

# 10

Chapter

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## Communications and Presentations

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**P**resentations can range from a short talk before a small group of acquaintances or colleagues to a lengthy speech to a group of strangers. No matter the audience or the setting, formal or informal, small or large, the best presentations leave the audience informed and interested. They want to know more about the subject matter and often have insightful comments and questions for the presenter. A bad presentation, in contrast, leaves the audience confused or bored and often makes them wonder why they wasted their time. A poor presentation detracts from the importance of the subject matter and can be detrimental to the reputation of the presenter.

In addition to length and format, presentations can also vary in style. The main purpose of a presentation is to communicate ideas and information. Effective means of communicating ideas and information can also vary and may include persuasion, instruction, inspiration, or entertainment.

Regardless of length, format, or purpose, presentations are an important and useful tool in all aspects of business. Given their importance, it is surprising that few classes are available on how to present

more effectively. All too often associates are assigned the task of “giving a presentation” and then left to their own devices. No wonder so many individuals list public speaking as their greatest fear.

This chapter will assist you in becoming a better presenter by providing you with knowledge about the processes of developing an effective presentation style and format. This is accomplished by asking important questions and providing useful tips that will help in examining the different stages of the presentation process.

## **TO PRESENT OR NOT TO PRESENT**

The first and most important question is whether this presentation is a choice or a requirement. If it is a choice you need to ask yourself some important questions before agreeing to present. Preparing for a presentation takes time. A rough estimate for an effective presentation is that it takes 30 to 60 minutes of preparation for each minute of delivery. Do you have enough focused time prior to the presentation to properly prepare? In addition, are you interested, excited, and sufficiently knowledgeable about the subject matter to deliver an effective and enthusiastic presentation? If the answer to either of these questions is a clear “no,” you should seriously consider turning down the offer to present.

## **BEFORE THE PRESENTATION**

Some time spent in planning will pay off. Not only will the presentation be better prepared, the planning process will increase your confidence and be reflected in a more convincing presentation performance.

### ***Define the Parameters***

Knowing the parameters beforehand will limit uncertainties and surprises and make you better prepared to deliver a targeted, informative, and interesting presentation. The most important parameters are topic and theme, time, program, preservation, audience, place, and questions. Some of these parameters can be determined prior to the presen-

tation. More than likely one or two of the later ones will change slightly by the day of the presentation. It is important shortly before the presentation to redefine the parameters to make sure that none of the changes will dramatically affect your presentation.

**Topic and Theme.** What will you be talking about? Will you be providing a general overview of this topic or highlights of recent activities? Where do you want to go in your presentation of this material?

**Time.** How much time do you have to make your presentation? It is a simple question to ask, but all too often a presenter finds himself or herself a number on the agenda or a name on the program. There may be a general sense that the talk will take 10 minutes or an hour, but no specifics are provided.

**Program.** Will there be other speakers presenting? How will the information in your presentation compare or contrast with the topics covered by other speakers? What is the order of the presentations? Are you expected to provide an exciting introduction to the program or a comprehensive summary?

**Preservation.** In the age of digital camcorders and cable television, presentations are often recorded or televised for future viewing or public consumption. If you think this could be the case with your presentation, ask. If your presentation is being taped, you should ask for a copy. This will be a valuable resource for reviewing your presentation and your presentation style. It will serve as a useful tool if you are asked to give a similar presentation at a later date.

**Audience.** To whom will you be presenting? Giving a talk about trees to a group of executives in the lumber industry would be significantly different from giving the same talk to the members of an environmental group. Research your audience beforehand. What is their background and how knowledgeable are they about your subject matter? What are they expecting from the presentation and how can you add value to their experience? Are they expecting to be informed, amused, or challenged? How many individuals are expected to attend your presentation? If you are presenting to a group or an organization,

especially one with which you are unfamiliar, take a few moments to find out more about it. Simple and useful information can often be found on the organization's web site or in one of its recent newsletters. What issues are most important to the members? If the group often hosts presenters, look for references to past presenters. What did these presenters talk about, and how were they received?

