

Effective Presentations

Approaches to performance success

Principals often have to make presentations – to students, staff, parents, board personnel and community members. Although you know what happens in a school better than most people, it is important to find the most effective way to deliver those messages. Following are some tips for making effective presentations.

Start with a “hook”: In general, keep introductions to one or two sentences, and follow with a creative hook to grab your audience’s attention. Advertising executive David Ogilvy once said, “when you advertise fire-extinguishers, open with the fire.”

Organize your thoughts: Ensure that you are trying to communicate one point at a time. Avoid going off on a tangent, by organizing your key points into paragraphs or bullet points.

Avoid “edu” jargon: This is especially important if your audience is parents, students or community groups. They may not be abreast of common acronyms, or specific terminology.

Speak with inflection: When you know a topic well or often give presentations on a particular subject, it becomes easy to fall into a monotone voice. Inflection is changing the tone of a word, or group of words, to express specific emphasis.

The use of aides: The use of presentation aides, such as PowerPoint, should work in partnership with your presentation to act as a tool for highlighting key points, or visuals.

Understand visual design: If using a program like PowerPoint, pay attention to your design. Fonts like Arial and Helvetica are the easiest to read when projected on a screen. Avoid the use of boldface or italics to highlight points. Avoid visual clutter on the page and stick with the ‘less is more’ rule.

Lists or bullet points: The use of lists should be kept to a minimum. Audiences lose focus after the first few points. Always highlight the most important points up front. The use of numbered bullets implies ranking, so if that is not what you intended, stick to regular basic bullets.

Embed key questions: Engage your audience by embedding questions allowing for feedback and/or reflection.

Practice makes you conversational: While nobody says you have to memorize your entire presentation, it is important to come across as confident and knowledgeable. Not reading directly from notes leads to a more conversational style. Make eye contact with your audience as this helps with engagement, especially in light of new ideas.

Calm yourself: If public speaking makes you nervous, beat the fear with breathing. Spend five minutes in a quiet space to calm your heart rate. Take three deep breaths in through the mouth and out through the nose. Drink lots of water and try using visualization techniques to calm the nerves.

Develop better body language: Statistics have stated that only 7 per cent of speech can be recalled by most listeners. Eye contact builds an immediate connection with your audience. Don't just scan the room, look at individuals and make eye contact. Control your mannerisms and watch for habits like fidgeting, or repetitive words such as "um" or "like." If possible, move around the room and change direction as points change, or stop movement during a key point, which helps add emphasis to key points.

Remember that at the end of the day, you are still the focus of your presentation. How you carry yourself, project your voice and even how you dress all play a part in how your presentation will be received.

Sources: speakerskills.com toastmaster.org lifehack.org