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CREATIVE WRITER

EFFECTIVE SPEECHES AND PRESENTATIONS

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CREATIVE COMMUNICATION

Here are some guidelines to help you improve your speeches and business presentations. They will ensure that people not only appreciate what you have to say but remember who said it.

For Further Information

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PREPARATION

Behind every successful and apparently spontaneous speech or presentation there will be hours of preparation and rehearsal. Senior executives dedicate huge amounts of time to speech preparation. This is no accident; it is precisely why they are successful. A memorable speech can be a turning point in someone's career because managers with good communication skills are singled out as potential leaders.

Learn from one of the greats

This passage from the introduction to *The Speeches of Winston Churchill (Penguin)* says all you need to know about the importance of preparation.



“Whether delivered in the Commons, on the platform or at the microphone, Churchill’s orations were neither the effortless effusions of an accomplished extempore speaker, nor the rambling remarks of someone thinking vaguely and incoherently aloud. They were formal literary compositions, dictated in full beforehand, lovingly revised and polished, and delivered from a complete text, which often included stage directions. As such, they were meticulously constructed set pieces, carefully planned from beginning to end, with ample documentation to support the case being made, and with the arguments flowing in ordered sequence, until the peroration was finally reached.”

FOUNDED ON A BUSINESS GOAL

- Presentations should always be founded a specific business goal, e.g.
 - launch new financial services product
 - align staff behind restructuring programme
 - attract funding from corporate investors
 - demonstrate superiority over competition
 - enhance personal reputation
 - increase sales by 20% in 12 months

Your goal: -

DRIVEN BY A CENTRAL PROPOSITION

- Presentations should be driven by a central proposition, e.g.
 - the first thing you will notice is the service
 - building on our strengths to grow new markets
 - a team with a track record of success
 - our standards are other people's targets
 - the opinion leader's opinion leader
 - a coordinated campaign requiring teamwork and commitment

Your proposition: -

Don't write a word until you have confirmed your goal and central proposition. They determine the tone and content of your presentation but especially its emphasis. If the central proposition were service, you wouldn't start off talking about features and benefits.

SELECTED CONTENT

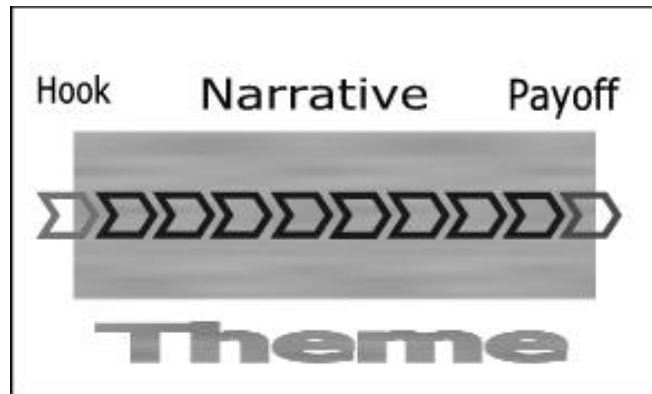
A presentation cuts a path through a jungle of knowledge and information, your task is to choose the best route for your audience. You must decide where to start and finish, the places you need to visit and the ones you can safely ignore. The route you choose will ultimately be determined by your strategic goals and your central proposition.

- Be selective in your choice of content. You don't have to tell the audience everything, leave them hungry for more.

- Address any barriers to communication. If there are issues that people are worried about and expect you to address, and you duck them, they will ignore everything else you say.

THE FOUR ESSENTIALS

- There are four essential components to an effective presentation; theme, hook, narrative and payoff.



- The theme is the creative foundation of your presentation that binds it all together. Sometimes the theme is extant, such as a journey into the future. Or it may be a controlling idea such as taking a customer perspective or playing devil's advocate. Without a theme, you will have an uphill struggle to make your presentation work.
- The first 30 seconds and the last 15 of your presentation are the most important. Use an opening hook to grab the audience's attention and get them on your side. It could be an anecdote, a blistering statistic, a bold prediction or story or gag of some kind. Charm them, scare them, make them laugh or ask a provocative question and they will want to be your friend.
- The narrative is what keeps people listening. It's the twists and turns you create in the story, the surprises, the pauses, challenges and unexpected revelations. The narrative carries your audience inexorably towards the payoff.
- Conclude with a payoff that's relevant to your audience and relates to your central proposition. People may be saying to themselves, "That's all fine, but what do I do on Monday?" Tell them what to do on Monday!

CREATIVE COMMUNICATION

Even the most apparently dull subject is amenable to creativity. No audience, however much on side and motivated, is above being entertained. The trick is to pitch it right and to avoid being patronising. The imagination you put into a presentation is testament to your commitment and will not go unnoticed.

STAND AND DELIVER

- The impact of a typical presentation is 55% visual (how you look), 38% vocal (how you talk) and only 7% verbal (what you say). A good presentation is a performance.
- Make it interactive. Put in a (rhetorical) question early on; “How many people here have...?” “What do you think is the most important thing is...?” “Isn’t it strange that...?” Questions wake people up and keep them on their toes for the rest of your presentation.
- Rehearse - lots. For maximum impact learn your speech by heart. A useful technique is to read into a tape recorder and play it back, say while driving. You will hear all the weak links and longueurs. This will also give you an accurate timing. Others prefer to try out a speech on a partner or colleague. Always try to rehearse in the room where you will be speaking so you can get used to the sound quality.
- Don’t gabble. In their desperation to get it over with, people often speak too quickly and waste all the preparatory work. Your audience has taken the trouble to come and listen to you, give them their money’s worth.
- Get your timing right. There’s nothing worse than being told to wrap up before you have made your point. It’s far better to finish early.
- Don’t hide behind the rostrum. Remember those presentations when the speaker walks to the front apron and engages the audience directly? Those are the ones you remember and that everyone talks about afterwards.
- Speak with passion. If you don't care about your subject neither will your audience.
- Make eye contact with individuals in the audience. Look at one individual and act as if you are speaking directly to him or her. Having made one point, pick someone else and give him or her another nugget of your presentation. If someone heckles, engage someone else in the audience about that issue, flatly ignoring him or her and never pick a fight.
- Don’t use clichés or jargon, they really lower the tone of your presentation. Avoid meaningless phrases such as clearly, actually, you know, quite candidly, for my sins etc. And avoid "umming" between words.

LIFE AFTER POWERPOINT

A power failure at an event I attended recently robbed the presenters of their speaker support. Instead of hiding behind their slides, they were forced to communicate. They surprised even themselves. It requires a little bravery but presentations without slides are invariably more engaging and hence more effective.



Nightmare



Dream

- If you are going to use slides, keep them simple and limited in number so your audience is listening to you and not looking over your shoulder.
- Graphics, photographs and diagrams work better than pure text. Certainly avoid slides that are very heavy with text.
- Stick to your main points as outlined in the visuals and your notes. Don't go off at a tangent.
- Refer to everything you put on a slide - if in doubt, take it off. Ideally, tell the audience they can have copies afterwards so they will listen and not take notes.
- Finally, enjoy giving your presentation – it's OK to smile!

WHY NOT LET ME

TRANSFORM YOUR PRESENTATION?

All the hard work and investment in an event will be wasted if delegates feel shortchanged on content. I work with my clients to develop strong themes, punchy scripts and concise visuals. And I can help them stand and deliver on the day.