**Place.** Where is the presentation going to take place? How are the acoustics of the space? What audio-video resources are available at this location? Will you be able to connect your laptop to the audio-video system at this location or will you need to load your program onto a computer already at the site? Will there be someone there to assist you with audio-video equipment? Will there be a stage, podium, microphone, table, chairs? Will the audience be seated facing you, or will they be seated around dinner tables? (If possible try to avoid big gaps between you and the audience. Make the setting as intimate as possible.) If you are using a screen for your presentation, where will this screen be located? (Try to get the screen set off to the side rather than in the center of the stage or on a back wall. This will allow you to reference it more easily and move around the stage more comfortably.)

**Question-and-Answer Component.** Will there be questions at the end of the presentation? Will there be a moderator to take questions or will you be expected to handle them yourself? If there are several presenters, will questions be taken at the end of your presentation or after all the presenters have spoken?

### ***Purpose***

Knowing your topic and theme is obviously important in delivering an effective presentation. Knowing why you are presenting, however, is equally important. After taking the time to analyze the audience and assess their needs, decide how these needs can best be met. Four common purposes for a presentation include persuasion, instruction, inspiration, and entertainment. Persuasion is a method for bringing an audience around to your point of view. Instruction is used to share basic information about your topic. Inspiration is effective when used during a change of process, procedure, or direction. Entertainment

lightens the mood. Often these purposes are used to varying degrees in a presentation. The important point is that in preparing for your presentation you take a moment to think about what purpose is the most important and effective for your presentation and your audience. To help determine the purpose of your presentation, ask yourself what you want people in the audience to do as a result of having heard your presentation. What concepts do you want your audience to leave with?

### ***Preparing Your Presentation***

As mentioned earlier, for an effective presentation you can expect to spend 30 to 60 minutes of preparation time for each minute of delivery. This means that to deliver a one-hour presentation, one can expect 30 to 60 hours of preparation. This is realistic given the research, preparation, and practice that must go into developing effective presentation materials.

In the current business environment it is often difficult to find time to focus on any one particular project. Interruptions are common, and it always takes a little extra time to mentally reengage and focus on what you were previously doing. If you want to give an engrossing presentation you need to dedicate your full attention to your presentation. Schedule an appointment with yourself well ahead of your presentation date to make sure that time will be available. Forward your calls, turn off your cell phone and pager, resist the urge to check your e-mail, and put a Do Not Disturb sign on your door. Sometimes the best approach is to find a location to work on your presentation outside of your normal office environment.

**Materials.** After you have taken time to define the parameters and ask some important questions about the topic and purpose, it is time to begin assembling materials for your presentation. This process involves several steps including collection, organization, writing an outline and rough draft, editing and then reviewing the draft.

1. *Collection.* Pull together information that you think best suits your topic while addressing the purpose of your presentation. What information do you have on hand? Is there any information that is out of date or needs to be supplemented with

additional materials? Is there anyone who may be able to provide you with further useful information?

2. *Organization.* Go through the materials you have collected and sort them into groups based on themes and topics.
3. *Outline and rough draft.* Develop a rough outline of your presentation. What topics and themes are appropriate for the beginning, middle, and end of your presentation? Expand on your outline to develop a rough draft of your presentation. Remember, this is a rough draft. Try to determine what are going to be the key points of your presentation. Write several sentences addressing each of the themes and topics contained in your outline. Try to identify at least five key points. More than seven key points is an indication that you may be trying to convey too much information in your presentation. Does starting with these key points, in light of your overall theme and purpose, succinctly tell your audience what you are going to say? Taken together do they successfully summarize your presentation?
4. *Editing.* For many novice presenters, this part of the presentation process receives the least attention. Given time and energy constraints, one may decide to wing it with a rough draft in hand. For most, however, taking the time to edit the rough draft will be well worth the time and effort. It makes the difference between a fair presentation and an excellent one. Editing the rough draft is best begun by letting a bit of time to pass between the writing and the editing. This allows for a fresh approach. In the editing process think about how the presentation can move from the written to the spoken word. This can be done by simplifying and solidifying the text. Cut unnecessary ideas and words, remove or clarify any jargon, and shorten sentences. In addition, support your ideas with anecdotes and examples. At the end of this process you should have a written copy of what you'd like to say in your presentation and how you'd like to say it.
5. *Review.* Take the time to thoroughly review your edited draft. Read though it out loud several times. If possible do this in front of friends or colleagues. Ask them for criticism and feed-

back on delivery, content, and style. Is the length appropriate for the time allotted? Are the ideas conveyed clearly? Are the overall theme and purpose maintained?

