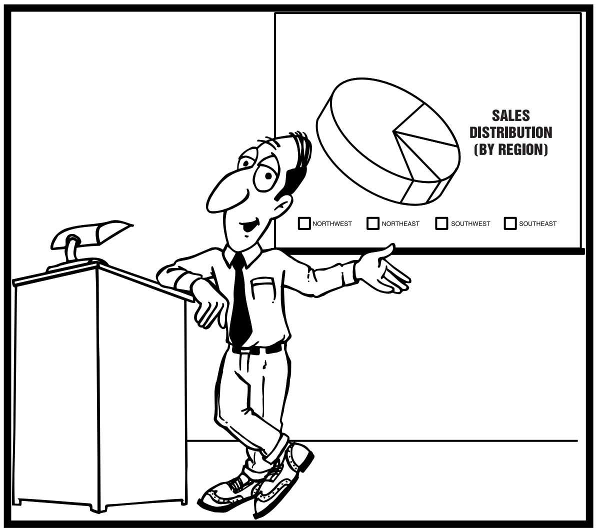
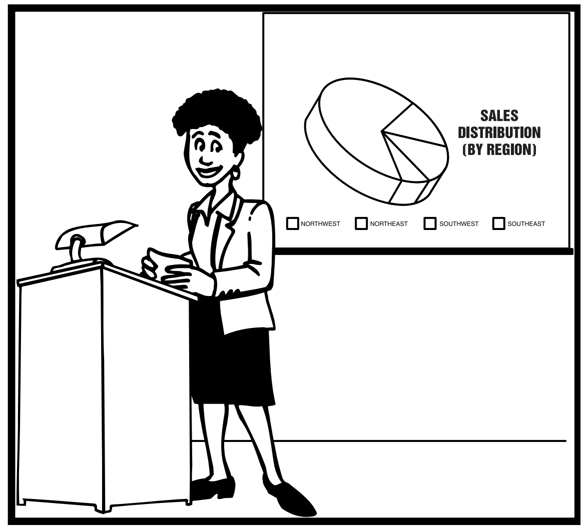
Presenting With Ease!





A training program

to help you communicate

when it counts

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face-to-face communication

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Table of Contents

List Of Illustrations

Introduction

Welcome to *Presenting With Ease!* The purpose of this booklet, and workshop you attended that complements it, is to provide you with a set of tools to improve the ways in which you communicate face-to-face, both during group presentations and one-on-one. In doing so, our mission is to help make effective communication a key element of your personal and professional success.

In addition to providing insight into strategy and content development, this booklet discusses the "principles of face-to-face communication". These principles are simple and easy to understand. Logically, the better you are at applying the principles on a daily basis, the more effective you will be as a communicator, regardless of whether you're communicating with one person or many. And the more effective you are as a communicator, the more successful you will be.

Although the principles are based in logic and are easy to understand, they can be incredibly difficult to apply. And they can take a lifetime to master. That is why practice is just as important as the principles themselves. Once you have a perspective that is based in principles, which you gained during the workshop and are reinforcing by reading this booklet, the next step is to practice applying these principles. You can do this one-on-one on a daily basis, and during group presentations wherever and whenever the opportunity presents itself.

So what are these principles? One important principle is that all communication must be two-way. This is so simple and logical that often we don't even think about it. But this simple principle is all too often forgotten in an age driven by technology. Many times people assume that simply because they have transmitted information from one location to another (or one person to another), they have communicated. Yet nothing could be further from the truth.

There is no communication unless something comes back. In some way, the receiver of the information must convey a message to the sender in return, in order to let the sender know the message was actually received and understood.

In a presentation, if you're communicating with the audience, you'll see them thinking about the ideas you convey. They should be concentrating on what you're saying, nodding their heads when they understand or showing a puzzled expression when they don't. An even more direct form of communication can occur during questions, which you will hopefully allow throughout your presentations.

If people ask questions, and you find yourself thinking "I just talked about that a minute ago, weren't you listening?", have you communicated effectively? Probably not. On the other hand, if people are asking questions that are taking the information you provided and relating it to their specific beliefs, circumstances or position in life, there is a better chance that you've communicated effectively. As we discussed during the workshop and we will continue to explore in this booklet, communicating effectively is vital to delivering a successful presentation.

Complements Your Current Skills

Presenting With Ease! is designed to complement and support, not replace, the skills you have spent most of your life developing. Virtually every day of your life, you have interacted with others in conversation. Our goal is to help you build on the skills you've already acquired — to identify the knowledge and experience you've gained communicating one-on-one, to sharpen and hone those skills, and to show you how to transfer those skills to group presentations.

Certainly there are a couple of differences in communicating to groups. You must always be well-prepared. Occasionally, you might get away with less preparation one-on-one, but you won't get away with less preparation in a group context. You must ensure that your message is carefully tailored to the needs, wants and desires of the audience. You must learn to manage nervousness and adrenaline. You must strive to create a two-way exchange, even though you will do most of the talking. And you must always display enthusiasm appropriate to the situation when talking to groups. If you're reading a eulogy at a funeral, for example, your level of enthusiasm will be different than if you're introducing a new product to your distribution network.

In helping you enhance your ability to deliver your ideas, *Presenting With Ease!* highlighted and explained 10 fundamental principles of effective communication. How does effective communication work? And what does the audience "get" when it does?

We helped you define strategy as it relates to face-to-face communication. How do you define the need and translate that need into value? How do you analyze the audience and event, so you can tap into common characteristics and their reason for being there? How do you develop time-bound, measurable objectives? And how do you measure your success against those objectives?

We examined the best ways to prepare your information. We introduced a number of models to help you focus your ideas and create a logical flow that is easy for the audience to follow. Applying these models is absolutely essential when you're talking to groups. However, these models can also be effectively used one-on-one. They will enable your communication to be clear and concise, and help you adhere to the principle of "less is more".

We outlined the difference between written and spoken language; how an audience receives information through their eyes (when reading) is completely different from the way they take in ideas through their ears (when listening). Broken grammar is expected; pauses in unusual spots are normal.

We examined the use of visual aids. And we provided you with clear guidelines for using visual aids effectively, whether one-on-one with clients or colleagues, or in group presentations large and small.

Finally, we looked closely at the skill of answering questions. Without a doubt, this is the most underdeveloped skill in human interaction. It is easy to improve your ability to answer questions, but it takes constant effort to maintain that improvement and constant practice to hone it.

The Audience Is Assessing You!!

During *Presenting With Ease!*, spent a great deal of time focusing on the importance of conveying your personality every time you convey your message. Whether you're providing training, introducing a new program to staff, or selling your products and services to the outside world, your personality is the window through which your message must travel to be received, understood and acted upon by your audience.

When you deliver a presentation, you stand up in front of a group (or, alternatively, you may be seated with the group, depending on the circumstances), and while you're delivering your message, you know the audience is assessing you. But remember, they're not doing so on the basis of your ability to be completely smooth and error-free in your delivery, or on your ability to entertain them as a stand-up comic. They are asking themselves a number of very simple questions:

- Does this person have something valuable to say?
- Do I feel comfortable listening to this person?
- Does this person listen to what I (or we, as an audience) have to say?
- Do I trust this person?

If the answers to these questions and others like them are primarily "yes", you stand a chance of being successful with your presentations. If the answers are most often "no", your communication effectiveness will be inconsistent, at best.

We hope that *Presenting With Ease!* has set you upon a path that will improve your communication skills for the rest of your career. Whether you're communicating one-on-one or to groups, we hope you will apply the principles of face-to-face communication to saving you time and energy, and to helping you be even more effective in the future.

Define The Need

The first step to developing a successful presentation is to define and understand the underlying need, or specific opportunity, that exists with an audience. Focus is important to success. To achieve this focus, you must match your message to the needs, wants and desires of the audience. If you cannot tap into those needs right at the start of the planning process, your chances for success decrease significantly.

In general, there are three ways to define the need. First, you can ask your contact person about the needs of the audience. Part of this occurs with your audience analysis, which is described in greater detail later in this booklet. However, before you get to the audience analysis (and perhaps as soon as your contact person asks you to speak), you should ask a few questions.

What need for information does the audience have? How can my message help them? What would the contact person like to achieve during the presentation? What are the ways in which the contact person thinks the presentation can help him or her achieve those goals? Do my goals match theirs? If so, what are some specific ways in which they match? If not, what are the discrepancies, and how can I reduce or eliminate those discrepancies?

Getting the answers to these questions will help you understand what the audience is expecting when they walk into the room. And there is a note of caution here. If the needs and expectations of the audience are different from the needs and expectations of the person who asked you to speak, you must eliminate those differences before the presentation begins, or someone will walk out of the room disappointed.

The second way to define the need is for you to draw upon your personal and professional experience with similar groups, and project what you have done with others to this new group. For example, you may be providing training to a group of new employees. Based on past experience, you may understand the types of information people are seeking when they join your firm. Using this past experience, over time you tailor the presentation to the need for information you identified with previous groups.

In drawing on your experience, you may be able to use your message to help you define the need. For example, you may be developing a new software package for your organization. As part of the development process, you may need to get information from users in order to customize the package to their specific requirements. In this case, their need may be to understand what you are attempting to achieve with the information they will in turn provide to you. That way, after the presentation, they will be more likely to provide you with the information you seek.

A third way to define the need is to actually ask the audience. This is probably one of the best ways in which you can effectively define their specific need for information. However, this is the most time-consuming method and the one that is most difficult to achieve.

You may use a survey or some other form of feedback, such as a focus group, to get this information. You may use both closed- and open-ended questions which will help you get the information you seek.

You could potentially administer this survey in a number of ways. You could fax or e-mail participants in advance, or send them a survey via “snail mail”. You could ask your contact person to distribute and collect the survey. You might develop survey questions and call a number of participants to get their perspective.

If you have the time in advance, asking participants directly is perhaps the best single method of getting to a specific audience’s need for information. However, even if you have the opportunity to ask them, don’t discount the other methods of gathering information to determine the basic needs your presentation will address. Indeed, the best overall approach is probably a blended approach, in which you ask your contact person, draw upon your own experience and ask the audience. If you do all three, your ability to tailor your message to the needs, wants and desires of the audience will be significantly higher, and your chances for success will increase.

Write Down The Need

Once you've identified the need or needs you'll address, you should write down these needs in a few brief sentences. Keep each sentence as simple as possible. This will help focus your strategy.

For the purposes of this booklet, we are developing two sample presentations. The first is a fairly short presentation to city council on the need for a "barking dog bylaw". We are members of the city's bylaw enforcement team, and our goal is to promote neighborhood harmony by encouraging councillors to develop and approve a new bylaw that reasonably limits the hours in which dogs can be outside barking, specifically between the hours of 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. (9 a.m. on weekends).

We know that the process to get this bylaw enacted has a few steps. The first is for council to strike a sub-committee to study the issue. Indeed, the purpose of our presentation is to convince council to strike such a committee. This will help move the process along and enable the issue to be discussed and resolved.

In this situation, therefore, there are a few needs that could potentially be addressed:

- Council members have a need to understand that the number of complaints is increasing significantly.

- Council members need to understand that this issue will become increasingly political if it isn't soon addressed.

- Council members have a need to understand that a reasonable solution is possible.

The second sample presentation is to a management team. We are developing a new software package for a business unit of our organization. We are using the presentation to inform managers of the progress we've made so far, and to ask them to obtain specific types of information from their staff.

The purpose of the presentation is to get the right information from managers and, by extension, their staff. This will ensure that the software can be tailored to specific business unit needs.

With this in mind, there are a number of potential needs this presentation could address:

- Managers have a need to understand the current progress of the project, and how they can keep the project on time by providing information prior to a specific deadline date.

- Managers have a need to understand how the right information from their staff will be vital to ensuring the final product meets their needs.

- Managers have a need to understand the exact type of information we're seeking, so we can customize the software.

The needs above clearly identify the initial direction of the presentation. In every presentation, understanding the underlying need is important to your success. Only when you clearly understand the audience's needs can you translate those needs into real value and a message that is clearly focused on them. After all, as we discussed during the *Presenting With Ease!* workshop, they are the most important people in the room. If they don't "get it", by definition you have wasted your time and theirs. And in our modern world, time is most precious commodity any of us have; it is something that none of us can afford to waste.

Translate The Need Into Value

In translating the need into significant value, you put yourself in the audience's shoes and ask: "If I were sitting in the audience, why would I give up my valuable time to attend this presentation? What does this presentation, and the person presenting the information, offer me? What do I gain by listening? Will I leave the room with more knowledge than when I walked in? Will I receive some form of value?"

Nobody expects you to download all the information and insight at your disposal on a particular topic in five, 10, 20, 30 or 60 minutes. In some cases, even if you have a full day, there is probably no way that you could impart all of your knowledge.

Your job is to take information and make it relevant to the audience. This is the true value of the presentation. You are not there to recite facts. You are not there to overwhelm the audience with reams of information. You are there to take specific facts — specific parts of your information — and make that information relevant and usable to the audience. This is value.

The best way to describe the process is to examine the differences between data and information in management reporting. Today, it is possible for managers to gather huge amounts of data from which decisions can be made. Data gathering begins by answering a number of questions. What were our sales today? Were they up from yesterday? Where did we sell the most? Who sold the most? What time of day did they sell the most? And so on.

Information is the art of turning mountains of data into usable bits and pieces. You do this by putting that data into perspective. It is the skill of answering two important questions: How? And why?

How much our sales up from yesterday? Why was there an increase? How is this relevant to our business? Why were our sales better in one region than another? How did one person or one group manage to sell more? How does what they did differ from others? Why is one time of day better than others? How can we capitalize on this trend?

Too often in presentations, we assume that the audience will answer the questions of "why?" and "how?" themselves when presented with the facts. This is not the case. You must answer these questions for them if you hope to make the data relevant to them. You want them to leave your presentation with some form of discernible value that they can use to improve their personal, professional or business life in the future. The value is the information they receive, not the data you transmit.

The amount of information you bring to the presentation will be limited by time. You should be generous, but focused, with your information, and make that information relevant to the audience. This is a difficult element to master with presentations, but one that will increase your success.

Imagine that your audience is listening to you while constantly thinking to themselves: "What's in it for me?" In reality, this is exactly what's occurring. Your job is to help the audience understand the relevance of your message. This occurs whether you want them to use or apply your information (in an informative presentation), or you want them to take immediate and direct action (in a persuasive presentation).

Write Down The Value

Write down your value statement in one or two sentences. For example, in our barking dog example, the value could be: "By the end of my presentation, I want council to understand that taking action now will keep a growing problem from getting out of hand in the future." With the software presentation, the value could be: "To have managers understand that getting their staff to provide the right information will improve the value of the final product."

The sentences above are both starting points and a destinations. Used at the start of the presentation, these help draw people into your content. They are also a destination. This is the relevance of your information to them. If people walk away from your presentation knowing what they need to do with your information, they will feel better about the information you presented than if they have to guess at what you're trying to achieve. This will increase your success.

Analyze The Audience & Event

As a general rule, the more you learn about and understand the people who attend your presentation, the more successful you will be — provided, of course, that you apply your understanding to he challenge of matching your message to their needs, wants and desires. Participants at your presentation have a number of common characteristics. They have opinions about the messages or issues you will discuss. They are there for a reason. And, above all, they will be reluctant to waste their time.

You must do everything possible to tap into the similarities that each individual brings to the presentation and, at the same time, the characteristics they share as a group. As you try to understand or define your audience, keep in mind that there are three distinct levels at which this can be done: demographics; opinions; the event itself.

Analyzing Demographic Characteristics

The first level is what most people probably think of when they think about analyzing an audience. This is demographic characteristics. This includes age, education level, cultural background, gender and socio-economic status. It could also include the types of jobs members of the audience hold, the amount of money they make, the professional associations or service clubs to which they belong, the cost of the house in which they live, whether they own a home or rent, where they purchase their clothes, what type of vehicle they drive, and the part of the country in which they live.

Even within a specific company or organization, there are a number of levels at which such distinctions could be made. For example, the demographic characteristics of those on the shop floor will be different from the board of directors. The characteristics of supervisors will be different from senior executives. And so on.

Your job in preparing for your presentation is to try to understand the similarities and differences in the characteristics of audience members. Use these traits to get a sense of the people to whom you'll be presenting. As part of the planning process, this will help you tailor your information to their specific needs.

Analyzing Opinions

A second method of analyzing the audience has less to do with their external characteristics than with their internal beliefs. This means defining the audience on the basis of how they react in general to issues around the information you'll present, and how they will react specifically to the message you plan to deliver.

