

Free eBook on

Effective Business Presentations

20 Ideas to Make Better Business Presentations



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1. 4 Ways to Open Your Presentation With Credibility

The first two minutes determine the fate of your presentation. Learn 4 ways to open a presentation with credibility, and make your audience sit up and listen.

What is a good 'opening' for a presentation?

A good opening helps you achieve two objectives for your presentation. They are:

1. Grab your audience's attention and
2. Establish your credibility

If you fail in either of these, your presentation may not take off.

2 reasons why an opening should grab attention and establish credibility:

1. It is observed that most business executives experience 'neural fatigue' in their work. In layman terms - 'Neural fatigue' is a condition where the tired brain loses its ability to focus on routine, mundane things.

When your presentation starts with, "I wish to take this opportunity to thank..." your audience switches off. So, your opening should be strong enough to grab the attention of your fatigued audience.

2. People buy you before they buy from you. If your audience feels that you don't understand their problem or you don't connect with them – they stop listening to you.

When you open a presentation with, "The history of my glorious company is..." they shut off their minds. So, your opening should establish a relationship with your audience.



How to make an opening for a presentation that achieves these 2 objectives?

Here are 4 creative ways to open your presentation with credibility:

The first way to open a presentation is to use...

1. Use Empathy:

The structure for this opening is:

"I understand how it feels to be (state the problem condition). In the last few years, I've been in your situation many times before. All those times, I wished someone would show me an effective and inexpensive way to overcome my recurring problem. But, I never got my answer. Today, I am happy to provide that answer to you, so you don't have to suffer the way I did"

The first sentence gets the connection. The next few sentences strike a chord. Your audience has no other way than to listen to the rest of your presentation. Let's see an example of how this structure is used...

Example of empathy opening is:

"I understand how it feels to be overweight. 2 years back I was so obese that I couldn't walk for 2 minutes at a stretch. I tried several methods but none worked. I wished

someone would show me an effective and permanent solution to my problem. I found my answer and you see the proof. Today, I wish to share my solution with you"

When you use it the right way, this opening never fails to grab your audience's attention. Since you show the proof for your claims, you gain audience trust almost instantly.

The second way to open a presentation is, to use...

2. Criteria and Comparison:

The structure is of this opening is:

"When it comes to choosing a (*product/service type*), there are 3 things you must consider to avoid (*state the pain*). The reason to consider the first criterion is ----- . The reason for the second criterion is ----- . The reason for the final criterion is ----- . Let me show you how my product fares against those 3 critical criteria"

This type of opening for a presentation, educates the audience, before making an offer. Since your educating them establishes you as an expert, you gain credibility in the minds of your audience. Your offer gets seen as a recommendation made by an expert.

Needless to say, you'll position your unique strengths as criteria for selection. Let's see an example.

Example of Criteria and Comparison Opening is :

"When it comes to choosing the right consultant to provide presentation skills training to your staff, you should consider three factors to avoid wasting your training dollars. The first is – the depth of specialized experience of the consultant in conducting presentation skills training programs, second - the list of reputed clients who recommend the consultant, and finally – the proof of results. Let me show you how we fare against these three important criteria."

We know that it works every time. It is the method we use to sell our services. Do ensure that the rest of your presentation is creative as well. This will make sure that your audience stays glued throughout.

The third way is to use...

3. Mistakes and Solutions:

When you mention the common mistakes made by people in a specific field, it gives you the 'been there, done that' flair. It helps you to connect with your audience, while showcasing your experience.

The structure of the opening is:

'Most -----people make 3 big mistakes while doing -----'. The mistakes are -----, ----- and -----'. Let me show you how you can avoid making the same mistakes and come up with the right solution"

This type of opening positions you as an experienced problem solver. When you present your offer, it feels as if you are doing an act of kindness.

Example of Mistakes and Solutions Opening:

"Most HR professionals make two big mistakes while choosing managers for top positions. The first is – they select from a small pool of candidates. This limits their options and yields poor results. The second is – they go by the optimistic opinions of the candidates in solving hypothetical problems, rather than relying on their past performance records. So, candidates who dazzle in interviews turn out to be duds on the ground. Today, I'll show you how to choose the right people for your top positions, by systematically avoiding the two common mistakes."

Remember to pick a presentation structure that flows well with the presentation opening you select.

Now, the final creative way to open a presentation is ...

4. Myths and Realities:

This method gives you an aura of path breaker.

The structure of the opening is:

"The two big myths of doing (*mention the task*) are ----- and -----'. Today, I will break those two myths. I will demonstrate how by following a simple method, you can achieve what's considered impossible by most people."

Let's see an example of how to apply Myths and Realities Opening:

"The two big myths of making great slide designs in PowerPoint are (a) it takes special talent to produce professional slide designs and (b) you need additional software to make studio quality slides. Today, I will show you how you can make stunning slide

designs by following the simple principles taught in presentation-process.com and by using their affordable diagram templates.”

These 4 presentation openings are carefully structured to get your audience buy in, before you make your suggestions.

Let's do a...

Summary on how to open a presentation with credibility:

- A good opening grabs audience attention and establishes your credibility
- The four methods to open with credibility are:
 - o Empathy
 - o Criteria and Comparison
 - o Mistakes and Solutions
 - o Myths and realities

Practice these methods to open a presentation, and leave a lasting impression on your audience's mind.

2. 5 ways to use PowerPoint slides effectively

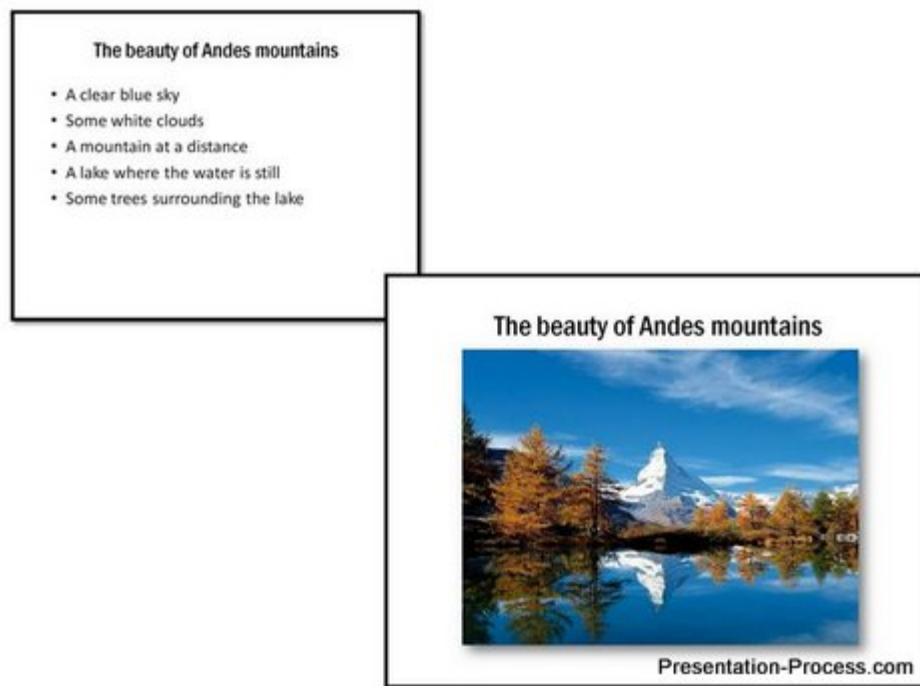
A PowerPoint slide is one of the most powerful presentation tools available for presenters. Unfortunately, most presenters never utilize it to its full potential.

