How to Engage A Large Audience
June 19, 2017
by Dan Solin

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

A critical tenet of the Solin Process℠ is this mantra: When you’re talking, you’re losing.

It’s fairly easy to listen more and talk less when meeting with a prospect or addressing a small group of investors. It’s far more challenging when you’re speaking to an audience. Here are some suggestions for rising to the challenge.

Do your homework

Ignore most advice about giving a great presentation. In my experience, it’s misguided. Traditional advice discusses the quality of your presentation aids and how you should organize your presentation to be as effective as possible.

The truth is, it’s not about you. It’s about your audience.

Don’t worry about presentation aids. You shouldn’t have any. If you follow my advice you won’t need them. Presentation aids reflect your views on what your audience wants to hear. You have no way of knowing if you are correct.

Instead of guessing what aspect of your topic is of interest to your audience, ask them. Send out a communication at least two weeks prior to your session. Tell participants the topics you will be presenting. Ask them what would be of interest to them. Guide them by giving examples of possible areas of inquiry.

Be creative. Instead of asking, “what would you like to know about investing?” consider a more provocative question like, “what do you dread about meeting with your advisor?”

You’ll be amazed by the responses you receive. Many of them will be on topics you hadn’t thought to discuss.

When this preparation is done correctly, the success of your talk is practically assured.

Don’t “present”

Your goal is to engage the audience as quickly as possible and never let go. I give myself no more than a minute to reach this goal.

I don’t stand behind a podium. I have no notes. Here’s how I start some of my talks:

How many of you identify as an introvert? How about as an extrovert? Why should you care?

My audience is engaged in responding to my questions and thinking about what else they want to ask.

Frequently, I don’t have to ask anything more for the balance of my session. Once the ice is broken, and the audience starts to participate, there’s no stopping them.

The trick to answering questions

The temptation when asked a question is to provide an answer, but that’s not always the best approach. When appropriate, ask the questioner a question. Here’s an example – I was recently asked this question: What should I wear to a first meeting with a prospect? My response was: Can you tell me more about the prospect?

Use questions to further engage the audience. When a participant asked me how to handle a particular sales situation, I responded: Interesting question. Has anyone had a similar experience?
These responses engage other members of the audience, in addition to the person asking the question. They also stimulate further thought and discussion.

The Solin Process℠ is about retraining your brain to elicit information. You can apply the process with great success to audiences large and small. It’s just a matter of knowing how to do it.

Dan Solin is a New York Times best-selling author of the Smartest series of books. His latest book is The Smartest Sales Book You'll Ever Read. His sales coaching practice has expanded to include advisory firms throughout the world. Dan is not affiliated with any advisory firm.

Get Dan’s investing insights by signing up for his free, weekly newsletter.

Watch Dan’s new YouTube investing channel