

Presentation Pitfalls

By Judith Filek—President
Impact Communications, Inc.

Have you ever heard of a speaker who wants to fail? Of course, not! Every speaker wants to be perceived as confident and knowledgeable, but when there is negative feedback, inevitably it is due to one of these three fatal mistakes. There are no “do-overs” in presenting, and so, to present like a pro, you must avoid:

- Being Under-prepared.
- Drowning listeners with too much information.
- Lulling people to sleep with a boring delivery.

It sounds easy, doesn't it? On one level, these pointers seem obvious, but on another, they are difficult to circumvent.

Mistake #1: Being Under-prepared

Because we are busy people, and, because many of us think we already know the audience, we show up having done very little preparation. When we do this, we risk making rash generalizations and fail to connect our solution to the listeners' key issues.

Wise speakers always take the time to go to the company's website to learn what is going on, even if they have done business with the company for years. They read recent news articles or listen to analysts' calls. Obviously, things change rapidly in any organization, and, without paying attention, a presenter can easily be broadsided by an impending divestiture, acquisition or reorganization.

Prepared speakers also learn as much as they can about their listeners' issues before creating their content and slides. They talk to their internal contacts first. They understand how their listeners make decisions so that they can provide pertinent

examples and data. By adjusting the content to the needs of their listeners, a speaker connects and builds rapport.

Finally, a speaker's pre-work should include anticipating objections and/ or tough questions. A speaker who says “I'm not sure” over and over again ends up looking like the village idiot. With forethought, the speaker can turn an objection into an opportunity and move the decision making process forward.

Mistake #2: Drowning Listeners with Information

Most of us are subject matter experts. We know a lot about what we do. Our subject fascinates us, and we want to share what we know. The problem is that our listeners only care about themselves and solving their problems. They don't want to take a deep dive into our product or service. By giving our listeners too much information, we cause confusion. We actually delay decisions. For example, listeners can feel like they are paying for features that they will never use.

Thus, one of the hardest decisions a speaker makes is deciding how much depth to go into. Audiences like the abridged version. It aids retention and helps individuals make decisions. Less is more! If one sticks to the needs of the listeners and showing how an idea or product will solve the problem, extraneous information can be eliminated.

Mistake # 3: Lulling People to Sleep by Boring Them

Ralph Waldo Emerson once said: “Every great and commanding movement in the annals of the world is due to the triumph of enthusiasm. Nothing great was ever achieved without it.” A speaker's enthusiasm means everything. Without it, there is a real danger of lulling people to sleep.

A speaker demonstrates enthusiasm and excitement in his body with gestures and facial animation and in his voice with his pitch and pace. Excitement is contagious. It creates desire. It makes an audience

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feel they have got to have what you have. It moves them to action. Conversely, a speaker who talks with a monotone or reads from his slides, inevitably is seen as boring. So is the speaker who locks his hands behind his back and rarely looks at his audience. The bottom line is if you're not excited, why should your listeners be?

Everyone makes mistakes, but some mistakes are deadly. These three mistakes:

- Being Under-prepared.
- Drowning listeners with too much information.
- Lulling people to sleep with a boring delivery.

will most certainly doom a speaker's success. They can be avoided, but it takes diligence requires vigilance. One has to keep eyes on the prize.

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