Here you'll learn the five ways to get maximum value from your PowerPoint slides.

1. Use your PowerPoint slides as an additional channel of communication

Take a look at these two slides:

The same message conveyed differently



Can you see the difference in impact when the same message is conveyed in pictures instead of just words?

A PowerPoint slide allows you to use visual expression to support your words, and hence opens up a whole new channel to add clarity to your message. When you use visuals in your slide and support it with your narration you use two channels to convey your message instead of one.

According to dual coding theory, your words engage the left brain of your audience and the visuals engage their right brain. So, your audience not only understands your message better, but also retains it longer.

If you are not using visuals in your slides, you are under-utilizing PowerPoint.

2. Use PowerPoint slides to build your information in stages

Your audience has limited capacity to process information. When you present too much information in one go, they feel overwhelmed and switch off.

A PowerPoint slide allows you to reveal information in stages, and thus helps your audience to take in information in bite sized chunks.

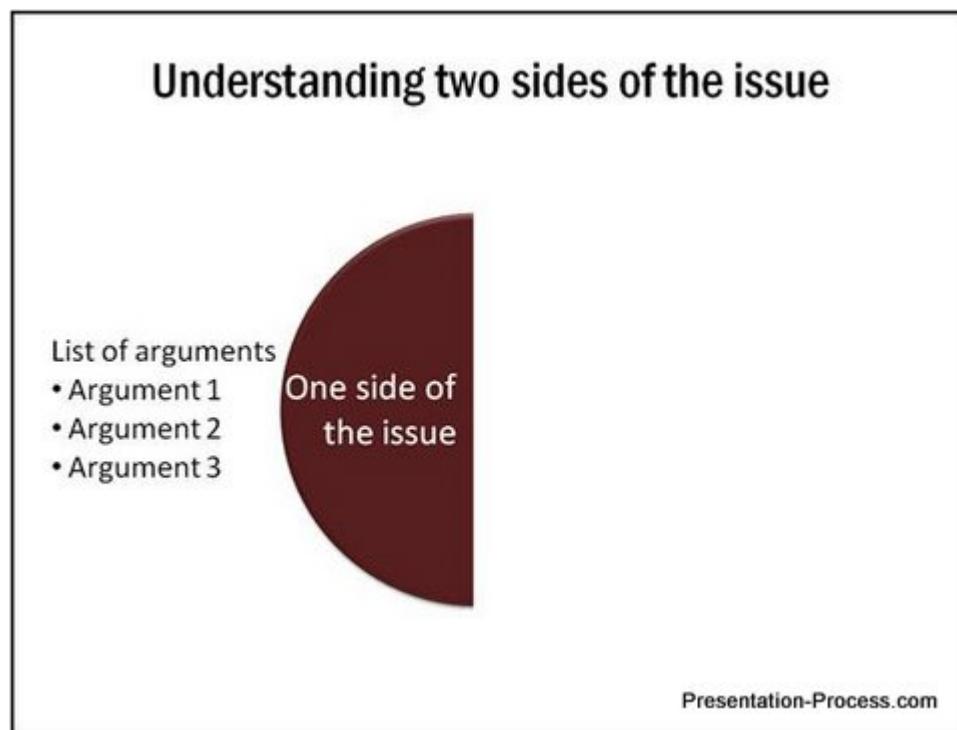
Use the power of custom animation to reveal sequential stages of a process one step at a time, or the growth of an organization one milestone at a time. You'll see your audience connecting to you better.

If you are not using custom animation feature you are wasting the potential of PowerPoint.

3. Use PowerPoint slides to arouse curiosity

Look at this slide...

Does this slide arousing curiosity?



Aren't you curious to know what the other side of the issue is?

You just saw the power of 'curiosity itch'. According to Information gap theory, your mind wants to solve the puzzle of the unknown.

You can use your slide to build curiosity in your audience and hold their attention. Since your audience gets into the state where they want to solve the mystery, your message will be registered much deeper than normal.

You can achieve this with custom animation or by using multiple slides to reveal information in parts.

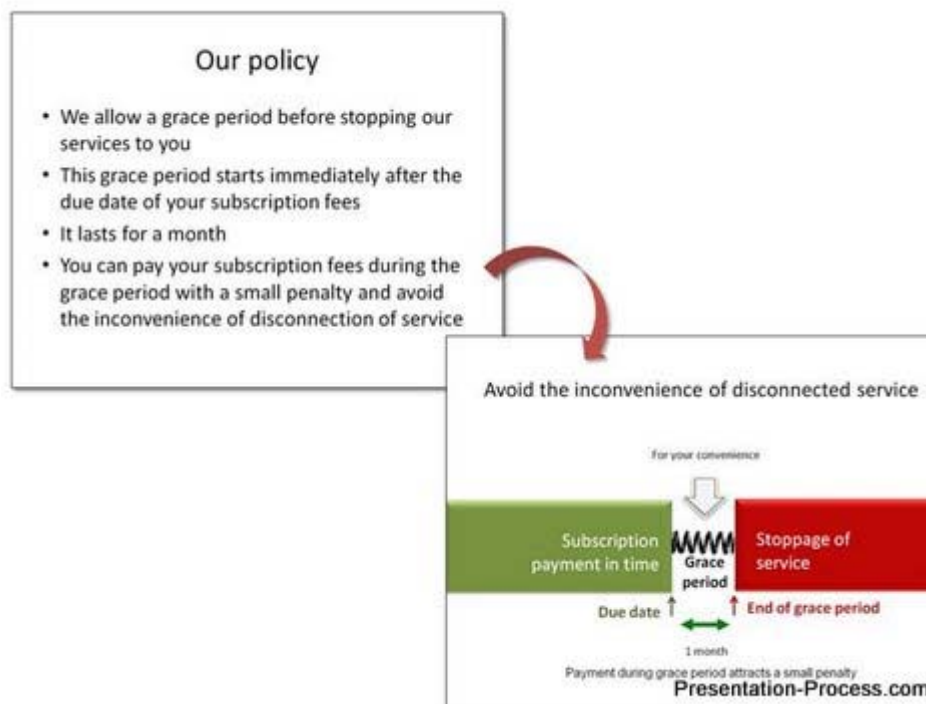
If you are not building curiosity in your audience, you are not using PowerPoint the way it needs to be used.

