

# What You Don't Know Can Hurt You!

By Judith Filek—President  
Impact Communications, Inc.

We have all heard the old adage, “What you don't know can't hurt you.” In the business world, in the speaking world, **not knowing** can and will hurt you. Not only will you look ill-informed, but your credibility will be seriously and maybe even permanently damaged.

Regardless of the audience, the expectation is that you will have taken the time to understand them and their needs or issues. Each audience feels their issues are unique. They need to hear what you have learned about them so that they can feel comfortable with you. Without demonstrating you have done your homework, you put any recommendations in jeopardy.

John Chambers, CEO of Cisco Systems, said, “The more I know ahead of time, the fewer mistakes I make.” Knowledge is power. Where do you get that knowledge? Some simple sources are:

**Personal or internal contacts:** These are the people that asked you to speak. Ask as many questions as possible about the audience and what they are seeking from you. What issue or need are they hoping to solve? What brings them to inviting you to the table and why now?

**Websites:** Company and organization websites provide a plethora of information. These sites reveal the company's financial data, their product line, their customers, their current initiatives and future endeavors. They identify their management team and any significant changes they have made. From the knowledge you have gleaned, you can discover significant issues that you can personally impact or solve.

**Newspapers and magazines:** Articles can help you uncover how the organization or individual is perceived by the press. They can educate you on the mistakes or challenges of your audience. Additionally, they can tutor you on market or industry trends that you can address in your presentation.

Doing your homework is essential. On one level, most of us recognize that this is important. However, on another level, many speakers “think” they know their audience so they don't bother to do the ‘grunt work.’ When they aren't successful, they really don't understand why. As Richard Marcinko, the founder of the Navy Seals, once said, “The more prepared you are, the less you bleed in the field.”

*Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our website, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.*