In general, there are three potential reactions to your message: People will support what you have to say; people will oppose what you have to say; people will not care about what you have to say. Your job is to understand as much as possible about whether they support, oppose or couldn't care about your message and the underlying issues on which it is constructed, then tailor your information accordingly.

If members of the group are generally supportive of your message, your goal should be to reinforce their opinion. You should develop content that acknowledges their support, and provides them with additional reasons for expanding or reinforcing that support. Your facts and logic should be structured in a way that provides them with the tools they need to continue to support your message, and perhaps even argue your case long after you have left the room.

You may use an emotional appeal to help lock in their support, but you should be careful. If they become too emotional about your message, they won't be able to help you convince others after you've left the room, as we'll see when we discuss strategies later in this booklet for handling potential hostility. By focusing on the emotional elements of the discussion, you may actually polarize their opinions.

If members of the group are generally opposed to your message, it is important to acknowledge that they have a perspective that is different from yours. It is, after all, their right to feel the way they do. You must understand that right and, if appropriate, recognize and acknowledge it. But your goal should be to neutralize their negative opinions and then to convince them to adopt your perspective.

However, you will not gain by meeting their opposition head-on. In fact, if you attempt this strategy, you will lose. There is a strong chance that everyone in the room is closer to each other than they are to you, especially if their opinion is contrary to yours. By meeting them head-on, you create a "me vs them" environment in which they will look to each other, and the similar opinions they hold, as a source of comfort. Your strategy in this situation is to stick to your facts. Position those facts in a way that tends to garner support from those whose opinion is opposed to yours, but whose opinion is based in logic.

If members of the group are not aware of the issues you represent, or couldn't care less, your job is to get them to formulate an opinion about your message and the issue it represents. In many ways, this is the most difficult challenge to overcome. After all, if nobody cares, how can you get them to care?

But, with this type of presentation, you have a couple of important factors working for you. Everyone has decided to spend time listening to you. By nature, people will actively seek opportunities in which to make the best possible use of their time. As they listen to you, they will attempt to make your information relevant to who they are as individuals. Your job at this point is to make your data and logic directly relevant to who they are. Explain to them why your message is important to them, and then convince them it is.

Analyzing The Event

The third method of analyzing the audience is to understand the event and/or organization that has brought them into the room to listen to you. Very often, this is an important key to tapping into common characteristics they possess as a group.

To do this, you need to ask some questions. Who else is presenting? What will they talk about? Is there a theme to the meeting? If so, what is it? How does your information fit into the theme, or into what other people will present?

What should you try to achieve with this group? What should the audience do or not do as a result of the presentation? Are there sensitive issues that should be avoided? If so, what are those issues and why are they sensitive to this group?

Answering these questions (and others like them) will help you understand how to position your information for this specific group at this specific point in time. This information, when added to the other elements of your audience analysis, will enable you to tap into their common characteristics and tailor your message to their needs, wants and desires.

Tap Into Common Characteristics

Very few groups are completely homogeneous. Trends emerge, but there will be people in the room that fall outside these trends. Use your audience analysis to get an idea of audience composition. Make sure you tap into the common characteristics that bring those people to your presentation at that particular point in time.

For example, you might be presenting your information to a group of Rotarians at a chapter that has been around for many years. Perhaps most people in the audience are near or at retirement age. But there may also be a number of younger people in the audience. You might shift your message toward the majority, but you wouldn't want to ignore the minority in doing so.

You may find that an audience is made up of people with a variety of opinions. For example, you may be asking for a budget increase to upgrade your company's computer systems. In preparing for the presentation, you discover that about half the audience is supportive of this investment and half opposes it. As a common characteristic, however, you know that all members of the management team want to decrease costs and improve productivity. These are common characteristics, and it is this common ground on which your presentation could be constructed.

If you can convince the majority that your recommendation will indeed decrease costs over the long term and improve productivity, and if they trust your ability to make good on these promises, you stand a better chance of having your budget approved than if you simply relate the features and benefits of the new system. Of course, there must be substance to the message. If your department has never made good on any such promise, you face an uphill struggle.

Your goal in analyzing the audience should be to use the analysis as a means of discovering common ground. If you can identify and quantify this common ground and capitalize on it, your chances of success increase proportionately.

Figure 1 on pages 15 to 19 provides a worksheet for defining audience characteristics, analyzing audience opinions, and reviewing the event itself. Use this model as a guide to understand as much as possible about the people to whom you'll be presenting and the event at which you'll present. It will help you to identify and capitalize on the common characteristics that bring these people into the room at that particular point in time, so you can better match your message to their specific need for information.

Figure 1
Audience Profile Worksheet

Analyzing Demographic Characteristics

- How many people are expected to attend your presentation? (Or how many people have you targeted to attend?)

- What is the age range of the group?

    - Is there an average age?
    - How old will be the oldest person in the room?
    - How old will the youngest person be?

- Will members of the audience be predominantly:

    - Male? Female?
    - A mix of both?
    - What is the ratio of that mix?

- Is the educational background of participants important? If so, does the audience have:

    - High school or equivalent?
    - Post-secondary?
    - Postgraduate?

- Is everyone of similar occupations?

    - Or is the audience a mix of a diverse range of occupations?
    - What are those occupations?
    - What is the largest single occupation represented in the room?
    - What percentage of people come from that occupation?

- What is the range of income of the audience?
  - Is there an average income?
  - How does income relate to their occupation or station in life?

- Is the audience primarily of one:
  - Race?
  - Religion?
  - Nationality?
  - A mix? If so, describe this mix and its relevance.

- Are there people in the audience who do not fit these descriptions?
  - If so, describe them.

Analyzing Opinions

- What expectations do you feel the audience will have about the need you're addressing or the value you plan to provide?

- How will the need you address and the value you offer capture their attention?

- What specifically do you hope participants will do with your information at the end of the presentation?

- How willing will they be to take that step when you walk into the room?

- Will members of the audience support your message, be opposed to it, or not have an opinion about it?
    - Of those three options, which will be prevalent?
    - What percentage of the audience will fall into each category?

- Are there any sensitive issues that should be avoided?
    - What are they and why are they sensitive?

- Are there any specific issues that should be discussed?
    - What are they and why should attention be drawn to them?

- Are there any significant events that have occurred for this group in the past year?
    - How do those events relate to your message?

- What will be the audience's interest in the topic?

- What, specifically, will the audience know about the topic?

Analyzing The Event

- Are you the only person delivering a presentation to this group at this time?

- If you're not the only person delivering a presentation, how many other presentations will be delivered to this group?

- If other people are presenting information to the audience, who are those other people and what will they cover?

- Is there a specific purpose to the meeting (i.e. management meeting, sales conference, recognition event, etc.)?

- Is the group participating in a larger conference or program? If so, what is the program or conference theme?

- What should the presentation achieve? What should the audience do or not do (think or not think) at the end of your presentation?

- Are there any sensitive issues that should be avoided? If so, what are those issues and why are they sensitive?

- Are there any significant events that have occurred in the industry, organization or group during the past year that affect their need for information (such as new product introductions, ownership changes, downsizings, increased competition)?

- What will be the audience’s interest in the topic?

- What will the audience currently know about the topic?

- Are there any areas, topics or examples that need to be covered during your presentation?

- What are one or two things about this group that your contact person feels you should know before addressing them?

- What is your time frame for the presentation? When are you scheduled to start? At what time must you be finished?

- What takes place immediately before and after your presentation (coffee break, meal, etc.)?

Visualize The Group

After you've gathered information about your audience's characteristics and their opinions about your message, close your eyes and try to imagine the audience as two or three people sitting across the desk from you. Ask yourself a number of questions:

- What would these people look like?
- How old would they be?
- If there were two people sitting across from you, would there be one male and one female? What would bind these people together? Characteristics? Issues? The event? Membership in a group, club or association?
- What opinions do they have about you, your organization or the message you plan to convey?
- Do they support your message? Or are they opposed to it?
- What issues are important to them?
- Would the people sitting across the desk from you have similar or different opinions? Would their opinion be based in logic or emotion?

The more you understand your audience, the more effectively you can tap into their common characteristics — what brings them into that room together at the same time. By doing so, you can create value with your message and provide them with information that is directly relevant to who they are as individuals, what they hold valuable, and what they hope to achieve as a group. This will create a strong foundation that will help you significantly enhance your potential for business success.

Determine The Type Of Presentation

In general, there are two basic types of presentations: informative and persuasive. They are very similar; in fact, sometimes it can be difficult to tell them apart. The biggest difference between them is the degree of action you want the audience to take.

For example, if you stand up in front of an audience and tell them that you want them to think more carefully about the information being presented, or to relate your information to their personal or professional life, your purpose is to inform. If you want the audience to take specific action — phone their elected representative, buy from you, attend a rally — your purpose is to persuade.

The Informative Presentation

In an informative presentation, the basic purpose is to share knowledge about a single subject that is useful to the audience. Overall, your goal is to train or teach the audience about things they've never thought of or used before, and to encourage them to use your information to enhance their business, personal, professional or family lives.

There is no "secret" to an effective informative presentation. The golden rule, however, is to explain the information in ways that the audience will understand your concept and remember your message well after the event.

In general, an audience will be more attentive if they perceive the information as relevant to their needs, and more likely to listen if they perceive the information to be "new" or something they haven't thought of before. This may simply involve uncovering a new angle or a new approach to an existing topic.

For example, picture yourself as a member of a group of air force flight trainees. On your third day of training, after listening to presentation after (boring) presentation, you are in a room with a very stiff and upright master sergeant. "Uh-oh," you think to yourself, "another boring presentation."

When the last trainee has found a seat, the sergeant holds up a piece of metal about the length and width of a ball point pen. "Does anyone know what this is?" she asks.

After a prolonged silence, she lets the audience in on a new piece of information. "This is a firing pin for a Codswell model 50 ejection seat. Those of you who pay attention during the next two hours stand a good chance of living if you ever have to use this piece of equipment. Those of you who don't pay attention ... won't."

Is the information new? Yes. Is it relevant to the needs of the audience? Yes. Will they pay attention? Almost certainly. Even in an informative presentation, there must be a call to action. You must tell the audience what you want them to do with your information. In the example above, the call to action is how the information can save the trainees' lives.

Creative Presentation Goes A Long Way

When information is presented creatively — when specific information in an informative presentation is highlighted or emphasized — the audience is more likely to remember the message and the way individual parts of the presentation are tied together.

To arrange information creatively in an informative presentation, there are three broad approaches:

- The information can be arranged according to time.
- The information can be arranged according to space.
- The information can be arranged according to topic.

Arranging information by time means creating a chronological order in the minds of the audience. You create a logical series that is based on what happened yesterday (past), what is taking place today (present), and what may take place tomorrow (future).

Space order creates a visual pattern in the minds of the audience. Emphasis is placed on spatial relationships. Patterns such as left to right, top to bottom, north to south, east to west are highlighted.

When presentations are arranged by topic, each main point becomes its own "mini topic" within the framework of the whole. There is a logical subdivision to the information. The topics that the presenter wants the audience to remember are emphasized.

In an informative presentation, as in all presentations, every piece of information must relate to the main topic as part of a logical "chain" of information. There is no middle ground; if information doesn't add to the main message, it takes away from it.

It's also important to overcome the natural tendency to provide too much information. But remember, less is more; the less you actually say, the more the audience will ultimately remember. They will have the silence they need to absorb your information and make it part of their frame of reference.

And even when the purpose is to inform, every presentation must have a call to action. The purpose is to motivate the audience to make the information part of their everyday life. The audience is being informed about a topic, but you attempt to persuade them that the information is valuable to their professional, personal or family lives. Informative speeches are characterized by such call-to-action phrases as: "I want you to consider how what I'm presenting will affect your life ..." or "Think about it the next time you ..."

The Persuasive Presentation

Persuasive presentations encourage others to adopt your point of view or accept a certain philosophy. In addition, persuasive presentations also strongly encourage the audience to take immediate and direct action: write a Member of Parliament; support a charitable cause with donations; sign up sponsors and run for cancer research; compost garbage; approve a capital spending request.

In persuasive presentations, you want the audience to specifically do — or not do — something. And, generally, this "do or not do" scenario can be divided into three categories: Reinforce existing beliefs; neutralize hostile or opposing beliefs; form new beliefs. Once the opinions are moving in the right direction, the next step is to move the audience to action, and it's important that they buy into the process and take action sooner rather than later.

There are never any guarantees that you'll be effective with a persuasive presentation, especially if you're trying to bring a predominantly hostile audience around to your point of view. In fact, in that scenario, chances are it can't be done if the entire audience is hostile. As we'll examine later in "handling hostility" (pages 88 to 90), if some of the audience is hostile, this can be used to your advantage.

But by employing the following strategies, you can increase your odds of success in a persuasive presentation:

- The information you present must be clear, reasonable and supportable.
- The evidence you supply must be carefully organized.
- Factual evidence should be used wherever applicable or reasonable.
- Anecdotal evidence should be supplied in sparing doses.
- As a means of opening and closing your argument, consider motivating your audience through the use of emotional appeal.

The Use Of Emotional Appeal

The use of emotional appeal is probably the most powerful tool with which to motivate an audience. Such appeal should be focused on the introduction and conclusion of your presentation; the facts supporting your arguments should occupy the main body of the presentation. Emotion should supplement logic, not the other way around.

The best way to develop emotional appeal is with ordered logic. For example, if you were encouraging your audience to donate to a local hospital for the purchase of new equipment, you might choose to talk about one of those pieces of equipment — a high-tech incubator that keeps precious little hearts beating and lungs breathing at an earlier stage of premature birth than was ever before thought possible.

This particular piece of equipment, you tell your audience, is very expensive. But it's also very important. To set up your message, your introduction might talk about "Jennifer", who was born premature. You might list her weight and her length, sticking to the facts but letting the audience draw their own picture. "Place this precious infant on a paperback," you say, "and there will be room to spare. The tiny hands are smaller than a paper clip. The feet are smaller than the nail on your thumb."

In this way, you are using logic, but the way in which the logic is structured evokes an emotional response. In your conclusion, you might draw attention back to Jennifer and others like her, who can be helped through individual and corporate donations.

Establish Time-Bound, Measurable Objectives

You are planning to deliver a presentation. You've carefully analyzed your audience. You believe you can tap into their common characteristics and provide significant value, and that your message will meet their needs, wants and desires. Now, to provide a framework for ensuring that your efforts pay off, you must establish time-bound and measurable objectives. By establishing objectives, you develop benchmarks. Without them, you cannot quantify your success, or work toward improving it.

People often conduct presentations for a variety of reasons, many of which can be extremely vague. And, at the end of the presentation, these people sometimes leave the room with ambiguous feelings of success. Certainly, it feels good if the audience responded to their message or laughed at their jokes. But the purpose of the presentation is not to audition as a stand-up comedian. There are business reasons for the presentation. As a result, it is important to set objectives for those business reasons and work toward achieving them.

By setting objectives and measuring your success against those objectives, you can determine whether you achieved what you hoped to achieve. If you did achieve some success, what can you change or do differently next time out to improve your success? If you're not achieving the results you should, how can you improve?

Developing an effective presentation takes time and effort. There may even be a cost involved. Your investment, whether personal or financial, must bring a return. Establishing objectives and measuring your results against those objectives will help you determine whether the return you get out of the process is indeed worth the investment you put into it.

Your objectives must be time-bound and measurable. In other words, you must achieve a specific result within a set time frame. If they're not time-bound and measurable, they are not objectives. They are vague goals. If you settle on vague goals, be prepared to settle for vague results.

The objectives you establish for your presentation should be focused on two main areas: the business results you hope to achieve; and the communications results you hope to achieve.

Business Objectives

It's important that you establish objectives for the business purposes of your presentation. Sometimes these objectives can be easy to quantify and achieve. Sometimes they can be elusive. Much of this can be traced to whether you're delivering a persuasive presentation or an informative one.

It can be relatively easy to define business objectives for a persuasive presentation. For example, if you deliver a presentation to a management group with the intent of getting a budget approved at the end of the meeting, your business success is relatively easy to quantify. Did you get the budget approved by the end of the meeting? If you did, you achieved your objective. If not, what could you have done differently to achieve your objective?

However, with informative presentations it can be difficult to precisely define the objectives you would like to achieve. For example, if you're providing a management team with an update on a project and how you are currently proceeding against plan, it can be difficult to define precise objectives. But you must make every effort to do so. If you don't, you will have difficulty determining your overall success, and what you need to do to be even more successful in the future.