Realize that presenters who advice against slides may be using PowerPoint in the wrong occasion.

4. Use PowerPoint slides to show the relation between objects

Studies show that a human brain stores information by forming connections called schema. By showing your audience how the various parts of your information are related, you improve their clarity.

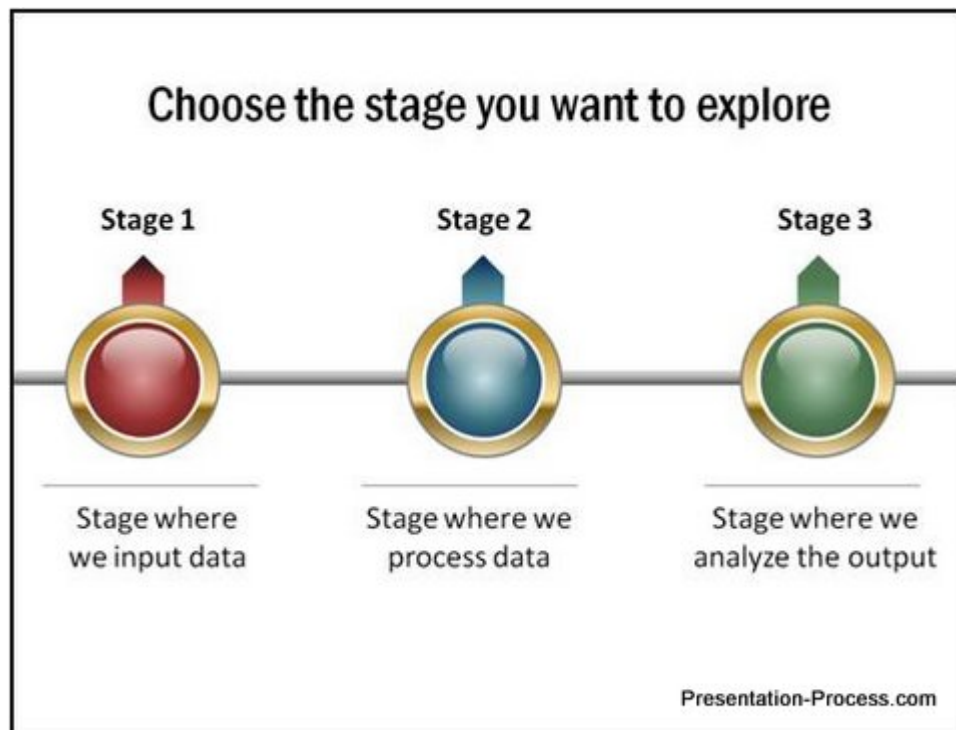
Showing relationship clearly



Use visual diagrams in PowerPoint to bring out the full value of your slides.

5. Use PowerPoint to make interactive presentations

Who says your presentation needs to be one way?



You can use hyperlinks in PowerPoint to connect various segments of your information and let the audience decide the priority of your presentation. This is especially useful when you make sales presentations to your clients. Your audience becomes part of your presentation and they own your ideas as if it is their own.

If you want to present information, you can use this format to conduct quizzes to your audience.

If you are not utilizing the interactive features of PowerPoint, you are wasting its potential.

In a nutshell...

A PowerPoint can take your presentation to the next level, provided you know how to leverage its value fully. You can go beyond using your slides as documents or as beauty props.

Presentation Process gives you all the knowledge you need to get maximum mileage out of your slides. Take your time to learn the vital skill.

3. 3 Ways of Using Presentation Humor

Is it appropriate to use humor in business presentations? Won't you look silly when it doesn't work? Discover 3 things that make humor work in business presentations.

Presentation humor is not about telling jokes:

Let us not confuse telling jokes in a presentation with using humor.

We are definitely not in favor of using jokes in business presentations. No matter how good you are, you can't start your critical presentation with "One day a man entered a bar..." and then expect your audience to take the rest of the presentation seriously.

Humor in presentations is about connecting with the emotions of your audience and making them see the 'other' side of issues with objectivity. When used correctly it increases the effectiveness of your message.

This article is about using humor to add impact to your message and not about making your audience roll in the aisles.

3 things that make humor work in business presentations:

Your humor needs to have 3 essential traits to work in a business presentation:

1. It needs to be contextual
2. It needs to 'ring a bell'
3. It needs to be personal

Let us understand each of these in detail.

1. Humor needs to be contextual:

The effectiveness of your wit depends on how relevant it is and how well it fits in with the context of your presentation.

I recently saw a HR presentation where the business head made a fairly strong point with this slide:



They are an outsourcing company and they had been on a frantic drive to increase headcount to impress their overseas client. The sudden spurt in staff numbers has naturally dented the profitability of the company.

This picture of overcrowded train crawling along the tracks aptly portrayed the company's current situation. The slide not only evoked laughter, but also made the audience realize (and remember) the nature of the situation they are in.

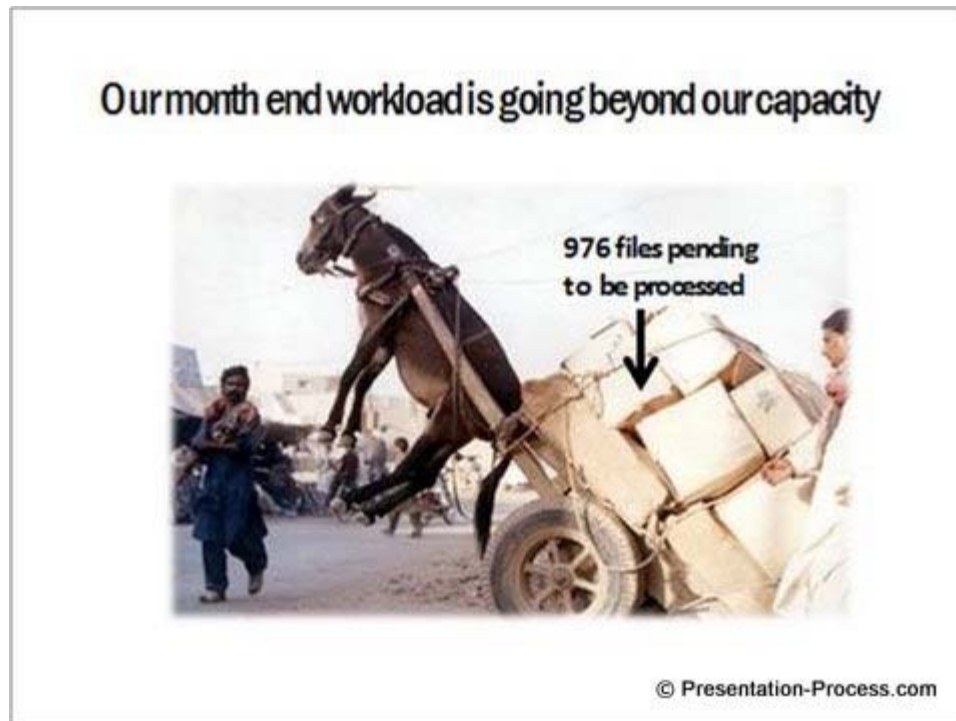
The slide is a good example for using contextual humor. Unlike a joke that 'fails' when it doesn't evoke a laugh, good humor doesn't 'fail'. Even if the audience doesn't laugh, the point is made. It allows the presenter to move on with the presentation, without unduly worrying about the audience response.

