

12 Most Common Problems Presenters Face

There are a number of concerns and challenges presenters face when organizing and delivering presentations. Here are 12 of the most common problems we have seen over the decades in our presentation skills training programs and coaching. Based on the book, *Present with Power, Punch and Pizzazz* by Arnold Sanow and Henry J. Lescault.

- **Lack of Initial Rapport with Listeners.** Many presenters walk in a room and immediately start practicing and going over their program. They fail to meet and greet the attendees. Although they have their material down, they have failed to build the initial rapport and connection that can determine the success or failure of a presentation. To fix this situation, always arrive early to set up. When attendees start arriving stand by the door and greet each one. Shake hands, smile, focus with good eye contact and nod to show you are paying attention. If there is still time after greeting everyone, continue to talk to audience members.
- **Poor Meeting Space.** Arrive early and make sure everything is set up the way you want it. Can everyone see you? Is the seating set up in a U-Shape or tables in rounds so that you get maximum interaction and impact? Is it too warm or too cold? Are there any distractions (open windows with great views, noise from other meetings, etc.)? Is the lighting appropriate? Is it clean? Can everyone hear you from anywhere in the room?
- **Stiffness in Use of Body.** By moving around you create energy and as a result keep your audience awake. To make our clients move around, we put little round sticky dots on the floor. This is a reminder that every few minutes they should move to one of those dots.
- **Body Language is Distracting.** People's attention spans are short. Anything you do that distracts them will take away from your message. Here are some common distractions; hands in pockets, playing with marker or notes, filler words (ah's uhms, oks'), speaking in monotone, your dress (not appropriate for the group)
- **Poor Use of Eye Contact or Facial Expression.** Eye contact is the key to building rapport or trust. Make sure you look people in the eye when you meet them and throughout your presentation. As a rule of thumb, good eye contact is around 3 to 5 seconds. After that people tend to become uncomfortable. After 5 seconds glance away and then come back. Also, make sure to smile when appropriate and use facial expressions to convey messages as happiness, anger and sadness.
- **Lack of Humor.** People remember humor 6 times longer than they remember anything else. We don't mean to use jokes. Unless you are a comedian be very careful if you do use jokes. Also, as a rule of thumb make sure all your humor follows the AT@T rule. Humor needs to be appropriate, timely and tasteful. Start a humor file on your computer. Write down everything you hear, say or do that seems funny to you on a daily basis. Family and friends are great resources for material as well as newsworthy items.

- **Speaker Seems Uncomfortable Because of Fear of Failure.** If you think you will deliver a poor presentation the odds are you will. Think the best. One technique we prescribe is to have our clients write out 50 times, “I am a great presenter.” We then have them repeat it another 50 times. By the time you are finished you start believing it.
- **Talk is Rambling.** Presentations are unclear because of poor preparation. 90% of the success of any presentation hinges on planning out your presentation and going over and over it until you feel comfortable. Our rule of thumb is that you need to spend at least 20 hours for every 1 hour presentation. 20 hours included the design, development and practice.
- **Use of Boring Language and Lack of Interesting Material.** To keep things spiced up make sure every 3 to 5 minutes there is a story, anecdote, exercise, humor, or question.
- **Lack of Energy or Enthusiasm.** People are more convinced by your energy, enthusiasm and conviction than by anything else you do. To make sure you keep your enthusiasm high, one exercise we suggest is to take any article in a newspaper and highlight or circle key words. Then read the article with your regular voice, and when you come to the highlighted words yell out the highlighted word. Do this 20 times before your presentation and you will naturally be more enthusiastic. In the next chapter see another exercise we use to keep your enthusiasm high.
- **Inability to Use Silence as Impact.** Many speakers talk too fast and don’t take a breath. To make sure everyone understands your message and to get maximum impact on what you want to get across, it’s important to stop at key points. For example, you may want to say, “80% of businesses that start today will be out of business in 5 years.” At this point stop, look at the audience and give them time to ponder this thought. By stopping they also tend to become more attentive. They are now listening to hear what you are going to say about it. If you don’t stop the impact is lost.
- **Presentation is Intellectually Oriented ... Speaker Forgets to Involve Emotionally.** Facts, statistics and data are important, however your presentation will come alive by having stories, anecdotes, case studies and examples. For example, one politician was discussing the budget deficit. Instead of just giving numbers and facts, he showed a slide with a picture of dollar bills going around the earth three times. In another instance, one speaker was talking about drunk driving. Instead of just statistics the presenter used the story about someone who died in a drunk driving incident.

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