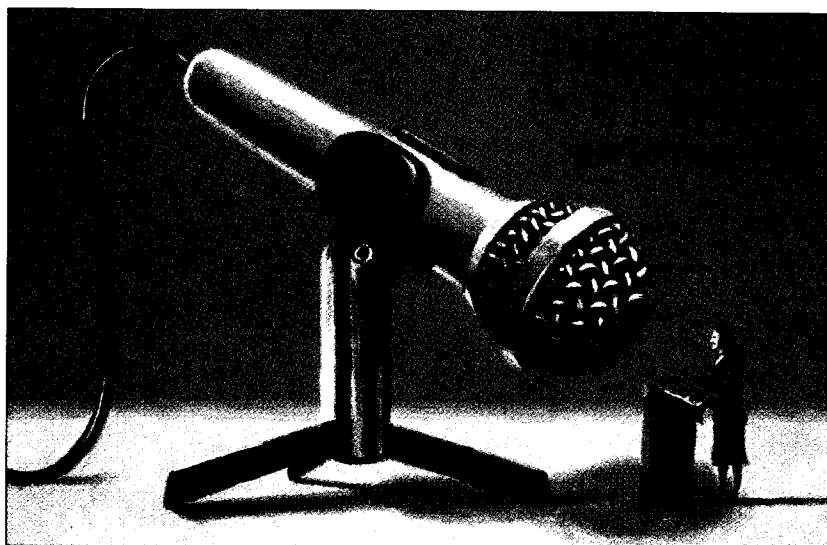


PERSONAL MARKETING



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# ACE YOUR Presentations

BY WILMA DAVIDSON AND SUSAN KLINE

**I**f you'd rather schedule a root canal than speak in front of an audience, you're in good company. Sir Winston Churchill, a master of oratory, is known to have said, "There are only a few things in life from which I derive intense pleasure—speaking is not one of them!" Still, Churchill overcame a

lisp and the lack of a university education to lead England for nine crucial years.

Your own goals may not include leading a nation at war, but if you are going to do some public speaking you will want the full attention of your audience. You will need to earn their confidence to get your points across so they learn what you intend them to. To do this, you must take the time to prepare your presentation.

## GIVE 'EM WHAT THEY WANT

**First, make sure you know your audience.** Learn who the decision makers are. What are their needs and concerns? Their hot buttons? Find out what motivates them and how they make decisions. When possible, ask someone who will be present about what the important topics and concerns are. Let your contact know your goal is to make the presentation as informative as possible.

Find out what your audience already thinks about the topic. For example, if your talk is about building a personal financial planning practice, experts may let you know that CPAs are concerned about potential liability exposure. Determine the common ground you share with your audience. If you are a CPA in practice speaking to managing partners, share war stories. Appeal to their intelligence and emotions—you will have to reach both to make your presentation work.

**Know your purpose.** Choose the burning issue, the key point. What do you want the audience to do or think after they have listened to you? Integrate your purpose with what you know the audience needs to ensure your theme is on target. State your strategic ideas and support them.

## MAP IT OUT

When you prepare your presentation, remember to divide your time into three blocks of 20%, 70% and 10%. Use the



## Don't ruin a perfectly well-planned presentation by being your own worst distraction. Look and sound sharp!

first segment of your presentation as an introduction that will grab your audience's attention. Preview your presentation's highlights in order. If you have not been introduced, introduce yourself and explain how your credentials make you an expert on your subject.

Open strong! Use a question, a statistic or a quotation from someone your audience recognizes and respects. You can make a promise or a prediction, or offer a relevant anecdote to enliven your message.

- Use 70% of your time on the main body of the presentation. Always split this segment into distinct parts (the problems experienced by lack of staff, the recommendation to hire new staff, the positive results you anticipate); put these parts into logical order and offer convincing support for each.

- Leave 10% of the time for your conclusion. Support your purpose with a new idea—don't repeat yourself—and tell your audience what to do to make it happen.

Use the three-part rule as a general guide, whether your presentation is 10 minutes or one hour long. If you can choose the amount of time you have, keep the presentation short and to the point. Take to heart the wisdom of Mark Twain: "A sermon loses its power after 20 minutes."

### BE PREPARED

If you plan to use visual aids, such as a Power Point presentation, keep them simple. Ask yourself how your visuals support or strengthen your purpose. Don't use slides that simply repeat what you are saying. A picture or graphic

works vastly better than a visual composed of text. As an anonymous orator aptly said, "A presentation is not an essay on its hind legs."

- **Keep in mind the 6 x 6 rule.** No more than six words across or six lines down for slides or Power Point presentations! You don't want your audience to be reading too much information while you are speaking.

- **Don't overdo.** Consider the hapless manager who arrived for his presentation for the CEO with two bags full of transparencies. When he walked into the boardroom, the CEO took one look and commanded, "Go outside, select your three most important slides, and come in again." The lesson: Less is definitely more!

### LOOK AND SOUND SHARP

You are the most important visual aid. Your words, mannerisms and appearance are extremely important. Don't ruin a perfectly well-planned presentation by being your own worst distraction. Here are some golden rules to ensure you make a good appearance.

#### Words

- Use familiar words and phrases, but avoid clichés.

- Use concrete rather than abstract language. Don't refer to the "facility"; if it's a warehouse, call it a warehouse. Don't talk about "realigning the business strategy"; say you'll be getting the business back to what it does best.

