

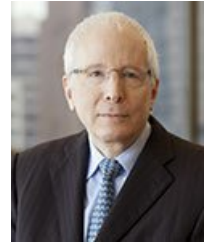
Tips to Avoid Presentation Disasters (Part 4)

May 3, 2016

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In my previous articles, I've given advice on how to dress and use gestures to give an effective presentation. But the underlying key to being a great speaker is not to focus on yourself; it is to anticipate what the audience wants from you – and give it to them. Here's how to do that.



This is the fourth and final installment in my series of articles on how to give an effective presentation. You can find the first three parts [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Limit use of presentation aids

When you give a presentation, you want the focus of attention on you and what you are saying. Presentation aids – especially PowerPoint – should be used sparingly, if at all.

Use PowerPoint only to present:

- An image
- A chart
- A short video

Never use it to present text, no matter how short the text may be. Ignore advice to “limit the number of bullet points” on your slides. There shouldn't be any.

I understand the temptation to throw bullet points onto a PowerPoint slide and use it as an outline for your talk. Resist this. Yes, this practice can make it easier for you to keep your train of thought, but it's distracting to your audience. They will be reading the slide and not listening to you.

With enough practice, you can keep an outline of your major points in your head. Your tone will be much more spontaneous and conversational than if you're simply reading from a PowerPoint slide. Even if you lose your train of thought, don't worry. Your audience will understand.

Your presentation will also be far more interesting and effective.

It's not about you

I keep an index card in my hotel room and look at it before I give a presentation. Here's what it says:

It's not about me!

From reading my series of articles on this topic, you could get a mixed message. I've told you how to dress, how to gesture, the importance of being authentic and of knowing your audience and how to craft opening remarks to grab your audience's attention.

You may also be consumed with the substance of your presentation. You want it to be impactful and to flow smoothly.

With all this attention on how you look, your non-verbal gestures and the talk itself, it's understandable you could believe it actually is all about you. Feedback forms reinforce this notion. They ask the audience to rate you. We, as speakers, take this input very seriously.

The focus of your talk, however, should be your audience. Your goal is to impact your listeners in a positive way. You want

to leave them better informed than you found them. If you don't accomplish that goal, the most expensive clothes and the smoothest delivery won't save you.

I have seen many examples of speakers who "dominate" the stage, moving restlessly and dramatically from place to place. They seem to believe they are actors and choreographers of their own personal play. Their speech patterns are contrived and appear manipulative. They are obviously enjoying themselves. After all, they are the center of attention, holding court before a rapt – albeit captive – audience.

Don't let your ego get the best of you.

The more dramatic your presentation, the less authentic – and more manipulative – it will be perceived. You want feedback such as the following: "This presentation really opened my eyes to a whole new way of approaching this subject," and not, "This was the most charismatic speaker I have ever seen."

Dan Solin is the director of investor advocacy for theBAM Alliance and a wealth advisor withBuckingham. 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.