



Stop Talking Before the Audience Stops Listening

Three Steps to a More Effective Presentation

An Executive White Paper by GettingPresence

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Executive Summary

While most public speakers set aside time to prepare for a presentation, many are not going about it the right way. Some don't care to prepare correctly, while others wing it, display arrogance or are simply nervous and afraid.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health more than 70 percent of people have a fear of delivering a presentation.¹ As a presenter, you know what you are going to discuss, you are the subject matter expert and you are in control. Then why do presentations evoke a sense of nervousness, fear and trepidation in so many?

There are three main reasons for this fear. First, people are ill-prepared. Second, many presenters are forced to use cookie-cutter templates that restrict their uniqueness and personalities. Third, many are not flexible and do not take the time to look at how they can take the framework provided and build upon it to the benefit of the audience.

Good presentations deliver compelling content from a prepared and interested presenter who conveys a strong presence. This executive white paper will explore the reasons presentations fail, provide guidance on how you can break through the constraints of corporate templates, and outline three best practices that lead to a stand-out presentation.

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¹ National Institute of Mental Health, March 2012, <http://www.statisticbrain.com/fear-of-public-speaking-statistics/>

Presence

Great leaders share something specific that sets them apart. *Presence* is the impression and impact you have on an audience. When you step on stage, are introduced via a Web conference, start that conference call, or walk into a room to make the big sale, the audience forms their impression of you within the first six seconds.

In a presentation it is the interpretation and delivery of the words that makes the difference that defines one's presence. While there is always a degree of nervousness, you can channel that adrenaline rush to work in your favor. You know what you want to accomplish, the game plan and the audience. Use your knowledge and passion to create a competitive advantage, to develop your executive presence.

The Presenter

Would you pay attention to you, and listen to what you have to say?

Presenting is a big part of your job, but predictably your sales, marketing and HR colleagues focus on the tangential elements of your presentation. There's little doubt the colors on your slides match those dictated by HQ, your company's logo is squarely in the correct place and you'll have a comfy conference room at your corporate gatherings. Moreover, you're likely to be told to pack as much information into 30 or 60 minutes as you can, otherwise you may be seen as lazy and coming up short. But as the fuss to ensure neatly organized copies of your slides are available for download after your next presentation, did anybody bother to give you the appropriate amount of time and resources to personally prepare your oratory skills? How about time to work with any co-presenters?

While you may not get the commitment you deserve, it's certainly your presentation results that matter most. Session evals are ruthless, and it's your name on that top line. To be sure, the reason you'll be successful won't be because attendee nametags are set neatly on the registration table or free cocktails are served promptly at 4:30 pm, it'll be because you prepared for your presentation.

“You know what you are going to discuss, you are the subject matter expert and you are in control.”

To be an effective presenter you need to understand that while there are corporate rules to follow, they have little to do with the effectiveness of your presentation. But while you must work within the rules, focus on what's really important: hooking your audience, keeping them engaged and ending the presentation. **These three areas demand your attention.**

- **The Hook.** How you draw in the audience will immediately set the tone for the rest of the presentation. Determine how you will appeal to their needs. Ask yourself why they are listening to you and immediately engage that need.
- **Engagement.** Once you have hooked your audience it is important to keep their attention throughout the presentation. Keep the content connected to why they are there.
- **The End.** An often forgot part of a presentation, the end is how you will be remembered. Revisit your main point, restate the audience takeaways and the importance of your presentation.

The Presentation

Microsoft PowerPoint™ is the de facto standard today when delivering a presentation. PowerPoint has become ingrained in our corporate culture. When you attend a presentation chances are high there will be a PowerPoint to accompany it. But thinking back to your last memorable presentation, do you remember the slide deck, or the person? For better or worse, it's the presenter you remember, each and every time.

Regrettably, today's business presentations are often limited by corporate formats and templates. Many times someone else determines how the presentation will look and be sequenced. This does not help anyone become an effective presenter or let your personality and excitement for the subject matter come through. This common practice was developed to ensure all presenters have a unifying corporate thread. While corporate branding loves it, the template has helped push the use of PowerPoint to the point where most only learn how to color between the lines.

While mandates may dictate how your slides should look, one size will never fit all. The key is that all of the mandates and templates in the world could never tell you how you should deliver your content.

“Use your knowledge and passion to create a competitive advantage, to develop your executive presence.”

Three Steps to a Better Presentation

The development and delivery of standout presentations comes down to three factors: knowing the audience, understanding how much content to deliver and practicing the delivery. These three steps underscore the importance of preparation. Take the time to work through them and walk on stage with confidence.

Step 1: Knowing Your Audience

Knowing your audience is the only way you can ensure your presentation will matter. Understand your audience's needs, their pain points and the solution-oriented messages that will resonate. Leave a positive impression by connecting with your audience and exceeding their expectations.

Step 2: Simplify

Once you have identified your audience and how you will connect with them, now it is time to start crafting your presentation. The first action is to clearly identify what the audience needs. Second, write down everything. The first pass should be an explosion of information. Next, edit your thoughts and ideas. Organize your narrative in a logical sequence and sequentially create the story.

Now simplify. Focus on how you will keep the audience engaged, understanding what they really want to hear, and developing your personal presence. Audiences want action. They want motivation. The goal is to keep the audience engaged with a clear, complete and concise story to tell.

Step 3: Practice, Practice, Practice

Practice doesn't make perfect, it makes permanent.

Great golfers don't rush onto the fairway and swing away. Nor do great racers hop behind the wheel and speed to victory lane solely with a heavy foot. Just like great presenters, winners practice and prepare for success.

As your next speaking assignment approaches, know your material, but don't memorize. Stand up and deliver the entire presentation out loud. **Say it out loud, don't just think it.** Run through your presentation once, make notes and run through it again. Practice in front of a video camera. Record your presentation - without slides - and play it back. Watching yourself on video is more informative than practicing over and over in front of a mirror.

As you recite your content, you'll begin to control your timing, pace and delivery. Improvements will come with practice, practice, practice.

“Focus on what's really important: hooking your audience, keeping them engaged and ending the presentation.”

Looking Ahead

Presentations should never evoke a sense of fear. They should bring forth the sense that you are about to step to a position where others want to hear what you have to say. To become more effective, look beyond the template provided and build a presentation that delivers a personality, satisfies the audience's needs and establishes an authoritative presence.

You are selling yourself on stage. Set aside time to fully prepare the presentation. Don't wing it, no matter how special you think you are. Lack of preparation stands out and the damage is irreversible. With an understanding of the traits that distinguish excellent presentations from ones that are mediocre, your next presentation will be successful.

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About Getting Presence

Getting Presence is the exclusive home for the most serious business and organizational leaders who practice influential communication behaviors and techniques. Getting Presence offers six communications programs:

‘Showtime’ Presence, Team Leader Presence, Media Spokesperson Presence, Millennial Presence, PitchPresence, and Talking In Print and can customize engagements tailored to customer requirements.

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