience. We can also be fickle, to an extent, judging the presenter on a host of different issues from his/her attire, accent, vocabulary, apparent expertise, personality (or lack thereof), and so on. All this places a lot of demand on you, the presenter, so you really need to understand the big picture before you take any action to make improvements.

To help you, this white paper aims to simplify the content of what is many years' worth of research and practical experience, in an attempt to give you a non-complex, step-by-step understanding of what it takes to become a persuasive, powerful public speaker. Whilst there are endless opinions, preferences and surveyed results that might either support or challenge our approach, we like to 'walk our talk' and we have found this method of professional presenting to be the most successful.

The Solution

Accept first of all that you need to be having a conversation with your audience. Whether the group comprises 3 or 300 individuals, the key word is just that – *individual*. Your audience is made up of individuals who all have their own varying backgrounds, expertise, personal preferences, value systems and professional opinions. Whilst you can't necessarily please everyone all the time, if you are delivering a professional presentation (whether for a charitable social event or on behalf of your company), you need to establish rapport and relationship with your audience.

Try the following 3 step approach to getting organised, before you even put pen to paper:

Step 1: Plan

Why are you delivering this presentation?

Be very clear on your objective: understand whether you are selling, educating, inspiring, exploring, and so on. Understand clearly why you are the best person for this particular presentation.

Who is your audience?

Be very sure that you know their designations (their professional roles), something about their background, and the reason they are attending your presentation. The more you know about your audience, the more you can customise your message to their needs and interests.

Do not make any assumptions about their expertise, understanding or knowledge of the topic you will be discussing. This can lead to embarrassment on your part as well as theirs.

What does your audience expect of you?

This is crucial. You need to find out what communication they have received for attending your presentation. Are they there out of real interest or are they there because the boss said so? This drastically impacts their expectations of- and interaction with you, as well as their attention span.

Wherever possible, ask the reason for their attendance so that you understand their interest. This will help you to relate to them during your presentation, particularly when you have a very mixed audience with differing interests.

When appropriate and possible, it can sometimes be useful to send an email or invitation to your audience ahead of your presentation – we can capitalise on the opportunity of making contact ahead of the event for our gain.

Make no mistake that in today's business world, your audience expects you to be confident, prepared and experienced. On top of that, there is an unofficial expectation that you wow them, too! So if you have any difficulties at the moment with how to prepare for your presentation, how to dress appropriately, how to connect with your audience, how to inject a little humour here and there, and how to get them to interact with you and hopefully even buy from or support you, it is your responsibility to get on top of these issues.

Our ever evolving world brings with it new markets, new challenges, exciting opportunities, as well as new expectations and demands. The audience today is quite different from even just 10 years ago.

An intention to deliver a good presentation, with awareness of what should be done, is quite simply not enough. Knowledge is not power. *Acting* on that knowledge is what will set you apart from your colleagues and competitors alike.

So whilst reading this material, you need to understand the requirements of powerful presenting, identify what you have and what you're lacking, and ensure you meet the grade before you get out there and present again. This is what your audience expects of you.

What tools or aids are available to me?

Decide if you are going to use PowerPoint slides, and if you do, be very sure that you do not fall into any of the 'Death by PowerPoint' pitfalls. You have a responsibility to communicate with your audience, not to read them a report.

If you decide to use slides, avoid full sentences, check your spelling and grammar, use short bullet points to guide you, use interesting graphics where appropriate, maintain consistency of themes and fonts, and be sure to check that all your equipment is in good working order.

Where will I be delivering my presentation?

The venue can have a great impact on your audience's experience of you. You should always contact the relevant person to check things like natural lighting, air conditioning or heating, seating layout, facilities such as toilets, water, and stationery, and be sure to take the name and number of a contact person at the venue in case something goes wrong and you need help.

How long should I speak for?

This is a key detail. You will find varying recommendations on duration in books and online sources, from 10 minutes to 45 minutes. You cannot follow generic guidelines if you are successfully customising your message to your audience, and to the purpose of your event. The objective of your presentation should determine the duration of your message, together with the availability of your audience, their other commitments, preceding and succeeding events or activities, and so on.

Of course, there are often times we need to present within a very specific timeline, when participating in forums or conferences, for example. Put yourself in your audience's shoes, we don't like sitting and listening for very long – particularly if the content is technical or complex. Then tailor your message to ensure you relay the key elements of your detail in a time that does not restrict you but also does not belabour your message.

That's just step 1 at the Planning stage – if you are not already covering these basics, there is no doubt that you are delivering sub-optimal presentations that are probably costing you money and opportunities.

Step 2: Prepare

If 'Location, location, location' is the property specialist's theme, then ours is 'Preparation, preparation, preparation!' The old adage goes "If you fail to prepare, then you prepare to fail."

Begin with the end in mind and use a Start → Middle → End approach to your content:

- ❖ Regardless of the simplicity or complexity of our content, structure is essential. You want to make it easy for your audience to follow your message, and to finally take some form of action, if relevant.
- ❖ *Tell them what you're going to tell them. Tell them. Then tell them what you've just told them.* This is a very old but effective means of maintaining order and structure in your delivery. There must be a clear starting and ending point, with a chunky piece in the middle.