Without the ability to measure and track your results, you will not be sure that you are generating the return you seek, based on your input in time, energy and other resources. Without objectives, your presentations will be a series of hits and misses, which will be frustrating. Setting objectives will help you determine where you hit and where you missed, and where you can improve the next time out.

Sample Business Objectives

For our “barking dog” presentation, we hope to:

- Convince council to immediately strike a sub-committee to further investigate the issue and examine staff recommendations.
- Ensure that reporters attending the meeting understand the significance of this issue and portray the issue as one that can be successfully resolved by monitoring broadcast news items and press clippings generated within one week of the meeting.

For our new software presentation, we hope to:

- Ensure that managers understand the type of information we seek, so that 80% of the information received by the deadline date can be used directly with no changes or modifications.
- Convey the urgency to managers of providing us with information on time, so that 90% of them get the information back to us by the deadline date.

The objectives shown here are a starting point. They are an initial benchmark. As you improve your success with presentations, you may discover that you can do better than what is shown above. If that occurs, raise the bar.

For example, in the second presentation you may set an objective that everyone return the information to you on time, and that all the information received be used with no modifications or changes. But remember, if you raise the bar, make sure you continue to measure your success against any new benchmark, and use that measurement as a springboard for increasing your success in the future.

Communication Objectives

In addition to setting and measuring business results, you should set similar standards to measure your communication results. This helps you determine where you can make the process of absorbing your information even more effective for participants in the future. Logically, if you improve your communication effectiveness, you will improve your business success.

You measure your communication effectiveness by:

- Establishing time-bound and measurable communication objectives.

- Developing ways of measuring your success against communication objectives through the use of a number of tools, such as distributing (wherever possible) a short survey, or feedback sheet, at the end of your presentation to determine your effectiveness in achieving those objectives.

Setting a benchmark and measuring your communication effectiveness provides cheap insurance. If your presentation is not as effective as you would have liked, you can often turn to your communication objectives to determine why. From the audience's perspective, did you communicate effectively? If so, how? If not, why not? And where can you improve in the future?

If nothing else, you'll rule out communication as a barrier to your success, which will allow you to focus on other issues. Did you clearly define the need? Did you meet this need with value? Did you effectively define the characteristics and opinions of people attending the presentation? Did you clearly understand the context of the event? Was your message tightly focused?

A sample communication feedback survey is shown as Figure 2 on page 30. This will help you measure your effectiveness and enable you to examine your results on the basis of the objectives you established. Feel free to use it directly or as a guide to help you in developing your own feedback systems.

You can administer this survey in a number of ways. It can be done fairly informally over the telephone. Another way is to hand out the survey at the end of your presentation. But when you hand out the feedback survey, respondents' names should be optional. You want direct, honest feedback that will help you improve your presentations in the future. Honesty increases if people feel they are submitting their comments anonymously.

Sample Communication Objectives

- Convince the majority of councillors that this is an urgent problem, but one that can be easily addressed, by monitoring questions and feedback during the presentation and conducting follow-up discussions with a cross-section of councillors and/or their executive assistants within two days of the meeting.

- Create a two-way exchange of information with councillors that results in them asking at least 25 questions during the presentation.

- Answer participants' questions effectively during the presentation.

- Use visual aids and other tools in a way that helps participants easily understand the concepts, but doesn't interfere with the message of the presentation.

If you don't establish communication objectives and evaluate your progress against them, and if you don't achieve the business results you seek, you will have no idea of what needs to be changed to enhance your success. You will be operating hit-and-miss.

And even if you have been relatively successful, the discipline of establishing and measuring communication objectives will help you improve that success in the future. You can determine what you did right and what you could have done better — where you were successful in matching your message to the needs, wants and desires of the audience, and where you could have improved — as a means of enhancing your success in the future.

Figure 2
Presentation Feedback

As a means of helping me to improve my presentations, I hope you'll take a few minutes to complete the following survey.

On a six-point scale, where one means you strongly disagree and six means you strongly agree, please respond to each of the following comments. After completing this form, please leave it face down on the table at the back of the room.

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly Agree
The information presented was appropriate for the venue and me, as an audience member.	1	2	3	4	5	6
The logic of the presentation was well-structured.	1	2	3	4	5	6
The information presented was easy to understand.	1	2	3	4	5	6
There was just the right amount of information presented.	1	2	3	4	5	6
The information was presented at just the right pace.	1	2	3	4	5	6
The presenter gave me lots to think about.	1	2	3	4	5	6
The presenter gave me time to think about each thought.	1	2	3	4	5	6
The visual aids reinforced the message.	1	2	3	4	5	6
Questions were answered effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6
I felt comfortable listening to the presenter.	1	2	3	4	5	6

Additional comments: ____

____

____

____

Develop Presentation Content

The primary rule of content for all of your presentations is that you only get to talk about one main topic. Regardless of your main topic, stick to it. Although the content of one presentation may include elements of another, and vice versa, save the details of second presentation for another time.

There are four distinct steps to developing the content of your presentation. Each is important to developing content that is clear, concise and tightly focused on the needs of the specific audience in attendance. To develop content that adheres to the principle of "less is more", you need to:

- Develop an overall framework of your presentation.
- Transfer this framework to a short "notes" outline of the presentation.
- Expand your content by either expanding your notes outline or your original framework.
- Complete your content.

Develop An Overall Framework

The first step in developing the content of your presentation is to put together an overall framework of six to eight sentences that will become the foundation of the information you will cover. To start this process, draw a narrow rectangular box at the top of a blank sheet of paper and write down the main theme of your presentation in one sentence. This sentence must draw a strong link between your message and the needs, wants and desires of the audience.

Once you have an initial sentence that captures your theme, the next step is to state the expected outcomes of the presentation, which you write down in a second narrow box under the first. This is the value of your message and/or your call to action. In face-to-face communication, don't begin at the beginning. Begin at the end (your call to action), and bring that ending to the beginning.

You want to inform the audience, right up front, of why the presentation has value to them and what you hope they'll do with your information as a result. This is your call to action. It is where you must “ask for the sale” — what you hope the audience will do or not do with that information at the end of your presentation.

You’re there for a reason. Tell the audience that reason right up front. Don’t hide it until the end or assume that the audience will draw the logical link between your presentation and what you want them to do with the information you’re presenting. Tell them right up front and remind them again at the end.

In an informative presentation, you either want people to use or apply your information. In a persuasive presentation, you want them to take immediate and/or direct action. If you don’t want the audience to do either of these, you must question why you’re standing in front of them in the first place.

For example, in our “barking dog” presentation, the call to action would be: “By the end of my presentation, I hope you’ll recognize that this problem can be dealt with efficiently before it grows into a hot political issue. And we recommend that you to strike a formal sub-committee to study the issue and review our recommendations.”

For the software presentation, the call to action would be: “By the end of my presentation, I hope you’ll have a clear idea of the information we need from you and your people to tailor the software solution to your needs, and that you’ll get that information back to us within two weeks so we can keep this project on track.”

Once you’ve outlined the theme of your presentation and what you hope participants will do with the information, the next step is to develop three ideas that support your main theme. These will be the main body of your presentation. Write down each of these ideas in one sentence, each in its own narrow rectangular box.

Why three ideas? Because people tend to think in threes: yesterday, today, tomorrow; past, present, future; top, middle, bottom; left, centre, right.

Each idea must be directly linked to the main theme that you wrote down in one sentence in the box at the top of the page. This is a basic principle of content for presentations of all types. Information should form an unbroken chain from start to finish. If everything isn't linked together, the audience will feel you're rambling. And if this occurs, your business and communication results will suffer.

Once you develop three supporting ideas, the next step is to outline your conclusion. The conclusion is the "because" or "if" portion of your presentation. This is where you recap your main points and restate your call to action.

The basic framework of your seminar content should be clearly and concisely stated in eight to 10 sentences. Figure 3 on page 34 graphically illustrates this. This model has then been applied to our "barking dog" presentation in Figure 4 on page 35.

Figure 3
The Basic Presentation Model

To begin developing your content, draw a rectangular box at the top of a piece of paper and, in one sentence, define the single, most important message to be contained in your presentation.

Once you define the single, most important message of your presentation, draw five rectangular boxes underneath the larger box. The first two boxes and the last box (of the six boxes in total), form the introduction and conclusion, respectively. Each of the three middle boxes is a single idea, a sub-heading that contributes directly to the main message.

This box and the top box form the basis of your introduction. This box will contain one or two sentences that tell the audience what to do or not do with the information you present. You may wish to use different types of introductions — such as questions, a story, or an anecdote. If you use these tools, however, remember that you must still get to the point quickly.

This is the first sub-point of your presentation. Each of the sub-points must relate directly to the main topic (the box at the top). If the sub-point doesn't relate, you have two choices. Change the sub-point. Or change the main topic.

Second sub-point of the presentation. Like each of the sub-points, this box will contain one short sentence.

Third sub-point. Try to organize your presentations along the "rule of thirds." As a general rule of thumb, there should be three sub-points relating to the main topic, and three sub-sub-points relating to each sub-point. Follow this guideline, and you will tend to follow the principle of "less is more" in the content of your presentation.

The conclusion recaps the presentation — reminds the audience what was said — often using "because" or "if" and restates your call to action. Don't begin your presentations at the beginning. Instead, begin at the end and bring it to the beginning. Tell them what you want them to do right up front. Remind them once again at the end.

Figure 4
The Basic Presentation Model — Applied
"Barking Dog" Presentation

The single, most important message to be contained in your presentation
I'd like to talk to you today about our proposal to add new levels of enforcement and penalties to our town's "barking dog" bylaw.

The call to action (what you want the audience to do)
By the end of my presentation, I hope you will understand that taking action now will keep a growing problem from getting out of hand, and we recommend that you strike a sub-committee of council to study the proposal further.

Sub-point #1
The number of complaints we're receiving is increasing rapidly.

Sub-point #2
We have recommended changes to the bylaw by drawing on the benchmarks and experience of other municipalities.

Sub-point #3
Changing the bylaw will promote neighborhood peace and harmony.

Conclusion
Because there is a rising incidence of complaints ... because other municipalities have overcome similar challenges ... and because we all believe that neighborhood harmony is important ... we would like you to strike a sub-committee to examine this issue and our recommendations for resolving this issue before it grows into a larger political problem.

The framework on page 35 is a broad outline of our presentation. In this framework, the entire presentation is summarized in about six sentences. Keep this in mind. If you can't say it clearly and concisely in six to eight sentences, don't expect a 10-, 20-, 30- or 60-minute time frame to save you. If your message isn't clear in the shorter format, it certainly won't be clear in the longer one.

Transferring The Framework

You started with six sentences. The next step is to transfer this short format to a slightly longer one — a short "notes" outline of your presentation content. In an effective presentation, you shouldn't gather all your information and edit down. You should begin with a short format — six to eight sentences — and build up from there.

The notes outline can actually double as a three- to five-minute version of your presentation. In fact, if you only need three to five minutes of information, this is all you'll need to complete your content.

As you'll notice in the "barking dog" example on pages 38 and 39, there isn't a grammatically correct sentence anywhere in the notes. This should always be the case with notes unless you're quoting someone directly. Notes are an essential part of an effective presentation and, at this point, it would probably be prudent to discuss how notes can be effectively used.

Using Notes Effectively

Notes are a balance between a written script (speech) and no notes (ad-lib, off-the-cuff or memorization). Your speaking notes should be six to twelve word reminders of each full idea, similar to what's in Figure 5 on pages 38 and 39. And, unless you're quoting someone directly, there should not be a grammatically correct sentence anywhere in your notes.

When you're delivering your presentations, particularly in the early stages of your public speaking career, you should always use good notes. "One note — one idea" is the adage that was often repeated during the *Presenting With Ease!* seminar. Another adage that was often used is that "if it isn't in your notes, you probably shouldn't be saying it", unless you're responding directly to a question.

Do your thinking when you develop your notes. Deliver your notes when you're in front of the group. This improves your focus, and helps you communicate clearly and concisely.

Each note should be your own "shorthand" of one idea, which represents from one word to 20 words of speaking, depending on the idea. To deliver the notes, look down quickly to get one note at a time, then look up at the audience and pause. Use the first pause to translate the note into a single full idea, but don't say anything until you have that idea firmly fixed in your mind. Once you have the idea clearly fixed, express it at your normal rate of word delivery — as quickly as you can get the words out of your mouth.

Pause again before looking down to get the next note. This is the "second pause" that encourages the audience to think about what you've just said. Remember, the audience needs time to think about each idea if they are going to "participate" in your presentation and relate your ideas to their frame of reference and who they are as people. This is also where you establish eye contact with the audience.

Do not try to alter the planned sequence of your notes as you're delivering them. Editing on the fly or ad-libbing will destroy an effective delivery. Not only will this take you away from your plan, it may extend the length of your presentation, creating time pressures that will ruin your delivery. If you try to convey too much information, you're not focused on communicating effectively. You're focused on trying to get through it all in time.

Plan your plan when you're away from the presentation. This is where you develop your notes. Then deliver your plan (your notes) when you're there. Making it up or editing as you go is hard work; it is less work to focus on delivering each individual idea effectively. And not only is it less work, it significantly improves your focus and enhances the communication process.

Using good notes will help you explain ideas in the simplest possible terms. If you give your audience time to think, they will take each simple idea and add their own level of sophistication. This helps them "participate" in the delivery of your information and allows them to personalize your ideas in a way that makes those ideas directly relevant to who they are as individuals. This is when communication works best.

Figure 5

Sample Notes Presentation

“Barking Dog” Presentation

Introduction

- Like talk to you today about proposal add new levels enforcement / fines — barking dog bylaw.

- By end of presentation hope you will recognize action now can keep growing problem getting out of hand.

    - endorse proposal / vote to pass bylaw recommendations.

- To do that, I’ll cover following points:

    - Number barking dog complaints increasing rapidly recent years.

    - Recommended changes draw on benchmarks / experience other municipalities.

    - Changes promote neighborhood peace / harmony.

Sub-point #1

- Number barking dog complaints increasing rapidly recent years.

    - Received less than 20 complaints / year 1993 dogs barking 11 pm-7 am.

    - This year receive 20 complaints / month.

    - No question growing problem / growing awareness of problem.

Sub-point #2

- Recommended changes draw on benchmarks / experience other municipalities.
    - All cases, complaint lodged by neighbor followed up.
    - Complaint valid? — dog owner provided warning.
    - Complaints continue? — fines begin $50 / escalate from there.
    - Filing false complaint? — $500 first-time fine.

Sub-point #3

- Changes promote neighborhood peace / harmony.
    - Reasonable to expect no constant barking overnight.
    - Experience other municipalities show less enforcement needed over time.
    - Experience other municipalities shows allows neighbors focus being neighbors.

Conclusion

- Because increase in complaints now trend ...
- Because other municipalities overcome similar challenges ...
- Because neighborhood harmony important ...
- We hope you endorse recommendations: strike subcommittee review recommendations / implement solution.

Expanding Your Content

There are two ways to expand your content. In the first method, you expand your original notes outline. You use this method to go from five minutes of information to about 10 to 15 minutes of information. In the second method, you expand your original six-box presentation framework. You use this method to significantly expand your content when you need more than 15 minutes of information.

The rule of thumb for presentation content, which we discussed during the *Presenting With Ease!* workshop, is to develop enough material to fill 50 to 60 per cent of the time available for your presentation. In other words, if you have a 10-minute time frame, you bring five to six minutes of information. This gives you some flexibility for when you start and allows the audience the opportunity to ask questions throughout.

If you have a one-hour time frame, you bring 30 to 35 minutes of information. Again, this allows you the opportunity to answer questions throughout. Of course, if you're using a good set of notes in which you are sticking to the concept of "one note, one idea", you'll know exactly how much information constitutes 30 to 35 minutes.

Expanding Your Notes Outline

In your notes presentation, you developed three sub-points to support your main theme. Then you added three ideas to support each sub-point. To expand your outline for up to 15 minutes of information, you would still keep to three sub-points, but you increase the amount of information under each sub-point. You may, for example, have six ideas under the sub-point (three groups of two ideas) that directly relate to the sub-point. Alternatively, you could have nine ideas (three groups of three ideas) under each of the sub-points to get to nearly 15 minutes of information.

