

The Ideal Presentation

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*This article is excerpted from Larry Tracy's new Ebook, **The Shortcut to Persuasive Presentations**, available from www.booklocker.com/books/1020.html.*

I don't want to raise false hopes with the title of this article. I have delivered almost 2,000 presentations, and have yet to make one that meets the description of ideal or perfect. What I describe here, based on my experience in speaking and conducting hundreds of presentation skills workshops for corporate and government executives, are the goals which all who want to become better presenters must keep in mind as they develop their presentations.

Solve the audience's problems

The fundamental reason people listen to a presentation is to gain information that will solve a problem, fill an informational need, and give them an "edge." As a presenter, you must realize this at the outset. Attempting to impress your audience with your erudition, or with the features of your product or service, will fall on deaf ears if you do not show how this product or service will help audience members. Presenters must seek focused *intelligence* on audience members or clients. Learn the problems faced by the audience, then construct a presentation that shows how these problems can be solved.

Get to the point early

Because of the overwhelming demands on our time and the multi-tasking we are all involved in, none of us has the patience to listen to a presenter who takes a long time to *get to the point*. Your audience members want an idea of the route you are taking, and the eventual destination. If you are going to solve problems, let your listeners know up front that you know what these problems are, and let them know you have a solution.

Give audience members *presentation ammunition*

Keep in mind that everyone must present to someone higher in the corporate food chain. In a sales context, if you are presenting to a person who does not have the power to authorize a purchase, keep that person's boss in mind as you are preparing your presentation. That means your *intelligence gathering* must operate on more than one level. Without being too obvious, provide the person without the *buying decision power* with ammunition he or she can use when making your case further up the line. You'll be gaining points with this person, as you will be making him or her look smart in front of the boss.

Provide *maximum* relevant data

For the same reason that you wish to *get to the point early*, you must also avoid doing a "data dump" on your listeners. They only want information which will solve their problems. The more words and facts you present, the greater the likelihood that your essential message will be lost. Short-term memory is precisely that. As new information is presented, it tends to push the just heard information out, somewhat akin to the *First In, First Out (FIFO)* accounting method.

Present in *minimum* time

Time limits are generally set by the audience or client, and having a finite time to present is actually a benefit to the presenter. An expert on a given issue or subject, or an enthusiastic sales person, could speak for hours, a recipe for disaster. Having a time limit, however, forces the presenter to focus on providing that *maximum relevant information* keyed to solving the audience member's problems and needs. This requires a willingness to edit your own words without mercy. A rigorous practice session will give you an accurate idea of the length of your actual presentation, enabling you to pare off minutes. This editing, combined with accurate knowledge of the needs of the audiences, will make your presentation more crisp and *to the point*.

It's best to come in "under budget" on time. You will be considered efficient if you provide the relevant information in less than the time allocated. If, however, you go over the allotted time, you will be considered inefficient, and you will have stolen audience member's most valuable commodity – their time. Here's a tip. Have a colleague sit behind the audience, or in the rear of the room, and give you unobtrusive signals when you hit "three minutes left" and "one minute left." Avoid looking at your watch. Although glancing at your watch demonstrates you are sensitive to the time needs of the audience, it can also cause members of the audience to shift their attention from the substance of your presentation to the question: "*How much longer will this go on?*"

In certain scored situations, such as a proposal for venture capital, or an oral presentation for a government contract, presenters are penalized for going beyond the time limits and could easily lose the capital infusion or contract they are seeking, no matter how superior their product, service or innovative idea.

Present in *clearest* terms possible

When we wish to provide the *maximum relevant data* in *minimum time*, there is the temptation to speak rapidly, much like the Federal Express commercial of a few years ago. Nerves can also cause rapid speaking. This becomes especially critical when the information being presented is complex, and the audience needs time to absorb it. An intense practice session, in front of colleagues and, if possible, a video camera, will enable you to gauge the optimum delivery rate. Too fast can be confusing, too slow can be boring.

Follow this advice, and you'll soon be considered the "go to" person for "chips-on-the line" presentations.

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