### ***Preparing for Delivery***

Once the material has been pulled into a spoken format that stays true to the theme and purpose of the presentation, it is time to refine the delivery process. This can be done through the identification of key words and phrases, the selection of appropriate presentation aids, rehearsal, and preparing for questions.

**Keys to an Effective Delivery.** One of the most important keys to a successful presentation is eye contact. With a written draft in hand, some presenters will keep their eyes glued to the printed page and neglect to make eye contact with their audience. Unless you are delivering a very formal address or speaking to the press, sticking to the exact words of the draft can be unnecessary and stifling. For a more spontaneous and original approach, which involves more eye contact with the audience, it is useful to identify key words and phrases in the draft. These prompts will be the basis of your draft or your visual aids. Stepping away from the script, rehearse your presentation using these prompts. What do these key words and phrases convey? How do they fit into the presentation as a whole? Transfer these prompts to index cards and practice giving your presentation using these cards. Work toward linking these prompts together in your mind and using fewer and fewer of the cards. Continue practicing this process.

**Presentation Aids.** Even though the rough draft developed from the materials you collected is the main structure of your presentation, there are a variety of aids that can be used to support your topic, theme, and purpose. These include computer-generated graphics, multimedia, and overhead transparencies. There is nothing more disconcerting, however, than a presentation with poor presentation aids. Instead of supporting your presentation, they detract from it by drawing the audience's attention away from what you are saying. A Microsoft PowerPoint slide with a solid paragraph of text will accomplish

one of two things: It will either put the audience immediately to sleep or pull all eyes to the screen for the next five minutes as people carefully try to comprehend the meaning of the words before them. Use presentation aids to support the presentation and encourage conversation between the audience and the presenter. Make sure to have a printed copy of each of your visual presentation aids in case there are problems with technology and you need to refer to an important number or point. Regardless of which aids you use in your presentation, it is important that all aids meet the following criteria:

- ✓ Fit with the script you have developed from your rough draft. They should either summarize or add value to what you are saying at a particular point in your presentation.
- ✓ Flow with the script. Do the aids fit smoothly together with the topic, theme, and purpose as they develop in your script?
- ✓ Are they appropriate for the size and type of audience and the venue where the presentation is taking place? Does an informal audience of five need a multimedia presentation?
- ✓ Look clear, readable, and consistent from all places in the room where the presentation is to take place.
- ✓ Display content simply and effectively. Cluttered and complex slides take attention away from your presentation.
- ✓ Use appropriate graphics such as drawings, charts, and graphics to support a particular point or issue.

Remember that the main structure of the presentation is the script, not the presentation aids. The simpler, clearer, and more precise you can make your presentation aids, the more effective they will be in supporting your topic, theme, and purpose. If you have questions about the quality and clarity of any presentations aids, rehearse your presentation for a trusted colleague, friend, or family member and ask for constructive feedback and criticism.

**What's the Point of PowerPoint?** Advances in technology have increased the percentage of information we receive visually. This has been especially true since Microsoft brought PowerPoint into our lives and dramatically changed the nature of presentations. Microsoft re-

leased PowerPoint in 1987 and since then over 400 million copies have been installed on computers worldwide. Estimates are that it is used in approximately 30 million presentations each day. Some people are now surprised if they attend a presentation and PowerPoint is not part of the program. Many of us, however, look forward to a PowerPoint presentation with all the excitement of a root canal. A dark room, a blue background with white lettering, and we struggle to stay awake and wonder what all that information was about that was flashed up on the screen only minutes ago. PowerPoint is not a required element of a presentation, but it can be a useful tool. Remember, it's not the slides themselves that are the problem so much as it is the content of the slides and how well the presenter uses them.

