

Solid Presentation Skills

Solid speaking skills are next in line when it comes to developing a powerful presentation style. This is where the honing of a solid, positive mindset and where thorough preparation come together to really give your message substance and polish. We previously talked about a presentation's basic outline: opening, body, recap and conclusion. Let's now talk about some great ways to open. Remember, you've only got about fifteen to thirty seconds before people start to settle into their impressions. Hence, when effectively presenting, we want openers that will not only grab our audiences' attention, but will also quickly establish our credibility, cultivate goodwill with our listeners and introduce our topics.

Think of your opening as not being more than 10 percent of your entire presentation. Budgeting your speech in this manner forces you to organize your time so that you know exactly what you're going to say and how you're going to say it. Scrap the old fillers like, "Today's topic is...", or "I'm going to speak on...", or worse, "I was assigned to talk about..." When preparing your opener, think of efficiency and accuracy. First of all, consider ways that will grab your audience's attention and perk them up. Several of the most effective approaches involve the use of humor, the telling of a personal story, the posing of a question, the sharing of a quote or the presenting of a startling fact or statistic. Anything that you feel will get your audience to tune in is critical to your opening.

When preparing your opening, how do you establish credibility? One thing is for sure: Don't just start spouting off your accomplishments and credentials. Nothing will turn an audience off faster. Sure, education and experience matter, but there are subtler ways of mentioning them. Sometimes it will be natural to mention the school from which you graduated, to refer to a publication you authored, etc. Many times, you can do so without seeming pompous. A better strategy than tooting your own horn is to have someone else introduce you before you come on. Another handy way to highlight your qualifications without including a "Why I'm So Great" section in your speech is to include a written bio sketch in any materials you may hand out. Your biography could even be included if a basic itinerary is handed out. Such background information is commonly seen for

keynote speakers in programs, for example. A written bio can be very effective, but it is very important to keep in mind that when furnishing this “blurb” about yourself that it be written in the *third person*—that is, as if someone *else* is describing you (“s/he” instead of “I”).

When I say you want to establish goodwill with your audience members, what I mean is that you want them to feel that you genuinely care about their needs. You want to exhibit your desire to share something that is both meaningful and useful to them. Very early on in your presentation (in your opening), you must clearly communicate the answer to the audience’s two most pressing questions: “WIIFM?” and “WSIC?” “WIIFM?” stands for “What’s in it for me?” “WSIC?” means “Why should I care?” Your audience has to have a reason to want to listen to you and providing them with the answers to these questions gives them one. If you can answer their unspoken, but sincere interest in WIIFM? and WSIC?, they will definitely feel goodwill towards *you*. You can then achieve a win–win situation where the feeling of goodwill extends in both directions.

Finally, how do you go about introducing your topic? Your introduction can be worked into the opening story, question, statistic, quote or joke you use to grab your audience’s attention. Alternatively, you can set up your presentation so that the way in which you grab their attention smoothly transitions into your topic. Last but not least, I will state the obvious and remind you that a charismatic demeanor from the get-go will carry you miles beyond a dry, monotone one.

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