

Preplanned Anticipation: The Secret Formulas of the Pros

Dig the well before you are thirsty.

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One of the key distinctions of ultra-successful persuaders is that they have taken the time to prepare ahead of time, every time. Too often we take for granted that we'll be able to just "go with the flow" or "wing it." Or we decide we'll just wait and see what happens. Why not? We've done it before. After all, we want our communication to come across as natural and spontaneous rather than mechanically rehearsed. However, the persuader who has anticipated questions and concerns and done the homework ahead of time has a considerable edge. Such a persuader gives a more compelling presentation simply because his preparation enables him to feel more confident. When we're unprepared or simply going through the motions, we feel less sure of ourselves. Our audience will then pick up on this lack of self-confidence right away. If you're not confident, they won't be confident either.

Perhaps the most fundamental of all preparatory steps is knowing your audience and knowing your message. Even if they have delivered the same message hundreds of times, great persuaders still review and prepare before each encounter and every presentation. They anticipate every possibility, every potential bump in the road.

Knowing Your Message

What is your message? What do you have to share that will make a difference in people's lives? What is your main objective, the key thing you hope to accomplish? You've got to understand the big picture. Then, with the big picture in mind, you have to get more specific. Do you have a clear vision of how your product, service, or idea will help your audience? You've got to know your product inside and out, its pros and cons and how it stacks up against the competition. Use the following list, distilled from the work of great persuaders, to give some direction to your process of preparing and refining your message:

- What do I want to accomplish?
- How can I ensure that my message is crystal clear?
- If I had to boil my message down to three main points, what would they be?
- How can I demonstrate my expertise?
- How can I increase my trustworthiness with this audience?
- Why should others care about what I have to say?
- What are the emotional reasons that will prompt my audience to respond?
- What are the logical reasons that will prompt my audience to respond?
- What is my “call to action”?
- What are some alternatives to my initial proposal?
- Does my plan have any potential pitfalls?
- What are the top five doubts or objections I will encounter? How will I respond?
- What information should I gather about my audience? My competition?
- Do I have product samples, brochures, order forms, and catalogs?
- Do I have additional bonuses or incentives to offer in the final moments?
- Are there other ways I can build the value of my product, service, or idea?
- How can I get my prospects involved in my presentation?
- How is what I have to offer different from the competition?