2. Humor needs to 'ring a bell'

Good humor 'connects' with the audience instantly.

I recently saw a presentation made by the manager of a document processing team in a bank. He wanted to share his concerns about the increased work load on the team during month ends.

He used a slide that immediately struck a chord with his colleagues.

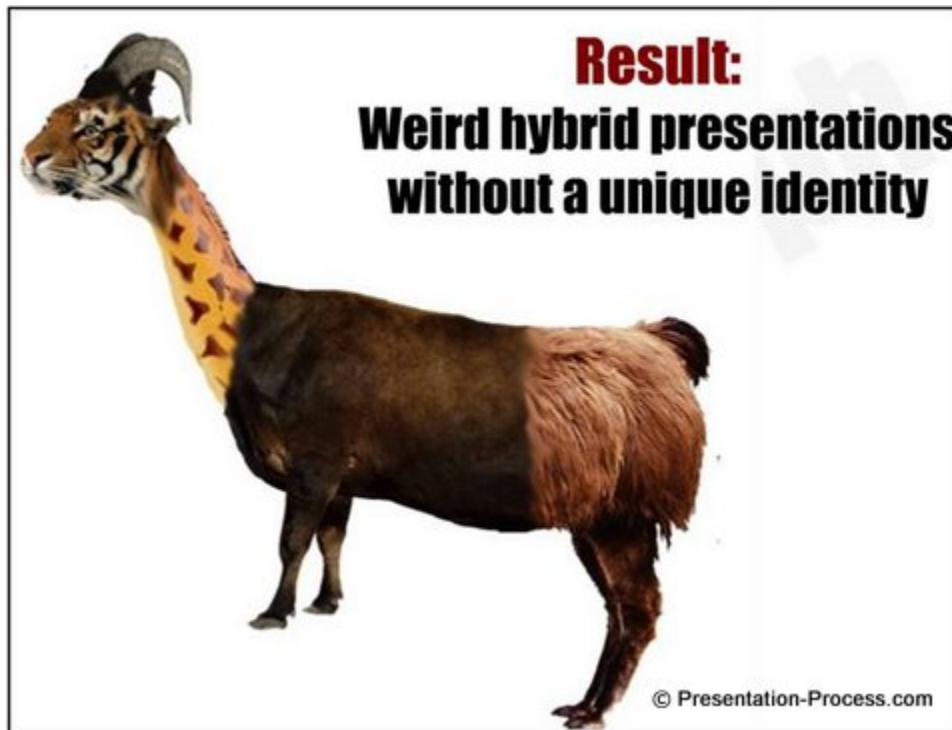


The slide didn't need a lot of explanations. The team could immediately feel the frustration experienced by the presenter. The discussion quickly moved forward to solving the capacity issues.

Another example...

Here is another simple and powerful image we use in our presentations skills training. We talk about the common bad habits that presenters have of putting together slides from different presentations to create their presentations.

We show this slide as the result of such cut-paste methods of creating presentations:



The point and the image always draw a laugh and our audience get ready to address this issue instead of getting offended.

Appropriate use of humor helped the presenter to convert a potential mudslinging session into a 'problem resolution' session. That is the power of presentation humor.

To make it work, you need to know your audience thoroughly. When you talk their 'language', feel their concerns – they connect to you. They don't take offense even if your humor misses the mark. They take the effort to see your point.

3. Humor needs to be personal:

It is always safe to direct the humor towards yourself. This ensures that your presentation humor doesn't come across as sarcasm – even if you cross the line unintentionally.

When you relate your personal experience you come across as 'real'. Your problems feel real. Your solutions feel real.

To tell a joke, you may need impeccable 'sense of timing'. To use good personal humor, you just need to feel the situation and tell it the way you experienced it. So, humor is easier to practice than a joke.

A few tips to use presentation humor as a powerful tool:

- Save anecdotes of personal experiences in a resources folder to be used later
- Make a list of your audience's frustrations to relate to them quickly
- Practice connecting your humor to presentation context. This will ensure that you don't lose your audience after they finish laughing.

Conclusions about Presentation Humor:

Using humor in presentations is no 'laughing matter'. It requires conscious effort and practice. But the impact you create is worth the effort.

4. 5 Tips to Present Data better

Presentation of data is tricky. Not everyone in your audience likes to crunch numbers. Learn 5 ways to make your audience understand your message in 2 seconds or less.

Numbers are distracting

When you present numbers on your slides, you can expect two types of reactions from your audience. One set of audience hates numbers and tunes off. Another set loves to crunch numbers and take off on a tangent. As a presenter you lose either way unless you know how to guide your audience attention by making your message obvious. You can also present information creatively to make it interesting.

Here are the 5 tips to present your key message in 2 seconds.

1. Use simple 2D charts instead of complex 3D charts

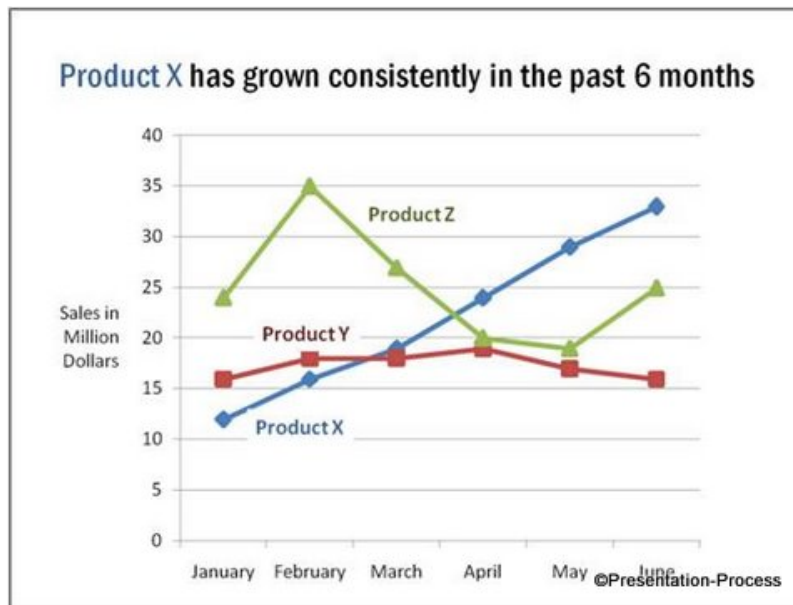
We don't doubt the fact that 3D charts look cool. But, when you use 3D, you make your audience work hard. You give them an additional dimension to think about. This delays their understanding.

