

Don't *Bore* Your Audience

(The key to engaging presentations)

What we need to hear is often the hardest to hear

"Don't bore your audience." That was the single best piece of advice that I ever got on presenting. It came directly from my CEO just before I left to give my first presentation in Europe. I must admit that this was a little unsettling to hear and that I took it as a personal criticism. But I have since learned that this valuable piece of advice was also given to him by a trusted mentor to help guide his career as well.

Why are so many presentations so boring?

Put yourself in the position of your audience. We've all been there. We often feel put out even to attend the presentation. And while public speaking may be among the top ten most stressful events in life, that's no excuse for boring your audience. Here is a snapshot of a typical internal conversation people in your audience are having while you present:

- What is the purpose of this presentation, anyway?
- What's in it for me?
- How many PowerPoint® slides does he have?
- Why am I wasting my time here? I have so much to get done.
- Why is he so boring?
- How can I gracefully get out of this?
- Calgon, take me away!

What you need to think about first

Think is the key word. Ask yourself these five questions before you begin to build your first PowerPoint® slide.

1. What outcome do I desire?
2. What is the single most important message that I must impart?
3. Who is my audience and what is important to them? Remember, an audience is more than an amorphous mass. It is made up of individuals with specific needs and interests.
4. What creative ways could I use to impart my message and engage my audience?
5. How will I know if I've been successful?

Preparation is the key

Now that you've spent a little time thinking, it's time to start preparing for your presentation. The true test of your preparedness is your ability to stand and deliver under unexpected conditions. For example, what would you do if this happened to you?

- The audio/visual equipment failed and you couldn't use your computer, slide show or other electronic presentation support?
- The time allotted for your presentation was suddenly reduced to only five minutes?

These are not unusual situations. They happen all the time. If they've never happened to you, just wait. They will. You must be ready. You must be agile. You must know your message and desired outcome. You must know your audience.

The cure for the boring presentation

There is nothing more pathetic than a presenter fumbling with a computer connection or trying to fix a PowerPoint® presentation that has been taken over by a poltergeist. So why even take the risk? Why not try something different? Why not be creative? Who knows, you might even delight your audience and yourself.

Try a PowerPoint® **FREE** diet

Here's a radical idea: for the next thirty days do not use PowerPoint® at all. That's right. Do not use the PowerPoint® software: not to create the outline; not to jot down notes; not to present from. Not to show your company logo. Nothing. Zip. Zilch. Cold turkey.

Here's what you'll gain during the PowerPoint® **FREE** diet:

- **TIME.** The time to really think through your key message, before you start creating it. Time to crystallize your message in your own mind first. Time to think more deeply. You'll save considerable time when you are not consumed in creating PowerPoint® slides.
- **CREATIVITY.** Without the crutch of PowerPoint® you will have to think about other creative ways to give your presentation. You'll rediscover the power and fun of flip charts, props, authentic story telling, demonstrations. Maybe you'll even consider singing your message—that's something they're sure to notice.
- **IMPACT.** You and your message are much more likely to be remembered if you take a fresh, creative approach to delivering it. It is not only what you say, but how you say it that creates the impact and outcome. Imagine the satisfaction you would feel if your audience could repeat your key message and stated that they would actually do something as a result of hearing your presentation. Impact and action. Isn't that what we are seeking in the first place?

Are you up to the challenge?

Will it be easy to do the PowerPoint® **FREE** diet? Will you get support from your boss, peers and team? I think not.

You will be tempted, torn, challenged and even told “*you must do it the professional way.*” PowerPoint® has become the standard tool for presentations. Well, standard has become boring. It has also become counter-productive. We must challenge ourselves to communicate, energize and persuade more effectively than ever before. There's too much noise and competition out there. Effective communication combined with a little creativity can make all the difference in your outcome.

So what have you got to lose? Another bored audience who tunes you out and doesn't remember or take action on what you say? Or do you want to be remembered, to influence change and opinion, to build relationships and results? Powerful, persuasive presentations can do all of this for you.

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