

Making Presentations

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It is a common occurrence to have to make a presentation to a group of people regarding your products or services. For a lot of people, this is not a comfortable task to take on. The following tips are intended to aid you in making an effective presentation.

The Audience

The fact that you have an audience is evidence that they are interested in obtaining as much information as possible. With that in mind, you will more than likely find your audience quite receptive to your presentation.

The audience is a collective personality and as such, it differs substantially from an individual personality. For example:

- audiences are always sympathetic; but
- audiences never accept excuses; and
- audiences never accept a sales pitch.

It is important to remember that no matter how apprehensive you may feel, the entire audience is pulling for you to succeed because they will suffer collective embarrassment if you should fail. This is your psychological advantage.

Audiences do not forgive anything, so don't apologize for anything, especially in your opening remarks. Poor quality electronic presentations, a last minute substitute, a malfunction of audio visual equipment, weather or problems with air travel are just worn out excuses.

So what if you are not an orator; technical information is best conveyed in an ordinary conversational voice amplified by a microphone. Simply organize your presentation in a logical manner and integrate it with your visual aids, then rehearse your presentation before a critical audience in your own environment until your presentation is second to none.

Nothing is ever sold to the audience because they will mentally reject the sales presentation. However, talking with individuals at a coffee break creates the ideal climate for follow up and sales.

Questions From the Floor

Questions that seek to clarify information in your presentation should be allowed to interrupt and be answered immediately and as quickly as possible.

Questions asked to help solve a certain problem should be referred either to a question and answer period or to a private discussion at a later time.

It is also a good idea to repeat questions from the floor to make sure that both the question and your answer are heard by the whole audience.

Visual Aids

Visual aids, such as electronic presentations, add many effects to a presentation. People remember more what they see than what they hear.

The advantage of an electronic presentation (vs. a movie or video) is that slides give you the time you require to explain the necessary details. The disadvantage is that slides are static and you want to give a dynamic presentation; which means you must keep the visual element of your presentation lively and interesting. Many experts believe that no image should be on the screen more than 30 seconds because after 30 seconds interest wanes and after 60 seconds boredom turns to drowsiness.

Generally, only the lights at the front of the room or the immediate area of your projection screen should be extinguished. Lighting in the back of the room can usually remain on, or dimmed slightly for contrast.

We're All in the Dark

Total darkness is also conducive to sleep, especially after a heavy luncheon. There could be some point in a lengthy slide presentation where elaboration, pause, questions or discussion provides an opportunity to turn up the lights to shift more attention to what is said, rather than what is seen. Nothing is so deadly to a presentation as a speaker talking for five or ten minutes in a darkened room with a static slide which has no bearing on the discussion.

Tabular and Printed Matter

Test your text for size and legibility by placing your slide on the floor, stand up and try to read it. If you can't make out the characters, the projection will not be much better for your audience. Graphs are more interesting and effective if done in a spectrum of color. Always strive to put your most important curves or bars in red because it is the most exciting color. Above all, remove the extraneous detail such as grid lines from a graph before redrawing it.

All presentation text should have a minimum two inch font on either the flip chart or on the screen. If you can't read the image from the back of the room, it's likely because there is too much text on the screen and because the font is too small.

Always speak face to face with your audience and never talk while facing your screen or flip chart.

The Show Must Go On

Even with the best preparation, sometimes equipment will fail and contingency plans are needed. Most often, audio visual equipment will be provided to your advance specifications, but you should be prepared to use flip charts or other visual aids without blame, fuss or apology at any given moment. Try to keep the momentum and interest focused away from any problems at hand and focused on the presentation. This not only shows respect for other people's time, it is the hallmark of a professional.

Perfect Is Not Possible

Accepting an invitation for a public speaking engagement is a significant responsibility, and the guidelines in this article are intended to help ease your apprehension in this regard. It is often easier to decline an opportunity or get out of a speaking engagement than it is to create an opportunity.

Style is the by-product of experience and practice. By concentrating on experience and practice, everything else will come naturally; including style, enjoyment and rewards.

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For further information regarding starting a business, contact the

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