Let's do a quick makeover of a 3D chart to convey the key message under 2 seconds:



The slide looks very colorful but complex. The chart says which product performed how well in each month over the past 6 months. Phew! That's a lot to grasp at one time. Avoid any Presentation tips that requires you to use make information complex.

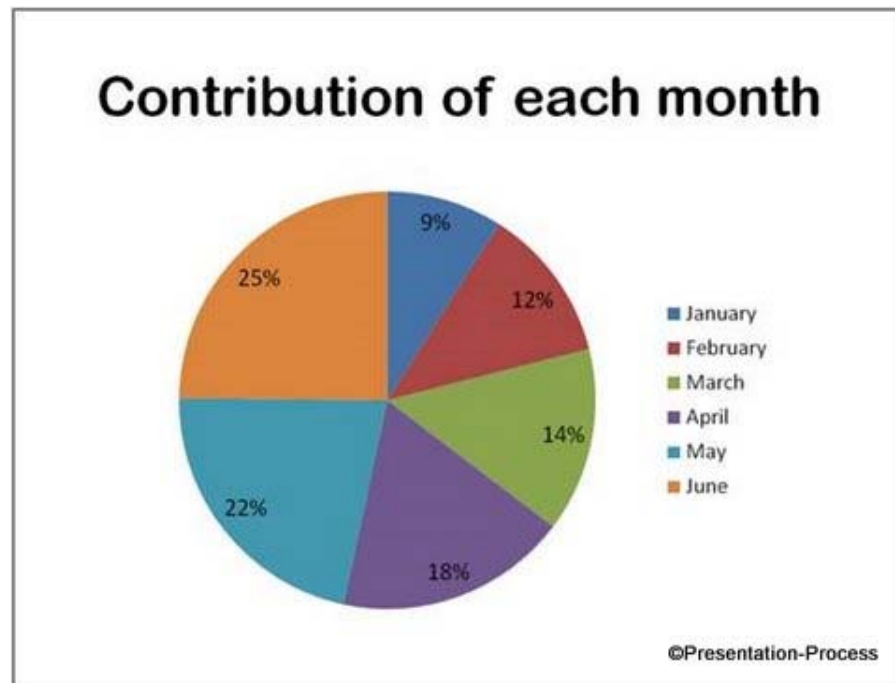
Consider this alternative presentation of the same data:



We used a simple 2D line graph to show the trend over time. The title gives a clear idea of what to look for in the slide. In 2 seconds your audience 'gets' the message of the slide.

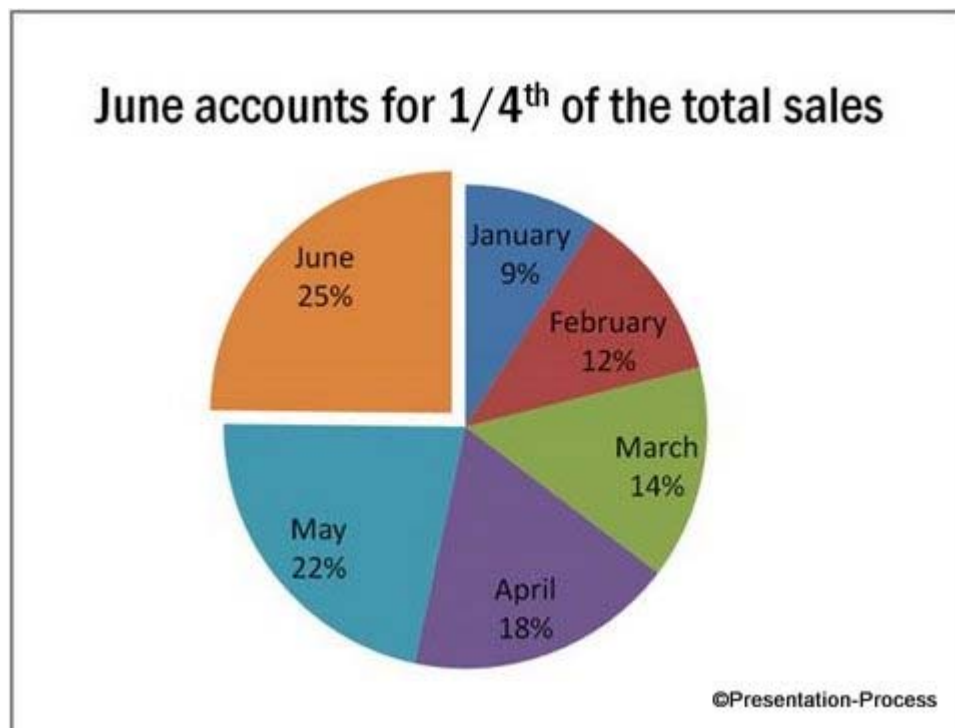
2. Use labels instead of legends

Take a look at this slide with a pie chart:



Though it's a simple chart to grasp, the legends placed off the chart delays understanding. Your audience needs to refer to the legends each time to make sense of the colors.

Consider this alternative pie chart:



Audience can find all the relevant information in one place instead of having to search around the slide. The slide title gives the core message. The relevant part of the pie chart is isolated for easy reference. So, your audience 'gets' your message under 2 seconds.

