

How to plan a great presentation – Setting your objectives

“To fail to plan is to plan to fail” The truth of this maxim is undeniable; and failing to plan a presentation has two inevitable consequences:

We deliver one of the biggest causes of audience disinterest - the “one size fits all” presentation that we regularly see demonstrated by the over-confident “I’m great on my feet!” speaker!

Also, with no plan, or route map, we have nothing to navigate by. We feel uncertain, not in control, thus suffering the main cause of presentation nerves. The audience consciously and unconsciously, picks up this nervousness and lack of congruence, and they stop trusting in us and in what we have to say.

By contrast, nothing is more inspiring in confidence to a speaker than to know that their message is exactly right for this audience, and to feel totally clear about its delivery from start to finish! I would go even further and suggest that there is no such thing as presentation nerves. Just people who don’t know how to plan a presentation or can’t be bothered! And guess what? It is the thoroughly prepared and well rehearsed presenter, talking with an audience rather than reciting Powerpoint text, who displays those powerful persuasion skills and congruence that wins an audience over.

To set your presentation objectives, work through this questioning sequence:

Question 1: What broadly speaking would I like to achieve with the audience?

1. Do I want them to appreciate and understand a wide range of issues or opportunities? Or:
2. Do I want them to understand some of the important issues/opportunities and recognise the actions/solutions that could be taken? Or:
3. Do I want them to understand the key issues and commit to agreed actions?

Question 2: Now I am clearer about what I want to achieve, but what realistically can I achieve?

1. How much time have I got, remembering anyway that attention peaks after 15 minutes and lasts only 20?
2. What do the audience know about the issues and how much explanation is required?
3. How well will the audience accept the issues and how much persuasion is needed?
4. What is my “credibility” with the audience and how much needs covering there?

After asking these questions you will now be 90% clear on what you can achieve and how you will get there. You can ensure that what needs to be covered, will be and properly. Working in this way you will avoid the mistake often seen, when a presenter falls between two stools, attempting to cover too many issues when the objective was to get agreement on a few. It will also clear your thinking on how far this presentation or pitch will take you towards your ultimate aim, and what further stages are required.

Question 3: Given the answers to Q2, what specifically am I planning to achieve?

You now have a clearer idea of what your presentation will achieve, but your aims still need to be refined into specific objectives. The audience “seeming to agree” or “sounding happy” is never enough. With those as aims we will inevitably fall short of what we wanted to achieve because we stop when it *seems* that we have succeeded. We have to set the good old S.M.A.R.T objectives. The acid test of communication success is the audience response versus your objectives. Asking “are you happy with that?” lets them off with a response without any commitment. Asking “Will they agree specifically to do *so and so by such a date!*” requires a specific agreement and commitment. Whether your presentation

is on range of issues to a conference audience or a boardroom sales pitch, get into the habit of setting specific and timed target outcomes such as:

- Minimum of 75 % recall of key message in exit survey with minimum of 15 % sign up to programme in the first week.
- Agreement within 24 hours of the pitch to move to stage 2 of the implementation programme by October 10th.

Setting target outcomes in this way brings considerable benefits: We feel compelled to ask the question to see if we have succeeded. And if we haven't, then better to know it and to do something about it. Also, faced with the prospect of measurable success or failure, we soon recognise the need for thorough preparation and to perform at our best. Once these are set as habits, we inevitably increase our success rate.

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