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CREATING AND DELIVERING MEMORABLE PRESENTATIONS

Remember When ...

Think back to a time when you attended a memorable speech, seminar, or presentation. Why do you remember it? What did the presenter do that made it so meaningful for you? Was the content just what you needed to hear? Were there cartoons or appropriate humor added? Was the pace quick enough to keep your attention but not so fast as to lose the audience? Was there time to discuss a question with colleagues?

What made this presentation memorable was no accident on the part of the presenter. Most trained speakers use replaceable "tricks of the trade" to increase retention and audience involvement. You, too, can become a memorable speaker if you use the tools described below.

The Critical Attributes

Skilled presenters and trainers make clear decisions about the content, speaker behavior and learner behavior when designing a presentation. Take a few minutes of planning time to define:

- **Content** - specific goals and objectives (knowledge) you would like the participants to leave with.
- **Speaker Behaviors** - add humor, mini-activities, vocal variety, wait time, and modalities and hemisphericity - (that is, using both sides of the brain).
- **Learner Behaviors** - what your audience will do to increase the rate and degree of learning based on the educational principles of motivation theory, retention and active participation.

Content Decisions

There are numerous types of presentations. Your talk may be a humorous after-dinner speech or a content-rich presentation on a detailed area of law at a seminar or board meeting. The composition of your audience will provide your first guideline in choosing your content. Whenever possible, survey a cross-section of your audience well ahead of time to find out what they would like to learn and what they already know. Surveying participants can be a great marketing tool providing you with an opportunity to speak with potential clients even

before your presentation.

How much content do you have time for? It is better to teach one objective well than to stuff multiple objectives into a brief talk and leave your audience confused and frazzled.

Speaker Behaviors

Humor

Let's be honest: few of us are standup comedians. Nevertheless, we can still add humor to a presentation. If you do not want to tell a joke, consider using an anecdote that you customize to meet your topic. For example:

"When John Glen, one the first astronauts to go into space, was strapped into the space capsule, his last thought before takeoff was his sudden realization that everything in the capsule was built by the lowest bidder! "

Analogies from this story are limitless. You can move easily to client service vs. price for legal services, environmental impact studies, or even the merits of taking litigation to trial.

Another way to add humor is to incorporate several well-paced and appropriate cartoons into your PowerPoint slides.

If you assistance remembering your captions or notes, print out a three-to-a-page set of handouts of your PowerPoint presentation. This print option offers a series of lines to the right of each slide which you can use to write in your highlights and key points.

Mini-activities

Plan to build several small activities into your speech. Perhaps you can open your talk with a question and ask the participants to raise their hands if they agree. Statistics show that the quicker audience involvement occurs, the more likely it is that they will stay involved. Other strategies include having the audience jot down a response to a question you pose, polling the audience, or having participants discuss a topic in small groups or with their neighbors.

The meaning of any activity increases if you process the answers publicly by writing down responses on chart paper or on a clear transparency for all to share. Activities should relate directly to content objectives in order to increase audience retention.

Vocal Variety

Have you ever been lulled into a near trance by a monotone presenter? Use vocal variety to keep your audience awake and interested. Use emotions such as happiness, anger, professorial tone, humor, or occasional sarcasm. Change the volume (loudness to softness) of your voice to match your emotion. Rehearse in front of a mirror and synchronize your voice to your body language.

Wait Time

After posing a question to a group, how much time do you think the average teacher waits for a response? The correct answer is less than one second!

Try increasing your wait time by counting to five before you call on any individual and watch as more participants ponder the question and develop clearer responses.

Modalities and Hemisphericity

Because individuals use different modalities to learn and retain what they learn, plan to use auditory, visual, and kinesthetic techniques. Most people learn best when presented with a combination of modalities throughout the presentation.

It is easy to tie modality variance into mini-activities. Examples include having the presenter talk (auditory), then having the audience talk or write (kinesthetic); play a short audio tape (auditory) or video (auditory and visual); or pass around a handout or visual for the audience to hold and examine (kinesthetic).