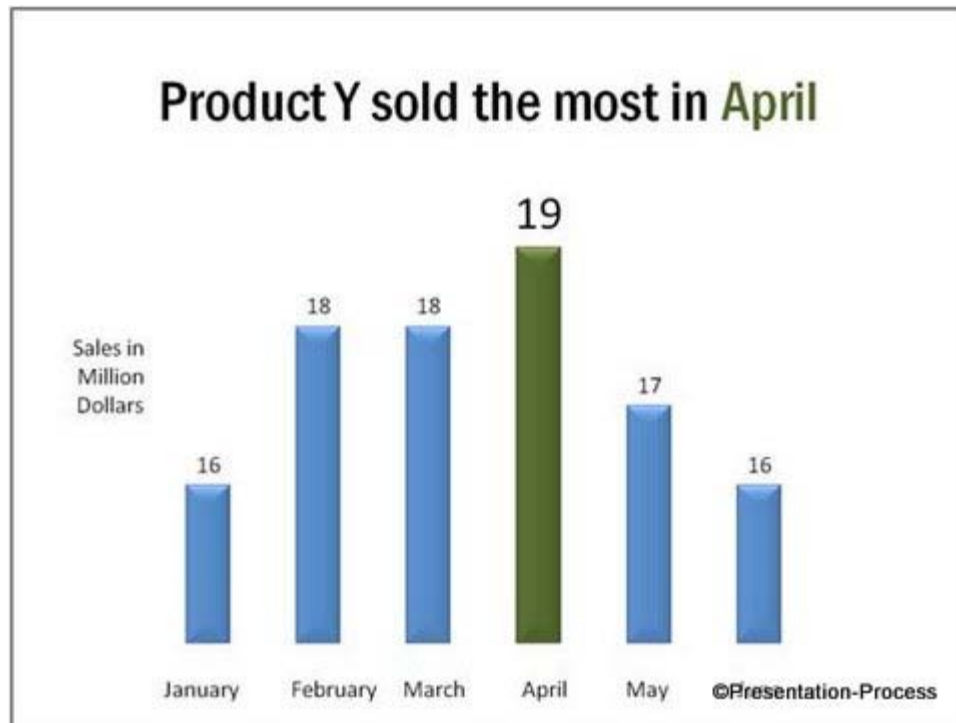
3. Make your key point stand out

Take a look at this slide with data:



Can you tell what the key message of the slide is? Neither can your audience. Slides without a clear focus take a long time to understand. You can read further [tips for data presentation here.](#)

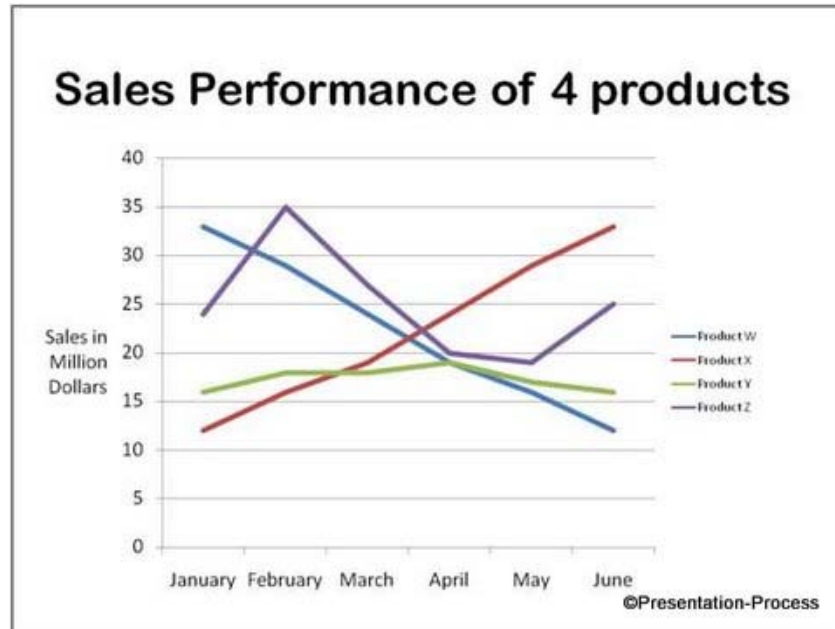
Consider this alternative slide with graph:



The key point almost jumps out of the slide. To make presentation of data effective, we ruthlessly removed everything that can potentially distract the audience attention. There are no grid lines. Units on the y axis are replaced by data labels. The key number is made larger than the rest. Naturally, your audience gets the message under 2 seconds.

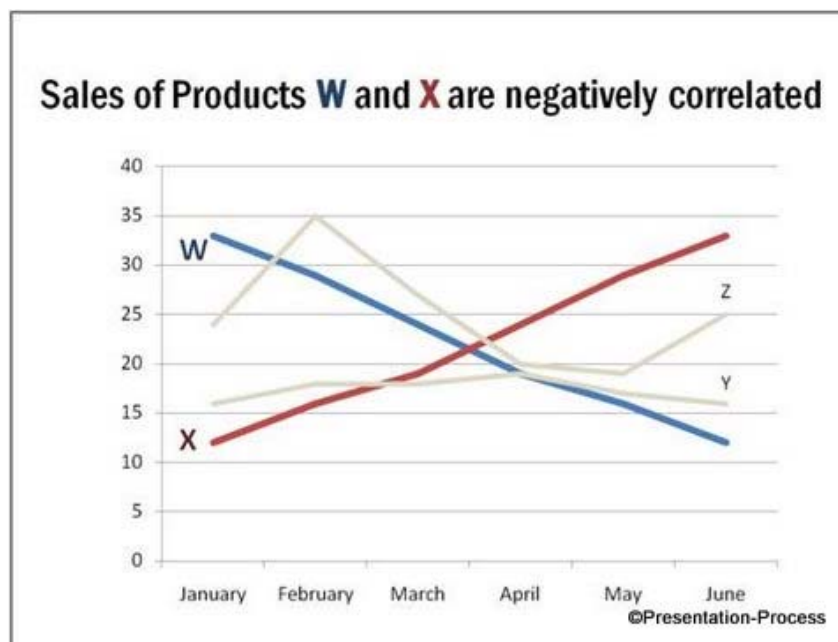
4. Don't spread your audience attention

Take a look at this slide with a line chart:



Every piece of data presented on the chart demands a portion of your audience attention. That is why busy charts with multiple data sets put a lot of stress on your audience.

Consider this alternative line chart:

