
The Mathis Group's Messenger

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Preparing a Powerful Presentation

Last month we showed you how to overcome some of the fears most associated with public speaking. This month we would like to teach you some tips about creating a powerful presentation.

First, let's look at the four main types of presentations: informative, persuasive, entertaining, and impromptu.

Informative Presentations

In an informative presentation, people are looking for new information. Training seminars, productivity meetings, etc. are examples of this type of presentation. Whenever you are giving new information, be sure that it is applicable to the audience. We've all been to training that is dry and boring. Do your best to present the information in a clever or creative way.



Persuasive Presentations

When trying to persuade someone, you must believe and be passionate about what you are saying. Your focus should be on getting people to take action or change their thinking. Your presentation should revolve around logical reasoning and strong evidence. Use emotional arguments and work off of your audience's reactions.

Entertaining Presentations

Entertaining presentations are typically done in a social setting--such as a program, show, or roast. When preparing for this type of presentation, it is vitally important

to know your audience. Make sure that your material is appropriate for the purpose of the presentation and the audience.

Impromptu Presentations

Impromptu presentations take place in a moments notice with very little, or sometimes no, preparation time. This can include introductions, award presentations, or answering questions. To succeed in an impromptu presentation, you have to be able to think quickly and logically on your feet.

When creating your presentation, the first step to do is to develop the main points of the outline. Get your basic ideas down on paper. You will then establish supportive information for each point. Examine statistics, facts, or illustrations that will fit with your points. Next, you need to go over your material to look for any gaps in information. Fill in those spaces. Research all of your data to make sure that it is correct and from reliable sources. Lastly, add any other illustrations necessary to make your presentation interesting.

It is important that your audience understands and retains the information you are giving. Repeat your point several times. Saying the same point three or more times will signal to the audience that it is important. Use creative slogans that will stick in the audience's head. Create word pictures to give a visual image. Design handouts that reinforce your message. The audience will be able to refer to these at a later time to refresh their memory of all that was said. Handouts also allow them to jot down notes as needed.

*Failure seldom stops you; what stops
you is the fear of failure.
Jack Lemmon (1925-2001)
Actor*

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How you chose to open your presentation will make or break it. If you don't have the audience's attention in the first few minutes, you've usually lost them for the entire presentation. Openers are used to draw in the audience and awaken them to the presentation. There are several types of openers from which you can choose.



1. Relate an exciting story
2. Tell a joke or humorous story
3. Lay the foundation for the presentation
4. Discuss the context of your presentation
5. Praise the person who introduces you
6. Brag on those in attendance

These are just a few openers that have been proven to work. Consider your audience, the topic being presented, and the environment the presentation is surrounding to determine the type of opener that would be the best to use. Under no circumstances should you making apologies for lack of preparation, use long, boring statements, ask questions with no answer, or give non-related stories during your opening.

Just as your opener grabs everyone's attention, your closing should be just as powerful. As you close, go over your main presentation points once again to summarize the entire presentation. You can also use a story, illustration or quote to bring everything together. If time allows, ask for audience questions. This will allow you to see if your material was heard and understood. Finally, if necessary, explain the desired action you wish to see done. Remember to avoid the following closing sins:

- Introducing a new topic
- Not closing at all--just stopping
- Talking down to the group
- Demanding they respond in a certain way
- Ridiculing/insulting their looks, race, or religion
- Apologizing
- Rambling on and on about the topic
- Forgetting your point
- Changing topics at the last minute

Knowing when to conclude is not always as simple as just getting to the end of your speech. After you have finished-conclude. If you have the audience at a decision point-conclude. When you are out of time-conclude. If people are restless and uninterested-conclude. If the audience is getting up and leaving-conclude.

Before going in front of a live audience, mentally go over the material 25 times. Rehearse your stories out loud. Do everything as if you actually have people in front of you. Get plenty of rest the evening before. Come early for the presentation to make sure everything you need is set up properly.

Once you are in front of your audience, work at bonding with them. Walk closer to them, smile, and use illustrations they can identify with and understand. Use your voice to draw your audience into the presentation. Act appreciative for time with them. Let them know

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that you are grateful for them taking time out of their day to listen to what you have to say. Bonding with the audience will make them more likely to listen to everything you have to say and remember it.

Just because you have prepared yourself mentally and tweaked your presentation so that it is perfect, doesn't mean that you won't get a bit of stage fright. You may become nauseous, begin sweating, have an unquenchable dry mouth, weak knees, or shaking legs and hands. This is all perfectly normal and expected, especially with your first few presentations.



Fear is not uncommon in given circumstances, and it does have a positive side. Fear:

- Will motivate you to prepare more
- Drives you to know everything about the audience
- Cannot be seen by most people, only you
- Can create adrenaline and give you more energy

So, how do you overcome and rise above fear? Start with preparation. Being prepared will give you confidence. Face the fear, don't run from it. If you run from fear once, you'll be more likely to do it over and over again. Remember that everyone gets nervous and has dealt with fear at some point or another. Keep a positive mindset before and throughout the presentation. Focus on your strengths not the fear. If you don't make your fear a big deal, no one else will either.

Another resource which can be used to polish your presentation skills is to learn from others. Read other speeches and watch their presentations. Be aware of how they use notes. How much do they move? How were the illustrations and examples told? How did they create excitement? How clear was the introduction? How did they pull the presentation to a closer?

Even though we hate to think, let alone talk, about it, odds are that you will bomb at least one presentation in

your lifetime. We want to be sure that you are prepared if that situation happens. Even though it may seem like the end of the world and nothing could be worse, that's just not true. The most important thing to remember is to learn from it. An unsuccessful presentation is one of the best ways to improve. Write out the areas of your presentation that you felt did not work. Was it too dry? Was there not enough content? Was it too long? Too short? Would more preparation have helped the situation? Try to gain input from someone who attended. Get a copy of your presentation and watch for yourself. Examine the pitfalls and make note on how to correct the problems.

Hopefully, these tips and suggestions will get you started on the right path for successful presentations. While it does take some practice and effort, you can become a confident presenter in little time at all.



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