



Make It Interesting!

Maybe I'm getting cranky in my old age or perhaps I have been spoilt by some wonderful speakers in the last 12 months. In any event, I am becoming less tolerant with poor presentations! If I am prepared to invest time (and in some cases money) to listen to you I expect that you will invest some time and effort to make it worth my while - and at least interesting. Communicating to a group, whether it be 5, 50 or 500 people, is not easy. However, if you don't want to be dull and you would prefer to be memorable, I would like to make a few suggestions....

Let's start with the end in mind, as Steven Covey recommended. If you are not clear on the purpose and the outcomes that you are seeking I think that your presentation is already condemned. Tony Bulmer urges his clients to answer two questions, in writing, combined in one succinct sentence:

- What do you want the audience to think or do (and I would add feel)?
- What is the relevance or benefit to them?

With that clarity of intent you can now focus on what and how you are going to present.

In my experience there are three common excuses that presenters use for being ordinary:

1. "After all, it's a dry subject". I'm sorry, I can't accept that the subject matter automatically means that the presentation is dull. If it is worth presenting it is worth presenting well. I've seen some economists transform what is potentially the most dreary market update into a fascinating story so I would like to challenge this excuse. What can you do to make your topic more interesting?
2. "Well, I'm not a charismatic person". This is a little more tricky because there is an inherent bias towards lively, witty speakers - and that may not be you. You may not be charismatic but you are interesting, aren't you? I've seen people tell engaging stories with their friends and then become a robot on stage. Trust yourself, relax, be you and project you - and there is a very good chance that I will find you interesting.
3. "There wasn't much time to prepare". You have whatever time you make available so use it wisely. It may be a question of priorities or it may be how you deploy your time (eg playing with the font on your slides rather than thinking about the purpose and outcome). It may also be that, even subconsciously, you don't want to practice too much because you want an excuse to be ordinary or you want to be safe. Or you don't want to be so good that you stand out. I can only ask, do you want to be memorable or not?



If you can take care of the excuses then you can now consider some positive steps to deliver a successful presentation. There isn't space to provide a full process here, and there are plenty of experts available to assist on specific matters, so I will simply throw out ten ideas for differentiating your presentation by engaging more fully with the audience through a wider range of senses:

- Use creative visuals, either slides or props
- Draw models and diagrams on flip charts or a whiteboard
- Show a video (there must be something relevant on YouTube)
- Play music to influence the mood
- Distribute handouts, at the appropriate point, to explain a key point
- Encourage the audience to speak, either to you or to each other
- Tell stories, give examples, relate case studies
- Find analogies that provide understanding (or just amusement)
- Share something personal about you to remind them you are human
- Employ a different seating arrangement (or take the chairs away)

I hope that you have some fun in trialling a few items from this list at your next presentation. The most important test is whether it works for you. The second test is whether it works for your audience.

It is certainly a challenge to prepare and deliver a top class presentation. How good can you really be?