Start →

Wow them from the outset!

Jerry Weissman's *The Art of Telling Your Story* is a very useful, practical book that gives lots of great ideas on how to launch your presentation with powerful, memorable openings. Instead of the usual dry introduction of you, your company and your advance appreciation of their time, why not try something different?

You could engage your audience immediately by opening with a very focused, relevant question, or share an anecdote or perhaps some recent statistics that you know will appeal to them. If you can capture your audience's attention and interest from the get-go, you're very much ahead of the pack.

Remember order and structure

They may not know what to expect from you regarding content or interaction, so be sure to let them know that it's ok to ask questions during your presentation, or perhaps you will ask them to reserve questions for the end. Share, at a high level, what you will be addressing and get agreement on the objective/s of your time together.

Be interesting

Use a heading or opening that is instantly different. The start of your presentation can really set the tone and positively impact your audience's perception of you.

Middle →

Be persuasive

If you have not read Dr Robert Cialdini's *Power of Persuasion*, now's the time. This globally recognised expert on the topic of influence lists The 6 Principles of Persuasion that we can use during our presentations to significantly impact our audience's thoughts, ideas and actions. Here is a quick synopsis on the principles:

1. Reciprocity: this principle teaches us how to leverage the event of obligation by acting first and benefiting others (especially in business).
2. Liking: we like doing business with those who like us, with those who are like us, and with those whom we like. Learn how to connect with your audience by capitalising on this principle.
3. Scarcity: we want more of what we can't have; you can very effectively position your product/service/concept in a manner that appears exclusive, which will pique your audience's interest.
4. Authority: wherever possible, you should be backing up your content and recommendations with authoritative proof, facts, evidence, reports, statistics, references and such like. This lends credibility to your message.
5. Social Proof: people will often wait and see what the masses do before deciding their course of action. Think of a social environment, often we follow what the majority is doing. You should be using as many references and testimonials in your presentation as possible.
6. Commitment & Consistency: this principle addresses the fact that people live up to what they write down, or what they agree to publicly. Wherever possible, get your audience to agree to

certain relevant issues or sections of your presentation that might support your Q&A session or the request you make of them later.

The Art & Science of Communication

You are communicating with various individuals on various different levels within a limited time frame. To succeed in this arena, you need to appreciate that communication is both science and art. And to keep it simple, you need to analyse and identify the communication aspects of your delivery that work for- and against you.

Recognise that your presentation is one component of many within a larger frame of communication, and it could very well impact any negotiations that take place subsequent to your meeting. Your presentation is not an isolated event, but part of a very important process, therefore you need to educate yourself on the process in its entirety.

Refer to the 'Recommendations' at the close of this article to maximise your existing strengths and mitigate any shortfalls you might identify, in pursuit of improving your presentation skills.

If you need to do a dry run of your presentation beforehand, make use of this opportunity to iron out any inaccuracies or inappropriate or irrelevant content. This is a good time to try a little humour or creativity on a colleague/friend.

End →

Wow them again!

Always end with a powerful, memorable closing. This might be a demonstration, some form of interaction with the audience, a commercial offer, etc. They will only retain a certain percentage of your message, so let them walk away with remembering your interesting opening, your passionate delivery, and your very memorable ending.

If you expect your audience to take any form of action as a result of your presentation, you need to give them a compelling reason to do so. Achieve this in the form of a demonstrable, persuasive manner that will leave them wanting more – even if they just engage you after your presentation that could be a 3 minute opportunity to convert them.

Q&A

As we mentioned earlier, you need to guide your audience as to how you might field their questions, if any. (Hopefully you always have questions otherwise your audience is probably disengaged, disinterested or disoriented!)

If it's a larger audience, repeat the question for the benefit of others, and answer to the full audience, not to the person who asked the question.

If you do not know the answer, do not act as if you do! There is nothing wrong with being unsure of a particular issue, but then the important thing is to make note of that issue and commit to getting back to that person. (That follow up is key.)

If you have difficulty handling challenging questions or audience members, you need to learn how to manage Hecklers. These are individuals who are intent on causing a stir for one reason or another (and many times you will find that it is as a result of the presenter's assumptions or errors). The Heckler is easily handled as long as you never (never!) show your frustration, embarrassment or irritation. The minute you lose your cool, you lose your credibility.

Step 3: Deliver

With steps 1 and 2 in place, the rest is easy! At this stage you should be able to relax in the knowledge that your thorough planning and preparation will stand you in good stead insofar as the content is concerned. And having tailored your content to your audience all that is left is to inject personality and charisma into your delivery.

Now it's about YOU

I said earlier that your presentation should be all about your audience, and how you can benefit them in one way or another (generally speaking). Remember this very important fact: *the more of YOU that you inject into your presentation, the more successful it will be!* Without a doubt. If you have ever attending a Presentation Skills course that has taught you to use certain words, stand in a certain position, adopt certain body language, deploy a certain delivery style...chuck it all out!

Here's why...