One of the biggest problems with PowerPoint is that although some organizations encourage its use there is rarely any emphasis on teaching people how to use it effectively. In addition, some companies and organizations require the use of a particular template or insist that the organization's logo be present on each slide. This results in poorly designed and ineffective presentation aids that detract from a presenter's ability to establish a personal relationship with the audience. Some of these problems can be dealt with, while others must be worked around.

One way to counter these problems is to focus on PowerPoint basics rather than on text animation, clip art, video clips, and colorful backgrounds. The more complex a presentation, the more likely it will upstage the presenter. To keep slides visually simple, use a limit of six words to one line and five lines to a slide. Also use no more than three colors per slide.

PowerPoint should be used to provide a map of what you are talking about and to help provide context for the rest of your presentation. Don't use PowerPoint as a surrogate for your speech. PowerPoint is not a teleprompter. In fact, putting less material on a slide can provide a unique opportunity for discussion, but make sure that you know the material you are presenting so as to fill in the details. When working with the program make sure that you know the technology well: What cable goes where? How do you advance a slide? These questions should be answered before you enter the room. Use the "Notes" view of PowerPoint to write out what you'd like to say in your presentation. This will serve as a valuable check in making sure that

what is shown on the slide directly relates to what you are saying. In addition, it preserves a more detailed copy of your presentation to share with others or to review at a later date. Don't spend too much time on PowerPoint, though, especially if you are not an expert with the program; time can be better spent working with the core materials of your presentation and rehearsing your delivery. Minimize the number of slides you use in a presentation. The fewer slides the better. If there is additional material that needs to be shared, use handouts. Learn to use the "B" key, which will black out the screen, giving your audience a chance to shift their focus away from the screen and back to the most important part of the presentation: you.

If you are comfortable with PowerPoint and feel that your presentation of the basics is sufficiently covered, take a step or two away from the bullet point format presented in the PowerPoint templates. Alternatives do exist, and these can add meaning and depth to your presentation. Some examples of these are the use of PowerPoint's text boxes, diagramming tools, and AutoShapes. If you want to use more graphics in your presentation, PowerPoint makes it easy to add images—a chart, table, or diagram. Think about symbols and analogies that can be used to emphasize your point.

**Rehearsal.** Similar to the process of editing the rough draft mentioned before, rehearsal is another part of the presentation process that is often skipped over. With a script, a few prompts, and some clever presentation aids, some presenters are ready to go. Once again, however, taking the time to rehearse the presentation will prove worthwhile in the long run. It will smooth over rough patches, reveal areas that may need further attention, and make you more comfortable about delivering the presentation. Rehearsing in front of others can be particularly beneficial and can bring up certain things that may have been overlooked earlier, such as a lack of eye contact, forgetting to smile, putting your hands in your pockets, or turning your back to the audience. If you want to make sure you are mindful of these issues during your presentation, write them down on an index card and place the card in front of you during your presentation.

During the rehearsal process take a moment to reflect on the style and content of your delivery. Does your presentation stay focused and avoid wandering off on tangents? Does it deliver a clear message to

your audience? Don't be afraid to fine-tune your presentation in order to address some of these issues. This will help maintain the focus and attention of your audience.

**Preparing for Questions.** Try to anticipate some of the questions your audience might ask. How can these questions be answered referencing your presentation or your visual aids? Are there any questions that might require a bit more research on your part?

### ***The Eleventh Hour***

After defining the parameters, developing a script, and preparing the delivery, the time will finally come to give the presentation. There are several important things to think of in the hours before this moment arrives. To cover any last-minute problems, you should redefine the parameters, check yourself, double-check your materials, and arrive early.

