

TIPS *FOR* SPEAKERS

HIGHLIGHTS
P ROPER P LANNING is the key to a competent presentation.
I NDICATE on your notes when each visual aid will be used during the presentation.
T O E NCOURAGE active involvement by the audience, format part of your handout as an outline of your presentation, leaving sufficient space for notes to be taken.

Step 1: Plan your presentation

While the old saying “plan your work; then work your plan” may be an oversimplification, it contains key elements of wisdom. Proper planning and follow-through are necessary for a competent presentation.

- *Identify your goal.* What do you want the audience to know, to believe, or to do after hearing your presentation? Don't just think about it. Write it down and keep it handy during the entire development process. It's hard to believe, but the very act of writing down your goal and referring to it frequently will solve numerous problems as you construct your presentation.
- *Make it logical.* People learn through associations, patterns, and logical links, so make sure your presentation has a logical flow. While the specifics of the subject matter and your goal will determine the best approach, a good overall framework to begin with is the tried-and-true “Tell ‘em what you're going to tell ‘em... tell ‘em...then tell ‘em what you told ‘em.”
- *Use examples.* Examples help clarify your information and bring your points to life. Remember, you already know the material, but the audience may have never heard it before and gets only one pass at it. Without examples to clarify and give meaning to your points, the audience will not understand all it could.
- *Decide how you will handle questions.* Plan on how you want to deal with this important part of the presentation and set aside adequate time.
- *Learn about your audience.* Get pertinent information that profiles the interests and backgrounds of its members—particularly those attending your presentation, if possible. This information can help you focus your presentation in meaningful ways.

Step 2: Develop your notes

Notes help you stay on course while delivering

the logical presentation you constructed in step 1. Here are a few tips to use to make your notes more effective.

- *Do not use a script.* Scripts are difficult to use effectively and will likely guarantee a poor performance.
- *Develop your notes in three phases.* First, make a rough outline by adding and organizing information.

Second, continue to expand and rearrange the outline until it is almost a full script of the presentation.

Third, edit your material down to its essential key concepts.

- *Use key words and phrases in your notes.* Instead of a script, develop notes by using key words and phrases that will jog your memory as you quickly glance at them. Remember, you already know what to say. Rely on your notes to ensure that you include all the points you intended and to help you stick to the logical sequence.
- *Use large type (try 18-point) with plenty of empty space on each page.* Remember, you're going to be glancing at these notes. This will also make notes easy to read, especially if lighting conditions are poor, you're tense, or you have poor eyesight.
- *Use a three-ring binder to hold your notes.* Pages will stay in place, but can be added and subtracted easily. The binder also becomes one package containing not only your notes but background material, visual aids, camera copy of handouts, and any other material relating to your presentation.
- *Indicate on your notes when visual aids will be used.* This serves as a handy reminder to you and could be used as a guide for another

person who may be assisting you.

- *Number the pages of your notes.* This step may seem incredibly simplistic, but it can prevent disaster.

Even though the three-ring binder should keep your notes in order, if they should happen to spill out and not be numbered...well, you get the point.

Step 3: Make training aids

Training aids consist of both handouts and visual aids and should not be considered optional for a professional presentation. They significantly increase the effectiveness of a presentation and demonstrate your professionalism.

Handouts. Handouts provide many benefits. Four of the most important are helping the audience follow your presentation; allowing you to provide additional information beyond what is covered in the presentation; expanding the number of people you reach, because many in the audience will share their materials with others who didn't attend the meeting; and ensuring that the audience leaves with your name and how to contact you.

- *Coordinate handouts ahead of time with the chapter responsible for the event at which you're speaking.* A host of administrative details needs to be coordinated before the presentation date. Additionally, the chapter contact may have helpful suggestions based on past experience with the anticipated audience.
- *Format the handout as an outline of your presentation.* Because active involvement by the audience enhances learning, it is strongly recommended that part of the handout be formatted as an outline of your presentation, with sufficient blank space for notes to be taken. This not only facilitates audience involvement but also provides an

overview of your entire presentation, helping the audience follow your logic.

- *Number the pages of your handouts.* This allows you to quickly focus the audience on the same page.

Visual Aids. Learning increases dramatically with the use of visual aids. One source states that people remember 20 percent of what they hear, but 50 percent of what they both hear and see. Visuals amplify, clarify, and explain important points.

- *Coordinate your visual aid needs ahead of time with the chapter contact.*
- *Use large type.* How many times have you seen a speaker display a picture while saying, "I know you probably can't see this, but I wanted to show it to you anyway because it's important...?" The rule of thumb is, if they can't see it in the back of the room, don't show it (try 24-point type).
- *Use visuals to supplement your notes.* In many cases, your visuals can serve as your notes—giving you the freedom to continue looking at the audience instead of your notes.
- *Select appropriate equipment and test it out ahead of time to ensure it is working properly.*

Step 4: Rehearse your presentation

The quality of your presentation will be directly related to the type and amount of your rehearsal. Rehearsing is particularly important because it tests all the variables, even those which you may not be aware.

- *Rehearse aloud in front of a live audience.* Nothing else works as well. You don't need a big audience—one or two people is fine. After each rehearsal, have your audience

critique both the information and your presentation of that information. Make sure you can achieve your goal in the allotted time.

Only after you have worked out all the problems (and there will be problems) should you use less effective rehearsal techniques such as talking in front of a mirror or talking to an empty room. But even then, always rehearse aloud.

- *Don't cheat.* If you are going to cut corners, do it in other steps—not this one.

Step 5: Arrive early

Think of arriving early as insurance to protect your investment of time and energy. You may be dependable, but weather, traffic, and any number of other factors could delay your schedule. Don't subject your reputation to Murphy's Law.

- *Be prepared when you get there.* This is not the time to worry about putting slides into trays or seeing if you brought everything you need.
- *Coordinate with the chapter contact once again.* Checking in with your contact ensures that you'll know about any equipment malfunctions, last minute scheduling changes, or any other potentially troublesome situation.
- *Check things out.* Look at the room in which you'll be speaking. How will the room be set up, and is there a place to put your notes? How does the audiovisual work? Who will control the room lights? How do the microphones work? Here's a good rule: Always assume microphones are on. Never say anything you don't want the whole world to hear when you are near a microphone.
- *Learn more about your audience by attending social functions and observing*

other speakers' presentations. What are members of the audience interested in? What are they excited about? Are they quiet or talkative? What is the level of their knowledge?

Step 6: Cultivate a positive attitude

Being a speaker is a wonderful thing because the deck is stacked in your favor. Everyone wants you to do well.

Nobody wants you to do poorly. You know the subject better than the audience. And you are prepared. Many speakers are concerned about being nervous and that's normal. Even the pros get nervous, but don't obsess about it. Heed the following tips, and you won't have a problem:

- *Do everything in steps 1 through 5.* Nerves will be less of a problem when you are truly prepared.
- *Stay positive and enthusiastic.* Attitudes are contagious; make sure yours is worth catching. Smile and let the audience know you are happy to be there, speaking about an interesting and important topic.

A large part of being an effective speaker is showmanship. If something is wrong, don't apologize, complain, or blame others. Members of the audience most likely don't know anything is wrong, and even if they do, they don't care who's at fault.

- *Speak to two or three specific individuals.* This technique is a good way to begin and will help you relate to the audience. After a while, you won't need this crutch.
- *Begin by saying thank you.* It's polite to thank your host and the person who introduces you. It shows you have good manners, and it's a good way to warm up and settle your nerves at the same time.

- *Avoid jokes.* They're too difficult to do well.
Just ask any comedian.
- *Don't forget to smile and enjoy yourself!*