



The Art and Craft of Presenting

Part 3

Having done some groundwork of the Athlete Presenter, this third excerpt of The Art and Craft of Presenting takes us towards the starting blocks with efficiently focussed preparation.

Let the games begin! Get Organised!

Identify the target audience: This is where we find out as much as possible about the people with whom we are trying to communicate. We need answers to questions like:

- What is their background and experience?
- How do they like to communicate or learn?
- How much time do they have?
- What do they think they need and want out of it?
- What do you and/or those you represent need and want them to get out of it?

Let me clarify briefly the distinction I am making between need and want. By need I mean the things that are essential to move forward like core skills whereas wants might be added bonuses like promotion or making more money.

When looking at background and experience it is important to try to assess what most people in the audience probably already know. Once we get started it is of course important to test some of these assumptions to double-check that we are right. This can be done quite by asking a couple of key questions or asking for questions from the audience. The discussions provoked will give you first hand evidence of the level of knowledge in the audience.

The next step is to gather all the information you might include in the topic, but as French philosopher Voltaire said, “The secret to being a bore, is to tell everything” because nobody wants or needs to know everything about anything, at least not all at once. So even at this early stage the crucial process of editing must start.

It is important to begin cut out anything that is not new and central to your message. Before we can do that, we must decide quite specifically define the message. The best way to do this is to describe the outcome we are aiming the audience to achieve. So many presentations are described and defined by their input or content which often causes them to become overloaded with useless information. If we think, describe and define output and outcomes, however, everything starts to become aligned to practical applications.

As the author of “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People” Stephen Covey put it, “Start with the end in mind”. In the case of presenting the end is usually an outcome with some specific benefit for the audience. For example, some years ago when compulsory superannuation was first introduced, the State Superannuation Board asked for some ideas for improving their presentations because the presenters felt they were boring. I began by asking what they called the presentation to which they replied, “Superannuation Information Sessions”. I then asked what they were for, to which they replied, “To help people achieve financial freedom in their retirement.”

As you have probably guessed, I suggested that both the presenters and the audience might be immediately less bored if they thought about the sessions and called them, “How to Achieve Financial Freedom in Your Retirement.” After all superannuation is profoundly boring but what it can do for you is extremely interesting. Focussing on the outcome, therefore help you to define your message, which in turn enables you to begin to edit your information and design your process.

Editing should involve at least two layers of ruthless decisions. The first layer is what bits of information are essential to your defined outcome message. Anything that does not specifically serve that message should be discarded. The second layer is about what you really expect people to pay attention to, recall and do something about within about 30 days. Most research indicates that if people do not recall a bit of information within 30 days they will forget it. So which bits of information have a direct connection to a specific action we want people to take within 30 days?

It is very rare for a presentation to fail due to insufficient content or information. The key information is almost always in the presentation but it often gets lost in the traffic of information overload. It is rare to hear anyone say that a presentation had too little information and even rarer for anyone to suggest that there should have been more PowerPoint slides!

99% of presentations are vastly improved by ruthlessly editing out all non-essential information so that maximum attention is paid to the “golden nuggets” that support the key messages that the presenter wants the audience to take away, recall and follow- through with action on in the next 30 days.

For this follow through action to actually occur there must, of course, be a strong motivation, so we must decide what feelings and attitudes to attach to each bit of core information and to the presentation as a whole. Without these motivational feelings no action will occur so everybody’s time will have been substantially wasted.

This often-illusory attitudinal component of presenting will be captured in the next excerpt of *The Art and Craft of Presenting* when we complete the **Get Organised !** segment of the *Athlete Presenter* process.