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Making Technical Presentations Shine

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Often, people who make technical presentations focus only on being accurate. That is a mistake. Besides accuracy, it's important for technical presenters to consider making the information understandable and memorable. Listeners who struggle with complex information tune out. In addition, they will not make a buying decision about something they don't quite understand.

To make a technical presentation shine, follow these five steps. First, focus your listeners on important issues. Next, strip your ideas down to the basics so that everyone in the audience can understand. Then, condense them. People only want to hear what is essential in a technical presentation. Color the most difficult parts so that these points are vivid, not blurred. Finally, review. Remember the old adage, "Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em; tell 'em; then tell 'em what you've told them."

Step 1 Focus your listeners:
Whenever people listen to a presentation, particularly a technical presentation, they wonder how the technical expert feels about the topic, what they personally are being asked to do and why they should bother. Since this is the case, tell them the answers to these questions in your opening remarks. Also, preview the keys points you will be discussing. Listeners want and need focus. The more you help them at the beginning; the more amenable they will be to listening to the topic at hand.

**Step 2 Strip the technical information
down to the basics:**
Since people in an audience will most likely have varying levels of technical knowledge, it is important to eliminate technical jargon and define terms. A speaker should say what he means and say it simply. He should not bury ideas in "technospeak." Listeners should not have to feel that they are translating from a foreign language into English. Because it is a well-known fact that it is more difficult

for the brain to process the spoken word over the written, technical presenters should also provide simple, clear, easy-to-follow handouts.

Step 3 "Net"it out:
The biggest mistake technical presenters make is to give people too much information. Three well-supported key points are ideal. Listeners want the abridged version, particularly with complex information. Instead of being convinced when they have a lot of data to sort and digest, an audience becomes confused and overwhelmed.

Step 4 Color your content:
Because people often lack familiarity with technical content, it is a good idea to give them a frame of reference. Similes, analogies, stories, examples, references and visuals help build bridges across difficult concepts. Moreover, they short cut the time it takes people to understand.

Similes, metaphors and analogies are quite similar in that they show a comparison between the known and the unknown. For example, a sales person trying to explain the need for networking to a customer with a home office might say, "Just like arteries and veins keep your body functioning, a personal network can do the same thing by linking all the computers in your home together so that they can share information on a single internet connection." Listeners always want to put things in the correct file folder in their brain. Analogies, similes and metaphors help them to do so by giving them a reference point.

People have learned difficult concepts with stories since biblical times. Stories work because they snare people's attention. Personal stories are even more powerful. A story about the clarity of the digital pictures sent to grandparents on each coast within an hour after the birth of a first baby using the company's newest digital software package can be very compelling. The thing about using a story is that the business point must be obvious. Otherwise, it will not aid in comprehension.

Examples are especially helpful when people are vacillating. People always want proof, especially if the product or process is costly. If the speaker can cite examples of how a process dramatically short

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cut the implementation time or saved similar companies money, listener are likely to be won over. The same principle works with references or statistics. Strong evidence simply cannot be ignored. However, there must be a framework for the statistic or reference. Otherwise, it will be meaningless for the listener. For example, a 4.3 % reduction in workforce may not mean much, but saying that 75 jobs will be eliminated from the Chicago division does.

People are visual by nature. When a subject is complex, it is a good idea to use simple visuals to explain the idea. Visuals that are heavily laden in text really aren't helpful and take the viewer 25-45 seconds to read. They also create a tug-of-war for the listeners. They want to follow what the speaker is saying, but yet they feel compelled to read what is on the screen. When creating a visual, think in terms of what your audience needs to know in order to understand. Then, choose the best method to get this across. Perhaps, it is a simple chart or graph. Perhaps, it is a bullet point list. However, remember a picture is worth a thousand words. People think in pictures, not words.

Step 5 Review:
Finally, it is always a good idea in a technical presentation to review. It may seem like overkill, but to an audience unfamiliar with these concepts, it isn't. Repeat the key points that have been made, the action step you are recommending and the benefits. It will leave people focused on what is important as they leave.

Court cases have been won or loss based on how well people understood the information. To insure that your next technical presentation is a winner, follow the five suggested steps. Listeners will not only understand your points, but they will be able to make an informed decision in your favor.

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