

Classical Conditioning: The Psychology Behind Your Talk



The theory of classical conditioning is most notably associated with behaviorist Ivan Pavlov. It describes how we can learn a new behavior via the process of association. In his experiments, he caused dogs to salivate by pairing the food they received with the ringing of a bell. This has applications that extend far beyond what you might have considered.

Classical conditioning is a potent and powerful form of associative learning, which can be applied to all of your presentations.

Understanding the Role of Classical Conditioning in Presentations

The basis of delivering an intelligent and memorable presentation is understanding how powerfully classical conditioning can influence the impact of your presentation.

As a speaker, your role is to get your audience into the right mood to listen to you. However, the emotion you want to elicit will differ, depending on the type of presentation that you are delivering. For instance, if you are delivering a presentation for a charity and want to entice people to donate, you'll want your audience to feel empathy. So the focus of your presentation will be on utilizing images that make them feel for your cause (ie feel sad). Alternatively, if you want them to buy your product, you'll want them to feel happy.

Once they are in the desired state, the theory of classical conditioning comes into play. They will start pairing their emotions with what you are showing them in your presentation. So when they see an ad about

your product in the days after your presentation, they will instantly be brought back to that state of happiness they felt while they were watching it.

Therefore, prior to preparing your presentation, you must think about which emotions you want your audience to feel. This understanding will help you come up with the best strategy for evoking the right responses, which will strengthen your audience's connection with your message.

External Variables affect your Audience's Uptake of your Message

Whilst you can convey a lot of emotion through the structure and delivery of your presentation, there are a number of subtle, external variables that you should also consider.

The environment that you undertake your presentation in will also play a part in setting the audience's mood. So in addition to having beautiful engaging slides, you may wish to take note of the venue. Is it clean, comfortable, and quiet? Is your audience capable of giving you their full attention without being distracted?

What is the lighting like at the venue? Is it dimmed so that your audience feels calm? Or is it really bright to suit the happiness that you are trying to elicit? Try to consider these elements in your next presentation, as they will certainly affect the state of mind that your audience is in when they are receiving your message.