10 Simple Strategies to Improve Your Presentation Skills . . . Today

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Your personal and professional success often depends on your ability to communicate effectively, but preparing and polishing a presentation can be stressful. Even experienced presenters are sometimes unsure about how to take their presentation skills to the next level. Here are 10 simple strategies you can use to dramatically reduce the amount of time it takes to prepare a new presentation, improve presentations you’re already giving and keep your audience spellbound.

1. Plan Your Purpose.

Before you create a new presentation (or when you review an existing presentation), ask yourself, “What’s my purpose for giving this presentation?” Is your goal to persuade, to inspire, to inform or to entertain? The content, stories and examples you use will be dramatically different depending on your purpose. Generally, it’s difficult to have more than one central purpose, so choose carefully.

2. Select Strong Supporting Arguments.

Make sure the body of your speech consists of the strongest examples and stories that prove your central argument. Also, make sure that you aren’t taking any leaps of logic as you try to prove your point. Write down the main ideas of your presentation and list all the possible examples and stories you could use for each point. Then select the most appropriate supporting material.

3. Remember Show and Tell.

The old sales adage, “telling is not selling,” also applies to presentations. You are most effective at selling your ideas when you SHOW the audience what you mean. Don’t say, “we can solve your problem.” Instead say, “John Doe had this same problem until he called us,” and then elaborate. Your stories, analogies and examples will make your points more interesting, more memorable and break the monotony of what could easily turn into a lecture.

4. Put PowerPoint In Its Place.

Have you ever experienced “death by PowerPoint”? While no person has actually died from this experience, too much technology is the death of your message and any chance to meet your presentation objectives. Ask yourself if you really need a visual aid. If you do, remember that there are other options available to you: flip charts, handouts, and overhead projectors (yes, they still exist) among many others. Whatever you choose, remember to connect with the audience before engaging technology, and that PowerPoint and visual aids serve you and not vice versa.

5. Use The Magic Word.

No, it isn’t “please.” In presenting, the magic word is “you.” When you review your presentation, make your sentences more “you-focused.” It will automatically ensure that your comments address the audience’s needs. Instead of saying, “I’m going to tell you,” say, “You will learn.” You will also become more conversational and connect with the audience better. Instead of saying, “People can improve their presentations by using the magic word,” say, “You can instantly improve your presentations by using the magic word.” See the difference?
6. Create Commercial Breaks.

If you are giving a long presentation, keep the audience’s attention by changing the pace at regular intervals. Audiences are easily bored when presentations continue in the same mode for too long. As with TV commercial breaks (or perhaps because of them), we expect variety. Evaluate your presentations and identify different ways to express your ideas through speaking, audience participation, visual aids or exercises. Then sprinkle them throughout your presentation to provide commercial breaks for your audience.


When you meet a new person, how long does it take you to form an impression? If you’re like most people, it takes less than a minute. This same evaluation process happens when you’re speaking. That’s why you should craft a powerful, attention-grabbing opening. If you can, it’s best to memorize the opening and speak without notes. And, PLEASE, never start your speech with an apology no matter what the circumstances.

8. Control Your Conclusion.

Your opening is important because it sets the tone of your talk; but your close is equally, if not more, important because it’s the part of your presentation that the audience remembers most. Handle any housekeeping items (next steps, question-and-answer sessions, or information about what’s next on the agenda) BEFORE you close. That way, the last thing the audience will hear are your most important points and call to action. If you can, you should memorize your closing as well.


Many presenters mistakenly try to share too much information. At best, these presenters merely bore their audiences. At worst, the extra content acts as a decoy that distracts the audience and de-emphasizes the important points. In presenting, less is more. Edit your presentations ruthlessly and make sure you are sharing only information that directly relates to your central purpose.


The audience doesn’t want perfection; they want connection. And that’s a good thing because there is no such thing as a “perfect” performance. However, when you connect with people on a personal level, the audience will forgive minor problems. Remember that everyone comes to your presentation expecting you to succeed. Keep that in mind during your presentation and don’t forget to breathe.

Preparing a presentation is a process and if you follow these 10 simple strategies, you can improve your presentation skills today.