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Making Powerful Points With PowerPoint™

Advanced Presentation Tips and Techniques

Try typing "*Presentation Tips*" into Google - you will get over 60 million hits. Similarly, "*Advanced Power Point*" will get you well over 10 million hits. Not exactly the focused results you need. So if you are a capable presenter, say in the top 10-20% of your peers, how do you turn your **A-** presentation or demonstration into an **A+?**

These tips are not for the novice - I assume that you already have an engaging presentation style, do not read from your slides, do not spray your audience with bullet points, that you actually have a point to present and that you are widely regarded within your company as a good presenter. Read on for some suggestions to raise your personal brand from the "good" to the "excellent". We'll look at this in three broad sections, controlling the environment, guiding the perception and amplifying your message.

Controlling The Environment

A good speaker will 'case the joint' beforehand, to gain an understanding of the room layout, lighting, acoustics and seating. You may not be able to change the physical arrangement of the room, but you generally have control over where you stand, the lighting level and the location of some accessories.

1. **Position yourself correctly.** 87% of the population is right-handed, and will naturally stand with the screen to their right so that the act of pointing is made easier. However, in the western world, people read from left to right, and you are unable to capitalize on this when standing on the "other" side of the screen. Move to the left of the screen.
2. **Position your accessories.** Place yourself in the same line of sight as the display screen. Forcing your audience to split their attention between you and the screen diminishes the impact of both your message and your winning personality. Should

you need a lectern, also place it near the screen (on the left of course) to avoid the "split personality" effect. As a well-trained presenter, you will of course ensure that everyone still has a clear line of sight towards the screen.

3. **Raise the lights.** Remember that the audience is there to see you, and you need them to see you - so that the 93% of your message conveyed by non-verbal communication comes across clearly. Dimmed lighting also encourages drowsiness and inattention - so keep the lighting levels up except for any spotlights which shine directly upon the screen.

Guiding Their Perception

While you cannot change a small rectangular conference room into a cavernous lecture theater, you can subtly change and guide your audience's perception towards the positive. Grab their attention when you need it, project the image of a calm and comfortable professional at ease with her material and finish with strength and enthusiasm.

1. **Be a control freak.** Sometimes to get a point across or answer a complicated question you need to take the audience's attention away from the PowerPoint. Use **Shift-B** to turn the display black, or **Shift-W** to turn the display white. When you do this the focus immediately turns to you. Plus at least one person will come up to you afterwards and say, "*Hey, how did you do that neat trick with the slide?*"
2. **Red means DANGER.** The human psyche associates red with bad, bad things and danger. Red is the color of STOP, the color of blood and the color of down (no-one ever got hurt falling up an elevator shaft). Be extremely judicious in your use of the color red. I personally use it to highlight a competitor's product and weaknesses or to weaken a poor option in a decision matrix - especially when using a whiteboard.
3. **Practice makes perfect.** I am constantly amazed by how many salespeople fail to practice an important presentation because they are "good on their feet" or "have done it all before". Practice does make perfect, as Tiger Woods constantly proves, so by creating the mental memory of a presentation beforehand, you can overcome all the grief Murphy and his law may throw at you. In particular, rehearse the first and last three minutes of your sessions.

4. **All's well that ends well.** Shakespeare was a smart gentleman. Always end your presentation as if it was the best one you have ever given - even if it was not. Finish strong with energy, enthusiasm and a smile and you will get some appreciation even if you had a rough five minutes in the middle. If a sports team loses four games in a row, but finishes up winning the Championship/World Series/Super Bowl - that is all anyone remembers.

Amplifying Your Message

To make your powerful points, your message needs to resonate with the audience and cause nodding heads and rueful smiles. You accomplish this by making your presentation relevant, personal and, preferably, brief.

1. **Think concrete.** One habit which drives people crazy about politicians is that they answer in abstract terms, full of "maybe, mostly and perhaps". When you can be specific in your presentation do so - for example, say "*we can match up HR salary data with call center productivity figures*" instead of "*we can join data from multiple sources*".
2. **Tell them a story.** A story will both personalize your presentation and also help internalize your points for the audience. Introduce mental images and use metaphors and similes to make your points. Your audience will feel as if the presentation has been customized especially for them and therefore has more value. That is why Starbucks can charge \$4 for a coffee.
3. **Answering the implied question.** Ask yourself two questions about each major slide or diagram you use. Firstly, "*does this slide, answer the obvious question my audience will have after listening to me?*" Secondly, after viewing the slide, will a neutral observer be able to answer the implied question, "*so what?*"
4. **You had me at "yes".** When answering a complex question, either within the context of your presentation, or during Questions & Answers afterwards, remember that sometimes you can simply answer with a "yes" or a "no" and then stop talking. That is often all the reassurance the audience needs. Don't allow a well-meaning colleague to say "*and let me add to that answer by saying...!*"

Summary

Try taking two or three of these suggestions which you regard as absolute no-brainers and incorporate them into your presentation mechanics. Then pick two which may be outside of your comfort zone, such as standing on the left or practicing beforehand, and try to fit them into your routine. Stick with them. You will soon be performing and presenting at the A+ level, and you may eventually leave your Power Point deck behind and rely on other media altogether!

"The human brain starts working the moment you are born and never stops until you stand up to speak in public."

George Jessel, US Actor, 1898-1981

Talking Points is a monthly column authored by John Care, Managing Director of Mastering Technical Sales. For more information on this and other Sales Engineering topics visit the website at www.masteringtechnicalsales.com.

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