Figure 6 on page 41 provides an example of how this could be done. The first section of our "barking dog" presentation has been expanded. Instead of having three ideas to support the sub-point, you'll notice there are six. However, you should also notice that the six ideas are grouped into three sub-sub-points with two ideas each. In other words, we are still following the "rule of thirds" in a presentation. We have three sub-points relating to our main theme and three sub-sub-points relating to each sub-point. This helps us adhere to the principle of less is more while ensuring our presentation is still an unbroken chain of information from start to finish.

Figure 6

Expanding The Notes

"Barking Dog" Presentation

Sub-point #1

- Number barking dog complaints increasing rapidly recent years.

  - Received less than 20 complaints / year 1993 dogs barking 11 pm-7 am.
  - This was first year ever kept records.
  - First time issue hit city's "radar" — became aware really was issue.

  - This year received 20 complaints / month.
  - More than ten-fold increase seven years.
  - Issue going from small blip to large one.

  - No question growing problem / growing awareness of problem.
  - People not only looking at issue themselves / talking to neighbors & friends about it.
  - Complaints isolated to specific neighborhoods but growing — both # per neighborhood and # of neighborhoods.

You'll notice that Figure 6 slightly expands the amount of information provided, when compared to the original notes outline (three- to five-minute version) of your presentation. By the time you complete the introduction and conclusion of the presentation, there will be about 10 to 15 minutes of information. Beyond this threshold, you should consider going to a second method of expanding your information.

Expanding The Basic Presentation Framework

The second method of expanding your content begins with the initial six-box "Basic Presentation Framework" you completed at the start of the process of developing your content. Starting there, expanding the framework involves a number of distinct steps.

First, you transfer the information in the first five boxes of the framework to the introduction of your presentation. Next, each of the three sub-points in your content are taken to the top of their own six-box format and six to eight sentences are developed for each sub-point, and notes are made for each sub-point. Finally, the conclusion is completed using the last box as its starting point; the information delivered during the presentation is recapped and the call to action is restated. This is graphically illustrated in Figure 7.

At this point, you still must resist the urge to go into great detail within each section. Keep thinking in fairly broad strokes. This will help ensure that all information is interconnected, will prevent you from getting bogged down in detail, and will help you adhere to the vital principle of less is more. Also, it is critical that each piece of information in your presentation be connected to what precedes and follows it. The audience will be listening to your information and, as we'll point out later when we discuss effective delivery, people can think or they can listen, but they can't do both together. To keep them from drifting or becoming confused, your information must be extremely logical and easy to follow. If participants spend too much time trying to "connect the dots" in your presentation, they will have trouble listening to what you're saying. They will give up. You will lose them. And your business and communication results will suffer.

The initial framework for our software presentation is presented as Figure 8 on page 44. An initial introduction is expanded in Figure 9 on pages 46 and 47. The sub-points are each taken to the top of their own six-box format in Figures 10, 11 and 12 on pages 49, 50 and 51. From there, the six boxes for the first sub-point are expanded into notes for that section of the presentation in Figure 14 on page 53. The basic framework of the conclusion is mapped out in Figure 15 on pages 54 and 55.

Figure 7

Expanding The Overall Framework

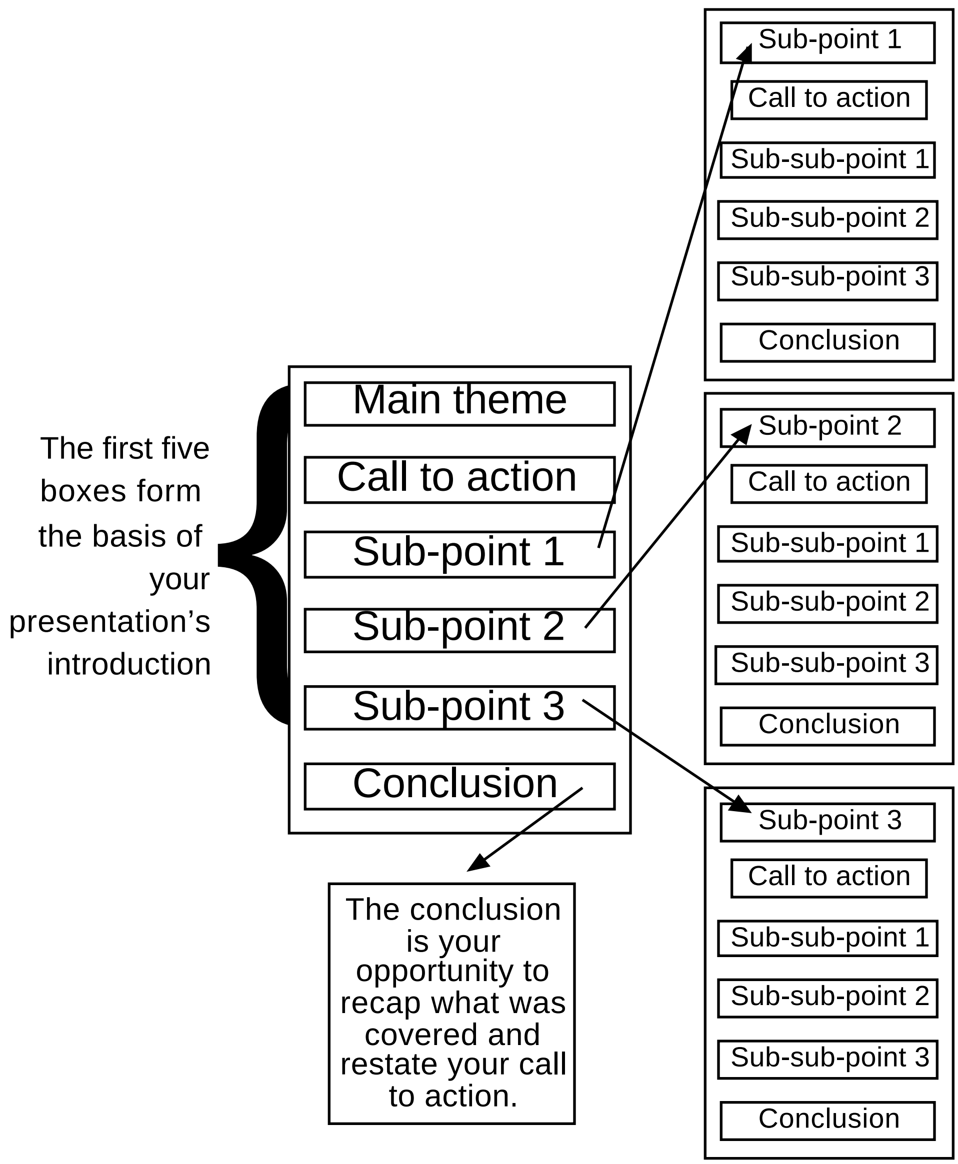


Figure 8

The Basic Presentation Model — Applied
“Software” Presentation

The single, most important message to be contained in your presentation.
I’d like to talk to you about the information we’ll need from each of your areas in the next two weeks to customize our new E/Z Serve application to your specific needs.

The call to action (what you want the audience to do)
By the end of my presentation, I hope you will understand the type of information we need from you and the importance of getting your feedback to us on time so we can keep this project on track.

Sub-point #1
We need you to get from your people information on the ways in which they believe a new software package could help them serve their customers.

Sub-point #2
We have developed a few simple tools to help you gather this information.

Sub-point #3
We need this information back to us in a usable form within two weeks if we’re going to keep to our tight development schedule.

Conclusion
If you can get good information from your people ... and if you can use the tools we’ve developed to format this information ... and if you get this information back to us on time ... we can ensure that the software will meet your needs and that we’ll be able to stick to our tight development schedule.

The Introduction
The introduction sets the tone for the entire presentation. It should help people feel comfortable, yet get to the point quickly. The introduction should also state the call to action. This is the value you provide and the "ask" for the next logical step in the sales process.

The introduction in Figure 9 on pages 46 and 47 was developed for our software presentation. It quickly gets to the point. It uses the first five boxes to outline the main theme, states the call to action (what the audience should do or not do with the information), and identifies in short sentences the overall topics to be covered. It also points out that questions will be taken throughout the presentation. As we'll discuss later, allowing questions throughout your presentation, whenever and wherever possible, is an important component of communicating effectively with participants, and making your presentations two-way, participative and interactive.

Some may call our sample introduction a fairly "dry" lead into the presentation. Yet it captures audience attention, establishes common ground between the speaker and the audience, and leads into the main body of the presentation. And it does all of those things while getting to the point quickly.

Potentially, there are a number of creative introductions that might be used to spice up the start of your presentations, such as the use of suspense, asking rhetorical questions, telling a story or creating contrast. These are covered later in the "Completing Your Content" section of this chapter. However, we know going in to this software presentation that there will be tight time constraints. So we have opted for this standard introduction as a means of getting to the point quickly and making the best possible use of everyone's time.

And that brings us to an important point. People often wonder if they should tell a joke at the start of their presentation. The best answer is "possibly, but probably not". If you're comfortable telling jokes (and relatively good at it), and if it's appropriate, you may start that way. However, the joke must relate directly to the main theme of your presentation. Otherwise, you run the risk of people remembering your joke the next day, but being unable to remember much else of what you said during the presentation. And remember, if the joke falls flat, you will have trouble recovering your composure. If you don't recover your composure, there is a high likelihood that your business and communication results will suffer.

You can capture attention, establish common ground and lead into the main body of the presentation by simply stating right up front the main idea you'll cover and what you want the audience to do or not do at the end of your presentation — similar to what appears below. In every presentation you conduct, bring your call to action to the starting line. Let them know what you want them to do with the information you're presenting. That way, they'll be more inclined to listen, follow your line of logic and figure out — for themselves — why they should do or not do what you're suggesting.

Figure 9
The Introduction Expanded

- Good afternoon.

- As I think most of you know, my name is Jane Smith.

  - I'm the project leader for the new E/Z Serve software package we're developing to help improve the ways you folks serve your customers.

- I'd like to talk to you about the information we'll need from each of your areas in the next two weeks to customize the E/Z Serve application to your specific needs.

- By the end of my presentation, I hope you will understand the type of information we need and the importance of getting your feedback to us on time so we can keep this project on track.

- I plan to cover three broad topics during my presentation.

  - First, I'll talk a bit about the type of information we need from your people on how they serve their customers and how they feel a software package could help them.

  - Second, I'll talk about the simple tools we've developed to help you gather the right information.

- ° Third, I'll discuss how we need this information back to us in a usable form within two weeks if we're going to keep to our tight development schedule.

- At the end of my presentation, I'll answer any final questions and wrap up.
  - ° But I don't want you to wait until the end of the presentation to ask questions. In fact, I hope you'll ask questions throughout.
  - ° Are there any questions so far?
- No? Then let's get to the first section of my presentation ...

Filling In The Main Body

Now that we've expanded the introduction while getting right to the point, the next step is to expand the three sub-points. To do this, you "lift" each sub-point from the initial framework and put it to the top of its own six-box format, and develop six to eight sentences for each sub-point in the presentation.

The call to action for each sub-point is for the audience to learn, understand and/or apply the information contained each section. After all, if you don't want them to learn about or apply the information, why are you presenting it?

Once you put the sentence from each sub-point to the top of its own six boxes, you develop three sub-sub-points that support the sentence at the top. If you follow this guideline, you will adhere to the "rule of thirds". People tend to think in thirds: yesterday, today, tomorrow; top, middle, bottom; left, centre, right. Structuring your presentation in this fashion will enable you to cascade your information in a logical approach. It will also help you adhere to the vital principle of less is more in developing your content.

The three sub-points of our software presentation are filled in as Figures 10, 11 and 12 on pages 48, 49 and 50. You'll notice that each sub-point is duplicated in the first box on each of the next three pages. And notice that the sub-point doesn't change when put to the top of its own six boxes. It stays the same. Once the sub-points are at the top of their own six boxes, each section of the presentation is then sketched out.

Figure 10
Sub-point #1 Expanded
Software Presentation

The single, most important message to be contained in this portion of the presentation (as drawn from sub-point one on page 44).

We need you to get from your people information on the ways in which they believe a new software package could help them serve their customers.

The call to action (what you want the audience to do with the information from this portion of the presentation).

By the end of this section, I hop you'll recognize the importance of having your people provide sound input into the design of the software package.

Sub-sub-point #1

Your people are closest to our customers.

Sub-sub-point #2

They have valuable insights into how their interaction with customers could be improved.

Sub-sub-point #3

To ensure this software will help them, we need their collective input.

Conclusion

Because they are closest to the customer ... because they have valuable insights ... and because their collective input will improve the software design ... we need their input and we hope you'll help us get it.

Figure 11
Sub-point #2 Expanded
Software Presentation

The single, most important message to be contained in this portion of the presentation (as drawn from sub-point two on page 44). We have developed a few simple tools to help you gather their input.

The call to action (what you want the audience to do with the information from this portion of the presentation). By the end of this section, I hope you'll understand the value of having your people use all their tools we have provided.

Sub-sub-point #1 We have three specific tools to help gather the information we need.

Sub-sub-point #2 It's not vital that every employee use every tool; dividing them into groups will be more efficient.

Sub-sub-point #3 We will also give everyone the opportunity to provide additional input beyond that of their specific group.

Conclusion Because the tools are available ... because dividing employees into groups is most efficient ... and because everyone will have the opportunity to provide input as they see fit ... we hope you'll encourage your people to use the tools at their disposal.

Figure 12
Sub-point #3 Expanded

The single, most important message to be contained in this portion of the presentation (as drawn from sub-point three on page 44).

We need this information back to us in usable form and within two weeks if we're going to keep to our tight development schedule.

The call to action (what you want the audience to do with the information from this portion of the presentation).

By the end of this section, I hope you'll commit to ensuring that your people take the time to do a good job of helping us gather information and get that information back to us within the time frame indicated.

Sub-sub-point #1

We will complete the initial framework of the software package while your people are gathering information.

Sub-sub-point #2

We will take about three weeks to incorporate their input once we receive it.

Sub-sub-point #3

We will have a prototype available about two weeks after that, which will keep us on schedule.

Conclusion

If we get the framework completed on time ... if we can incorporate their input three weeks after that ... and if we can get the prototype completed two weeks later ... we should stay on schedule.

You'll notice that each of the sub-points is still only appears as a skeletal framework. There are still only six to eight sentences for each sub-point. This is important, because it will help ensure that your presentation doesn't get bogged down in detail. It will also help ensure that the information you select for the presentation is focused on exactly what the client needs to hear, which is not necessarily only what you feel compelled to tell them or what you've gotten into the habit of telling others. And, if you follow this process, you will be much more likely to adhere to the important principle of less is more, which we'll discuss at greater length during the "Present Your Message & Personality" section of this booklet.

The next step is to turn each sub-point into notes. As discussed previously, you should always deliver your presentations from notes (even your introduction and conclusion, which have been shown here as sentences for demonstration purposes).

This has been done for sub-point number one on the following pages. Figure 13 on page 52 is a direct duplication of sub-point #1 from page 48. Figure 14 on the facing page is a short notes presentation for this section of the presentation.

The information on page 53 has been transferred directly from the six boxes on page 52. The information is turned into notes — i.e. no complete sentences anywhere on page 53 — but has otherwise not been altered. Transferring the information directly and keeping the flow is important to ensuring that all pieces of your presentation fit together properly.

Figure 13
Sub-point #1
Software Presentation

The single, most important message to be contained in this portion of the presentation (repeated from page 48).

We need you to get from your people information on the ways in which they believe a new software package could help them serve their customers.

The call to action (what you want the audience to do with the information from this portion of the presentation).

By the end of this section, I hop you'll recognize the importance of having your people provide sound input into the design of the software package.

Sub-sub-point #1

Your people are closest to our customers.

Sub-sub-point #2

They have valuable insights into how their interaction with customers could be improved.

Sub-sub-point #3

To ensure this software will help them, we need their collective input.

Conclusion

Because they are closest to the customer ... because they have valuable insights ... and because their collective input will improve the software design ... we need their input and we hope you'll help us get it.

Figure 14
Sub-point #1 Notes
Software Presentation

- This section presentation talk about how need get info on ways your people feel new s/w package help them serve customers.

- By end this section, hope you recognize importance having your people have input into software design.

- Cover three things this section:
  - Your people closest to customers.
  - Your people have valuable insights — interaction with customers improved.
  - To ensure we help, need collective input.

- Your people closest to customers.
  - Deal with customers daily / constantly — sometimes many years.
  - Have gathered large knowledge base how interact customers — vice versa.
  - Goal is tap into insight — customize program better help their needs.