- Use conversational English. Plain-speaking Lee Iacocca won over Congress by saying, "And if you give us this loan,

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **IF YOU PREPARE BEFORE YOU PRESENT,** you are more likely to have an influence on your audience. Make sure you know your audience's needs and concerns. Find out what motivates them and how they make decisions. Know the purpose of your presentation and integrate it with what you know about your audience.

- **DIVIDE YOUR SPEECH INTO THREE PARTS:** The first 20% of the allotted time should be a lively introduction, 70% should be devoted to the body of your presentation and 10% should be reserved for your conclusion.

- **IF YOU PLAN TO USE VISUAL AIDS,** keep them simple. Don't use slides to repeat what you are saying. A picture or graphic works vastly better than a visual composed of text. Be sure you have all the equipment you need, that you know how to operate it and that it works.

- **LOOK SHARP. DON'T RUIN** a well-planned presentation by being your own worst distraction. Use words that are familiar to the audience but that are not clichés or jargon. Dress so you stand out, not stick out.

- **REHEARSE IN FRONT OF A FRIEND OR COLLEAGUE** and seek constructive feedback. Consider making a videotape of yourself to help you spot the mannerisms and weaknesses in your presentation.

- **BE PREPARED FOR THE Q&A PERIOD.** Keep the responses short and to the point. Always close after the Q&A—audiences remember best what they are told first and last.

- **DON'T BE NERVOUS.** You are not facing an opponent. In virtually every instance, your audience wants you to succeed, not fail.

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## Audiences remember best what they've heard first and last, so don't miss the opportunity to end on a strong note.



we'll pay it back—every last penny of it.” Would he have saved Chrysler with: “And if you discern it as fit and proper to extend to us the aforementioned requested temporary funding, we will, at our earliest convenience, reimburse the collateral afforded us”? Not on your life!

- Eliminate nonwords, clutter, *ers* and *ums*.

### Platform presence

- Take control of the setting. Arrive early enough to examine the layout of the room. Determine where you will stand and see if you have room to walk in and out of the audience's space. Be sure you have all the equipment you need, that you know how to operate it and that it works.

- Dress so you stand out, not stick out. If in doubt, dress up, not down.

- Wear well-fitting clothes made from quality materials: wool or wool-blend suits, cotton shirts, silk ties and blouses. Use a light touch for makeup or jewelry. Aim for quality—not quantity.

- Make your voice an asset. Vary your pitch, your rate of speech—slower for key points, faster for background material. Use silence for impact. Enunciate clearly. And, please, don't memorize your presentation—you won't sound natural, full of conviction or enthusiastic.

- Identify distracting mannerisms and overcome them. Do you pace, move about without purpose, sway or shift from foot to foot? Do you wring your hands, jiggle change in your pocket, sweep back your hair? While you needn't stand stock still, you should limit meaningless or intrusive gestures. Expend some of your nervous energy ahead of time. Walk, run, swim, work out. Engage in a physical, mental or spiritual activity you enjoy shortly before your presentation. You'll feel better and be more ready

for the opportunity you've been given to present your ideas to others.

- Rehearse in front of a friend or colleague. Seek constructive feedback. Videotape yourself if you can.

- Engage your audience with a reassuring smile rather than a stone-faced look more suited to delivering a eulogy. Be enthusiastic. Always look up—not down at a PC or the podium—and make eye contact.

### I WELCOME YOUR QUESTIONS!

Many speakers wisely allot time for questions and answers. Don't ask, “Do you have any questions?” Invite them by saying, “And now I welcome your questions,” or “Now I'm prepared to take your questions.” Practice your responses ahead of time. Here are some tips for answering questions effectively.

- Always restate the question. It buys you time to think about the response, helps the audience get a handle on a rambling question and helps them focus when someone asks several questions at once.

- Pause or take a breath before you respond. Again, this gives you a moment to organize your thoughts. You may not always need the extra time, but when you do the pause will appear natural, not as a sign of hesitation.

- Keep the response short and to the point.

- If you don't have an answer, say so. Don't try to bluff your way through a response. If the question is legitimate, offer to get back to the asker at a later time and take his or her name. If the question is irrelevant or unanswerable, it is all right to respond that the question is beyond the scope of the presentation. You may want to offer to discuss it further afterwards.

Prepare to close after the Q&A session. This is your last chance to bring your audience back to your message, especially if the questions took you down a different path. Audiences remember best what they are told first and last, so don't miss the opportunity to end on a strong note.

### THEY WANT YOU TO SUCCEED!

As you take control of all aspects of the presentation, have a positive image of yourself. Visualize your success—imagine yourself speaking enthusiastically, competently and

confidently. Remember, no star athlete ever went onto the playing field thinking he or she was going to lose. In your case, it should be easy to avoid such a grim thought. You are not facing an opponent. In virtually every instance, *your audience wants you to succeed, not fail*. With step-by-step planning, preparation and lots of practice, you'll come through with a superior presentation every single time. ■

## Speaker's Checklist

**Ask yourself the following questions while you are planning your speech, and once more the day before your presentation.**

**Do you...**

- Know and believe in what you're talking about?

- Speak to your audience's hearts as well as their heads?

- Consider your audience's attitudes and points of view as you plan your presentation?

- Limit your main points?

- Speak plainly with short, succinct phrases?

- Use analogies, anecdotes and specific examples to make your points persuasive and memorable?

- Check out your room and equipment well ahead of time?

- Perfect your posture, natural gestures, movement, eye contact, facial expressions, apparel and voice to reflect and emphasize your enthusiasm and credibility?

- Identify your nervous habits and use mental and physical strategies to control them?

- Anticipate questions?

- Visualize yourself giving a successful presentation?

- Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!