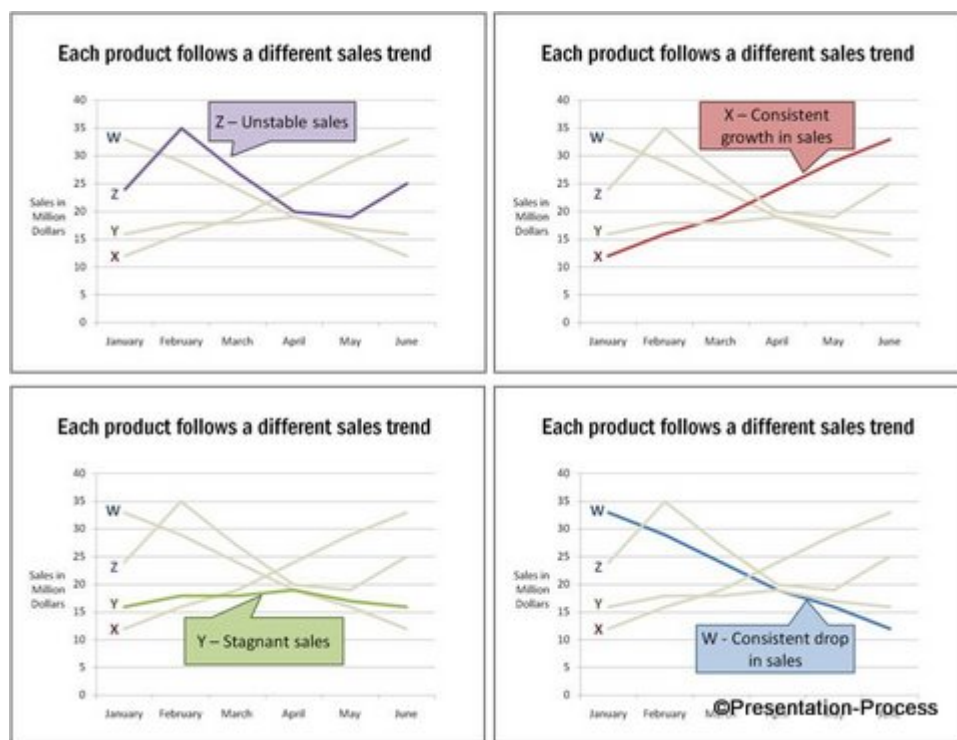


We retained just the two data sets required to make our point. The rest is dimmed out. This channelizes the audience attention to where it matters. This is a very effective way to get your point across in less than 2 seconds, when your chart has a lot of elements. Presentation of data with simple animation makes data powerful.

5. Use callouts where required

Using callouts is quite effective to draw the attention of your audience to multiple areas of your chart. It is advisable to use custom animation to show the callouts one at a time.

In the example below, we used callouts to highlight 4 different aspects of the chart:



In each case, we retained just the relevant information and dimmed the rest.

Summary of the tips to make effective presentation of data in 2 seconds:

1. Use simple 2D charts instead of complex 3D charts
2. Use labels instead of legends
3. Make your key point stand out
4. Don't spread your audience attention
5. Use callouts

These 5 simple tips will help you get your message across in 2 seconds or less.

5. 3 Ways to Use Visuals in Business Presentations

Many times, when we advocate use of visuals in presentations, the immediate response is “I have been using pictures in my presentations. But I don’t seem to get the results I want”.

In every such case the mistake presenters make is ‘using visuals the wrong way’.

Remember, it’s not the visuals but the right visuals that get you results.

Many presenters are of the opinion that using pictures in their presentations is their passport to success. What they don’t realize is – it’s not the visuals, but what they choose to visualize that determines the results.

Let us see some examples of wrong focus and the way to correct them.

Example 1: Presenting data:

A business presenter wanted to update her senior management about her team’s monthly performance. She presented a beautiful slide that must have made a Zen master proud. She mentioned the key facts and figures in her talk. But the audience was unimpressed.

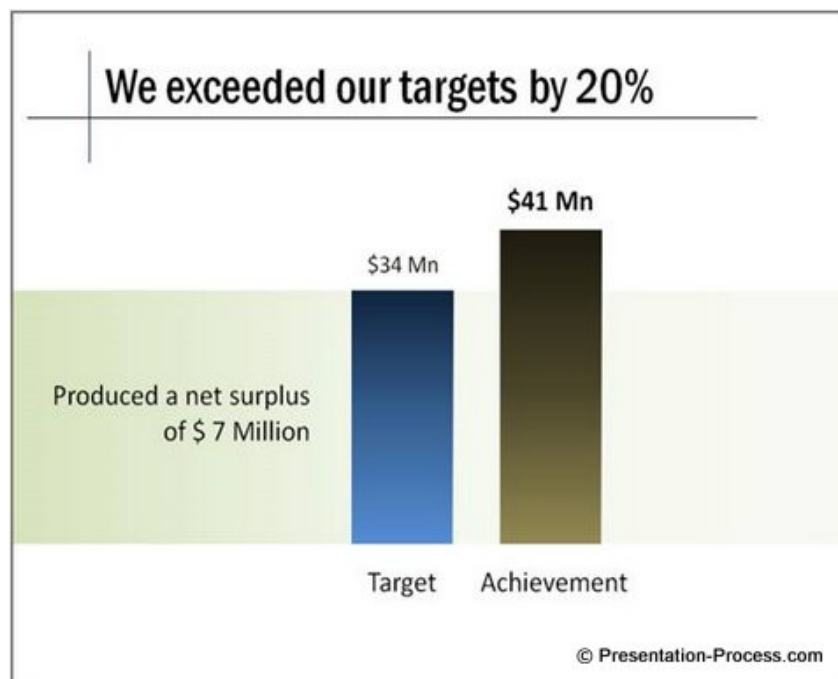


Problem:

Though the slide is impressive, she chose the wrong subject to visualize. Her audience wanted to know the specifics of her achievement. They didn't need a visual to tell them what achieving target meant.

Solution:

We decided to makeover the slide by focusing on what her audience expected to see. We included some specifics that supported her claim. See our suggested visual presentation below:

**The result:**

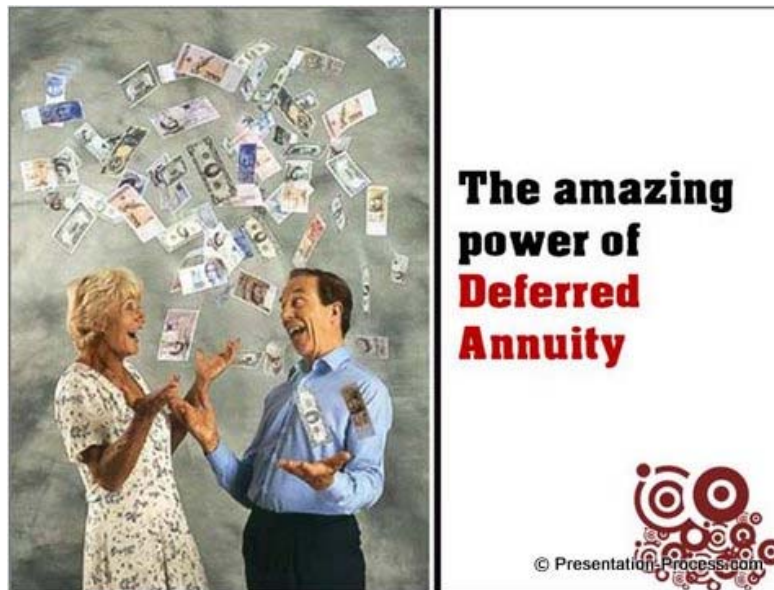
This slide may not be as colorful as the earlier one. But, this is exactly the information that was required by her audience. The visual representation of over-achievement, backed by specific numbers is easy to understand and remember.

Example 2: Explaining a Process:

In a recent workshop, a trainer expressed his disappointment with using visuals to explain his concepts. He said his participants were not 'getting' his explanation, no matter what pictures he used.

He shared his slides with us. He had taken the advice of a presentation guru and made his slides look like 'Banner Advertisements on the Highway'.

Here is an example of one of the slides he used to explain the concept of 'Deferred Annuity'.