- Your people have valuable insights — interaction with customers improved.
  - Such insights only help software development process.
  - More gather up front / less reworking of software after prototype released.
  - Ensure that entire process runs smoothly / minimize problems down road.

- To ensure we help, need collective input.
  - Don’t want situation someone not provide input / not use software.
  - Want to ensure input comes all sections / all areas of staff.
  - Want do best try ensure software package meets needs wide range customer service challenges.

- Because your people closest our customers ...
- Because have valuable insights.
- Because wide range input important ...
  - We need their input ...
  - We hope you’ll help us get.

The Conclusion

The conclusion is the "tell them what you told them portion" of your presentation. It provides you with one last opportunity to tie everything together. It is where you recap your main points and restate your call to action — what you want the audience to do or not do with the information you present.

Like all aspects of successful presentations, concluding with impact means maintaining proper balance and perspective. If you conclude too abruptly, the audience will be startled. Conversely, you must not ramble aimlessly.

An effective conclusion begins at the very start of your presentation, where you told the audience what you wanted them to do — or not do — at the end of the journey. Once you're at the destination, you need to restate your intent. Tell them, in clear and simple terms, and with all the professionalism at your disposal, what you want them to do with the information you've provided. Figure 15 provides a conclusion for our software presentation. It recaps the information provided and restates the call to action fairly quickly. It also provides an opportunity to answer any final questions.

Figure 15

The Conclusion

Software Presentation

- In conclusion, I'd like to recap what we covered during our presentation.

- Because getting input from your people is vital to the success of this package ...

- Because we have developed tools the simplify the process of gathering information ...

- Because we need this information back in usable form and within two weeks ...

- I hope I our team can count on your support to help ensure this software package will meet your needs and that we can stay on schedule.

- Are there any final questions before we wrap up?

<<PAUSE>>

- Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present our ideas to you at today's management meeting.

- If you have any questions over the next few weeks, please call or e-mail me at any time.

- Thank you.

Completing Your Presentation Content

Once you've expanded your notes outline or your framework, the final step is to find information to complete your presentation. Your job at this point is to find statistics, analogies, stories and anecdotes to help bring your presentation to life and make it relevant to participants. This is where you also begin to develop any visual aids you need. And you'll notice that we recommend that visual aids come last, not first, in an effective presentation.

Even if your organization has a "stock" presentation to serve a specific purpose, there is little chance that you'll be able to pull out one of these presentations from your marketing or public relations department, remove a visual aid or two, and be ready to present the information to the audience. When the stock presentation was developed, whoever developed it was saying "this information was perfect when it left our hands".

But how it left their hands has nothing to do with you or your audience. Your job is to ensure that the information in your presentation is tailored to the needs, wants and desires of each specific audience you're addressing. The only thing that counts is whether the audience receives the information in your presentation and acts on it when they do.

The true value of these off-the-shelf presentations is the wealth of information they contain. In fact, they almost always contain too much information. Chances are, you're going to have to take out a great deal of information anyway, which underscores the value of the approach presented in this booklet. Once you have your outline in place and your basic framework completed, you go to your stock presentation and find the information to fill in the outline.

This means going to the stock presentation to find the "gems" of information that will help bring your information alive in the minds of participants. These gems include facts, statistics, anecdotes, stories, examples and, lastly, visual aids.

Develop the information in your presentation first. Visual aids should come last. In fact, whenever you have a situation in which you try to fit the visual aid to the presentation, be cautious. Chances are, it won't work. It's better to develop a good set of notes, and then develop visual aids to support the information contained in your notes. When in doubt, leave the visuals out and simply talk to your audience.

Creative Introductions

Effective introductions capture audience attention. They establish common ground between the speaker and the audience. They lead into the main body of the presentation. And they do all of those things while getting to the point as quickly as possible.

The introduction sets the tone for the presentation. And, in your introduction, briefer is better. The audience appreciates an interesting or creative opening. But their patience runs thin if you don't answer some very important questions right up front: Why should they listen? What will they get out of it if they do? What, precisely, you want them to do — or not do — as a result of your presentation?

There are a number of types of "creative" introductions that can be effectively used to gain audience attention, find common ground and lead into a presentation. In developing an introduction, however, it's important to keep in mind that the creative element should never overshadow the main message of the presentation. An audience often appreciates creativity, but not at the expense of brevity. You must state your main theme and your call to action up front.

When in doubt, you can achieve these ends by simply stating — right up front — what you want the audience to do or not do at the end of your presentation. Bring your call to action to the starting line and let the audience know immediately what you want them to do. That way, they'll be more inclined to listen, follow your line of logic and figure out — for themselves — why.

The following are some suggestions of different types of introductions:

Question

A question — or a series of questions — can help focus audience attention on the issue you wish to discuss. Questions involve the audience immediately, particularly if the questions are relevant to their frame of reference or need for information.

For example, if you were delivering a presentation on energy savings in the home, you might ask everyone in the audience to raise their right hand. From there, you could ask a series of questions and, as those questions are answered, ask members of the audience to lower their hands.

“Did you turn your thermostat up,” you might ask them, “when you got up this morning (assuming the presentation is given in winter)? If not, lower your hand. Did you take a shower using an energy-efficient shower head? If not, lower your hand.

“Did you turn off the tap while brushing your teeth? If not, lower your hand. Did you turn off the lights as you moved from one part of your home to another? If not, lower your hand.

“Congratulations! Those people with their hands still up are starting their day with energy efficiency in mind.

“What I’d like to do now is show you how easy it is to have energy efficiency as a goal. And how a series of little steps, taken on a daily basis, can save you money ... and make you feel good about doing your part for our environment.”

Story

Telling a story can be very effective. There are, however, a few conditions. The story must summarize and capture the main message of the presentation. It must gain audience attention and quickly lead into the main body of the presentation. And, above all, it must be short.

Stories are most often appropriate in longer presentations. But if they are succinct and to the point — and if they add to the message — they can also be applied to presentations of less than 10 minutes.

The following introduction comes from a “canned” 20-minute presentation developed by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC):

> “Being here today reminds me of the story of Mert and Bert, two Americans who like to hunt. On this particular occasion, they headed to the far reaches of northern Canada to hunt moose. And after a week of hunting, both bagged a moose.
>
> “When their pilot came to fly them out, he told them, ‘I can’t fly both of you, all your gear and these two big moose.’
>
> “ ‘Why not?’ Mert asked. ‘Because the load will be too heavy and we won’t be able to take off,’ the pilot replied.
>
> “They argued for a few minutes, then Bert said, ‘I don’t understand. Last year, each of us had a moose and the pilot loaded everything.’ ‘Well,’ said the pilot, ‘if last year’s pilot could do it, I guess I can too.’
>
> “So they loaded the plane. It slowly and reluctantly lifted off and headed toward the distant mountains. Unfortunately, the plane was too heavy and it crashed into a mountainside.
>
> “No one was hurt. As they surveyed the wreckage, Mert asked, ‘Where are we?’ Bert scanned the scene and answered, ‘Oh, about a mile farther than we were last year’.
>
> “What I’d like to talk to you about today is benchmarking your communication results. By the end of my presentation, I hope you’ll recognize that benchmarking can keep you from being like Bert & Mert ... stubbornly doing the same thing over and over with very little improvement each time out.”

Quote

A quote from a recognizable or famous personality can occasionally be used to introduce a topic. The advantage of the quote is it illustrates that someone else has concisely expressed the message you are trying to relate. But, as with all introductions, the quote must relate to and enhance the main message.

Quotes should be chosen from people the audience knows. If you're uncertain about whether they know the person, make sure you explain the quote's relevance — both to the topic and to the audience.

For example, if you were discussing the importance of teamwork, it might be appropriate to use the following quote from someone who pioneered the concept:

> " 'Coming together is a beginning. Working together is success.'
>
> "Who said those words? Henry Ford.
>
> "What I'd like to do today is borrow from Mr. Ford's wisdom. Two organizations came together as a result of a merger 12 months ago. That was our beginning.
>
> "Now it's time to turn our focus to success. I'd like to share my thoughts on how we can work together effectively. And by the end of my presentation, I hope to give you some tools and insights you can use to help all of us work together effectively, and build on our success."

Suspense
The use of suspense can be an effective method of introducing a presentation, particularly if it gets an audience to listen to a subject to which they might not ordinarily listen. For example, the following introduction might be used to introduce a topic that many people might not believe affects them directly:

> "It costs more than $3 billion per year. It causes the loss of more jobs than even our most severe recession. It kills thousands of Canadians each and every year.
>
> "The problem is not war. It's alcoholism. And it affects each and every one of us to varying degrees.
>
> "What I'd like to do today is give you some insight into recognizing alcoholism among your family, friend and co-workers. By the end of my presentation, I hope you'll be able to recognize a problem if there is one, and how to get help if it's warranted and, most of all, wanted."

Compliment
Most of us like to be complimented, and when a presenter does compliment the audience at the beginning, it tends to make them feel important. While this form of introduction tends to be overdone by politicians, if used sparingly it can be a powerful tool for encouraging the audience to feel good about the speaker and the message he or she is presenting.

For example:

> "Thank you for the opportunity to be here this morning, and to participate in this discussion on 'Funding Cutbacks: Doing more with less in the public sector.'
>
> "Before launching into my perspective, I'd like to take a moment to compliment your organization for having the courage to tackle this issue head-on. Particularly at a time when most others are hiding their heads in the sand and hoping it will go away.
>
> "I know the deficit won't disappear by itself. You know it, too. And that's why I am delighted to be here ... participating in a forum that will hopefully charge the 'idea bank' ... and help us cope more effectively with the challenge of deficit reduction in the future.
>
> "I'd like to talk to you about how I believe we can do more with less. And by the end of my presentation, I hope to give you some tools, techniques and insights you can take back and apply to the challenges you face on a daily basis."

Provocative statement
The drawing power of the provocative statement is the way it uses an illustration to create contrast. And, through this contrast, the audience is encouraged to view an issue in a new light or from a new perspective.

For example, the following introduction was delivered by a municipal politician seeking re-election for a second term:

> "Good evening ladies and gentlemen.

> "I'd like to do something this evening that very few candidates for re-election will do. I'd like to talk about the campaign promises I made three years ago.
>
> "For those of you who don't remember my promises, I made ten in 1989. Of those ten, I kept nine ... a pretty good record.
>
> "But I'd like to do something else a bit different this evening. I'm going to ignore the promises I did keep. And talk about the one promise I didn't keep.
>
> "By talking about the one promise I didn't keep, I hope to convince you to vote for me so I can once again serve as your representative on city council."

Promise

Finally, there is an introduction that delivers a promise. To be effective, the promise must be immediate, it must be realistic and attainable, and there must be a tangible follow-through and benefit for the audience.

For example:

> "During my presentation today, I promise to get you thinking a bit differently about the social programs and safety nets that we — as Canadians — hold dear.
>
> "I personally believe that we cannot continue to be all things to all people ... in the pension plans we offer ... in the health care systems we operate ... in the welfare programs we support. During the next 20 minutes, I'm going to demonstrate why I believe that ... and how I believe our systems must evolve to take us to a new way of doing things.
>
> "By the end of my presentation, I hope you'll agree with me that by slightly lowering our overall expectations —not much but a little — we can maintain our high standard of living indefinitely."

Concluding With Impact

There are two major goals of the conclusion:

1. Recap the main points of your presentation in a way that reminds the audience of what you said.

2. Restate your call to action.

Like all aspects of effective presentations, concluding with impact means maintaining proper balance and perspective. If you end too abruptly, the audience will be startled. Conversely, you must not ramble aimlessly.

Concluding with impact begins at the very start of your presentation, when you tell the audience what you want them to do — or not do — at the end of the journey. Once you're at that destination, you should restate your call to action. Even in an informative speech, you must tell the audience, in clear and simple terms, what you want them to do or not do with the information they've received; how they could use the information to improve their lives or what action they need to take in the future.

The following are a few examples of types of conclusions:

Summary of Main Points

A summary of the main points is a direct and straightforward way to end your presentation. By listing what was covered — simply recapping your main points and restating your call to action — you can once again briefly explain how each point supports the main message.

In some cases, it may be possible to weave an additional message into the conclusion when you're listing these points. There are, however, two qualifiers. First, this additional message must, once again, support your main theme. And second, it must be a logical extension of the information already presented; the audience must immediately say to themselves:

"Of course, why didn't I think of that?" Or, "yes, that makes sense".

Tell a Story
As with the introduction, a story told in the conclusion should be simple, short and to the point. It should highlight the message, but do so with brevity.

The power of the story is that it “hangs” the message in the minds of the audience. By recalling the story a day, week, month or longer after the event, they will probably retain the main message and may even retain your supporting points as well. This may help make the information contained in your presentation a part of who they are as people.

Strive for Emotional Impact
Nothing drives home important points more effectively than emotional impact. Yet concluding with such impact can be difficult because it requires a careful balance of emotion and event. If that balance is achieved, however, the emotional close can be very, very powerful.

For example, the following conclusion wrapped up Douglas MacArthur’s farewell address:

> “But I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barrack ballads of that day, which proclaimed most proudly that:
>
> “‘Old soldiers never die; they just fade away.’
>
> “And like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away — an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty done.
>
> “Good bye.”

Entertaining Presentations &/Or The Use Of Humour

Even a presentation that entertains, to a certain extent must also inform. But presentations that are designed primarily to entertain are the most difficult to prepare, especially for those people (and they are in the majority) who have a tough time telling a joke.

To succeed in this venue, don't try to string together joke after joke. Instead, let personal anecdotes, examples and stories do the entertaining. The best humour is that which comes naturally; it arises out of the subject, audience, occasion or situation. And, most often, this can be found in the stories you tell.

With humour, you always run the risk of offending someone, no matter how careful you are. And when you alienate certain portions of your audience, chances are they won't hear much else of what you say. They'll be too busy thinking about what you've already said.

As a "golden rule" in the general use of humour, it must always add to your main message. Every story you tell, every anecdote you use and every joke you relate must directly support your main message. If it doesn't, discard it.

The best (and safest) humour is a story or anecdote from your personal experience. If handled properly, humour of this type presents minimal risk. Self-deprecating anecdotes also work well.

As a final note, humour must always be effectively paced. The audience needs time to digest what was just said — the setup — and jump forward to the punch line. Pausing is essential.

Presenting Your Message & Personality

You've developed effective communication skills in dealing with colleagues, clients and others one-on-one. "But," you may ask, "don't I need to develop new skills when I stand up in front of a group?"

The answer, in a word, is no. Granted, presenting your ideas to a group is a bit different from presenting to clients one-on-one, or to small groups of colleagues. But there are a great many similarities — perhaps more than you might imagine at first. Our goal in this section of the program is to help you understand the skills you've developed one-on-one, and provide you with a framework for applying those skills to the challenge of delivering your ideas to groups.

- Convey your message.
- Convey your personality.

Every time you stand up in front of a group to deliver a presentation, you must achieve two basic goals. First, you need to convey a message. Indeed, if you don't have a message to contribute — no value to offer the audience — why stand up in the first place? Second, you need to convey your personality — who you are as an individual and a professional. If "the medium is the message", your personality is the window through which the message must travel to be received, understood and acted upon by the audience.

In many ways, the second goal of conveying your personality is just as important as the first. If the medium <u>is</u> the message, your success in conveying your message, to a large extent, depends on whether you successfully convey your personality. If people don't feel you're sincere, you won't convince them of much, whether one-on-one or in a presentation.

Relaxed Conversation The Key

You convey your message and your personality every day of your life in relaxed conversation. It doesn't matter whether you're talking to a friend, a family member, a client, a colleague, or a prospect. When you talk to someone else one-on-one, the other person gets a sense of your message and of the person delivering it — you!

The same applies to groups. The people at your presentations have come to hear a message. In listening to that message, they must also get a sense of your personality. This is who you are as an individual and a professional. If you try to act or behave like someone other than who you are, the audience will sense it. If they do, they will be reluctant to take the action you suggest later, and you will lose the opportunity to build a mutually-beneficial relationship with them.

If you convey your message and your personality in relaxed conversation every day of your life, it's not a large leap to also accept that relaxed conversation is, therefore, your best possible communication style in presenting your ideas to groups. Indeed, as the *Presenting At Ease!* workshop demonstrated, the more successful you are at conveying your personality in a relaxed, natural style, one that is as close as possible to your conversational style, the more successful you will be at conveying your message.