**Revisit the Presentation Parameters.** As mentioned earlier, some of the parameters can be determined prior to the presentation; others will change slightly by the day of the presentation. It is important to take another look at the parameters to make sure that none of the changes will dramatically affect your presentation. Review the parameters and address any concerns or problems. Have there been any changes in the program or agenda? Has your presentation been moved in the program? Will someone be introducing you? Who is that person, and does he or she need anything from you prior to your introduction? Will someone be asking audience members to turn off their cell phones and pagers? You should request this if possible.

Another parameter that often changes the day of the presentation is the size of the audience, which will have a lot to do with how you choose to address the formality and style of your presentation. For small groups of 5 to 10, the presentation will often be informal. You can remain seated and work to develop a more personal relationship with your audience members. For an audience containing between 10 and 30 individuals, it is still possible to develop relationships, but the style will probably be more formal. With an audience of this size, visual presentation aids become useful. When the audi-

ence size is closer to 100, good presentation aids will become even more useful. An audience of this size will increase formality further and make it more difficult to develop personal relationships. When the audience size surpasses 100, your presentation will be more of a performance. It is best to use a microphone and try to exaggerate facial gestures and arm movements.

Changes and difficulties at the location of your presentation can be a real headache. Give yourself at least a couple of hours before the presentation to double-check the audio-video resources available at the location. Are they working? Are you still able to connect your laptop computer to the audio-video system? Do you need to load your presentation program onto an on-site computer? Do all of your computer-based audiovisuals run smoothly with the projector? Will you be using a remote to advance your slides? Who will help you with the audio-video equipment if there are any problems? In addition, find out exactly where you will be presenting in the room. Where should you be prior to your presentation? Will a glass of water be available? Where are the restrooms?

**Speaker's Podium and Its Use.** A podium has always been a central fixture of lecture halls and auditoriums. For the most part, if there is a podium in the room a presenter will often be drawn to it like a magnet. This is not always for the best. Although a podium can provide a sense of authority and a convenient place to rest one's water glass, it can also serve as a barrier and hinder one's efforts to connect with an audience. If a podium is present and there is a convener for the meeting, ask where presenters are expected to deliver their presentations. If the choice is up to you, think about the size and nature of your audience. With a smaller, less formal group, step away from the podium so that you can develop personal and individual relationships with your audience members. With a larger, more formal audience, a podium can serve as a means to minimize stage fright and help the audience focus on the presenter.

**Speaking Attire.** What are you going to wear for your presentation? With all the thought you have put into preparing what you will say and how you will say it, it is possible that this item has been sidelined until the last minute. The most important thing

to keep in mind is that your choice of attire should not detract from the message you are delivering. Dressing conservatively and neatly will convey the professionalism of your presentation. In the minutes before your presentation make sure to double-check your appearance. And did you remember to turn off your cell phone and pager? In general when planning on what to wear for your presentation, consider these questions and the following list of do's and don'ts from the Executive Communications Group at <http://ecglink.com>.

### *Clothing "Do's"*

- ✓ Always look professional.
- ✓ Dress for the audience, the circumstance, the corporate culture, and yourself.
- ✓ Wear clothes that fit.
- ✓ Make sure your clothes are pressed.
- ✓ Keep jackets buttoned (formal).
- ✓ Err on the side of conservative.
- ✓ Keep your hair neat and trimmed.
- ✓ No hair in eyes.
- ✓ For women: simple manicure, conservative makeup.
- ✓ Mild (or no) fragrances.
- ✓ Ties should be conservative and reach the middle of your belt buckle.
- ✓ Lace-up shoes (usually black) with a suit.
- ✓ A traditional starched business shirt, preferably white cotton with a suit.
- ✓ Shirts with a simple collar and cuffs.
- ✓ A formal but simple watch.
- ✓ Hair, usually parted to one side, not reaching the top of your shirt collar.
- ✓ Over-the-calf socks for men; hosiery should be skin color or darker for women.

