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10 Tips for Giving Powerful, Professional Presentations

Four most feared words: "You're giving the presentation." Here are 10 tips on presenting for those who want to release their fear of public speaking and develop effective presentation skills.

In spite of the popularity of cross training, most people as a rule aren't asked to do something totally out of their field. Yet almost everyone in a corporate or professional setting these days is expected, even required, to give presentations. Public speaking is a profession that requires training and practice just like any other. But we're constantly being pushed to the front of the room to sell, educate, persuade, dazzle and shine. It can be scary for some and downright debilitating for others.

Here are my top ten "P's" for giving Powerful Presentations.

1. The Plan

In choosing your topic, realize the best speakers speak from their own experiences. It's good to have references from (other) experts, but remember you're the specialist here or you wouldn't have been asked to speak. During the planning phase find out all you can about your listeners, location, and latitude. Customize your talk to your audience. Know how to get to your venue then arrive early. Know what's expected of you and stay within your time frame.

2. The Preparation

Mark Twain said, "It usually takes me three weeks at least to prepare a good impromptu speech." The best way is to write your talk, then speak from notes highlighting what you want to cover. The second best way is to write the speech out and practice it until you can do it without referring frequently to your script. The worst ways are reading it with little eye contact or memorizing it (unless you're a professional actor).

3. The Presentation

The most important aspect is the visual – how you look, eye contact, body language, gestures and the visuals you use. If you look nervous, it destroys your message. As someone said, it's all right to have butterflies, just make them fly in formation. The next important element is vocal – how you speak, the tone, pitch, clarity, volume and quality of your voice. The final element is verbal – the actual words you say. It's important to be accurate and, yes, entertaining. The bottom line is that how you deliver the talk makes more of an impression on your audience than what you say. Audiences will forgive you for making mistakes, but not for boring them or wasting their time.

4. A Positive Attitude

This is a hard one when you're feeling scared and nervous. And it's the best way to stop the jitters. The key is to be prepared, then get your ego out of the way and stop thinking about how the audience might judge you and think about what you can do for

them. It's always about your listeners, not yourself. They want you to do well. You know you can do it!

5. Be Physically (and mentally) Fit

This means taking care of yourself daily. Eat right, exercise, meditate, and get enough rest especially the night before. You must have real physical and mental energy; you can't fake it.

6. Practice!

7. Practice!

8. Practice!

The more you practice and hone your presentation, the better it will be when you give it. And the more you give actual presentations, the better you'll get at it. In fact it's the only way to master public speaking.

9. Play

You thought I was going to say "pray." That's always a good idea; I do it before every talk. Then Play. Relax and have fun. Giving a speech isn't brain surgery, even if you would prefer a lobotomy to having to give one. Personal stories are the most interesting part of any presentation that's ever been given and what people will remember most. Be naturally humorous rather than telling jokes.

10. Pick a Professional Coach

If you really want to be good at giving presentations, hire a coach. You can also take classes or join Toastmasters. Practice first in front of someone trained to give you good, honest feedback and who wants you to excel!

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