

Beetle Bailey and Presentation Skills

By Larry Tracy

Tracy Presentation Skills

In March 2002, the comic strip Beetle Bailey contained a valuable lesson for business presenters. As General Halftrack walked into his office, his secretary asked: "How was Lt. Fuzz's presentation?"

The General replied: "Like the Washington Monument." Puzzled, the secretary asked "The Washington Monument? General Halftrack responded, "Yeah, it took a long time to get to the point."

How often have you felt the frustration of General Halftrack because the speaker didn't "get to the point?" Worse, have people listening to your presentations been exasperated because they didn't know where you were taking them, didn't know what was your point?

An audience, whether it is one person or many, wants speakers to provide maximum relevant information, delivered in minimum time and in the clearest possible terms, centered on the needs and concerns of the audience.

Time is the defining aspect of any presentation. Few audiences have the time for a full exposition of a subject. Presenters must reduce and translate the salient data into an easily and quickly understood message.

The 3-1-2 System, the heart of my presentation skills workshop, enables presenters to organize their thoughts in the optimum manner to implant their message in the collective mind of the audience, and to Get to the Point.

Most people prepare their presentations using a 1-2-3 Method, drafting in the order of how they will deliver - (1) Opening, (2) Body and (3) Conclusion. This is the method to organize our thoughts we have been taught since elementary school.

Unfortunately, this system leads to various false starts, because the presenter is attempting to place the ten gallons of knowledge he or she has on the subject into the eight-ounce glass of the presentation.

It is definitely not flexible, and forces the presenter to make changes on the fly. This results in time-pressed presentations lacking coherence. The traditional system of organizing our thoughts is simply not geared to 21st century presentations.

Let's see how the 3-1-2 system can help you "Get to the point."

Place the 30-60 second Bottom Line of your message on a 3x5card. This phrase should result in the intersection of the audience's needs and your objective goes on this card, which you mark with a 3.

Insert in front of this phrase words that signal the close of Your presentation, such as: "So, in conclusion" or "Let me leave you with this thought." You now have the words with which you will close with "punch."

This is your closing argument, to borrow a trial lawyer's technique. This phrase can also provide you with a mini-presentation when you find that the allotted time for your presentation has been sharply reduced at the last minute.

Next, take another 3x5 card, mark it with a 1 and write an opening phrase that will cause the audience to listen because you have hit a psychological "hot button" that sends the signal "This will benefit you," or "This will keep you out of trouble." A startling statistic or an apt quotation from a well-known (to the audience) figure could also be in this opening as an attention-getter.

You might wish to include your "3 card" conclusion in your opening statement, and then inform the audience that you will now proceed to prove the validity of your conclusion.

The audience now knows where you are going, and can, in effect, open "files" on their mental desktops in order to absorb this information. Audience members will know at the outset just what is your point. They won't have to wait.

Remember that a business presentation is not a mystery novel. You want your audience to know "who shot John" right away, and then proceed to show the evidence. Above all, you want your audience to be alerted to the fact that you know what their material or psychological needs/problems are, and are prepared to provide information that addresses these concerns.

With the (3) and (1) cards filled out, you have the parameters of your presentation established. You know where you are going and can thus structure your presentation so the audience knows where you are taking them. Take a few cards, marked 2A, 2B 2C, etc. and list your supporting arguments.

The 3-1-2 System ensures that the most important information you wish the audience to retain and act upon is placed at the beginning and the end. The 3-1-2 system will help you "Get to the point," and avoid the criticism General Halftrack meted out to Lt. Fuzz.