

Yikes, A Large Group Presentation

By Judith Filek — President,
Impact Communications, Inc.

Zig Ziglar once said that giving a speech may be compared to a pregnancy. Initially, you are very excited, even honored, but only as the day of delivery draws near does the full magnitude of your commitment to deliver hit you.

For most of us, the prospect of speaking to a large group is a very scary proposition. Our comfort level is in speaking with one or two people across the table, not to eighty or a hundred from a raised platform. Since companies are realizing that large group presentations are a terrific way to reach a greater segment of their targeted market, it is critical that you learn how to handle this taxing situation effectively. The following is some things that you can do that will insure that you have the impact you desire.

1. Do your homework. **Know as much as you can about your audience ahead of time.** Why are they attending your session? What are their needs? What solutions are they are seeking? For example, if you are speaking to a user's conference on your company's security devices, know the security issues in their environment. If it is a mixed audience, give examples from many areas.

You can learn about your audience, by looking at the advanced list of attendees, or you can look at last years' roster. You can also talk to previous speakers and survey some registered participants about their interests and needs. **The more you know ahead of time, the more you can prepare content that hits the mark.**

2. **The pros, the people like Zig Ziglar, Jack Welch, Tom Peters or Carly Fiorina, know that when it comes to content, less is more.** They know the power of three, three key points, versus seven or eight. If your goal is

to get people talking about what they have heard, make it easy for them to remember by applying the rule of three. Resist the temptation of going into much detail.

3. **Allow 25 – 35 % of your allotted time for questions.** People only buy when their particular issues are answered. Brainstorm the questions you might be asked ahead of time and practice the answers out loud. You will sound more confident.
4. **Do whatever it takes to gain and hold people's attention.** Without attention, you get no retention. Remember, your audience gets bored easily and is often preoccupied with things in their personal and business life. They are used to doing many things at once so they will be looking at their palm pilots or reviewing materials from a concurrent session while listening to you unless you are engaging.

Begin and end your presentation with pizzazz. Use stories, questions, quotations, statistics or examples to pull people into your world, away from theirs. Make sure that when the information gets technical, you use analogies or humor. It will shortcut the time it takes people to understand and jump start interest. To make your points stand out, back them up with specific examples from the industries represented. People love real life, customer stories.

When you conclude, do so in a very focused manner. Review your recommendations and their benefits and share your point of view. After all, you are the subject matter expert. **Always end with a final strong statement that captivates attention.**

5. **Know your content.** Do not be note or slide dependent. Participants will find this annoying and look for ways to escape. They just want you to talk to them. The more you can keep your presentation conversational, the better. **Be sure to practice out loud with your slides six or seven times.** These rehearsals will imprint your talk into your muscle mind, and you will hardly have to rely on your notes.

Continued on page 2

Avoid memorizing. Even if you are successful, the audience will notice that the presentation doesn't sound natural. A better approach is to create your notes on our **Presentation Planner** using trigger words; three or four words that help you remember the whole concept. **If you use this conceptual approach, versus writing out your whole talk and trying to memorize it, you will be more natural and better able to remember what you want to say next.**

6. **Be passionate in your delivery.** If you can avoid speaking from behind a podium, do so. **Move toward your audience to show people that you are confident and that what you say is important.** Participants will notice your movement even if they are reviewing other materials. Eventually, they will look up and begin paying attention. If you feel uncomfortable without a podium, at least begin and end your talk away from it.
7. **Look at your listeners.** Although eye contact may seem difficult with a large audience, it can easily be accomplished by randomly looking at four or five sections of the room. This will cause a ripple effect. The people on each side of the person you are actually looking at will feel involved, as will the people several rows behind. **Remember, scanning an audience is not the same as engaging in solid eye contact. People, who really want to sell their ideas, look at people for a full sentence or thought or for about 3-6 seconds each.**
8. **Use your body and your voice to back up your message and to show how excited and thrilled you are to be speaking about your product or service.** Because not everyone can see you well, **make sure to use big gestures that originate from the shoulder, not the wrist or elbow.** Don't worry about over-gesturing. Just concern yourself with making your points stand out. Your gestures will be strong and natural if you approach them from that mind set.
9. The expectation of your listeners is that you are happy to be speaking to them so **smile.** When you smile, your listeners will smile back.

Once you start to get a reaction from them, you will feel a lot more relaxed. People should not get the impression that you are having a root canal.

10. People hate voices that are monotones. It is important to pause and breathe to keep your voice strong. Make sure your voice sounds like a musical instrument by emphasizing particular words or phases in each sentence.
11. Ahead of time, know the room configuration, seating arrangement and the audio visual equipment. **Get there an hour early to test and retest any equipment.** Do not dim the lights. Make sure the heating and air conditioning is appropriate. A room that is too hot or cold can cause people to flee.
12. **Stand by the door and introduce yourself to people when they arrive.** It will develop rapport and help you to relax. You may also learn something that you can incorporate into your presentation. **When it is time to begin, take some deep breaths and visualize having a terrific time.** Your audience wants you to be successful.
13. Finally, **if something happens** to your slide show or a tray of dishes crashes, **make a joke of it and continue.** Once you are on, you are on. If you do not seem bothered, your audience won't be either.

Speaking to a large group is a challenge, but the more you do it; the more comfortable you will become. If you follow these suggestions, the next time your boss says, "I have a great opportunity for you," you will be ready.

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. To reach us, phone (847) 438-4480 or contact our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.