Hemisphericity, for purposes of this article, means being aware of individual differences in learning style. Everyone is either right or left brain dominant. Most individuals are left dominant, meaning they learn best in a linear, concrete fashion, that is learning one step and then the next. Right brained individuals like to process a cluster of information simultaneously in a more creative fashion. If you want to reach every member of your audience, alter the hemisphere style (right or left). This also adds variety and entertainment to your talk. For example, providing participants with a list to follow is left brain, whereas asking the audience to brainstorm solutions to a question is a right brain activity.

Learner Behaviors

Motivation Theory

You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink. Right? However, you can do certain things to increase the probability of his drinking. You can run him hard, withhold water, or even salt his oats.

Motivation theory uses this concept as it relates to the learners or participants in your audience. Two factors to consider are the level of concern and interest.

Level of concern is a facilitation factor you can vary to a moderate degree. For example, the statement, "The information I am about to give you can save your company from a million dollar law suit," will certainly raise your audience's level of concern.

If your audience is too concerned, on the other hand, that the level of your speech will be too high for their comprehension, you can lower their level of concern with a reassuring comment like, "This seminar is designed to help those with minimal prior knowledge. Detailed handouts will be provided."

Interest encourages the presenter to vary the activities, modalities, and diversity of the presentation. When teaching patterns to small children, for example, it might be a great motivator to bring in a turtle to see the pattern on his shell. However, if we brought in a boa constrictor to teach patterns, this might pass "interest" and create terror.

The point is to vary the interest level by alternating what you are doing. Change the format of your PowerPoint presentation every three or four slides to add a graphic or activity/discussion starter of some kind. Change to a DVD. But do not to add so much tension or change so often that the learners can no longer focus on your objectives.

Retention Theory

The ability to remember what has been learned has always been a desired outcome of teaching. Until recently, however, it has been assumed that certain people had "good" memories and other didn't. Now we know that the way something is taught has a great deal to do with how well information is retained and whether it can be recalled for use at a later time.

Consequently, it is important to identify the things an instructor can do, as well as the things the learner should do to change, "Never heard of it." To, "Sure I remember!"

To increase retention, teach to your stated objectives at a level that is appropriate for the audience – not too hard or not too easy.

Add meaning to your topic by providing significant "take home" value. Give handouts, provide lots of audience-specific examples, and use a variety of modalities. That is, say something and then write it down, provide visual examples that match written content, ask for quick testimonials from the audience to make a point, or send follow-up materials.

Within 24 hours of a presentation, most people will remember about 40% of what they heard, 60% of what they saw and heard, and 70% of what they say, heard, and "touched."
Increasing the use of modalities increases retention.

Active Participation

The key to keeping an audience actively involved is to engage them in early and frequent participation. Try involving the group with a suggestion that will stimulate "covert" thinking, such as: "Remember when...," "What common factors do...," "Consider..." or "What would happen if..."

Help participants make the connection by tying the covert thought into an "overt" action. For example, "Write a list of ...," "Tell your neighbor...," "Jot down...," or "Raise your hand if..."

It is much more enjoyable for any participant to be actively engaged during a presentation. Active participation adds meaning, interest and motivation and it also increases retention.

Conclusion:

Delivering memorable presentations take thought and planning. You will never have another chance to make that first impression of your knowledge and presentation abilities.

Increasing your comfort level will make you a better speaker. Practice your presentation in front of a mirror or video tape it. Make adjustments and practice and video it again until you are at ease with the delivery. Remember that the best athletes are always being coached. Getting professional training and coaching can also make a significant difference in your ability to create memorable presentations.

Remember to gather participants' names and addresses, if possible, for future follow-up. Effective and relevant follow-up from a memorable presentation can be another piece in the on-going client development puzzle.

The author, Merry Neitlich, is a partner with EM Consultants with offices in Irvine. Merry can be reached at merry@EMconsults.org.