

GREAT PRESENTATIONS

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For many people, delivering presentations is part of everyday life. No matter your position or title, whether you work in a small or large organization, nonprofit or for-profit, government or association, chances are a time will arise when you will need to deliver a presentation. And it probably will happen more than once. Most inexperienced presenters (and even some experienced ones) get nervous just at the thought of having to speak in front of a group, no matter who the audience is. It is sometimes even said that public speaking ranks higher than death among people's greatest fears. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Because there are many places and situations where you might give a presentation, it is safe to assume that there are many types of presentations. Each requires a slightly different kind of preparation. This *TD at Work* is designed to help you craft and deliver a memorable, informative presentation or speech.

This issue will offer guidance on:

- preparing your presentation
- controlling your nerves
- selecting proper visual aids
- delivering virtual presentations.

The principles covered here can be used in a variety of public speaking situations, such as introducing another speaker, accepting an award, or delivering a proposal. Different types of speaking events have their own unique set of rules and guidelines, so it is always best to seek out guidance from those you are speaking for.

This issue of *TD at Work* is unique because, in addition to including our typical checklists and tips, we've enlisted some of the elite professionals in the training and presenting world to offer advice and words of wisdom. With their help, you'll learn to present like a pro.

PREPARING FOR YOUR PRESENTATION

We've all been witness to a failed presentation. A presentation that has actually made us, as members of the audience, uncomfortable. How does this

happen? Why do presenters fail? The most likely answer is lack of preparation. The presenter was overly confident, too busy, or put it off until the last second. Don't let this happen to you! No matter how far in the future your next presentation is, it's never too soon to start preparing.

To get your preparation underway, ask yourself some basic questions:

- What am I presenting?
- Whom am I presenting to?
- Why am I presenting?
- What do I want to see happen?

This all seems fairly simple—which is why it gets skipped so often. But this vitally important step needs to happen each time you present or speak. (As you read the sidebars from our speaking professionals, you'll see this theme repeated time and time again.) Let's drill down further and get to the goals of each of these questions.

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What Are You Presenting?

Here you need to figure out your content. If you've been asked to present on a similar topic in the past, then this part is mostly done for you: Just update your existing material to be accurate and timely, and tweak any points to fit the audience and the purpose of the presentation.

If you are creating material from scratch, then you have a little more work to do. If you've been asked to give a presentation on a topic, chances are you're already a bit of an expert in that area. Start jotting down main points or areas that you want to cover. For instance, perhaps you are an experienced manager in your organization and are asked to give a presentation on the basics of new employee orientation and onboarding. You would want to cover such topics as whom to involve; supplies to collect; and activities to schedule before employees' first day, on their first day, and after their first day.

Whom Are You Presenting To?

Who is your audience? They may be as close to you as the people in your department, or you may have never met them before in your life. Whatever the case, you want to learn as much as you can about them, along with what they know about the topic. Some key questions to ask may include:

- At what level in the organization are the audience members?
- How familiar is the audience with the topic about which you are speaking?
- Is audience attendance mandatory or optional?
- How will the audience benefit from your presentation?
- How large is the audience?
- Is the audience likely to agree with your views? Or will they have a different opinion?
- What demographics does the audience represent?

All this information—and anything else you can obtain—should be researched and analyzed well in advance of the presentation. You will then be able to customize the content of your presentation to reflect the audience. No matter what type of presentation you are giving, you always want to build on what the audience already knows. When an audience notices that the presentation has been created specifically for them, you are much more likely to get buy-in for your call to action.

Why Are You Presenting?

The quick answer often is because you were asked to. But that answer doesn't help you shape your presentation; to do that, you need to dig a little deeper. Is there a reason that a presentation has been requested—versus some other form of updating employees (newsletter, website, article, book, and so forth)? Here you want to consider:

- What needs do the audience members have?
- Why are they attending your particular presentation?
- What do participants expect to learn from your presentation?

- What do the participants' supervisors expect them to learn?
- How are you in a position to fill that need?

These are important questions to answer during your analysis steps so you can use the answers as you form your presentation.