To understand relaxed conversation, it's helpful to break the conversation process into 10 fundamental principles. By understanding these principles, and how they support effective face-to-face communication, you can sharpen your one-on-one communication skills and effectively transfer those skills to the challenge of delivering group presentations.

1. Your best style is relaxed conversation.
2. Be yourself.
3. Relaxed conversation is two-way.
4. Relaxed conversation is receiver-driven.
5. Less is more.
6. People can listen or they can think, but they can't do both together.
7. People won't remember what you say, they will remember what they thought about what you said.
8. Be conversational in your delivery.
9. Think before you speak.
10. Silence is vital.

Principle #1
Your best style is relaxed conversation

Every day of your life, you have conveyed your messages and your personality while engaged in conversation. Think of what happens in a conversation when one friend is enthusiastically explaining a concept to another.

The first person is doing most of the talking. He or she is enthusiastic, so the words come tumbling out; the rate of word delivery is rapid.

But there are many pauses. The person talking watches the receiver carefully, looking for nods and "uh-huhs" that signal the listener has gotten one piece of information and is looking for the next. Sometimes, pauses occur right in the middle of a phrase. They may last four or five seconds. If the receiver looks puzzled at any point, the sender will probably backtrack, sidetrack or stop. He or she may ask if there are any questions. Once the question or a series of questions is answered and a "milestone of mutual understanding" is created, the sender gets back on track and moves the message forward.

These milestones of mutual understanding occur frequently in a good conversation. They should become just as frequent in your presentations.

To do that, you must emulate conversation in your presentations. You're not there to "download" information. You are there to create understanding that is based on a two-way exchange, and to facilitate an environment in which people can apply what you tell them to their personal or professional life.

If you see a puzzled expression, don't wait for the person to ask a question. Handle it the same way you would in a conversation. Ask him or her if they have a question or there is something you can explain more effectively.

And, wherever possible, allow questions throughout your presentations. But be brief with your answers. Questions are an opportunity to create "milestones of mutual understanding". But remember, you pass milestones. You don't camp at them.

Principle #2
Be yourself

You are unique. You have your own way of speaking and your own mannerisms — how you talk, how you stand, how you hold your hands. To convey your personality to a group, you must express yourself in a manner similar to the way in which you express yourself one-on-one. If you are expressive with your hands one-on-one, it's OK to be expressive with your hands when talking to a group. In fact, it's essential. Conversely, if you don't use your hands much in conversation, don't suddenly adopt animated gestures when you stand in front of a group. You will come across as plastic, contrived or phony — which will make it difficult for the audience to trust you.

When delivering a presentation, you know it's important to be on your best behavior. You know there are certain standards you must meet. You must dress appropriately. You must be attentive when someone asks a question. You must answer the question. But worry less about how you "present" yourself than how you communicate with the members of the group.

Your body language must be natural. And what is natural for you is probably not natural for someone else, or vice-versa, which is why we hesitate in setting rules for gestures you should attempt to emulate or the body language you should try to convey.

To understand this, think of the gestures you make when you are enthusiastically explaining a concept to a friend over the telephone. Who are these gestures for? The person on the other end? How do they benefit from those gestures when they can't see them? Understand that those gestures are part of who you are as an individual and are an inherent component of how you communicate. Bring them to your presentations, and let them happen naturally.

Professor David McNeill of the University of Chicago has been studying non-verbal communication (body language) since 1980. He is interested in the gestures people make when they communicate with others face-to-face.

In his studies, he has concluded that people communicate best when they create unconscious and spontaneous gestures. They key words here are "unconscious" and "spontaneous". If you clasp your hands rigidly behind your back because you don’t know what to do with them, you are neither “unconscious” nor “spontaneous”. You are not being yourself. If you’re not being yourself, you are not communicating your personality. And if you haven’t conveyed your personality, you will be inconsistent in conveying your message.

Be on your best behavior during your presentations. You want to create a good impression. Be open and attentive to the needs of the audience. But, most of all, be yourself.

Principle #3
Relaxed conversation is two-way

To be effective, relaxed conversation must be two-way. Indeed, by definition, all communication must be two-way. As Figure 16 illustrates, in the basic communication model, a sender encodes a message and sends it along a medium, where it is decoded by the receiver.

But communication does not occur until something comes back. Even if one person does most of the talking in a conversation, he or she is looking for the nods, listening for the “uh-huhs”, and stopping to answer questions. The sender quickly recognizes that a blank look means the receiver is not listening. He or she will respond by pausing to let the listener catch up or asking if there is a question.

Your presentations, like your conversations, must be two-way. If you treat people with respect, and create a two-way process in which their questions are answered clearly and concisely, you stand a better chance of having them apply or act on your message than if you stand in front of them and dump information on them.

Figure 16
Two-Way Communication

Principle #4
Relaxed conversation is receiver-driven

In a relaxed conversation, the speed at which information goes from sender to receiver is driven by the receiver's needs, not the sender's. If the receiver doesn't signal that he or she understands — with a "nod" or by saying "uh-huh" —the sender probably stops before moving on. If the sender doesn't do this, one of two things happens. The receiver keeps thinking about the previous idea and misses the new idea, or the receiver stops thinking about the old idea (thereby virtually forgetting it) and tries to keep up.

If you're sitting one-on-one with your boss or explaining a marketing idea to a colleague or team member, you will send information at a rate that is based on that person's needs, not yours. If you don't, the person will quickly lose interest and the communication between the two of you will break down.

The same applies to your presentations. If you talk nonstop, you will quickly lose your audience. You will resemble the person at a party who has cornered someone and talks their ear off. Of course, the more that person talks, the less the other person actually listens. And, the less he or she listens, the more the first person talks.

In your presentations, make sure the information you're sending is driven by the audience's needs, not yours. If they are obviously thinking about the idea you've just conveyed, stop talking until they absorb it. And if you throw out an idea that creates puzzled expressions, it's probably a good time to stop and ask: "Are there any questions?".

Principle #5
Less is more

The less you say, the more your audience remembers. This is the paradox of face-to-face communication.

If you try to cram too much information into your presentations, you will not create a two-way exchange. And you certainly won't be receiver-driven. How can you be?

The speed at which information travels from you to the audience is not driven by their need for understanding, but your need to get through it all in time.

If you have one hour allotted for your presentation, bring no more than 30 to 35 minutes of information. This allows you to answer questions along the way and, provided your answers are brief, get through your information in the allotted time.

Principle #6
People can listen or they can think,
But they can't do both together

As human beings, we can listen or we can think. But virtually none of us can listen and think at the same time. By definition, this means that you must pause when delivering your presentations. And those pauses must be as full and as frequent in your presentations as they are in your conversations.

You want your presentations to be thought-provoking. However, don't disturb those thoughts when you provoke them. You want people to think about what you're saying and apply it to their personal or professional situation. But while they're thinking, if you're talking, they won't hear a word you say.

If your content is thought-provoking, members of the audience will find things to think about. But if you talk non-stop, they will miss large portions of what you say. They'll rush to catch-up once or twice. After that, they'll give up. And, if they give up, your communication effectiveness decreases proportionately as they find something else to think about during your presentation.

Principle #7
People won't remember what you say

People at your presentations will not remember your exact words. Instead, they will remember what they thought about what you said — how they took your information and applied it to their frame of reference. It is this process that truly makes face-to-face communication effective

But this process can only occur in silence, whether you give them that silence, or they take it for themselves. And remember, if they take that silence to think about a previous idea while you're talking about the next, chances are they can't hear a word you say.

If your pace is effective, and you allow the audience the time they need to take what you say and compare it to who they are as individuals, they will remember your message over the long term. This is where communication really works, whether one-on-one or to groups. And it is this approach that will improve your communication effectiveness during group and one-on-one presentations.

Principle #8
Be conversational in your delivery

If you've ever read the transcript of an interview or conversation, you've probably noticed that people rarely talk in complete sentences. And if you participated in the conversation from which the transcript was drawn, you were probably shocked at what you saw written down. It makes much less sense when you read it than when you heard it.

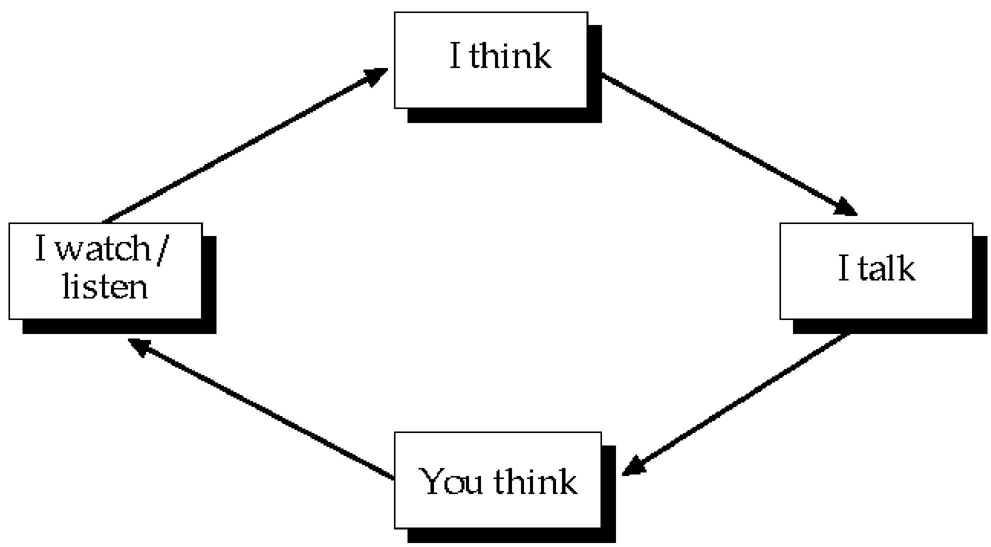
There is a basic pattern in relaxed conversation, as illustrated by Figure 17. In the first step, which we refer to as the first pause, the sender thinks about what he or she is going to say (I think). Once the idea is formed, the sender expresses it (I talk). If the sender is enthusiastic, the words come tumbling out at a rapid rate of word delivery.

As each idea is delivered, the sender stops talking and allows the listener to think about what was just said (you think) — to absorb the idea and relate it to a meaningful frame of reference. During this second pause, the sender watches and listens for the receiver's reaction (I watch/listen). Once there is a nod or "uh-huh", the sender forms the next idea (I think). And so on.

If you start watching people around you, you'll discover that this cycle occurs less than 20 words at a time during relaxed conversations. A similar pattern should occur in your presentations. This, however, can be very difficult, particularly if adrenaline is driving the process. In that situation, it's possible for pauses to be two,

Figure 17

Pattern Of Relaxed Conversation



three, ten or even twenty minutes apart, especially if the speaker doesn't adhere to the principle of "less is more" and comes with too much information to begin with. When this happens, the information becomes a non-stop stream to which it can be extremely difficult for the audience to listen to and retain.

Remember that the audiences at your presentations are used to hearing conversation. Each of us receives information that way every single day. We need pauses to absorb the information. If someone prepares a speech and reads it to us, or talks nonstop off the top of his or her head, we tend to tune out. On the speech side, as soon as we hear perfect sentence structure, we know we're being read at, not communicated with. On the nonstop talking side, we know that the person really doesn't care if we think about the information, so we don't bother.

This is one of the reasons why we recommend that you use notes, especially at first in your development as a speaker. Use your notes to give yourself an idea to think about before you speak. After you've formed the thought, express it. And get the words out quickly when you do.

After you've expressed the thought (a maximum of 20 words at a time), look at your audience. Establish eye contact. This is the second pause. In that pause, constantly ask yourself: Are they following what I'm saying? If you see quizzical expressions, ask if there are any questions, even if you're in the middle of a sentence. You would do this in a conversation or a one-on-one presentation. Do the same thing in your group presentations.

Principle #9
Think before you speak

In a conversation, you take time to form each thought before you say it. You should attempt to do the same thing at your presentations, although that can be much more difficult because of the impact of adrenaline.

Adrenaline is released into your system as a physiological response to stress — the stress of standing in front of the group. And adrenaline will have two effects on your ability to deliver information at your presentations.

First, it changes your time clock. It makes one second seem like eternity. The time you're taking to think through your ideas will seem like forever. As a result, you will start talking before you're really ready. But don't panic. Stop talking. Use your notes. Think through your next thought. Then start talking again. The pause always seems infinitely longer to you than it ever does to them.

Unfortunately, however, the second effect of adrenaline is that it inhibits your ability to think. In a stressful situation, adrenaline creates the fight or flight response, and there isn't much thinking involved in either option. This is another reason why we recommend using a good set of notes wherever possible.

It is also why we recommend that, wherever possible, you allow questions throughout your presentations. Questions are the best way to reduce nervousness, and the stress and adrenaline it creates. As soon as the audience starts asking questions, the emphasis is taken off the formal presentation and moved toward having a more relaxed two-way conversation — safer ground for someone who's nervous.

Resist the pull of adrenaline. Stop talking. Think through each thought. Start talking again. Use good notes. Focus on delivering one idea at a time. This gets you off to a strong start.

As for nervousness, by encouraging questions, you take the emphasis off a presentation and switch it to an extended conversation. Never forget that the greatest reducer of nervousness in public speaking is a question or two that you can answer clearly, concisely, and confidently.

Principle #10
Silence is vital

There are two types of silence. The first is for you to think (the first pause).   The second is for them to think (the second pause). Before you say something in a conversation, you think before speaking. And you almost always do so before you answer a question in a conversation. We call this silence the first pause.

In a conversation, after you express each idea, you look to see if the other person has "gotten it". Again, you do so while pausing. We call this the second pause.

During your presentations, remember that you're not there to prove that you can talk non-stop. You're there to provide information that people can think about and apply to their personal circumstances. But remember, they can only think in silence — whether you provide that silence or they take it for themselves.

If you lose your place or your audience, pause. If it's you who's lost, the pause allows you to think about where you are, where you're going, and what you need to say to get there. If they're lost, the pause will help them find their way back so they can listen to your ideas again, and relate those ideas to their personal frame of reference.

When You're Asked To "Say a few words ..."

In the vast majority of cases, you know when you're going to be asked to say a few words. It's extremely rare when someone calls you up to the podium or the stage completely out of the blue. You will almost always get some notice, even if it's only 5 or 10 minutes.

If you're the most senior executive at a company function paying tribute to customers, for example, you know you will likely get asked to speak. Find out in advance if that's the case. If so, come fully prepared to with notes and a message to convey (that adheres to the principle of less is more), even if it's a relatively informal event. If you're uncertain about your delivery, rehearse your remarks as you normally would. And remember to bring your notes. You may not need them much if you're fully prepared. But if you do need them, they'll be right there with you.

If you're actually at the event when you're asked to say a few words, you may only have a few minutes. Our advice is to take the time to develop a few notes to guide the "conversation" you're going to have with the audience. Analyze the audience and event quickly. Think about what brought them all there in the first place, and tie your remarks into that reason.

Find out of there are specific people you are supposed to thank or to whom you are to pay tribute. Jot down their names (envelopes and napkins have been known to serve this purpose!). Then think through the basic content model. Jot down one idea (a note of only two or three words) that summarizes why you're all there and another brief idea for what you hope people will take away with them. Then jot down a few words for three small sub-ideas that support this message and conclude by thanking the audience, the people organizing the event and others, if appropriate. In other words, your actual "presentation" should be no more than five or six extremely short bullet points.

When you're delivering your notes, focus on one idea at a time. Think, then speak, and use both pauses. The first pause is for you to think; the second pause is for them to think. Be receiver-driven. Use the second pause to look for signs that your audience is "getting it."

Try not to succumb to adrenaline. Measure your pace and be conversational in your delivery. If you get into trouble, stop and gather your thoughts. Stop talking if you start to lose your audience. Talking more quickly with even fewer pauses will not bring them back. Silence will.

Use simple language. And, above all, remember that you're not being asked to speak because you have a reputation for talking non-stop. You're being asked to speak because you have something to say. Think about it. Say it. Then sit down.

Using Visual Aids

In most business presentations today, the common practice is to insert ideas into a software package, project them directly onto a screen in front of the audience with the right hardware — or print them out as a "deck" of overheads or a series of handouts which the audience has in front of them — and assume that the end result has a good chance of being successful.

But is this as effective as some people assume?

Canadian media guru Marshall McLuhan, of the University of Toronto, coined the phrase "the medium is the message." If we accept Professor McLuhan's views on the subject, how does this concept apply to presentations? What is the "medium"? And how does the message travel through that medium to be received, understood and acted upon by the audience?

