

10 Tips for a Powerful Workplace Presentation

Bring your information to life for your listeners.

By Karen Friedman

Speaking in front of colleagues, prospects, and managers can rattle even the most seasoned communicator. Perhaps you didn't have time to prepare, or you've been told to present material that is not within your area of expertise. When it's time to contribute, your stomach might start to flip-flop, and your normally confident self freezes or rambles.

I once worked with a man named Patrick who desperately struggled to hold people's attention when he presented at work. Yet, outside of the office he was magnetic, personable, and hilarious.

No matter how often we worked together, nothing seemed to help him improve until he told me he was a die-hard New York Yankees baseball fan. Being from Philadelphia, I couldn't share his passion for the Yankees, but what struck me was how his entire demeanor changed when he spoke about them. So, I gave him a homework assignment: Convert me, a Philadelphia Phillies baseball fan, to his New York way of thinking.

The next time we got together, Patrick showed up in full Yankee garb, carrying a baseball bat and glove, with a big Yankee logo painted on his face. He had plastered pennants and Yankee paraphernalia on the walls of the

conference room and handed me a bag of popcorn as he motioned me to a seat. Patrick then delivered one of the most engaging presentations I can remember.

Without realizing it, Patrick did more than talk Yankees. He pitched his sports knowledge with energy and confidence. He drew me into his story with steady eye contact, big gestures, and movements. His enthusiasm was contagious.

You may not be delivering a work presentation about your favorite team or hobby, but if you want people to listen, you need to bring the same energy as if you were. When you change your mindset, you'll change the way audiences react to you.

In the past 25 years, I have coached thousands of speakers across scores of industries on four continents. The most successful employ these 10 tips to deliver dynamic business presentations in any environment.

1 Know your audience.

All audiences are not created equal. For example, you wouldn't give the same talk to a labor union that you would to a medical association. That's why it's important to understand their concerns, fears, challenges, and subject knowledge before you speak, so you can see the topic through their eyes and tailor your remarks to them. Then, identify what you want them to know, do, or feel when you're done speaking.

2 Begin at the end.

Before you start writing scripts and developing slides, summarize the key takeaway of your talk in one sentence that answers this question: Why should my listeners care? As an example, if you're speaking about a new medication, the takeaway might be "It saves lives." This becomes your story line and everything that follows should drive the story home.

3 Engage with strong opens and closes.

Capturing your audience's attention at the beginning helps listeners stay engaged throughout the presentation. That's why opens and closes are so important. Instead of instantly diving into details and the minutia of your product, try focusing on benefits or frame the problem you are trying to solve. For example, product X is twice as fast and half the price. At the end, circle back to your key takeaway.



4 Use 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. In each, 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.

5 Have a conversation.

You probably have a colleague like Patrick who is fun to be around. Yet, when that person presents, they seem robotic. Don't present. Converse. Conversations are more animated and allow for vocal variety, facial expressions, and gestures that occur naturally, as if we are speaking to a friend. To do that, practice with and without slides. With slides, you'll internalize information and learn the material. Without slides, focus on the key points to be more conversational.

6 Create visual slides.

New research from Prezi, a visual software company, reveals nine in 10 people of 2,000 surveyed said a strong narrative and visuals will keep them more engaged. Look for ways to turn words into visuals with pictures and charts, which are easier to follow. Instead of reading your slides, talk to the audience, not the screen.

7 Presenting across a screen.

The same applies to virtual presentations. Instead of looking at another monitor or at individuals on various parts of the screen, position your camera at eye level so you can look directly into the camera. This makes participants feel you are making eye contact. In a hybrid environment where people are attending remotely and in person, it's also important to look at the camera from time to time so everyone feels included.

8 Make it personal.

Personalizing information with anecdotes and examples makes your message more relatable and easier to understand. For example, I recently listened to a medical director deliver a presentation outlining a shortage of obstetri-

cians and gynecologists in his hometown. The numbers on his slides were important but his message was not that compelling until he told a story about a woman in labor who drove 35 miles by herself in a blizzard to deliver her baby at the hospital because there were no specialists nearby. It's doubtful his audience will recall the numbers on the slides, but they will most certainly remember that story.

9 Keep it simple.

Albert Einstein once said, "If you can't explain it simply, you don't understand it well enough." Every industry has its jargon and acronyms but the moment you start speaking in technical terms is the moment you will lose your audience. Even when speaking to peers who understand the subject, crowded slides and complex information make presentations hard to follow, which creates a disconnect between you and your listener.

10 Remember the P's.

Whether presenting in person or remotely, it's important to Pace, Pause, Project,

Pronounce, and Practice. Pace yourself by pausing. Pauses give people time to process what you're saying and can also help emphasize important points. Whether wearing a microphone or presenting remotely, speaking slightly louder to project your voice helps command attention. So does clearly pronouncing words to avoid trailing off at the end of sentences. The best way to master these skills is to tape yourself practicing out loud. This adds up to P for Presence.

Utilizing these techniques to combine content and delivery will reduce anxiety and position you as a confident, energetic speaker who can engage listeners and hold their attention. People came to hear what you have to say. You owe it to them to say it well.

Karen Friedman is a business communications expert, syndicated columnist, and author of *Shut Up and Say Something* and *Ordinary People: Extraordinary Lessons*. Find out more at karenfriedman.com.

7 Ways to Battle Butterflies

- 1 Arrive early.** Greet people before you begin. Shaking hands, making eye contact, and engaging in small talk make you more approachable and your audience less daunting.
- 2 Tech check.** Check your equipment and run through your slides in advance. Make sure the room is set up the way you like it.
- 3 Time it.** Time your talk before you deliver it. Build in extra time so you don't run out of time and race through material.
- 4 Breathe.** Take a few deep breaths before you begin. This will help calm your nerves and prevent you from holding your breath.
- 5 Pause.** Taking moments to pause as you switch slides or make an important point will help keep you from speeding up your speech.
- 6 Practice.** Practice out loud. Record your presentation and play it back to determine which areas need work.
- 7 Smile.** Not only does smiling help you connect with your audience, research shows it reduces stress and helps you relax.

—Karen Friedman