

Tips to Avoid Presentation Disasters (Part 2)

April 19, 2016

by Dan Solin

Advisor Perspectives welcomes guest contributions. The views presented here do not necessarily represent those of Advisor Perspectives.

Last week, I discussed the importance of knowing your audience, knowing yourself, being authentic and being brief. Here are two more suggestions for giving a powerful presentation and avoiding the disasters I often see inflicted on undeserving audiences.



This is the second installment of my series of articles on this topic. You can find the first [part here](#).

Look the part

When I ask advisors how they want to be perceived, I typically hear “professional,” “competent,” “trustworthy” and “likeable.”

Those are the right goals. To get there, you need to look the part.

Overwhelming evidence demonstrates that what you wear impacts how others view you. That’s the easy part. Unfortunately, I’ve found that conveying to advisors of both genders how to dress in order to buttress the impression they want to make is controversial. So I have come up with a simple suggestion.

Go to any high-end department store or comparable men’s or women’s store. Ask to speak to the personal shopper. Tell this person how you want to be perceived.

I guarantee they won’t be stumped and are likely to have some excellent suggestions.

I advise my clients to view their wardrobe as an investment. It will yield a return.

Here’s a collateral benefit to dressing appropriately: You will likely give a better presentation. The connection between your clothes and your presentation involves a well-known effect called “enclothed cognition.” This effect describes how we are affected by what we wear. Think of how uniforms impact the performance and conduct of those in the military, members of the police and prison guards.

If you’re wearing appropriate clothes, you will exude more confidence and will project that assurance to your audience. Your presentation will live up to the way you look and feel about your appearance.

Focus on your opening

If you don’t grab your audience’s attention with your first few sentences, things will go downhill. I’ve been surprised at how often speakers use openings that turn off audiences, rather than engage them. Here are two examples.

The speaker strides to the podium (supremely confident), takes one look at the audience and says, “Good morning.” When he gets a tepid response, he doubles down and says it again, only louder. Apparently, he is signaling that he wants a more energetic reply. Sometimes he gets it and sometimes he doesn’t. It doesn’t matter.

You have to wonder why anyone believes treating your audience like monkeys waiting to be trained is a good idea. It’s demeaning, off-putting, manipulative and presumptuous. It tells the audience nothing about your presentation or why they should stay to hear the balance of it.

The second common opening is even worse. The speaker starts the presentation by asking everyone to please stand-up. She then directs them to introduce themselves to the person on their left and on their right.

This opening suffers from all the deficiencies of the previous one, but has the additional burden of ignoring the fact that many in the audience will find this exercise profoundly uncomfortable, particularly if they are introverts.

Here's an opening I use in my talks and workshops to advisors. You can adapt it to the subject matter of your presentation.

"I want you to imagine that in this room is a prospect with \$5 million in assets. He is interviewing investment advisors. My talk is devoted to showing you how to maximize the possibility of converting this prospect into a client. I am going to tell you *exactly* what to do and what not to do."

This opening focuses on precisely what the audience wants to know (where the attention belongs), instead of me. It conveys the topic I will be discussing. It also tells them how what I will be saying will benefit them.

It definitely gets their attention.

I will describe more presentation bloopers and tips next week.

Dan Solin is the director of investor advocacy for theBAM Alliance and a wealth advisor with Buckingham. He is a New York Times best-selling author of the Smartest series of books. His latest book isThe Smartest Sales Book You'll Ever Read. His sales coaching practice has expanded to include advisory and non-advisory firms in the United States and Canada.