Visuals & Relaxed Conversation

Before turning to group presentations, let's look at a similar situation — a one-on-one sales presentation. Suppose someone is delivering a message to one or two prospects. The salesperson has a brochure that summarizes the features and benefits of the product. It's colorful, dynamic, filled with pictures and charts, and highly readable. Does the salesperson hand out the brochure while talking?

Probably not. Experienced salespeople know that if they do hand out the brochure, the color draws the prospects' attention and the content keeps it there. Even if the prospects struggle to listen, chances are the salesperson has lost them. Like all of us, the prospects across the desk can't read and listen at the same time.

Effective salespeople know, by either instinct or experience, that keeping the prospects' attention means communicating effectively when they have the chance, and giving handouts at the end of the sales presentation. During the presentation itself, the salesperson will make the exchange a two-way process; he or she knows that the speed at which information is presented should be determined by prospects' needs, not the salesperson's need to get through it all in time.

Compare this to a “modern” presentation. This time, as a presenter to a group of 15 or 20 prospects (two of whom were the original couple and all of whom are similar in age or other demographic characteristics), the salesperson has a software package in which the colors, charts and words from the brochure can be copied, pasted and projected onto a screen. The technology is marvelous. The presenter simply clicks a mouse, and there it is.

Does the presenter use the technology if it’s available? Probably. And once the presenter starts developing visuals for this modern presentation, it’s tough to stop. First there were only a few pictures. Then there were charts. By the time the presenter is done, even his or her notes are projected onto the screen.

During the actual presentation, what does the audience do? Well, at the risk of sounding repetitive, the color draws their attention. The content keeps it. And even if they struggle valiantly to listen to the presenter, chances are he or she has lost them.

If you’ve ever sat through a presentation and thought to yourself “they could have printed out the visuals, sent me on my way, and I would have gotten as much out of this presentation”, you know that the communication process can quickly break down if visual aids are overused.

Must Achieve Two Goals

Earlier in this booklet, we discussed that you must achieve two goals every time you deliver a presentation. You must convey your message, and to do that, you must also convey your personality. It’s your personality — not the software package on your computer — that the message must travel through to be received, understood and acted upon by the audience.

Visuals are a spice. And, like any spice, they can add flavour. But, used in excess, they can ruin the meal.

In your presentations, learn to apply the skills you’ve developed one-on-one to the challenge of communicating with a group. Relax. Be natural. Make the process two-way and interactive (even if you’re doing most of the talking). Don’t let it become a one-way transmission of information. And use your visuals as an aid, not a crutch.

There is no doubt that visual aids, if appropriate to the message and used properly, can assist the communication process. Conversely, there is also no doubt that if visuals are overused, are inappropriate to the message or are used improperly, they can hinder the movement of the message from sender to receiver and back again.

One of the goals of *Presenting With Ease!* is to provide you with clear guidelines for using visual aids effectively. The medium is the message, and the medium is you — whether you're talking to one person or many.

The following pages recap the principles that apply for the use of visual aids and some guidelines for using visual aids, whether you're using a flip chart, overheads, slides or computer-generated graphics. We have also applied our "visual milestone" philosophy to the use of computer-generated graphics to our barking dog presentation to illustrate how this process can be effectively used.

Principles For Using Visual Aids

- People can read or they can listen, but they can't do both at the same time.
- If people have a choice between absorbing information through their eyes or their ears, they will choose their eyes.
- You put a visual up; people look at it, read it, analyze it and think about it.
- While they're doing that, they will have difficulty listening to what you say.

Guidelines for using visual aids

- Visual aids are an excellent way of helping the audience remember key points — but only if used correctly.
  - Every time you put a visual aid up while you're talking, you run the risk of losing the audience because they can't read, think at listen at the same time.
  - With charts, graphs and pictures, try to let people know what they're going to see before you show the visual, and then allow them to examine it in silence.
  - Don't make your visuals the main focal point of your presentation.
- Before developing your visuals, develop your notes first.
  - When you've assembled your ideas, determine the points at which visuals would enhance, or add value to, the message.
  - Don't project your notes onto the screen; use "blank slides" or "milestone" of one or two words between charts, graphs and pictures.
  - There is no middle ground with visuals. They either add to or take away from the overall impact of your presentation.
  - Limit what you put up on the screen. Less is more.
- Visual aids should supplement your notes, not the other way around.
  - Using your visuals as notes — regardless of whether 35 mm slides, overhead transparencies or computer-generated graphics — is less effective than simply developing your notes and delivering them conversationally.

- When you use visuals, ensure that they are concise, clear and consistent.
    - Focus on a single point. Remove all nonessential information (duplicated spreadsheets, for example, should be converted to one usable picture).
    - When it comes to charts, graphs and pictures, tell people in advance what they're going to see. This makes the process of discovering your information as efficient as possible for the audience.
- Give the audience time to absorb the visual aid.
    - The amount of time provided should be directly proportional to the complexity of the visual. If you watch the audience, you'll see when they're done looking at it.
- Remember that using visual aids, like all aspects of face-to-face communication, should be receiver-driven.
    - When the audience has had time to absorb, ask if there are any questions or explain an element of the visual, if necessary, to help build understanding.
- Keep your visuals simple and clear.
    - Use a large, readable typeface.
    - Try to use a dark background colour with light type. And be careful. Some background and font combinations look great on a PC, but are unreadable when projected onto a screen.
- If you're using slides or computer-generated graphics, try to use neutral, non-distracting images between the visuals.
    - When you're finished with a visual, introduce this non-distracting image screen (i.e. blank slide) onto the screen and go on with your seminar.
    - With overheads, take the visual off the screen and/or turn off the projector when the visual aid is no longer needed.

- If you don't feel comfortable projecting a blank slide or turning off the overhead projector, and feel you must use "word" slides, keep the number of words to an absolute minimum.

  - What is in front of the audience should be visual "milestones".

  - The audience should pass these milestones of one or two words in a split second, and not have to set up camp at them to get the meaning.

  - Use one word for each milestone wherever possible.

- Remember that one of your two primary goals is to convey your personality.

  - If visuals get in the way of that process, discard them.

  - When in doubt, leave them out ... and simply talk to your audience.

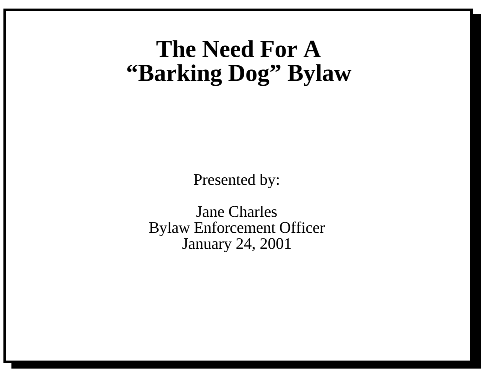
Computer-Generated Graphics

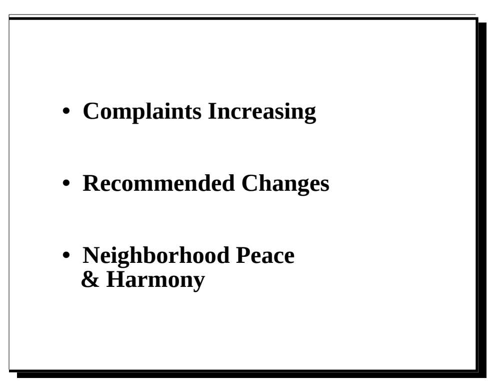
There are very few absolutes when it comes to using visual aids. There are principles and there are guidelines. Underlying all of these is a need to communicate effectively.

However, there is one absolute. If put your notes in front of the audience, you will be less effective than if you develop notes and use them in the way described in this booklet.

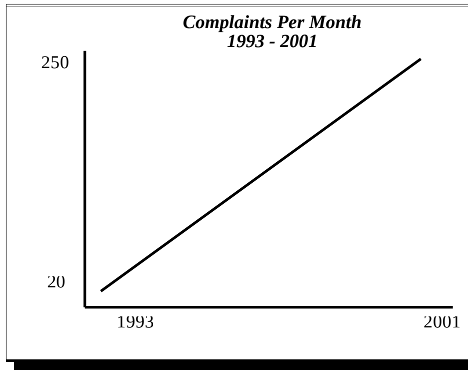
When using computer-generated graphics, you should use them as milestones. The purpose of this is to have a minimum of distracting information in front of the audience.

The following outlines how a set of computer-generated graphics could be generated for the barking dog presentation we developed earlier:





- **Complaints Increasing**



- **Complaints Increasing**

- **Recommended Changes**

- **Neighborhood Peace & Harmony**

Recommended Action

Strike a subcommittee to review options and draft new bylaw

Answering Questions:
Making The Process Two-Way

Some people believe that questions should be held to the end of a presentation, and dealt with during a final question and answer (Q&A) session. Our advice, however, is to encourage questions throughout your presentations wherever possible. It is the best possible way to ensure that the presentation is a two-way exchange of information and ideas.

While it is important to answer questions from the audience as they arise, it is equally important to keep your answers short. This simple tactic will enhance the communication effectiveness of your presentation. It will also help you stay on track and finish on time.

The Q&A process is the audience's opportunity to participate in your presentation. You've had your chance, now give them theirs. This is where they can best relate your information to their specific needs.

Looking For One Thing

Whenever someone asks a question, they are looking for one thing: An answer. They're not looking for another speech or presentation, or for dazzling footwork that avoids the answer. If the answer is "yes", they'll want to hear it. And the same applies if the answer is "no", "possibly", "absolutely", "eventually", "unlikely", or "only under specific conditions".

In your daily life, if someone asks "What time is it?", you don't describe how the watch works, that it is driven by a quartz mechanism, that the introduction of the quartz mechanism led to the death of the Swiss watchmaking industry, or that Swiss society has adapted so effectively that its unemployment rate is now as low as it was when nearly 45,000 Swiss workers were directly employed in making watches and other timepieces. Instead, you probably look at your watch and tell them.

In your presentations, answer questions directly. And once you answer each one as it's asked, stop talking. Even if it's a "tough" question (i.e. one that challenges you directly or touches on a sensitive area to your or your organization), you must still answer it. If you ignore the question, if you evade it or waffle in any way, the audience will spot it and your credibility will be affected.

The act of answering questions, by its very nature, implies participation. This is where the audience can best relate your information to their specific needs. Let them audience drive the process. And once you answer each question, stop talking.

Using The "First Pause"

Always try to think before you respond to a question. Whenever you're asked a question in a presentation (or even one-on-one), try to pause before answering. Applying the first pause before answering a question has a number of distinct advantages:

- You look confident.
- You can use the pause to examine the question before answering.
- You can take the time to think, and prepare the shortest possible answer.
- You compliment the questioner: "The question was good enough that I had to think before answering."
- You establish a pattern in which difficult questions do not stand out.
- You maintain control of your emotions and the pace of the questions.
- You become a better listener, because you condition yourself to wait until the end of the question before formulating an answer (i.e. you're not thinking of the answer while they're talking).

Be careful with loaded questions (i.e. "Given that you've said this software will never be ready on time, how critical is it that we get you the information by next Friday?") You must take out the loaded portion before answering. (Possible reply: "I didn't say the software won't be ready on time. I did say we're currently behind schedule. Having this information to us by Friday will help put us back on schedule.")

Keep your answers short. And, after you've answered the question, stop talking. This is the hardest challenge of face-to-face communication — whether one-on-one or with groups. If the audience wants more, they'll ask, especially if you've created a two-way interactive format in which they feel comfortable asking questions because they know they will get the answer.

Logistically, if your answers are short, you can potentially handle more questions than if your answers are long. If you have a total of 10 minutes in which to answer questions, 60-second answers means you'll only get four or five questions (someone had to ask before you could answer); 20-second answers allow room for 20 or more questions; 10-second answers allow even more. When more questions are asked, the session is receiver-driven. This adds tremendous value to the communication process.

When in doubt, opt for honesty over cleverness in the Q&A. And always pick reason over emotion. Even during tough moments, if you stick to reasonable positions and prove your honesty, you will gain respect from the majority of participants at the presentation.

Repeating a question when the audience has difficulty hearing is polite. However, repeating a question to buy yourself time doesn't work. You can, however, clarify what someone is answering if you're not sure. Check with them or rephrase the question and ask: "Was that what you were asking?" Then make sure you pause to form an appropriate answer.

Try to end the final Q&A session with a quick and (very) brief summary. This is where you quickly recap the main points and bring closure to the process. Make it obvious to everyone that the event is now over.

Figure 18

Three Acceptable Answers

There are three acceptable answers to every question you can be asked, whether you're asked that question one-on-one, or in a group presentation:

- Yes, I have the answer and here it is.
- No, I don't have the answer but I'll get it for you.
- Yes, I do have the answer but I cannot provide it to you.

There are very specific cases in which you would use the third response — for example, if providing the answer would divulge sensitive competitive information or break client confidentiality, In every other case, the first two answers apply. Either you have the answer and you'll provide it, or you don't have it and you'll get it.

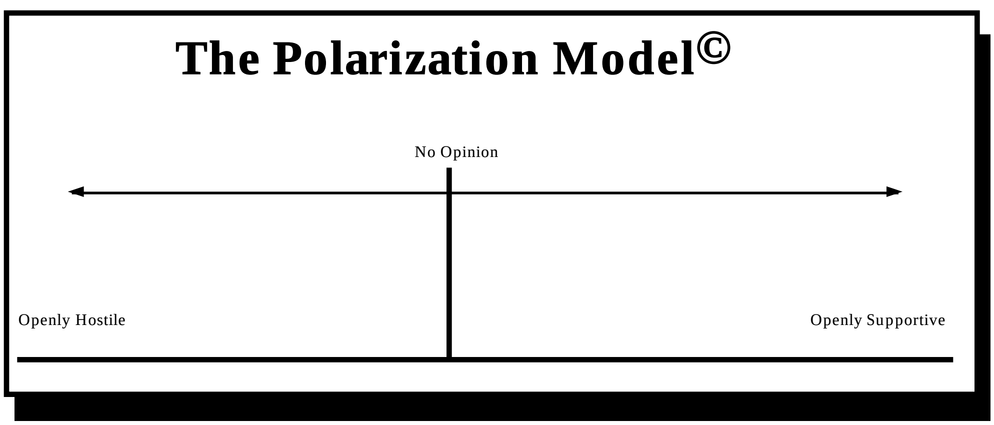
Handling Potential Hostility

Hostility arises as a result of issues. And an issue is "an unresolved problem that has the potential of escalating into a dispute". It is, quite simply, a fight looking for a place to happen.

When someone "takes issue" with you or your organization, they are mapping out the territory in which that dispute is likely to be fought. Battle lines are drawn. People line up according to the values, beliefs and/or opinions they hold.

Theoretically, every issue could potentially be mapped along a spectrum, going from openly hostile at one end to openly supportive at the other. Those people with "no opinion" are found somewhere in the middle. This is illustrated by The Polarization Model in Figure 19.

Figure 19

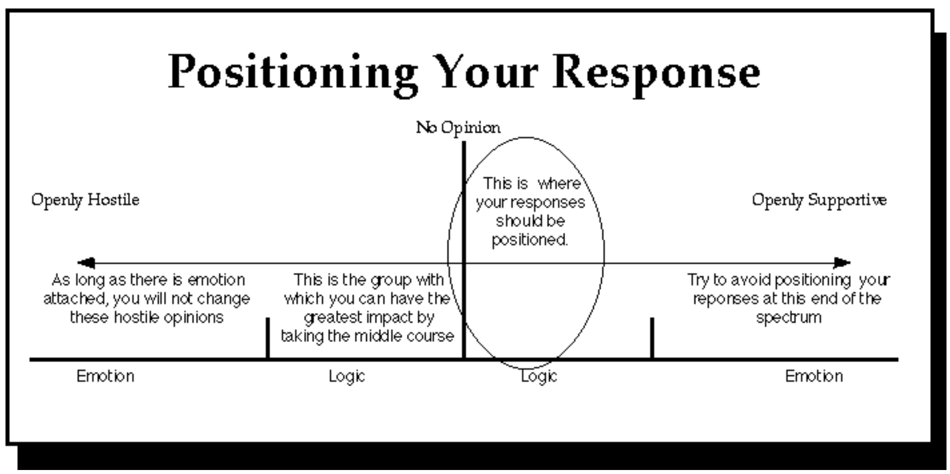


If someone takes issue with you during a presentation, it feels as if they are trying to drag you out to the openly hostile end of the spectrum. Your natural instinct is to resist their pull with equal force, and to try to drag them out to your side of the issue.