Imagine for a minute that you and I are friends or colleagues, and we're having a conversation about the project we're working on. We're both interested in the topic, we probably have some good ideas to bounce around, it's 2pm so lunch is settling in our stomachs and we're feeling a little lazy, and all the while we're enjoying a relevant, interesting chat.

If, during this chat, you use words and body language that are not yours, in other words they don't come naturally to you, your conversation will become staccato, disorganised, insincere and probably irritating. That is exactly what happens in a presentation when you try and use somebody else's words and signals!

This is one of the most important lessons you need to learn, and accept, as a professional speaker. If you are representing the company or idea that you are presenting about, people want to hear what you have to say about it, and if they are going to make any investment (whether commercially or otherwise), you can bet this year's salary that they are as much investing in you as they are in the value proposition or idea or concept you are talking about. Therein lies all the demands we spoke of earlier, for you to be professional, cordial, prepared, confident and experienced. Your audience wants to know that they can trust their ideas/money/time to you, so they need to get to know you.

Passion sells. Charisma is catchy. Personality is required! Be yourself. It will not only make your job of presenting easier and more enjoyable, it will help you to establish that all important connection with your audience, in pursuit of a conversation and a relationship. Just because you're standing up in front of a group does not mean you're not having a conversation.

Paint a Picture

Whilst we all have different learning and listening styles, many people enjoy visual, tangible demonstrations during a presentation. Wherever possible, use the aids around you (flipchart, multimedia facilities) to emphasise the impact of your product/service. By painting a picture in people's minds, you help them to understand your concept, and you can take them by the hand (mentally) from Point A to Point B.

Success Characteristics

Ray Poynter of Research.™ shares the results of a 2009 survey that analysed 114 professional public speakers. The audience who participated in the survey (separately) highlighted 10 speakers who shared some common denominators with regards their style and technique.

Here is Ray's Top 10 characteristics of successful professional speakers:

1. **Content:** their content is useful, valuable, relevant, accurate and interesting.
2. **Voice:** not too fast, nor too slow, with a good mix of lilt and intonations to keep it interesting.
3. **Audience:** like a considerate lover, they ask "How was it for you?"
4. **Story:** rather than reciting facts and figures, they translate the data into a story.
5. **Style:** informal yet professional, relaxed but upbeat, confident but not cocky, having presence.
6. **Ability:** intention and effort are not enough, ability must support the apparent expertise.
7. **Argument:** put forward a case rather than merely report the details
8. **Confidence:** a key factor in all communications, the audience immediately detects this
9. **Engaging:** having a conversation with the audience whilst delivering the message
10. **Humour:** not jokes or non-stop laughs, but natural, appropriate humour which we all enjoy

According to Professor Mehrabian (currently Professor Emeritus of Psychology, UCLA and globally known for his pioneering work in the field of non-verbal communications), we place immense importance on the *how* factor of communication, as opposed to *what*.

In other words, the old adage "It's not what you say but how you say it" is of crucial importance when presenting. His research findings were shared in the late 1970's, and whilst latter research on the same topic reveals only slightly altered statistics (with developments in the past 40 years such as modernised communication media, more women in business, etc.), this research applies across cultures and across industries. That's why it's so important for you to inject your personal style into your presentation delivery. Anyone can learn or understand the data you are presenting.

Much of the success of your presentation lies in your delivery style, less so your content and other related factors.

Recommendations

Clearly, a theoretical understanding or agreement of guidelines and recommendations is not sufficient. It is incumbent upon us as professionals to adopt a 'learning by doing' approach, and to ensure that we try and test our individual presentation styles and techniques. This is the only way to discover what works for you. The good news is that once you discover that style, you're set for life.

From there you will experience increased creativity and confidence that will consistently improve the quality of your presentations. But to do this, you must be willing to open yourself up to critique to progress you from your current presentation style, to being a powerful, persuasive, enjoyable presenter. Some practical steps you can take:

- ❖ Read books
- ❖ Watch videos
- ❖ Attend coaching or training
- ❖ Request assistance or guidance from your employer/mentor

Whatever assistance you employ, ensure that it is from a professional, experienced, reputable source.

Some benefits of changing your approach

As I mentioned earlier, in order for you to change your current presentation style, you need to agree some clear benefits of making the effort of change. Even if change is good, there is still a transformation process that we sometimes experience as frustrating or negative. Here are some clear benefits that you will experience by developing what we term *Persuasive Presentation Skills*:

- Immediately enhance your confidence levels.
- Apply that confidence to close business opportunities through your presentations.
- Enjoy (and negotiate!) increased remuneration as a result.
- Reduce preparation time by using a process and templates.
- Enjoy career advancement as a result of your presentation successes.
- Start enjoying public speaking and the impact you make on your audiences.

Unless you are 100% satisfied that you are the most persuasive, powerful presenter you can be, you should take action today to improve your status quo. Whether your motivation is for career advancement, meeting sales targets or merely personal interest, the world of public speaking is not the intimidating, formidable arena you might perceive it to be.

If you think you could probably be a good presenter but have never tackled the obstacles you face (job, emotions, experience...), you're probably right. With the hurdles out the way and by demystifying what is actually a very enjoyable experience, you could boost your confidence and your salary at the same time!

“Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

Albert Einstein