

Better Public Speaking

Think of the last really memorable talk or presentation that you attended. Now, was that easy to do, or did you really have to rack your brains to remember one? Sadly, too many presentations are easy to forget. And that's a big problem because the only reason the presenter gave the talk was to communicate something to you.

However, there are four basic things that you can do to ensure that your verbal messages are understood - and remembered - time and time again.

Although somewhat obvious and deceptively simple, these are:

Understand the purpose of the presentation

Keep the message clear and concise

Be prepared

Be vivid when delivering the message

Understand what you want to achieve:

Before you start working on your talk or presentation, it's essential that you really understand what you want to say, who you want to tell and why they might want to listen. To do this, ask yourself: Who? What? How? When? Where? Why?

Who are you speaking to? What are their interests, beliefs and values? What do they share in common with others; how are they unique?

What message do you wish to convey? One way of answering this question is to ask yourself about the 'success criteria'. How do you know if and when you have successfully communicated what you have in mind?

How can you best put across your message? Language is most important here, as are non verbal cues such as body language and expressions. Choose your words and non verbal cues while keeping your audience in mind. Plan a beginning, middle and end. If time and place allow, consider and prepare audio-visual aids.

When? Timing is important here. Develop a sense of timing, so that your contributions are seen and heard as relevant to the issue or matter at hand. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent.

Where? What is the physical context of the communication in mind? You may have time to visit the venue, for example, and rearrange the furniture. Check for availability and visibility if you are using audio or visual aids.

Why? In order to convert hearers into listeners, you need to know why they should listen to you – and tell them if necessary.

The Importance of Simplicity:

When it comes to wording your message, less is more. You're giving your audience headlines, too much information will overload and bore your listeners.. They are not expecting to become experts on the subject as a result of hearing your presentation, therefore simplicity is best.

If you're using slides, limit the content of each one to a few bullet points, a single statement or a very simple diagram.

Preparation:

Failing to prepare is preparing to fail. In fact, it is the most important factor in determining your communication successes. When possible, set meeting times and speaking and presentation times well in advance, thus allowing yourself the time you need to prepare your communications. Each minute of a presentation deserves thirty minutes preparation.

Of course, not all communications can be scheduled. In this case, preparation may mean having a good, thorough understanding of the office goings-on, enabling you to communicate with the knowledge you need to be effective, both through verbal and written communications

Successful Delivery:

The manner in which you deliver your speech or presentation has a lasting impact on your audience. Again, preparation is paramount here, in order to hold the listeners attention. Some useful tips for keeping your presentation vivid include:

Use examples to bring your points to life

Keep your body language up-beat - don't stay stuck behind a rostrum

Don't talk too fast. Less is more here too. Pauses are effective.

Use a variety of tones of voice

Use visual aids.

Presentations and public speaking, although daunting, can be a very enjoyable, rewarding experience, once adequate time is taken to prepare and rehearse them. An enthusiastic speaker who is confident with their material will make a lasting memorable impression on their audience.

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About the Author

Sheila Mulrennan from Professionaldevelopment.ie specialises in writing articles relating to Personal Development Training, Communication Skills and [Presentation Skills](#). Visit her website at www.Professionaldevelopment.ie for more.