

## **It Is How You Say It**

Verbal packaging is another critical aspect when it comes to sharp presentation skills. The words we use and the way in which we use them can have a huge impact on how we are perceived by our audience. As Mark Twain said, “The difference between the right word and the wrong word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.” You see this all the time in marketing and advertising. Have you noticed that used cars are now referred to as “pre-owned” or even pre-loved? Somehow this terminology softens the negative connotation associated with the word “used.” Other examples include “invoice” instead of “bill,” “representative” instead of “salesperson,” “concern” instead of “problem” and “investment” instead of “price.”

The airline industry has some good examples of creative packaging, too: “delayed” instead of “late” and “flotation device” instead of “life preserver.” If we examined other industries, the list could go on and on. You can take a cue from these industry giants by employing a bit of your own verbal packaging. That is, it would be a great idea for you to develop your own list of words and phrases that are relevant to your industry or topic. That way, you will have alternatives in your persuasive toolbox for words that may be jarring or have negative connotations. Other ways you can make your language more effective are to use words like “we” and “us” more. That way, you can engage your audience and create a cooperative, “we’re in this together” feel to your presentation.

You might also consider making your language verb-oriented. Doing so gives your speech a feeling of energy, momentum and vitality. When you’re really trying to paint the picture and help your prospects feel like they’re in the actual situation you’re describing, use vivid language. Lastly, as a general rule, and particularly when you’re trying to get a key point across, always lean toward being concise rather than verbose. If you can get the point across in five words instead of ten, then don’t complicate your message by trying to be flowery and clever. Chances are people will start thinking about how pretentious you are rather than focusing on the point you’re trying to get across. As we were discussing in relation to structuring your message, it holds true here as well that clear and concise are your safest bets.

I mentioned earlier the power humor exerts in grabbing your audience's attention and in creating immediate rapport with them. Humor can be a very effective persuasive weapon when it is used skillfully. Of course, you can end up really embarrassing yourself if you don't tell a joke quite the right way and no one laughs. When it comes to humor, the audience will either laugh with you or feel sorry for you. Check out websites like [www.cartoon.com](http://www.cartoon.com) and [www.cartoonbank.com](http://www.cartoonbank.com) for humorous ideas. You can also find entire books that are dedicated to humor, quips and stories for speakers. It is always a good idea to test your humor on friends or, better yet, on individuals who might be of the same mindset or understanding as your audience before you're in the actual persuasive situation. Stories are another way to easily engage an audience. Often, it is through telling a story that a message can best hit home with your prospects. Stories give people something to identify with. They can entertain, teach and inspire all at once. When incorporating stories into your presentation, you can draw from your own experiences as well as others'. The *Chicken Soup for the Soul* book series is an excellent resource. These volumes contain stories that are tried and true and that you know have already touched millions of people.

We've already touched upon humor and storytelling as far as opening your presentation, but they are also effective tools throughout the body of your presentation. Other sources of supporting material you may consider incorporating into your presentation include statistics, testimonies, articles and visual aids. You do not necessarily have to use all of these tools; in fact, to do so may be overkill. The key again is what will most clearly, concisely and efficiently deliver your message. If you make a lot of noise about props and visuals, you may end up defeating your purpose by just creating distraction. Draw from any source that you feel will enhance your presentation, but don't feel obligated to use a piece of arsenal if it's not appropriate.

Let's now turn our attention to the use of visual aids. What might these include? When we think of visual aids, we envision the common ones, like charts, graphs, pictures, Power Point presentations, etc. During your presentation, you can also use handouts,

video footage or even a physical object if it is relevant to your message. Visual aids are effective persuasive tools because they are optically stimulating. Most people are visually oriented. When you tap into *both* the auditory and visual senses, comprehension and retention increase dramatically. When preparing your presentation, consider what your different options are in terms of what kinds of visuals may be most effective for your particular situation. As a general rule, the shorter your presentation is, the simpler and fewer your visuals should be. Conversely, if you're going to be speaking for quite a long stretch, it may be wise to utilize different visual stimuli throughout your presentation as a means of holding your audience's attention.

However long your presentation is, you need to manifest enthusiasm for your subject. If your objective is to inspire people and get them to act, then you must transfer pure energy to them. As a university instructor, I have my students give passion speeches, where the only point is to see if they can instill the same intensity of interest in the subject in their audience that they as the speaker project. I remember one student who gave a very impassioned speech about frozen yogurt. And you know what? Afterwards, you really felt like going out to get some frozen yogurt. That's the point of exhibiting enthusiasm for your subject matter. You want people to be inspired enough that they are actually moved to action. While creating action is your ultimate objective, you also want to keep your enthusiasm up throughout your entire presentation. This will keep your audience's attention and maintain a sense of energy.

I was doing a presentation once where I offered a free CD to anyone who ran to the front of the room. There was one guy sitting off to the side who jumped up and ran toward the front of the room in pursuit of the prize. In the process, his right leg (prosthesis) fell off, but refusing to be stopped, he literally did a roll forward (in his suit!). He then crawled until he'd made his way up to the front. It seems crazy, but the audience loved it. He was a great sport. Everyone was genuinely having fun, and most importantly, they were really interested in what was going on. That's the kind of excitement and energy you want to generate in your audience.

Since we're talking about being exciting and enthusiastic, it's worth taking a moment to talk about stage presence. I mentioned this earlier, and I just can't stress it enough: You **MUST** videotape yourself while you are presenting. We want you to be energetic during your presentation, but obviously you can't get carried away. Make sure you don't have any irritating mannerisms while you are speaking in front of others. These quirks can be overt or subtle, but in either case, you probably won't realize they're irritating—that is if you even realize you're doing them at all—until you see them on video. When viewing your tape, check for common public-speaking blunders like vocal fillers (“um” is the big one) or annoying gestures. Do you use your hands and arms to the point of flailing? Are you always touching your face? Do you pace back and forth? Know clearly what you look like to your audience before you're up there in the actual situation.

We talked at the beginning of this section about how to have a good opening to your presentation. Your closing is a little more basic. Where your opening equaled about 10 percent of your speech, think of your conclusion as taking up only 5 percent of your total speaking time. As highlighted previously, your conclusion entails the time it takes to clearly and concisely restate your main points. Once you've successfully gotten your concluding remarks across, get right down to your “call to action.” Make it short and to the point, and energetic. Engage your audience's emotions so that you can really drive home your point. Think of your conclusion as the final punch, the thing you want your audience to remember most. You've spent so much time setting it up, so you want the conclusion to be really powerful.

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