

What It Takes to Make Your Points Stand Out

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Winston Churchill once said, “If you have an important point to make, don’t try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time— a tremendous whack!”

Most speakers want their points to come across loud and clear. They want to hit them with a tremendous whack. Yet sadly, often the opposite occurs. People routinely bury their thoughts. They over-connect their ideas, leaving their listeners wondering “What’s the point!”

When putting together content, it is critical for any speaker ahead of time to identify the points he or she wants the audience to remember. If there are too many points, it will be impossible. After all, no one automatically remembers the names of the Seven Dwarfs! Speakers have to make it easy for their listeners to discern what is critical. Less is more.

The importance of any idea becomes diminished if weak or tentatively language surrounds it. Never say things like, “This is sort of important.” Is it or isn’t important? “This maybe is something you might want to consider.” Should I or shouldn’t I consider it? Language is everything. It either frames the strength of the idea or undercuts it.

The wise speaker emphasizes his or her ideas by repeating them over and over again. Political strategists, for example, know the importance of repetition. In the recent election in the U.S., Barack Obama consistently repeated the need for change in each of his speeches. Repetition reinforces. People remember best when they hear something three times. If your idea is important, mention it in the opening remarks; in the body of your talk, and one more time in your summarization.

Reinforcement of your ideas can also come through the use of examples or analogies. If the point you want to make concerns ease of acces-

sibility, a speaker might tell his own personal experience of needing access to his own medical history when admitted to the emergency room. One could also share an example of a customer from a similar industry who is now utilizing a particular software program and how the corporation has benefited from it. Stories and examples are remembered long after the fact, particularly if they have been powerful.

Delivery also affects retention. Every time a key point is delivered, a speaker should pause for at least three seconds. One might even preview the idea by directly stating, “This is really important for you to remember.” If a speaker begins talking too quickly after a point is presented, it will be forgotten. Also, some presenters make the mistake of “over-connecting,” that is to say, their ideas do not come to a definite end. One idea bleeds into the next with a connector such as “and,” “but” or “so.”

Speakers go to a lot of trouble putting together content. Hit a home run with your content through repetition, word choice and strong delivery skills of previewing and pausing. While these may seem like small points, little things can make a big difference to ideas being remembered and ultimately accepted.

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