

Tune Them in by Involving Them

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Most of the time when people are brought together for face-to-face meetings, the purpose is for persuasion—either to accept an idea, buy a product or approve a decision. Often, these meetings are not successful because the speaker misunderstands the need for audience involvement in the persuasive process. Great presenters, on the other hand, know that to motivate an audience to action, listeners must voice their concerns and actively participate in dialogue. Although great presenters make audience involvement look effortless, they actively seek participation through relevancy, problem solving, emotional appeals, fun or spontaneous activities.

Relevancy:

Listeners automatically become involved if the topic is dear to their hearts. For example, if you are talking to cardiologists about a medical imaging machine that can offer 260 slices of the heart versus six, physicians will have many questions because they need to determine if this particular device can help them better serve their cardiac patients. However, many speakers, due to time constraints and their own work load, fail to uncover their listeners' particular issues. Instead, they talk about the topic generically, unaware that it minimizes discussion and delays decisions.

Problem Solving:

Smart speakers know that prescription without diagnosis is a recipe for disaster so when talking, for example, about a production issue or customer complaint, they ask their audience a lot of questions. Some may be rhetorical questions or “yes” or “no” questions, while some may be open ended questions. Listeners, not only willingly voice their opinions, but also they are impressed the speaker cares enough to ask. When the speaker does finally define a particular solution, the audience feels that it is the logical choice, particularly since it seems to take their views into account.

Emotional Appeals:

People are moved by their heads but also by their hearts. The old adage is true that people buy on emotion and justify with facts. For example, a young woman who began a presentation to launch her company's non-invasive diabetes monitoring device mesmerized her audience by holding up a stapler and asking her listeners to staple their thumbs. Listeners became intrigued as she talked about how the current process of monitoring insulin levels feels like stapling one's thumb three and four times a day. They were riveted by the time she introduced her company's new, non-invasive pulse-ox product that could be worn like a wrist watch. The emotional elements of her presentation greatly enhanced the woman's credibility so that after her presentation, listeners were ready to place orders.

Fun/Spontaneous Activities:

Most audiences attend meeting after meeting and assume that the meeting will be tedious or even boring. When a speaker makes an event fun because of a demonstration or by doing something usual, the audience becomes motivated.

When Steve Jobs introduced his company's new I Phone in January, 2007, he made a point of holding up all of the many electronic gadgets the I Phone could eliminate, so many of them that some fell to the ground. On a screen, he showed all of the great things the I Phone could do, whether it was checking one's stocks, emailing a friend, receiving a call or downloading music. The applause from the audience was thunderous. The sales force left the meeting ready to tackle any and all competition.

When a Chief Financial Officer of a small consulting company wanted to show the need for a new CRM system to an audience resistant to change, he used a large ball of string. After asking everyone to stand up, he proceeded to toss the string to the first person involved in a particular process; then he

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asked that individual to toss it to the next person involved until all of the seven people who had to touch a process were identified and wrapped in string. Finally, he introduced the new CRM system by cutting all the strings, with the exception of just one person's. The buy-in was instantaneous and unanimous. Had he lectured, instead of demonstrating, the non-technical audience would have been resistant.

While getting involvement takes effort, it results in better understanding which ultimately leads to an acceptance of your ideas. Josh Gordon in his book, *Presentations That Change Minds*, says that the role of a presenter should not be that of a gatekeeper through which content flows, but rather that of a lightning rod to a dynamic communication process.”

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