



FINANCIAL TIMES

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Essential Guides

MAKING BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS

HOW TO DELIVER A WINNING MESSAGE

PHILLIP KHAN-PANNI



PUBLISHING
FINANCIAL TIMES

The Financial Times Essential Guide to Making Business Presentations

About problems

Be direct. After all, you are there to try and solve problems.

Examples:

- What are the main issues you have with this type of product?
- Have you ever been let down by your current supplier?
- Is there information you'd like to have, but which you are not getting now?
- What would simplify your procedures?
- Do you need to cut costs/save time/extend the application?
- Some of our customers have had reliability problems with this (competitive) product in the past. Has that been your experience?

About effects

What are the consequences and knock-on effects of the problems you have persuaded your client to reveal?

Examples:

- Is this slowing down your overall rate of production? By how much?
- What is the effect of a delay in delivery?
- If the system is dependent on Ernie's knowledge, what happens when he's on holiday or off sick?
- How long before this glitch leads to a full breakdown of the system?
- Will this lead to job losses and budget cut-backs?

About importance

Find out how important it is to correct the problem – to the company and to the decision maker. Focus on the cost of not correcting it.

Examples:

- Have you worked out what this problem is costing you?
- How urgent is it to put it right?
- What is it costing you to have unreliable deliveries?
- How much market share do you think you are losing because you don't have up-to-date information?
- How would it be if you could have [your corrective benefit]?

You must aim to get your prospect to admit that the problem is serious and costly and that they want it corrected NOW.

Essential shortcut to your Elevator Speech

Write the following three things, with a 2in/5cm gap between them, then add what is indicated by the italics:

- 1 You know how (*add a problem or two that people can relate to*).
- 2 Which means that (*write the consequence of the problem/s*).
- 3 What I do is (*state how you provide the solution*).

The next chapter deals with the content, and deciding what to say.

Summary

- The Elevator Speech helps identify the added value that you provide
- Deliver your personal 'take' on the facts
- Follow the 4 Ps of presenting: Principles, Purpose, Planning, Pre-qualifying
- Five key questions to remind you of your purpose
- Use fact-finding questions to uncover where the real 'pain' lies

4

Deciding what to say

In this chapter

- Choosing relevant content: Purpose, Audience, Topic
- The five main types of presentation: Entertaining, Informative, Analytical, Problem Solving and Persuasive
- The negative and positive elements of a presentation
- Talking about what you know
- Your role as problem solver
- Projecting your brand values

When you come to decide on the content of your presentation, follow the simple PAT formula: *Purpose, Audience* and *Topic*. Just remember, this chapter is about content, not about structure. That will be covered in Chapter 5.

Purpose: Why are you giving the presentation, and what are you hoping to achieve through it? What is the change in thinking, attitude or behaviour that you want to bring about? How strongly do you feel about that? If you find yourself saying, 'I've got to give this presentation and I don't know what to say', you should take a big step back and re-think your purpose.

One of the main reasons why presentations fail is that those delivering them are not engaged. The presentations are part of their routine responsibilities, and there is no conviction in what they say or in the way they put it across.

Quite a few such presentations were delivered by people in key roles within the Regional Development Agencies in Britain, which were set up to attract and promote business within their areas. In one example, there was a small department which had several million pounds available to lend to SMEs, small companies that were desperate for financial support. Yet the people with the money to lend prepared presentations that were truly boring, talking about the available financial aid as though it were a form-filling exercise.

I put it to them that they were in a position to make things happen, to help businesses grow and develop, to create new jobs, to bring increased prosperity to the region, even to save businesses from collapse through lack of funds. All exciting possibilities. Worth getting excited about! I said their presentations should not be about the *process* of applying for the funds but rather about the *opportunities* that the funding could create.

Your own presentations should arise *out of your personal conviction* that you have:

- something to say;
- something you want people to hear, not out of an obligation to fulfil an arrangement.

As I said before, presentations delivered without a commitment to the message will tend to fail.

Audience: Who will be there to listen to you, and why are they there? Many audiences contain people who attend because they have been instructed to be there, and may need to be engaged as early as possible. Others may have expectations that go beyond your brief, and you will need to rearrange those expectations.

- What do you know (or can you find out) about their interests, demographics, motivation and relevance to your topic?
- What do you feel about such people?
- Are you in tune with them?

Every audience will be different, and your preparations should be re-tuned every time, no matter how often you give the presentation. Remember that there will almost always be some who think they know more about the subject than you. Think about how you would address them. Think about how you will engage them from the start.

Topic: What will you talk about? Start by writing the headline for an ad promoting your presentation. What's the main benefit you can promise? Make it as specific as possible, as though you were addressing a group of people who should be there, but who need convincing.

One of the most important people to convince is yourself. You need to identify the added value that *you* can provide through this presentation. That will give you your focus and raise your level of confidence.

Essential tip

- When thinking about what to say, concentrate on how it will benefit *the audience*.

There are, of course, several kinds of presentations, and your approach will differ in each.

Five main types of presentation

For the most part you will be offering solutions to problems. No solution is of any interest or value unless first there is agreement on the problem and the need to put it right. Think about it: does it make sense to offer a solution before you know what the problem is (if there is one)?

Someone once told me *'Prescription without diagnosis is malpractice'*. How would you feel about a doctor who wrote out a prescription without first finding out what was wrong with you?

Equally, you and all your credentials are of no interest until you can demonstrate that you can provide value.

That's why it makes no sense to start your presentation with your credentials, or any claims of past greatness. Many presentations (and even expensively produced ads on TV and in the press) begin with something like, 'At [our company] we believe in such and such.' Frankly, who cares?

I'll return to this subject a little later, and in greater detail in the next chapter. For now, let's consider the five main kinds of presentations:

- 1 Entertaining.
- 2 Informative.
- 3 Analytical.
- 4 Problem solving.
- 5 Persuasive.

Entertaining presentations are designed to keep the audience amused. They include after-dinner speeches, and they have little purpose beyond entertainment and raising the profile of the speaker.

Informative presentations deliver new material to the audience, and may be reports on the progress of a project or about some new development or discovery in a subject that is familiar to the audience.

Analytical presentations deliver new thinking or an explanation of some current situation. They are frequently used in academic circles, but in business they provide the basis for decisions on some new direction. For them to be useful, they need to recommend some action to implement the new information.

Problem solving presentations are similar to analytical ones but contain, by definition, 'the next step'. Like analytical presentations, they can be simply academic unless they prompt some new action.