

Communicating with Impact!

What Makes a Great Presenter?

Every day millions of people around the world make a presentation. Yet most of us who have been to meetings know that very few of those people are truly great. The truth is, most presenters are just plain average – and quite a few are simply dreadful.

SUMMARY

For a presentation to be outstanding, a speaker must engage the audience. To do this the speaker must; know their audience; convey enthusiasm and passion for their subject and deliver their presentation, without prompts, using a relaxed, conversational style.

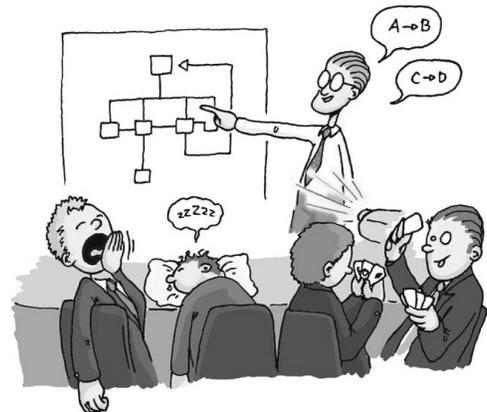
Every one of us has the ability to be truly great as a presenter. There is nothing particularly special about the people who stand out as brilliant. However, the average presenter is usually holding themselves back, doing things which prevent them from being good.

At every training course and conference we run, we spend some time debating what makes a great presenter. We have been able to produce a definitive list of what to do to make your presentations great.

The overwhelming conclusion of all these discussions is: content is NOT important. Of the hundreds of people who have debated what makes a great presenter, not a single person has mentioned the value of the content. Your audiences are NOT interested in what you are saying, but the way you are saying it. If you say it well, that appears to make the content interesting. What this means is, if you concentrate

your planning and preparation on content, you are likely only to be average. The most important factor for great presenters is that they make a personal connection to every member of the audience. This means lots of eye contact, liberal use of the words 'I' and 'you', and ensuring that everything you deliver is done from the audience's perspective. To do this successfully you need to know a great deal about your audience in advance.

The connection you make between yourself and your audience seems to be enhanced by the widespread use of



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“The words that you actually say.....are more important than the ones that the audience read. You are not just a presenter: you are also a leader.”

Graham Davies, The Presentation Coach,

2010



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examples. Your audience expects you to 'show' rather than 'tell'. You don't need to give them 'messages' and 'content'; instead you need to give them lots of examples and they will work out the message for themselves. These examples should always include you. Your audience wants to know about your thoughts, your feelings and your opinions. They want to share your experiences.

Your audience also wants you to be a living person; they don't want to hear from a statue. Presenters who move about are the ones who gain the most attention. In social situations we are active – we use gestures, we move our bodies and change posture. To avoid doing so when presenting makes you look abnormal and this serves to disconnect you. There is also a big advantage to moving – it helps reduce nerves when presenting.

Great presenters are interactive. They ask questions, they involve the audience and they treat the presentation as a conversation. This helps boost the connection between themselves and the audience because, for the audience, the interactivity appears normal, whereas being spoken at for a great length of time does not.

Another important aspect of making your presentation appear normal is that your audience will expect you to deliver your material without any prompts. Conversations do not need notes! Audiences expect presenters to know their stuff.

An extension of this is that great pre-

senters talk from the heart. They are passionate about their subject and they are emotional. The dispassionate, business-like presenter is one of the most disliked, according to our discussions.

Our training sessions also reveal that audiences want to have fun. They want to see you enjoying yourself and they want to have a laugh. This does not mean you need to tell jokes, but it does mean your audiences expect you to be light. They want humour and they want you to smile. Straight faced, dry presenters are particularly disliked by audiences.

Your audience will also expect you to motivate them. This does not mean you need to be a motivational speaker. Your audience is expecting you to tell them what to do. Great presenters give audiences some action to take. All of these discussion points suggest that those presenters who treat their presentation as a conversation – who just have a chat with the audience – are the ones marked out as truly great. People who give presentations by delivering content are seen as boring and uninteresting. This also means their messages are not conveyed, so they may as well not be presenting in the first place.

Oh, and one final thing. Our discussions show that audiences simply detest the use of computerised slides. They just want to hear from you. Truly great presenters therefore do one other vital thing – they switch off the projector!