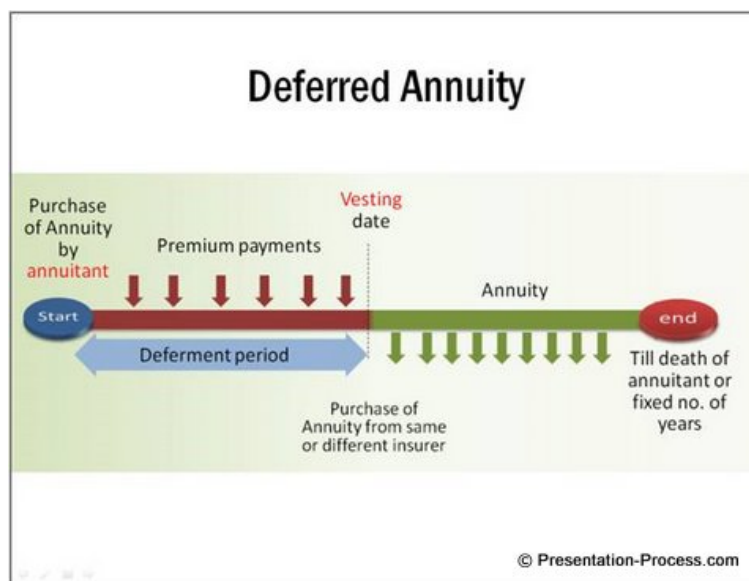


Problem:

The problem with the slide was wrong focus. His audience wanted help in visualizing the concept of Deferred Annuity. He made his slide to help them visualize the feeling of owning the product.

Solution:

We made over his slide to help the audience visualize the concept...



(Note: It is a type of annuity contract that delays payments of income, installments or a lump sum until the investor elects to receive them.)

This made over slide captures the relationship between the various elements involved in the concept. When we showed the slide by animating the relevant portions, the eyes of the trainer lit up with clarity.

By shifting the focus of visualization to where it needs to be, we made the concept clear for the audience.

Example 3: Selling an idea

One of our clients is a distributor for a network marketing company. He complained that his 'professional slides' were not getting the response he wanted from his team.

Here is an example of one of his slides:



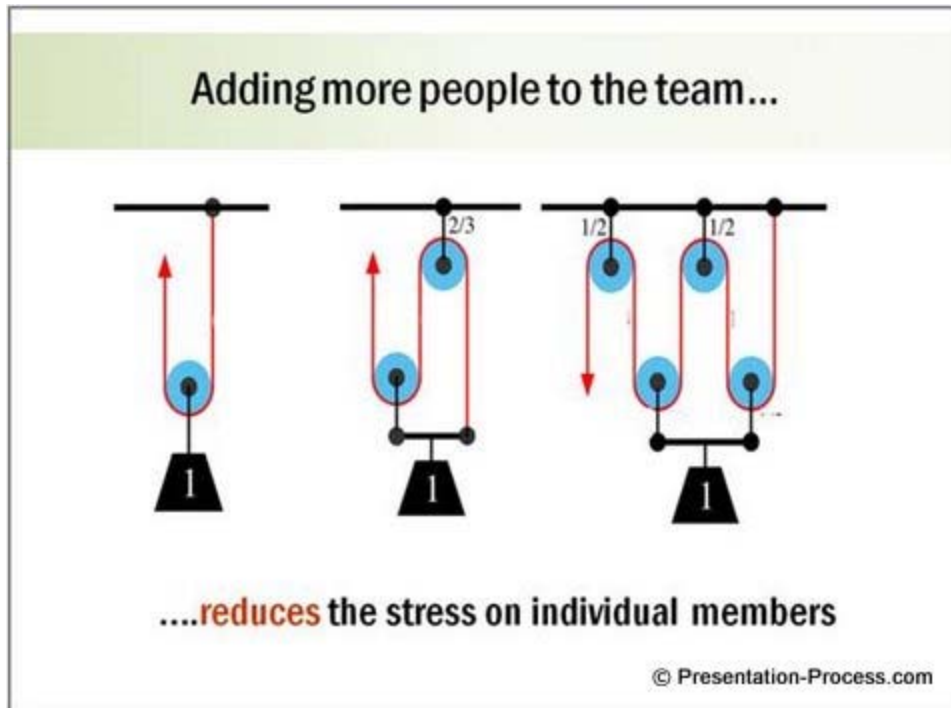
We asked him to explain the slide to us, and this is what he said, "Adding more people to a team reduces burden on individual members in the team. It is like using pulleys to spread the weight."

Problem:

The problem was the wrong focus of his images. Instead of using his slides to support his explanation, he used them to make a stylish impression.

Solution:

We found the analogy of pulleys to be brilliant, and we suggested this alternative slide to support his explanation:



This slide brought his message to life and made a significant impact on his audience.

Once again, this shows how you can enhance the impact of your presentation by shifting the focus of your visualization.

Remember the key message about making visual presentations...

It is not the visuals, but the right visuals that get you results. Before you start making visual slides, take a moment to check if you are visualizing the right subject.

Author's Note

I worked in 2 multinational companies for over 15 years before taking the plunge as an entrepreneur.

During my stint in 2 large companies for over 12 years in various middle and senior level positions I noticed a void in the presentation skill levels of business executives.

Many of them had brilliant ideas, but they lacked the skills necessary to sell those ideas effectively to internal and external customers.

Since I experienced the kind of impact my presentation skills had, on my fast track career growth, I wanted to help others present their ideas better and reach their true potential.

What I decided to do...

Fortunately, my wife Arte, shares my passion for helping people with their presentation skills. We have together devised our own process for creating remarkable business presentations and named it the Minimal® process.

We tested every one of our suggestions for audience impact in our workshops and made sure that every step in the process is validated by sound research.

What this means to you...

We bring a rare combination of four vital skills to help you learn the very best in creating business presentations.

1. We have a rich and focused experience in corporate and business worlds. This helps us understand your challenges better.
2. Our PowerPoint skills are quite refined. You'll find ample evidence in on our website www.presentation-process.com
3. Our design skills are well recognized. We have website dedicated to selling PowerPoint Presentation Templates designed by us – www.buyapresentation.com

4. We have a strong process orientation. This helps us teach you every small step in the process of creating business presentations in a clear and consistent manner.

Online Accolades:

- We won the Presentation Horror Story Contest 2010 conducted by Slideshare and 3M.
- A lot of our presentations have been FEATURED on slide sharing websites like SlideShare and AuthorStream.
- I am a Platinum level author online at EzineArticles for my contributions on presentations and sales skills.
- We sell an extremely popular and well-appreciated PowerPoint Diagrams pack for business presenters. You can find more about the Pack in the ALL PRODUCTS section of presentation-process.com website.

Finally, with this book, I hope you too join the league of business presenters making remarkable presentations. Happy Presenting!

Do visit our site regularly for updates on business presentations skills and PowerPoint tutorials.

M.S. Ramgopal

---The End---