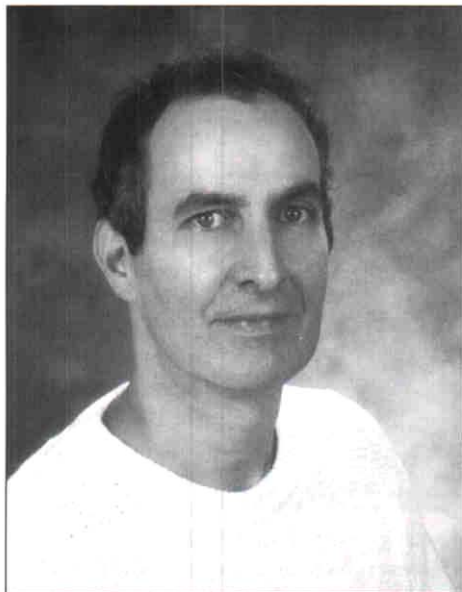


Steps to a Better Presentation

By Jeff Davidson



1) Check it out: Visit the meeting room the night before a speech. Even if you only have a chance to stick your head in the door, the mere fact you familiarize yourself with the look of the room will permeate your subconscious during your reverie. In the morning, the room will be a familiar place. You will do better in it.

2) Prepare, prepare, prepare: You can't over-prepare knowing your audience, studying their literature, understanding what they face and meeting the needs and expectations of the people in the seats and the meeting professional who hired you.

3) Pause: Before actually saying your first words, take a second or two to take in the experience of being in front of the group. There is no finer time in the life of a speaker than beginning a speech. Unfortunately, too many rush right into their opening lines and lose a valuable opportunity to establish a connection with the audience that can't otherwise be generated.

4) Begin already in motion: Rather than start off your presentation with the pace, volume, and energy normally attributed to the start of a speech, offer the audience your mid-speech form.

5) Focus on faces: Look at individual audience members. Hold your gaze. Too many speakers dart around the audience, really speaking to no one. Speak to an individual, even if he or she is one of five hundred, establishes a first person connection with that person, everyone around that person, and every one who can view the interaction.

6) Offer vocal variety: When you hear a speaker proceeding along the same path at the same pace, you could literally tune in every five minutes and the speech would sound the

same. You know the speaker is not offering vocal variety. Let your voice get high, low, loud, soft, humorous, and sad. Give the audience an enjoyable experience.

7) Use audio-visuals sparingly: Forget the fact that PowerPoint slides allow you to show anything. The audience is not there to see an AV demo; they are there to see and hear you. Make yourself the audio-visual. If you use audio-visuals, make them an adjunct enhancement, not the focus of your presentation. Otherwise, anyone could be speaking and you will dissipate the audience's focus and attention.

8) Pay homage to the 7 minute shift: The typical adult audience can only maintain focus on a particular topic area for about 7 minutes. Every 7 minutes, if not sooner, move onto something else, whether it be a new subtopic, new story, or a new way of interacting with the audience. If you run on in the same way for longer than 7 minutes, you run the risk of having audience members drift, if not doze.

9) Tell stories: Stories are the quintessential human connectors, linking us with our most distant ancestors. Stories enable speakers to connect with an audience on emotional, lyrical, and inspirational levels. Even if you are a how-to presenter, speaking to a roomful of corporate CEOs, effective use of stories make your speech much more lively and memorable.

10) Use humor: This doesn't mean you have to tell jokes. Too often, jokes fall flat. But, there is a humorous part of you. Think of being with friends or in some social setting where you are the life of the party. Translate that aspect of yourself to the platform. Let the playful part of you out. Whether you tell jokes or not, you will find most of the audience is more than willing to follow along with your humor if you offer it to them.

11) Come full circle: Near the end of your presentation, link back to something you said in the beginning, to give a sense of closure. It tells them you are prepared, and despite the length of your presentation, there is a pattern, rhyme, or predetermined plan to tie your material together. The link doesn't even have to be strong. It could simply be a key phrase, story, or element of the early part of your presentation.

12) Offer a strong close: While it is never recommended speakers' memorize or read their speeches, an exception is at the close. Whether you recite a verse, a song, a poem, a quote from somebody famous, or your own quote, practice in front of the mirror and then practice the night before until you can deliver the close with perfection. For many, this is all they will

remember. So it is the part of your presentation you must offer with perfection.

13) Reinforce what you say to an audience: Use participant packets, formally known as handouts. They could be distributed before, during, or after your presentation, based on your method of delivery, how you want audience members to interact, and what you want them to retain. Opt for a shorter participant packet rather than a longer one. Lengthy packets may inundate and overwhelm audience members.

14) Shorten your lists: Rather than give them a list of ten things to consider, give only five. People are exceedingly busy these days, and having five, or even three, things to do is much more palatable than ten.

15) Spoon-feed your audience at every opportunity: The old saying, "Tell them what you are going to tell them; tell them; and then tell them what you told them", has never been more important. However, you need to do this in a creative way.

16) Mix it up: Mix your brilliant, high-content, how-to information with some stories and anecdotes. There is nothing worse than listening to a brilliant speaker who overloads the audience with observations and insight, facts and data, but doesn't break up the material with stories. These stories give listeners a visual picture.

Remember the old adage, "Know your stuff; know who you are stuffing; and, know when they are stuffed." Simply giving oodles of high-content, how-to information ends up in the boomerang effect — people have difficulty remembering and leave feeling overwhelmed.

17) Pain & Suffering: Recognize and acknowledge the listeners' pain throughout your presentation. If they are in customer service, acknowledge the kinds of ordeals they experience on a daily basis. If they are in sales, find out the burning issues confronting them, and keep acknowledging them throughout your presentation. Nothing will endear you to your audience faster and maintain that precious relationship more than your keen display of their blights or predicaments.

Jeff Davidson, *Breathing Space Institute*

<http://www.BreathingSpace.com>