

IDEAS PRESENTATIONS

Listen to the sound of silence

Developing your ability to express an idea will make you a more confident and influential presenter

It has been said that the ability to express an idea is as important as the idea itself. But how do we acquire these expressive powers?



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These powers can actually be mastered by developing some key presentation techniques that help us "package" our ideas and deliver them with greater impact to our audience.

Firstly, let us look at how we need to package our ideas to make them easily received and understood by an audience.

Before you begin to plan your presentation, it is important to have a good understanding of your audience. You need to research what level of expertise and previous experience they already have so that you can plan your material accordingly.

It is vital to select appropriate examples. Normally, the more experienced the audience, the less detail and fewer examples you need to use. The less experienced the audience, the more you need to use examples to help illustrate key concepts.

The way in which you structure your material will have a huge impact on how the audience receives it and remembers it.

All presentations should have one key objective. This is like the spinal cord of your presentation: it holds it together and all other information in your presentation should relate to it. Decide on your key objective first and keep it in mind while you develop your material. It will help to keep your ideas focused throughout your presentation.

OPENING

A good presentation should always have a strong opening and ending. The opening is one of the times when the audience's concentration is at its highest.

Your opening should capture the audience's attention and clearly communicate your key message.

It is important that your audience understands your key message at the start of the presentation. It will help them to understand the subsequent material, which may contain complex concepts that are more difficult to grasp.

By communicating the key message at the beginning, you also give your audience more motivation to listen to you. It is useful to think of the opening as a self-contained mini presentation – similar to a trailer to your main presentation.

When you are delivering your opening, try to use sentences that are short and succinct; they sound more dynamic and are easier to follow.

If you start off with a long rambling sentence, you will give the impression that your presentation is also going to be long and rambling – an immediate switch-off to your audience.

An interesting title or a relevant quote is a good way to help gain the attention of your audience. You will arouse their curiosity and encourage them to listen to you.

The ending of your presentation is another key moment when the audience's concentration is at its highest. So use the opportunity to re-emphasise your key message.

A good ending leaves the audience with a final thought to ponder on. Using a provocative question or statement can be a powerful way to end your presentation and leave your audience with such a thought.

SECTIONS

To help keep your messages clear and focused, it is helpful to divide the body of your presentation into sections.

As a rule of thumb, a presentation should have up to three main sections, with sub-sections within these main ones. Treat each section as a mini self-contained presentation with a beginning, middle and end. This makes it easier to follow and helps the audience remember the message.

Remember that the audience's concentration peaks at openings and endings. Therefore, the more you have in your presentation, the more you help sustain audience interest.

You will also find that your presentation is less daunting to deliver. By dividing your presentation into sections, you can focus on one section at a time.

So, instead of being daunted by having to deliver a 30-minute presentation, you can look at it as possibly being three nine-minute presentations.

TRAINING

The way we deliver our message also has a strong impact on the way in which it is received by our audience.

Delivery skills can be developed through training, coaching and feedback. You may think that some-



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one is naturally good at presenting.

However, more often than not, they have spent time developing and polishing their skills in order to come across clearly and professionally to their audiences.

When we train people in delivery skills, we find that control of delivery is a key factor in helping them to present with greater impact.

SPEED

The ability to pace your delivery will strongly influence the way in which complex concepts and ideas are received and understood by your audience.

An audience is not able to speed listen. If you speak too quickly – or you do not pause enough between sentences – they will find it difficult to keep up with you and will soon lose the motivation to continue to concentrate on what you are telling them.

Speed is also more difficult to

control when you are feeling nervous or anxious about your presentation, as we tend to speed up when we are nervous.

It is sometimes difficult to make oneself pause, as the sound of silence leaves most of us feeling quite uncomfortable.

We help people to control their pace through use of pausing. The pause is a powerful tool that acts as a brake pedal to help keep control.

I encourage people to pause at the end of their first sentence for two to three seconds. This helps them start with a controlled pace and they are less likely to speed up once they start speaking.

It also gives the audience time to assimilate your message, which will lead to greater understanding.

A two to three-second pause can seem like an eternity to the speaker; but to the listener it seems very natural. In a typical presentation

skills workshop, we practise incorporating pausing into our words, until pausing starts to feel natural and comfortable.

On many occasions, people say to me that, at the end of a presentation, they cannot remember what they said, that it all seems like a blur. This is often because they have 'free wheeled' through the presentation without full control of the speed of their delivery.

Pausing allows you time to collect your thoughts; you will feel in greater control of your delivery and your mind will be less likely to go blank.

Pausing has a very positive effect on the way you use your voice. You will find that your words are expressed more clearly. By slowing down, you will have the ability to emphasise the powerful words that help to enhance your message.

EMPHASIS

Often people speak in a monotone or flat voice that does not inspire their audience.

For example, I often hear phrases such as "this is a very innovative idea", "we have made huge improvements in this area" and "this is something that we are particularly proud of".

However, the way in which these lines are delivered can often convey the opposite of what is intended.

When you are delivering a com-

plex idea to your audience, think of the words that you most want them to hear and place greater emphasis on these words.

The result will be that your message is more clearly punctuated and carries greater influence.

Ultimately, your delivery will create a more powerful impact on your audience.

So the next time you are faced with presenting some complex ideas, remember the following five key tips to ensure that your messages are easily understood by your audience:

- Research your audience
- Decide on your key objective
- Keep a clear structure throughout your presentation
- Control the pace of your delivery
- Emphasise the important words in your sentences

INVESTMENT

Finally, remember that most good presenters are not born that way.

If the outcomes of your presentations are important to you, it is worth investing time in your preparation and on developing your delivery technique so that you become a more confident and influential presenter and ultimately more successful in your business environment.

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KEY POINTS

- Before you start your presentation, it is important to have a good understanding of the audience
- The more experienced the audience, the less detail and fewer examples you need to use
- It is sometimes difficult to make oneself pause, as the sound of silence leaves most of us feeling quite uncomfortable