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Professional Development: 10 Performance Tips for Your Presentation

Finally, it has happened. You have reached the stage in your career that others want to hear from you and learn what you know in your area of expertise. You have been invited to speak at a conference. What now?

BY SHARON ABRAHAMAS
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Finally, it has happened. You have reached the stage in your career that others want to hear from you and learn what you know in your area of expertise. You have been invited to speak at a conference. What now?

Are your knees knocking? Are you afraid that you will blank out when you see the audience? Alternatively, would you like to WOW your audience with a smooth and engaging presentation? If your answer is yes, then follow these 10 tips for a perfect presentation.

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1. Know the Purpose

Decide what the goal of your speech is, then prepare your words to lead the audience in that direction. Clarify in your mind if the presentation is strictly for information or are you asking your audience to take action. This will help you decide what to include or remove from your content. Just like essays you wrote in college, have structure to your talk. Tell them what you will tell them, then tell them, and then tell them what you told them. Think of a good comedian, he or she always creates a thread and closes with coming back to the original joke.

2. Understand that Public Speaking Is a Skill

To become an effective speaker, you need to practice, practice, practice. Similar to how you improved your tennis game or skill at writing a memorandum, you must practice. Once



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BY STUART J. OBERMAN

Artificial Intelligence will revolutionize law firm marketing forever. Law firms are now (or should be) leveraging the potential of AI in order to enhance their marketing efforts. By harnessing the capabilities of AI, law firms are able to expand their marketing strategies, boost efficiency, accuracy, and overall client engagement.

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you have prepared your remarks, present them to yourself in the mirror, to colleagues at work and even to your significant other or friends. Ask for honest, hard to hear feedback. Record yourself or videotape and review the tape to look for areas of improvement. It is scary to see or hear yourself, but it is the shortest path to mastery.

3. Come Out Swinging.

First impressions are hard to overcome even if the rest of the speech is letter perfect. When you first speak, begin with a compelling statement or question that grabs the audience's attention. Use a statistic, a news headline or even a story sets the mood of the presentation. After you have opened, then share your credentials. Do not start with, "I am a lawyer at blah, blah, blah." You will lose the audience's attention immediately.

4. Talk from Within

Audiences evaluate the level of trust they have for a speaker throughout the presentation. Use personal experiences related to the topic to emphasize points or to expand a rationale for action. You know your stuff — that is why they asked you to speak. If you can, do not write out the speech word-for-word. Write an outline instead and then speak about each point as you move through it. Presenting this way allows you to have more eye contact with the audience because you are sharing knowledge rather than giving a presentation. If you listen to effective speakers, you can hear a level of sincerity in their voice. They believe in their topic and speak naturally about it.

5. Use Audience Participation

There are a variety of methods with which to engage the audience that are not goofy icebreakers or activities that make people uncomfortable. The simplest is to expand your Q&A session. Often a speaker will ask if there are any questions and then blankly stare at the audience while everyone sits in silence. You can always plant a few questions among people you know to get the ball rolling. An excellent way to help engage the audience is to ask them to raise their hands or clap in response to a question. For example, say, "Raise your hand if ..." or "By show of hands how many of you ..." By engaging people in this non-threatening manner, they will feel more comfortable responding to questions.

6. Prepare, Then Prepare Some More

If you know your topic inside and out, should you stumble you will be so grounded in your presentation that you only wobble, not fall. Do your research and be prepared to cover all angles of your topic. Consider questions the audience might ask. Practice, receiving feedback and seeing yourself on tape are all tactics that will reduce your anxiety and heighten your speaking skills, but preparation is key.

7. Delete the 'Ums,' 'Uhs,' 'Likes' and 'You Knows'



The use of filler words happens when the speaker loses eye contact with the audience. Review the recording of yourself giving a practice speech to a small group. Listen for your word crutches. Notice if you reduce filler words when you maintain eye contact with the audience. If you have trouble losing the ums, try silence or a breath instead. This takes practice, but it is key when presenting as a knowledgeable and polished speaker.

8. Keep It Tight

If you are delivering a strictly informative speech, then make sure it is direct and concise. Audiences typically can handle this for about 30 minutes to one hour. Be sure to include stories and examples of what you are talking about so you keep the audience engaged. When the presentation is over the 1.5-hour mark, you should consider how to format the information to include some dialogue or audience participation to keep the group engaged.

9. Include a Visual Presentation

A slide presentation may be used as your outline and substitute for paper notes. However, you do not want your audience to read your slides instead of listening to you. The key is to stick to the 5-7 rule: use only 5-7 words on a slide. Better yet, do not use any words and stick to pictures that evoke the content. As an example, you can flash a newspaper headline then talk about the issue or show a photo of a lion then mention why something needs strength or courage to overcome.

10. Go Out With a Bang

Ending with “in conclusion” or “finally” sounds like a term paper. Once you have summarized by “telling them what you told them,” conclude your presentation by leaving your audience wanting more or with a call to action. Your goal is to have the audience want to follow up with you in some manner, so tell them what that manner should be.

Offer to send them an article or white paper if they provide a business card or send you an email. Ask the audience to catch you during the rest of the conference to discuss more about the topic. Whatever it is, ask your friends and colleagues if your presentation ending has a WOW factor before you present it.

Public speaking is one of the most challenging activities for most adults to do. You know now how to make it look easy.

Dr. Sharon Meit Abrahams, a member of the Board of Editors of this newsletter, is a legal talent development expert helping lawyers improve their performance, productivity and profitability.

The views expressed in the article are those of the authors and not necessarily the views of their clients or other attorneys in their firm.

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