

# TEN TIPS FOR PERSUASIVE PRESENTATIONS

by Larry Tracy

## **TIP 1: Have a specific objective**

If you don't know what you wish to accomplish with your presentation, your audience certainly won't know either.

Giving a great speech is not a purpose in itself – it is a means to an end, and the end is what you want your audience to do with the information presented. Be quite specific, and spell out your objective in no more than a sentence or two. Print it out and tape it to your computer monitor. This will keep your preparation focused and on target.

## **TIP 2: Know your audience's problems, needs and concerns**

To be successful and persuasive, presentations must be **audience-centered**. You must know the problems of your audience because your objective is to offer them a solution. This requires in-depth-research about your audience. Keep in mind – the prime motivation for people to listen to you is their perception that your presentation will benefit them. "*What's in it for me?*" is the classic question of all audiences.

## **TIP 3: Structure backwards**

We have learned to write and speak in a *1-2-3 structure*: (1) Introduction– (2) Body – (3) Conclusion. For oral presentations, this is counter-productive: In contrast to reading a book, we do not have the luxury of going back and reading again what we missed the first time. Therefore initiate your draft with your conclusion, and your presentation will be focused on merging your objective with your audience's problems, interests and concerns.

Place your conclusion on a card marked **(3)**, then develop an introduction that signals the audience that you know its problems and will be offering a solution. Place this on a card marked **(1)**. Finally place your supporting arguments on a series of cards marked **(2A)**, **(2B)**, etc. This *3-1-2 System* provides focus, structure, and thematic unity.

## **TIP 4: Practice solo with tape-recorder or video-camera**

After completing the presentation draft, practice by yourself with a **tape-recorder** or **video-camera**. You will be at your weakest in this initial practice, hence the advice to have nobody present whose comments could seriously hurt your confidence. Listen to your presentation, note the rhythm and cadence, the "*uh's*" and "*y'knows*" and other abominations, and check your mastery of the subject. If video-taping, note any off-putting mannerisms and body language, and coordinate your gesture with your vocal inflection.

## **TIP 5: Practice with colleague, friend or spouse**

After completing the solo practice session, you are ready to practice in front of another person. Choose this person carefully, as you do not want a hyper critic who will find excessive faults with your presenting style. Neither, however, do you want the obsequies person who finds no faults whatsoever, and praises you to the skies. You need honest and constructive criticism aimed at "tweaking" your presentation.

**TIP 6: Convene Murder Board practice session**

The **Murder Board** is a rigorous practice session, similar to a flight simulator training pilots how to handle in-flight emergencies: Select no more than four people to be your simulated audience, and share with them all the *intelligence* you have gained on your prospective audience. These four people will then role play your audience.

Their comments, questions and criticism help you correct your style of delivery, find the gaps in your knowledge, and anticipate questions and objections.

**TIP 7: Arrive early to meet and greet**

Personal contact and inter-personal skills are important for the success of any presentation, but they are absolutely vital when you attempt to persuade people to adopt your opinion, agree with you on an issue, or buy the product you are selling. We tend to accept information from people we like, but reject it from people we don't like.

Arrive early so you can get to know members of the audience and they can relate to you as a human being. If appropriate, mention names during your presentation of people you have had the occasion to meet prior to your presentation.

**TIP 8: Use visuals to support, not to impress**

Visual aids, including the ubiquitous PowerPoint, can make or break a presentation. The advantage of using them is that most people are visual and can more readily absorb information that is graphically presented. The disadvantage, especially with PowerPoint, is that the slides can become a crutch, and excessive use of such slides, with all the "bells and whistles," can be distracting and confusing. The bottom line is to not allow the wonders of PowerPoint to be remembered, while the substance of the presentation is forgotten.

**TIP 9: Employ rhetorical devices**

Repetition of key concepts, the careful use of the strategic pause, and parallel construction are just a few of the devices you can use to add spice and cadence to your presentation.

Two examples of such techniques will illustrate this important tactic. Winston Churchill, instead of saying "*We in Britain owe a great debt to the pilots of the Royal Air Force,*" expressed this thought with the memorable words "*Never in the field of human conflict have so many owed so much to so few.*" President John F. Kennedy used a classic device when he said, "*We must never negotiate out of fear, but we must never fear to negotiate.*"

Use your imagination to see how you can arrange words to create such cadence and rhythm.

**TIP 10: Conduct immediate post-presentation analysis**

Our instinct after completing a challenging presentation is to breath a sigh of relief and relax. Big mistake. Within minutes, sit down with a note pad or tape recorder and record the questions asked, the reaction of the audience to your presentation, your impression of your own performance, etc. Don't wait until the next day. Short term memory is precisely that, and you will remember only generalities. The immediate analysis will provide specifics.

Transfer this specific information to your data base, and you have an excellent head start to use in the **Murder Board** leading to your next presentation.