*Clothing “Don’ts”*

- ✓ Wear clothes that talk louder than you do.
- ✓ Undo multiple buttons on your shirt or blouse.
- ✓ Wear clothing that no longer fits.
- ✓ Wear wrinkled clothing.
- ✓ Use fabrics that have a noticeable sheen.
- ✓ Let hair fall in your face or obscure your eyebrows.
- ✓ Have a hair style that requires continual adjustment.
- ✓ Use a fragrance that smells from a distance.
- ✓ Wear an ID badge when you’re presenting.
- ✓ Wear busy patterns.
- ✓ Wear garish ties.
- ✓ Sport untrimmed facial hair (in some organizations, any facial hair can be career-inhibiting).
- ✓ Wear shiny tie pins or clips or big belt buckles.
- ✓ Wear visible jewelry (other than a watch and/or a single simple ring).
- ✓ Wear distracting lapel pins for men, or dangles, bangles, or anything noisy for women.
- ✓ Leave top shirt button open with a tie.
- ✓ Wear short-sleeved dress shirts.
- ✓ Wear short socks.
- ✓ Wear loafers with a suit for men, or open-toe or ultrahigh-heel shoes for women.

**Other Appearance Considerations.** Your audience should be able to see your eyes clearly and easily. If you wear glasses, consider an antiglare coating for the lenses, which makes it easier to see your eyes. Avoid any tint (unless medically necessary) and avoid heavy frames that can obscure your eyes. Any perfume, cologne, or perfumed grooming product should not be noticeable at normal business proximity. This means that you can exit the elevator and no one entering should be able to guess that you were there. Also, if you will be in a

health care setting, you should not wear anything scented because colognes can aggravate certain medical conditions and allergies.

### ***Importance of Backup Plans and Preplanning***

Do not make the mistake of leaving an important presentation aid behind at your home or office. Put the materials you will need for your presentation in a separate and secure location. Check them carefully the day before and the morning of your presentation to make sure that nothing is missing or broken. Bring a backup copy of your visual aids in a folder or on a CD in case something happens to the originals. Are there any handouts you want to provide to your audience during or after your presentation? If so, make sure that you have more than enough copies available well in advance of the presentation day. Do you have that index card of what to be mindful of when presenting (such as looking your audience in the eye)?

In order to do a last-minute check of the parameters, arrive early. Knowing that the audio-video equipment and your laptop are working will put your mind at rest and add to your confidence about your presentation. Take a minute to look over your notes and run through your key words and phrases. In addition, and if it is appropriate given the size and formality of your audience, playing host before your presentation can be a good way to begin developing a relationship with your audience. Greet audience members individually as they arrive, and ask people if they are comfortable in their seats and can see the screen. Developing a personal relationship with your audience in this way will also help alleviate some of your stage fright.

## **DELIVERING THE PRESENTATION**

The time has finally come to take the stage. There are a couple of important steps that can be taken to engage your audience and make your presentation informative and interesting. To overcome stage fright, remember that for most situations the audience wants the speaker to succeed. The audience is there because they want to hear what you have to say. Once you have been introduced to the audience, take a moment to establish your presence. This is not very difficult, but it

does involve patience and a bit of confidence. It is done by taking a deep breath, looking your audience in the eye, relaxing your frame, and, most importantly, smiling.

### ***The Introduction***

Even if someone has already taken the time to introduce you, it is helpful to take a moment to introduce yourself. This will quickly clarify a couple of important points. It lets your audience know who you are, what you have come to speak to them about, and what credentials you possess to speak on this subject. This also shapes the audience's expectations of your presentation.

The best presentations are engaging as well as informative. In order to engage the audience, you need to begin developing a relationship. Get your audience's attention by showing them that you understand their concerns and issues, that you are aware of their expectations, and that you respect their opinions. You can do this by asking an engaging question, doing something unexpected, or showing them a unique visual aid. This not only serves to break the ice but also shifts some of the attention from you back to the audience. One of the most effective tools for developing a relationship with your audience is to tell a story. This is not always easy, but an engaging story that is relevant to your presentation will get your audience's attention quickly and effectively.

Sometimes, especially during a long presentation, the audience's attention might begin to drift. Don't hesitate to take a break during your presentation at an appropriate point. A five-minute break can do wonders for reviving your audience. You might even plan for a break during the initial stages of planning your presentation.

