

Pain-free Presentations

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25 million meetings take place in corporate America DAILY. The average worker sits through almost 1,000 hours of presentations each year. Those are staggering numbers! Unfortunately, a lot of that time is wasted because the individuals doing the talking aren't good presenters. So, what can we do to make presentations pain-free? Read further and find out...

Have you ever walked into a meeting room and known from the first minute that you were in deep trouble? The speaker is nervous. The audience is asleep. Rather than presenting the facts and talking about them, everyone suffers through an hour of boring slides with bouncing bullet points, fade-ins and bizarre animations. Most companies are cramming more and more meetings into our workdays. That makes it all the more important to communicate creatively and effectively so that those precious hours aren't wasted.

Let's start by examining the top mistakes that most presenters make:

1. Reading directly from slides or papers
2. Talking too quickly
3. Speaking in a monotone voice
4. Covering too much information
5. Fidgeting and odd movements

Listen, folks... Whether it's a 'business meeting' or not, we all want to be entertained and engaged! Our society is fast-paced and people have split-second attention spans. In order to get your point across and benefit your organization, you have to step up your performance. Let's start by directly addressing some techniques to help you avoid the top five presenting mistakes.

Don't read your material. Remember that when you start reading to people, they automatically think 'Heck, she could have just emailed this out and let us read it on our own!' If you're presenting on a subject, you should know enough about it to speak knowledgably in a natural manner. If you don't know what you're talking about - you shouldn't be up in front of the group to begin with. So, practice enough to deliver the majority of your presentation without reading, and trust yourself to speak comfortably within your area of expertise.

Your physical presence when presenting is immensely powerful. Information alone will not hold people's attention. Make a point of curbing your bad habits and nurturing some new ones. Fast talking is usually due to nervousness. Also, we tend to read faster than we speak, so reading your material will be an added incentive to rush through your presentation. Slow down, enunciate, and don't be afraid to allow pauses. Presenting should alter your natural speech patterns to help you communicate effectively with a larger group. Monotone is fine sometimes, but in a group it puts people to sleep. So, when presenting, be animated, allow your voice to rise and fall, show excitement, smile, make eye contact, and add extra inflection to what you are saying to keep the audience's attention. And for heaven's sake do something sensible with your hands! No weird gestures, no arm and leg crossing, no twitching, etc... Move smoothly and evenly in front of the group, use your arm motions to engage the audience and hold something in your hands if you're prone to fidget.

One hour can seem like a long time on paper, but you can't really cover massive amounts of data in a short time span. Take the time before you start preparing to figure out what you absolutely have to express. Don't cram slides with paragraphs of information, charts and graphs. Don't hurry through 30 topics in one session. Keep it simple. Believe me; your audience will thank you.

There are three elements to presenting: the **POINT**, the **PIAZZ** and the **PERSONAL TOUCH**. Each one is critical and none can carry a presentation alone.

THE POINT

Decide what the purpose of your presentation is and what leading points you need to cover to support your main point. This is an important part of speech preparation, but it's not the only part. Unfortunately, most speakers spend all their time on the subject matter and no time on their delivery.

THE PIAZZ

Every point you want to make has to be memorable and entertaining. Even if you're presenting sales numbers or talking about a new inventory management system, you have to engage the audience to be effective. Tell stories, use humor, bring props, explain examples – do anything you have to in order to make your presentation shine.

THE PERSONAL TOUCH

How are you going to deliver your message? Think about the size of the group, the arrangement of the room and the resources you will be referencing. Consciously plan your movements, tone of voice and gestures to match the subject matter and the people who will be listening to you. Use images, talk about real interactions and share emotions to keep the group interested in what you have to say.

It doesn't appear that the number of meetings is going to decrease in the near future. If most of us are going to sit through 500 – 1,000 hours of presentations each year, we might as well make them good! So draw on these ideas, practice your delivery and make your next presentation pain-free.