You must resist this instinct. This is where the first pause is absolutely vital. You will have the time to carefully examine the question and think through the best possible answer. You gain control by pausing, and you keep control by only answering questions (not responding to statements or challenges) and providing the shortest possible answers.

To be most effective, your answers should be positioned near the centre of the spectrum. This is illustrated by Figure 20.

Figure 20



If you can occupy the middle position, the "high ground" as it is often called, the hostile situation can be used to sway opinion in your direction.

With any issue, as opinions get further from the centre, the way that people respond to the issue goes from a logical, rational framework to an emotional one. What does this mean to you? If you react to emotional hostility with open emotional support, you might have an entertaining presentation, but there is little chance that anything will be ultimately resolved by the exchange. While watching this dispute unfold in front of them, all those who started out on the right-hand side of the spectrum — supporting your perspective — will end up there. Conversely, all those who started on the left-hand side of the spectrum — opposed to your viewpoint — will finish there. Nothing gets resolved.

If, however, you can construct messages that are logical, but supportive (and if you can keep your cool during the situation, regardless of how tense it gets), you accomplish a great deal more. First, by conveying messages that supports their previously-held beliefs, you reinforce all opinions that originally supported yours, whether based in logic or emotion.

On the other side of the spectrum, as long as someone has an emotional attachment to a perspective contrary to yours, you will never change their opinion, no matter how hard you try. So why try? It is appropriate, however, to acknowledge that they have the right to feel the way they do, but don't try to change their opinion through the use of direct force.

Instead, your messages (the answers to the questions posed by the hostile individual) should be based in logic, fact and reason. By staking out this ground, all those with a logical opinion, even though it is opposed to your perspective, are the people with whom you can have the greatest impact. For this group, two forces will be at work.

First, if you present a case based on logic, they can compare your logic to theirs and make a reasonable, rational decision. And second, they may not feel comfortable associating with those whose opinion is based in emotion, even if those people are on "their side" of the issue. By offering a reasonable, rational alternative, you may attract them to your perspective as a means of disassociating themselves from the dissidents and zealots at the outer fringe.

Managing Logistics

The purpose of this portion of the booklet is to help you understand the logistics surrounding the process of actually conducting your presentation. By understanding these logistics and preparing for them effectively, you lay the foundation for ensuring that the entire event, from start to finish, is focused on helping you communicate effectively.

There are always a number of details surrounding your presentation to which you should pay close attention. For example:

- What will be the format of the presentation?
- How large (or small) a group can you work with?
- How should you arrange the room?
- How do you help people feel comfortable when they arrive at your presentation?
- What is a good length of time for your presentation?
- How do you establish credibility at the start of the presentation?
- What handouts should you include at the end?

Format Of The Presentation

There are two basic formats with which you should be familiar. In the first, you conduct the presentation alone from start to finish. In the second, you partner with others — such as colleagues, coworkers or other professionals — and take a team approach to conducting the presentation.

When you partner with others, either at a presentation you organize or one they organize, try to play a leadership and consulting role with your partners. Encourage them to take the same approach as you in defining the need, creating value, understanding the audience, establishing objectives and developing messages that meet audience needs. Give them encouragement and constructive feedback on their ability to actually get up and deliver those messages.

If you are organizing the presentation, make sure that your partners have an understanding of what you're trying to accomplish. (Conversely, if they invite you to join them, understand what it is they're trying to accomplish. As their partner, contribute as much as you can to the success of their presentation.) And, as early as possible in the process, determine who is to do what. One person should act as host, or MC. This person welcomes the audience, introduces the partners and sets the stage. Will the MC introduce each speaker? Or will one speaker introduce another? How much time does each person (or each section) have in the presentation as a whole? How should questions be handled? Should they be allowed throughout (yes!)? How much additional time should be allowed for questions at the end? These are only some of the issues that, as a team, you need to answer well in advance of your presentation.

On your own, or when partnering with others, make sure you develop an entire plan, from start to finish, of what will be discussed. Be aware that when you partner with others, you can't control how long they talk, and this may create time pressure. If your partners do not adhere to the principle of "less is more", some questions from participants may be left unanswered. And, if the presentation finishes late, there will be little or no time for networking or discussion after the presentation. Work out signals in advance with your partners in the event they need to be more brief in their responses.

In all formats, make sure all messages are focused on the needs of the audience. And stress to your partners the importance of "less is more" in delivering their information.

Size Of The Group

In theory, if you are being conversational in your delivery, the size of the group shouldn't matter. Your message, and how it's delivered, should be similar whether you're talking to two people or 1,002.

But realistically, with less than 75 participants, you should be answering questions throughout your presentations. Beyond that, it can be difficult to create a two-way, interactive format. People may feel intimidated asking questions. It may also be difficult for everyone to hear the questions asked.

One value of a presentation is that people can ask questions, and then assess your ability to answer them. With larger groups, some people may never ask the questions that come to mind. And that's a shame, because it doesn't give you the opportunity to demonstrate your ability to answer the question, and your professionalism in handling it. They may walk away with questions unanswered.

Room Arrangement

The arrangement of the room is almost always dictated by the physical space available. In all cases, work with the limitations or opportunities available. When you have a choice, there are a number of potential ways in which the room can be arranged. Figures 21-24 illustrate a number of these.

The bottom line, however, is that you must learn to work with whatever you're provided. Try to keep the physical distance between you and the audience to a minimum. Make sure that everyone can see the flip chart and make sure that everyone in the room can read whatever information you project onto a screen.

Figure 21
Narrow "U" Setup

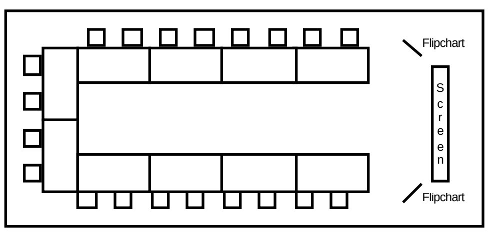


Figure 22
Wide "U" Setup

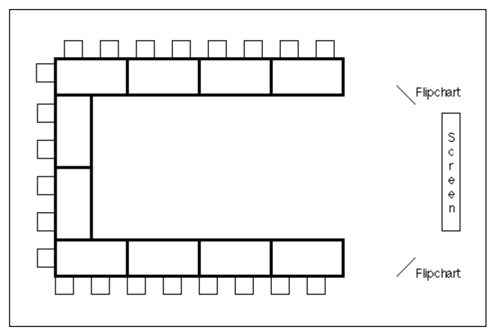


Figure 23
Classroom Setup

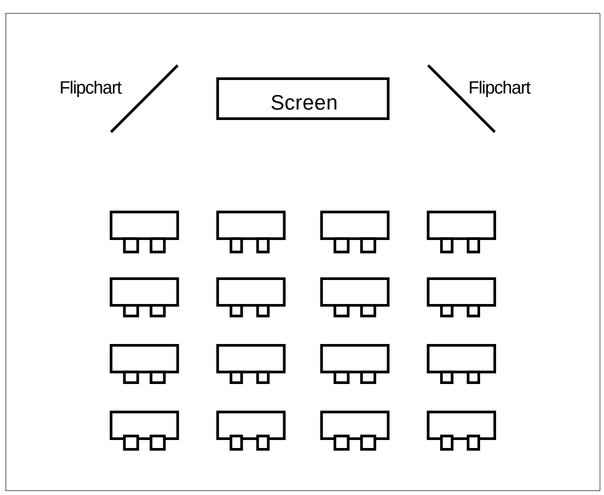
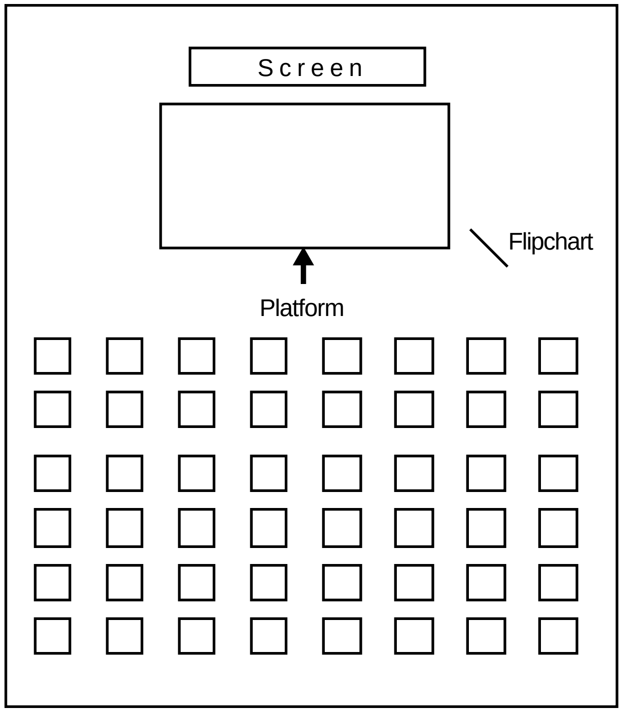


Figure 24
Theatre Setup



Your primary goal in arranging the room is to create an interactive environment. Try to keep the physical space between you and the audience to a minimum. Try not to be so close that you're "in their face", but if you have a choice between four meters and two, choose two.

If you're using overheads or computer-generated graphics, you should dim the lights nearest the screen, but the room should be light enough so you can establish eye contact with the audience. If you can't see participants, you can't tell if they agree with what you say or if they have a question, or even if they are still awake! When in doubt, leave the AV out, and simply talk to your audience.

The most important consideration with room arrangement is to be flexible and adaptable. If a room contains a large boardroom table, you must adapt your presentation to the space available. Work with what you've got. The room arrangements should not get in the way of interactivity. Make people feel comfortable. Help them relax the same way you would if you were meeting them at their office or yours. And, above all, communicate effectively with them.

Make People Feel Comfortable

Wherever possible, arrive early (up to one hour) and be ready to go at least 30 minutes prior to the start of your presentation. This will allow you to check the room, set up, and make changes if necessary. Then you can relax and greet people as they arrive.

At your presentation, be a good host. Introduce yourself to participants as they walk through the door. Shake hands. Find out their names if possible. Your goal should be to make the entire experience, from start to finish, as comfortable and welcoming as possible.

Offer refreshments if they're available. Then gently encourage people to find a seat. Once everyone is seated, start your presentation. And always try to start as close to the advertised time as possible. If stragglers walk in, don't put them on the spot or embarrass them. Smile at them and invite them to find a seat. Let them get their bearings and find a seat as you continue with your presentation.

Establishing Your Credibility

Establishing your credibility means providing a short synopsis of what enables you to stand up in front of this group to deliver information to them. This outline should be a summary of who you are. It should be no more than 100 words. And you should attempt to tailor your background to the nuggets of information you discovered during your analysis of the audience.

If someone introduces you, provide that person with a short written introduction that outlines your background, your experience, and what you're there to talk to them about. This introduction should not be a long litany of accomplishments. It should give people an overview and provide just enough information to help them understand you are capable, willing and able to help them achieve their goals.

By the same token, if you're introducing partners at your presentation, include enough information to provide a flavour of why they're attending as an expert. But don't go into great detail. Each introduction should not exceed 30 seconds. Participants need to know that they're listening to a qualified professional, but they don't need to know the intimate details of how that person got there. More details can always be provided in a handout.

Finish On Time

It's important to finish your presentations on time. And being on time usually means finishing a bit early. This allows an opportunity to network. And networking with participants before, during and after the presentation is important to building mutually-beneficial business relationships. If you finish late, plan on having people disappear quickly.

Finishing early will also give people time to provide you with the feedback you seek as you work toward evaluating your business and communication success. This is a good time for you to hand out your feedback forms. Encourage people to complete the evaluations and leave them at the back of the room. If they have the time, the chances of them doing so increases dramatically.

Handouts

You should provide people with any handouts at the end of your presentation, not during it. And any booklets, brochures, flyers or other material produced by you or your organization that support your presentation messages should be included in the handout. Be focused with the information you provide. Distribute your handouts at the end of the presentation, unless you're prepared to have participants reading the handouts during your seminar — and not listening to what you say.

Evaluating Your Success

Evaluating your success means determining whether or not you've achieved your business and communication objectives. It is also where you ask yourself one important question: "What can I do to be even more successful in the future?"

As you look back on your presentation, you can evaluate your success on the basis of two factors, the communication effectiveness you achieved and the business results you achieved.

When it comes to communication effectiveness, there are a number of signs that can help define your success. If you get lots of questions during the presentation, that's a good sign — especially if people are taking what you say and asking questions around their personal circumstances. This indicates that people are applying what you say to who they are as individuals. You will also probably be more successful if you felt like you were too short with your answers. This means you probably kept your answers short, which probably led to more questions and created more interactivity.

If, on the other hand, you keep thinking to yourself that participants are asking questions on topics you just covered (and you're wondering why they weren't listening), something's not right. Ask yourself whether this is their fault, or yours. Chances are, you need to pause more frequently and focus on creating a two-way exchange. This simple tactic will give people time to absorb what you've said before you move on to the next idea. It helps them listen more effectively.

Another method of determining your communication success, which has already been discussed, is to ask participants to complete a short survey, or feedback sheet, at the conclusion of your presentation. The purpose of getting this information is to help make the process of absorbing your information even more effective for participants in the future.

But keep this feedback separate from your response cards. You want direct, honest feedback that will help improve how you communicate in the future. And you want that feedback from everyone, not just those who may provide you with positive feedback. Reading the negative feedback and using it as an opportunity to improve in the future is an important element of continuous improvement.

On the business side, carefully evaluate your business results. Were you planning to have city council strike a subcommittee? If so, did they? If not, why not? If you wanted people to provide you with strong input into the development of a software package, was their input what you hoped it would be? If not, could you have done anything different to improve the input you received? To find out, follow up with people at your presentation and get their input. You must measure your business results so that you can make small improvements from each and every presentation you conduct.

This is where your communication objectives, established at the beginning of the process, pay huge dividends. If you didn't achieve the business results you were seeking, a variety of factors may have contributed. Was your message appropriate to the needs, wants and desires of the audience? Did you meet their expectations? Did you answer questions clearly and concisely? Did you keep your answers short? How does your perception of these factors compare to what you received on the feedback sheets?

Whatever the reason, it's important that you identify it and determine whether or not you can take steps to enhance your business and communication effectiveness in the future.

Conclusion

The goal of *Presenting With Ease!* has been to provide you with a series of practical tools that you can apply to enhance the business results you generate as a result of the presentations you deliver. But there is no substitute for practice. Conduct some presentations and, as you do, keep a number of factors in the back of your mind.

First, understand the strategy should come first. Many presentations simply miss the mark because people begin developing their content as the first step in the process. They feel that they know what they want to tell the audience, but they forget that it's just as important (if not more important) to understand what the audience needs to hear.

Second, set objectives for your presentations. Make sure there's a reason for every one. The reasons can vary and, by extension, so will the objectives. But if you're going to put something into the process, you must get something out of it.

Third, stick to the models for developing your content. Know what your time frame is and use the appropriate process for developing your information. These models will help ensure that your information is clear, concise and focused, and keep you to the important principle of less is more. Develop good notes. Use them. And remember that visual aids come last in the process, not first.

Fourth, try to relax when you're delivering your presentations. Breathe deeply before you go up. Develop strong notes and take them with you; preparation is vital to managing nervousness. And encourage questions throughout your presentation. As soon as you start answering questions, the nervousness will decrease significantly. You're no longer delivering a presentation. You're having a conversation.

Finally, evaluate your effectiveness and use the evaluation to improve in the future. People often talk about continuous improvement. Developing the skill of delivering effective presentations is continuous improvement at its highest possible form. Nobody can be successful all the time, especially at first. Use your successes and your failures to improve in the future. They are learning experiences. If you can do that, you can increase the number of successes and decrease the number of failures over time.

Always Looking For Feedback

Thank you for attending *Presenting With Ease!* By now, you have received a framework by which you can design, plan, implement and evaluate presentations that are focused on achieving specific communication and business objectives.

If you have success stories, or any ideas you have that will help improve the program or the booklet that accompanies it, I'd be delighted to hear about them. Please feel free to contact me any time by phone at (416) 410-EASE, by fax at (416) 410-3273 or by e-mail at At_Ease@compuserve. com.

Good luck!

Yours Sincerely,

Eric Bergman, ABC, APR