It is important to remember that when you are developing a relationship you need to be yourself. Use your emotion as well as the raw information contained in your presentation to convey your message. Having a sense of conviction about what you are saying will serve not only to strengthen your relationship with the audience, but also to alleviate some of the initial stage fright you might feel.

Sometimes, through no fault of your own, you will find yourself in front of an unresponsive audience. It could be due to the poor quality of previous presenters or the fact that attendance was mandatory.

Perhaps it's just that it's 7 A.M. on a Monday morning after a three-day weekend. Regardless of the cause, no matter what you try, the audience refuses to display any emotion about your presentation. In this case it's best to face facts and move on. Focus on your material and speak passionately and convincingly. Remember that just because the audience as a whole was cold and unresponsive, this is not necessarily true about the individuals that make up the audience. Given another time or space and some one-on-one contact, you may find that members of the audience were receptive to the topic, theme, and purpose of your presentation.

### ***Body and Voice***

Having conviction in what you are saying will be conveyed not only in the words you use, but also in the way you stand and the way you speak. In establishing your presence you took a deep breath, relaxed a bit, and smiled. This process is meant to prepare your body and voice for the task ahead. During the presentation your stance should be erect and focused. Your feet should be shoulder-width apart and your weight should be balanced. Remember to keep your hands out of your pockets and look your audience in the eye. If you have your index card in front of you, you won't make the mistake of forgetting this during your presentation. Avoid turning your back to your audience, don't lean casually against a podium or table, and don't fidget with clothing or jewelry. Your casual stance can come across as disinterested, unprepared, and disrespectful. This is not the impression you want to leave your audience with after the presentation is finished.

If you are having trouble looking your audience in the eye, look just over the head of the person sitting in the last row. In this way it will seem to people in the audience that you are looking directly at them. Another option is to look at the center of people's faces rather than at their eyes. You can also select a few people around the room you feel comfortable making eye contact with and focus on them. Choose the option that best suits your comfort level.

In addition to a straight and focused posture, your body language should also be positive and as natural as possible. When you are trying to share important information with family members or friends, how do you approach them? Do you move around and use hand gestures

and facial expressions? Do you sometimes smile and laugh? Use this same approach with your audience. It will convey to them that you are confident, sincere, and respectful.

If you are uncertain about your posture and body language during your presentation, make a video recording of yourself during your rehearsals. Watch the video and keep an eye out for poor posture or body language and any tendencies that might detract from the focus of your presentation.

To be truly effective, however, an erect and confident posture combined with a positive and natural manner must be accompanied by an effective use of voice. One of the biggest problems that people experience when giving a presentation is that they begin speaking very quickly. The material rushes by in a blur and the audience is left squinting at the visual aids trying to figure out exactly what was said. Speaking quickly also has a tendency to raise the pitch of your voice and wear you out quickly. There are a few steps that can be taken to guard against the tendency to speak too quickly. First, take a deep breath and relax. Breathing normally will help pace your speech. Second, listen to yourself. Do you seem to be rushing your sentences? Do you feel short of breath? Is the tone of your voice rising? If so, slow down, work on lowering your voice, and take a breath. Third, if, despite forewarning and practice, you still find yourself speaking too quickly, get a trusted colleague, friend, or family member to sit in the front row during your presentation. Visually check in with that person every couple of minutes and have him give you a subtle hand gesture if you need to slow down.

Another problem people often experience when giving a presentation is hesitating and saying “um” or “er” when they have lost their train of thought. A better approach is to pause, take a breath, and refocus. Be conscious of whether or not you have these tendencies. If you are unsure, make a recording of yourself giving your presentation. While listening to the recording, follow along in your rough script. How often do you hear yourself say “um” or “er”? Are there certain places in your presentation where you have more trouble than others? Be aware of these problems and work to correct them.