In addition to there being a reason for the presentation, there is a reason you are the one doing the presenting. Maybe you are the subject matter expert on the topic at hand, and the group wants a quick and informal “tips and tricks” training. Or perhaps you will be the team member leading a specific project or initiative, and the expectation is a presentation on the project plan. Knowing this information will help you fit your presentation's tone and depth to your audience.

NO MATTER WHAT TYPE OF PRESENTATION YOU ARE GIVING, YOU ALWAYS WANT TO BUILD ON WHAT THE AUDIENCE ALREADY KNOWS.

What Do You Want to See Happen?

The last question to ask as you are preparing yourself to present is about what the outcome of your presentation is supposed to look like. Is it a motivational presentation, intended to get everyone excited? Is it meant to demonstrate a new set of processes and skills that management wants the staff to master? Or is it simply an introduction of another speaker? There are many different styles and types of presentations—and each style or type has a different form and includes different elements. A presentation to motivate and inspire the team will look very different from a presentation on the 10 steps to using the new accounting software or one that introduces a senior leader to speak at your conference.

Making sure you know the desired outcome is essential to a great presentation. One of the worst things you can do as a presenter is come to a speaking engagement where you've written a talk with the wrong outcome in mind.

Do it now: Turn to the job aid, Preparing Yourself to Present, and work your way through the listed items. Using this document will help you ensure that you are prepared to put together a winning presentation. You probably have easy access to much of the information requested on this job aid, but there also is most likely information that you need to seek from people who have asked you to speak. Make sure to get the answers you need from them early so you don't have to rework your presentation later.

CREATING THE PRESENTATION

Some people prefer to write out their entire speech; others feel comfortable creating only an outline. Whatever you decide, you must consider the various parts of your presentation. You will need to:

- grab the audience's attention with your opening
- develop the content
- close the speech powerfully.

Open With a Bang

Your opener sets the tone for the entire presentation. A solid start to a presentation

- gets the audience's attention
- tells them what they are going to learn.

There are numerous ways to successfully open your presentation. Here are some tried-and-true examples:

Ask a question. This immediately engages the audience and can work to the benefit of the presenter. If you were presenting on public speaking tips, you might ask, "How would you like to feel more comfortable speaking in front of an audience?"

Tell a personal story. This can be tricky because not all people are born storytellers. If you tell a story, keep it short and relevant to the audience. Although you should avoid telling a story that is too long, rich details can make a difference. Use names, and provide details like the

time, place, and weather. Descriptions make your story come alive.

Use an icebreaker. These are brief exercises that help the audience members get to know one another. Having audience members introduce themselves is a basic example. If you are presenting to a group that already knows one another, you might try having them state their hopes for the presentation and how they will use what they learn back on the job.

Begin with a quote. Starting with a quote is a great way to show the importance of the topic, to add to your credibility as a speaker, or even to just get your group thinking. You can pick a statement that aligns with your topic—or even challenges it. In the age of memes and tweets, this is a great way to kick off your presentation and make it memorable.

Share a statistic. Similar to asking a question, sharing a statistic at the beginning of your presentation allows your audience to start processing content right away. You could pose the statistic as a question, such as, "Did you know that before you go to bed tonight, there will have been 131 billion emails sent today?" or more as a statement, "This year, we will lose 2.3 million hectares of forest land." This is a great tool if you are not the first speaker in a day and need to quickly refocus the group on your topic. But when using facts and statistics, make sure that they are accurate and up-to-date. If someone in the audience recognizes that you are using results from a 10-year-old study, or have other inaccuracies, your credibility will be lost.

Use humor. Everyone loves to laugh—and humor is a great way to bring people together. We can easily connect over a specific situation, a funny video or movie clip, or a shared experience we've all had. But this is a definite gray area that can be tricky because everyone's style of humor is different. That joke that went over great with your office mates or friends might not get the same reception in front of a crowd of executives.

No matter what technique you use to open your presentation, make sure you include how the audience is going to benefit—make them care. Give them the WIIFM (what's in it for me) right from the start.

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