

If Your Presentation is Boring, Blame Yourself Not Your Topic

Perspective on People:
By Karen Friedman

My team and I were recently hired to conduct speaker training at a global meeting. Before participants joined us for breakouts and coaching, we sat through their meeting where experts presented information. Surprisingly, each speaker was worse than the next. Their slides were text heavy, written in sentences, as the presenters read through them while randomly waving laser pointers at no particular place on the slide.

It was a scientific meeting being held to educate attendees on a specific subject. Following, these attendees would work us in breakout sessions to learn how to effectively communicate this information and engage different audiences.

It struck me as unfortunate that the company putting on the event missed a huge opportunity to select presenters who could exemplify how to be great speakers and set the tone for the meeting.

Instead, the meeting chair led off apologizing for the dense slides; as he shoved his hands in his pockets, appearing bored at what he was about to share. He spoke far too quickly, without pausing to give listeners a chance to process what he was saying and spent a good deal of time talking to the slide instead of his audience. It was a

global audience where English was not everyone's first language so it was likely listeners struggled to keep up.

The best way to become a good speaker is to start by watching good speakers. Being captivated by a strong communicator often inspires you to up your game so others want to listen when you talk.

Given we've been coaching speakers for more than two decades, I can share the most common reason people, especially scientific and technical experts, say they can't convey complex information in an interesting way.

"My subject is different than others because I need to present very dry technical information that isn't exciting."

Your subject may be different, but it's up to you to present it passionately and in an interesting way. Instead of blaming your topic for being boring, look for ways to excite your audience. When you change your mindset, you will change the way your audience sees the subject. If you think of your subject as dull, then you will likely come across that way.

CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK

Start by summarizing the key take away of your talk in one sentence as if it is a headline. As an ex-



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ample, if you are speaking about a new therapy, you may start by saying this new therapy can protect your children against future disease. If you're delivering financial information, you might begin with a startling number or statistic

to peak your listener's curiosity. Always think about your listener when you create content. If you were them, what would you care about?

CONVERSE, NOT PRESENT

When we converse, we are typically animated and have inflection in our voices. We tell stories and share examples that support that story. Your presentation should do the same. Think of your talk as a story and use analogies, examples and case studies to bring the information to life.

CREATE AN INTERESTING OPEN

An oncologist I once worked with was presenting at a medical symposium packed with colleagues. Instead of launching into the new study data right away, he began by talking about problems oncologists face and then discussed how the study results may help them address these problems. He instantly had their attention.

WATCH TED TALKS

While your talk may be longer than ten minutes, Ted Talks are great examples of how to make any topic interesting. There are talks on house painting, making tasty pizzas and even one on doodling. Instead of delivering a 45-minute talk ripe with spreadsheets, text and bullet points, you'll observe techniques good presenters use to make listeners feel like active participants which keeps them interested. You'll also notice powerful delivery techniques such as the pause.

BREATHABLE SEGMENTS

As a former reporter, I learned how to breathe life into my stories. The same applies to organizing business talks. Like developing an outline, pick three to five key concepts you want to convey. Look for places to insert the three V's: vignettes, videos and visuals. The more interactive you make your talk, the more involved your audience will become.

At the speaker training I referred to at the top of this article, the closing speaker, unfortunately, was as dull as the opening speaker. Instead of leaving her audience with a key take away, a call to action or a powerful reminder of why this information is important to them, she ended by presenting a slide that included approximately 200 words in small font, written in sentences.

In what seemed like an eternity later, she said "this is the take home message", which was highlighted in dull blue at the very bottom of the slide that people in the back of the room struggled to see.

Everyone applauded and at first, I wasn't sure why. Then I realized they probably weren't clapping at the take away. They were applauding because her talk was over.

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