An additional and important element to consider in regard to the use of your body and voice during your presentation is variation. This is part of the process of conveying emotion to your audience. While re-

hearing your presentation, think about ways to change your body language or voice to convey the importance of particular material. Change the speed and tone of your voice and use inflections and emphasis. One of the most effective ways of making a point during a presentation is the use of silence. After making a particularly important point or summarizing several previous points, pause for a moment and allow the audience to absorb and reflect on what you have said. Vary gestures and other body language to convey similar messages.

### ***Humor***

The use of humor in your presentation is a great way to further build on your relationship with the audience and lighten and vary the mood. Make sure you are confident in your use of humor and use it to support points in your presentation. Confident, relevant, and natural are the qualities you want to project to your audience. Avoid using humor to belittle or make fun of people in the audience. It will detract from the theme, topic, and purpose of your presentation. As the presenter, you are the only legitimate target for humor in the room.

### ***Expect the Unexpected***

As Dwight D. Eisenhower once said, “In preparing for battle I have always found that plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.” Despite the importance and necessity of all the planning and practicing you have done in order to deliver a successful presentation, learn to expect the unexpected. This requires flexibility both in the way you relate to your audience as well as in the way you deliver your presentation. When mistakes happen, and they will, don’t try to ignore them; this just makes them more obvious. Acknowledge them, deal with them, and move on. This can be done by deflecting them or countering them with the use of light humor. Don’t, however, be overly sensitive to mistakes. In many cases the mistake may be small enough that the audience may not have even noticed it.

A level of flexibility should also be present in the delivery of your presentation. A presenter who is too polished, overly confident, or too prepared can alienate an audience. Be sensitive to how the audience is relating to you and be flexible enough in your presentation

to lighten the mood or change the style of your delivery. Leaving room for improvisation will add an element of freshness, realism, and sincerity to your presentation.

Flexibility will also be important if there are any problems with your presentation aids. Instead of dwelling on any problems, try to address them and, if you cannot solve them quickly, make a humorous aside and talk directly to your audience. Remember that the presentation is not about the visual aids; it is about you. You have prepared and you are ready.

## **CONCLUDING THE PRESENTATION**

In developing the outline for your presentation, you organized the material you collected into themes and topics with an eye on what would be appropriate for the beginning, middle, and end of your presentation. Over the course of your delivery you have carefully developed these themes and topics in light of the purpose of the presentation. At the end of your delivery make sure that you bring your presentation to a close with a concise and effective conclusion. The conclusion should be succinct so that it leaves your audience with a clear message about your main topics and themes. Don't repeat the main text; summarize it. In addition, end on a positive note with energy and confidence. This will leave your audience interested in learning more about your topics and themes.

## **QUESTION-AND-ANSWER PERIOD**

Dealing with questions can be as intimidating as delivering the presentation itself, and some presenters might prefer to skip the process entirely. To properly conclude your presentation and respect the relationship you have developed with your audience, you need to allow for questions. When answering questions, acknowledge the speaker and repeat the question so that the entire audience can hear it. Avoid getting into a debate or argument, and if you do not know the answer to the question, admit it. Ask for the contact information of the person asking the question and offer to get back to them with a response later.

## **POSTPRESENTATION CONSIDERATIONS**

After a presentation, the script and visual aids often end up in a folder casually tossed and forgotten on your desk. It is time to get on with other things, and if you need to deliver the presentation again, you can always dig up the folder and use the same materials. This approach is a mistake and wastes a valuable opportunity to take advantage of your initial assessment of the presentation. Even letting a couple of days pass before reviewing your presentation will cause you to forget valuable points.

If you were fortunate enough to get a video recording of your presentation, use it as a tool to examine your presentation for content and style. If possible watch the video twice, focusing on a different aspect each time. It would be difficult to cover both aspects at the same time.

## **SUMMARY**

Presentations and communications are critical success factors in today's competitive organizational environment. Managers find they are spending more and more time preparing for presentations, and in communicating their ideas with colleagues, customers, investors, and other stakeholders. It is essential that managers consider these presentation opportunities as important to advancing the organization's purpose and in achieving its goals and objectives. Properly prepared, managers can use presentations as an effective tool for success and opportunity.

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