

PREPARING AND PRACTICING THE PRESENTATION

Basic guidelines for designing your presentation:

- List and prioritize the top three goals that you want to accomplish with your audience. It is not enough just to talk at them. You may think you know what you want to accomplish in your presentation, but if you are not clear with yourself and others, it is very easy – too easy – for your audience to completely miss the point of your presentation. For example, your goals may be for them to appreciate the accomplishments of your organization, learn how to use your services, etc. Again, the goals should be in terms of what you want to accomplish with your audience.
- Be really clear about who your audience is and about why is it important for them to be in the meeting. Members of your audience will want to know right away why they were the ones chosen to be in your presentation. Be sure that your presentation makes this clear to them right away.
- Be clear about the tone that you want to set for your presentation; for example, hopefulness, celebration, warning, teamwork, etc. Consciously identifying the tone to yourself can help you cultivate that mood to your audience. Above all, keep your voice steady. Any nervousness can be detected by the audience through your voice.

How do you prepare for a big presentation?

Do what you need to in order to feel confident and comfortable giving the presentation. If you are not sure what to do in order to feel confident and comfortable, then lean towards being more prepared than not. Here are some tips for things you can do:

- **Start with your key talking points** – There is no point writing a full script or presentation until you know what points you want to hammer home. Then, you can stick with a standard format: **(a)** tell them what you are going to show them; **(b)** show them; and, **(c)** tell them what you just showed them.
- **Write a script** – It lets you write everything out and start massaging the words the way you want. It also gives you a benchmark against which you can practice and refine things.
- **Do not get hung up on specific words** – It is unlikely that missing or changing any one word will totally ruin your presentation, so do not worry

about perfection. The only person that knows you “screwed up” is you.

- **Find your speaking style** – Over time with enough practice you can learn to speak and present in any style, but if you are in crunch mode and do not have enough time, just try and find your own speaking style. Find your groove. Try to make people see the practice you have put in, your enthusiasm and your confidence.
- **Practice in front of people** – If you have not given a lot of presentations this *will feel awkward* but it is better to get over those feelings now rather than when you are on stage. So, practice in front of others. But be careful about taking their advice, especially if the presentation is fast approaching. The risk is that you try to incorporate changes you are not really comfortable with, whether it is in the actual script or in your presentation style, and you end up causing more damage than good. Given the opportunity you should seek expert help with your presentation, but be careful about how you take any advice, especially late in the game.
- **Practice with distractions** – It is great to sit in a bubble with no distractions whatsoever and practice. You need the quiet time to memorize things and get a feel for what you are doing. But also practice while distracted – be it by other sounds or visually because it makes you feel more confident that you can pull it off.
- **Practice piece by piece** – It is quite helpful to practice each section of your presentation in pieces. Focus on one part, memorize the core elements, run through it till you are comfortable and then move to the next piece. Then it is just a matter of stringing the pieces together, which is easier.
- **Think ahead** – Think of the next 1 or 2 sentences while speaking. So when you are on sentence 5 your mind is already bringing up sentence 6 and 7. You need not think *too far ahead* but just enough that the transition from sentence-to-sentence is ultra-smooth and simple. Each sentence triggers a reminder for the next one.
- **Practice hand gestures** – If you are giving a presentation with nothing in front of you like a table, then you need to be aware of what you are doing with your hands and your feet. So, think about your hand gestures and how they relate to what you are saying. If you plan to move around, pace in sync with your words.
- **Find your comfort zone** – All the advice in the world will not help if you cannot get comfortable with your preparation, practice techniques and ultimately, the presentation itself. *Do whatever make you feel comfortable*. The more comfortable you feel, the more confident you feel, and the better things will go.

