



Own your audience

How to prepare for a presentation

When I worked at Procter & Gamble early in my career, it became apparent that the people who were considered “successful” were those who owned their audience. They knew how to captivate people’s attention, make them think and inspire them to step beyond their fears.

My boss at Procter & Gamble gave me great advice. He said, “For every five minutes you deliver your presentation, plan for an hour of preparation.” At first I thought he was kidding. But he wasn’t, and I’ve heeded his advice over the years with great success.

Make the most of your time and talent by considering the following as you prepare:

1 **Define your outcome**

Your outcome is your destination. Ask yourself, “What do I want this audience to think or do differently as a result of my presentation? How will I know if I’ve been successful?”

2 **Know your audience**

Who will attend your presentation? How knowledgeable are they on the subject? Will they get excited? Or, will they be upset and show resistance? The more you know about your audience up front, the easier it is to target your message.

3 **Determine your presentation structure**

The beginning sets the tone. Get right to the point. Research studies show that the first and last 30 seconds of a presentation have the most impact. When you know your audience, you can meet them

where they are and then use stories, illustrations, analogies to shift them to where you want them to be.

4 **Involve your audience**

Ask for their opinions or suggestions, ask about their personal experiences, or ask them to do something. If the group is too large or you are time constrained, pose a question and have them debrief with a partner or silently respond.

5 **Use visual aids to support your presentation**

Never let your visual aids be the primary focus of your presentation. Instead, use them to reinforce or support your message. YOU are the presentation, not your visual aids. Memorize your presentation whenever possible. If you use handouts, let your audience read from them, but you should only occasionally glance at them – speak to your audience not at them.

A few more tips ...

To get off to a good start, practice your opening until it rolls off your tongue. You

want to make a good first impression and build off positive momentum.

Practice your timing. You don’t want to extend beyond your allotted time. Know what you can cut out if you run short of time or expand if granted more time.

“Be confident,
but not arrogant ...
speak from the heart.”

Record your presentation before you deliver it “live.” Listen for filler words such as “ummmm,” “like” or “you know.” These can creep up when you are thinking out loud and will undermine the impact of your message.

Finally, the best presenters are confident but are not arrogant. They speak from the heart and are able to connect with their audience because they are real, not scripted. Your audience will feel the difference. People change behaviors because they are emotionally moved to do so. ■

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