

Don't Lecture Me, Involve Me!

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Busy executives hate lectures. When someone lectures them, they tune out and become preoccupied with things in their professional and personal lives. Anyone wanting to sell an idea needs to involve their listeners on a constant basis. Without involvement there will be little attention and little retention. So how does a speaker involve listeners during a presentation? There are five key ways.

- 1. Questions.** What easier way is there to get involvement than by questions? There are many kinds of questions a speaker can ask to get his listeners involved. One is a rhetorical question where no actual response is necessary. Another is a closed question that simply asks people for a “yes” or “no” or a show of hands. Both rhetorical and closed questions work very well when opening a presentation. The third kind of question is the open-ended question. These questions are more challenging and are best reserved for the middle of the presentation where there is a possibility the speaker might not be addressing the customer's pain points or where there is a need to learn more about how a solution might help an organization. Questions have a very positive effect on an audience. They make listeners conclude that the speaker wants to be sure or that he wants to learn more about them and their issues.
- 2. Stories.** The power of the story in the business world is phenomenal. If a speaker can tell a story about another customer who had a similar problem that was solved by his solution and how that customer's world dramatically improved as a result, listeners perk up. Not only do they understand the solution, but they begin to see that it will work in their situation also. An industry specific story is far more memorable than a description of the product's features and benefits.

- 3. Analogies.** People stay interested in things they understand or in things that they can relate to. They quickly disengage when something is beyond their frame of reference. To keep listeners involved in technical issues, it is a good idea to use an analogy. Moreover, the analogy will make it easier for listeners to retell your solution to others.

- 4. Startling statistics.** Surprising facts or statistics always grab people's attention. It makes them thankful to be in the audience. Statistics about how a product can save them time or money will be remembered. The key thing is that the facts or statistics must be impressive and most be able to be substantiated. Broad generalizations will be quickly pooh-poohed.

- 5. Humor.** Everyone responds to humor, assuming that it is appropriate. It relaxes the audience and makes them feel relieved that the presenter will not be boring. Self-deprecating comments make the speaker seem human. Joke-telling is not advised since there is always a danger of offending. Once any listener is offended, the presenter might as well pack up and go home.

The average attention span of an adult does not vary much from a pre-schooler. Speakers who pay attention to keeping their listeners involved by using questions, stories, analogies, startling facts and humor undoubtedly will be remembered. Their message will not fall on deaf ears. Listeners who are engaged from start to finish are likely to close business.

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