



## ***Six Top Tips for Presenting with Impact.***

---

Are emails and computers destroying our ability to speak well? Good verbal communication seems to have flown into cyberspace as inboxes fill up with emails and managers mumble their way through monotone PowerPoint presentations, reading aloud from over-packed slides and sending their audience into a stupor.

The skills required to analyse spreadsheets are a far cry from those needed to transform numbers into fascinating presentations. But analyse this: UK businesses lose nearly **£8bn each year** because of dull presentations that force colleagues and clients to switch off and waste company time. This is based on a manager **earning an average £30,000 per annum** and attending a one-hour meeting every week in which he or she does not listen.

With a justified reputation for being boring, it is perhaps unsurprising that British bosses dread public speaking more than any other part of their job. However, “nothing in life is more important than the ability to communicate effectively” according to former US president Gerald Ford. So here are some tips to transform your presentations into a performance that will make people sit up.

### **1. Make Your Message Memorable**

Whenever you speak in public you are selling something – whether a principle, a service or an action. You are not just imparting information; your aim is to get people to do something based on what you say. This will only happen once they realise the benefits of your message, so you need to hammer these home. As Winston Churchill once said, “If you have an important point to make, don’t try to be subtle or clever. Use a pile driver. Hit the point once. Then come back and hit it again. Then hit it a third time – a tremendous whack.” This works extremely well if you can make your point relevant to your audience. The trick is to find the overlap between what you want to say and what they want to hear. Base your key message around this and everyone will be happy.

### **2. Enrich Your Voice**

To create a rich tone to your voice, use your abdominal muscles as bellows to pump air through your voice-box at the top of your windpipe. This projects your sound forwards and adds resonance, making your voice more appealing. It can also increase your volume, depending on how hard you work the muscles. The power behind your voice should always come from your belly not your throat, otherwise you risk damaging your vocal cords and becoming croaky, hoarse or even speechless. To test that you are using the right muscles, blow forcefully as if you are blowing out a fire. You will feel your speech muscles tightening in your belly. You need to relax these again before using them for speech. When the muscles are relaxed and you breathe in naturally your belly should expand outwards and your chest should remain relatively still.

### **3. Create Vocal Energy**

If you feel passionate about your subject (as you should!) this will come across in your voice. But if you feel uninspired you can bet your bottom dollar that your audience will be uninspired too. However, it is easy to give your presentation an extra energy boost. One important tip is to smile. This may seem counter-intuitive, especially for serious topics, but

smiling brings your voice to life and adds extra sparkle to your speech. It enhances your musical ups and downs and creates more interest for your listeners. Smiling gives you the 'three vital Es' that make your voice attractive: excitement, energy and enthusiasm. It's said that a smile is worth a thousand words; it is also worth some of the £8bn wasted annually.

#### **4. Let Your Body Do the Talking**

Your body language communicates a great deal, and you can use it to make yourself appear more dynamic and convincing. Body language can include a range of movements from strong, defined gestures to stillness. If you generally gesticulate a lot, you may find that stillness draws your audience in. If you are generally fairly still, then a sweeping gesture may grab attention. People are stimulated by movement, so don't stand stock still. But don't use random or overly repetitive gestures. One important rule is to match your gestures to your words. If you talk about a fall in profits, for example, your hand might follow a downward curve; but if you talk about an increase in profits you might demonstrate an upwards curve.

#### **5. The Eyes Have It**

Eye contact draws people in and encourages them to listen because they feel you are addressing them personally. Meeting someone's gaze is one of the most intimate and powerful things you can do. It gives you a strong presence, creates rapport with your audience and adds impact to your speech, influencing whether you win people over. Here's how to do it: look someone in the eye for between 2 and 5 seconds as you speak. Then make eye contact with someone else, before moving on to the next person. Look at people in different parts of the room and really try to connect with each individual. If the audience is large, mentally divide the room into four; identify one person in each quadrant and one in the middle. When you make eye contact with any of your chosen individuals, the others in their section will feel you are looking directly at them.

#### **6. The Dos and Don'ts of Visual Aids**

Visual aids should be exactly what their name suggests: a visual illustration of your topic. Coloured charts and graphs are useful for simplifying information and photographs can grab the imagination. However your audience will lose interest if you show a plethora of slides crowded with text. In addition, if you keep looking at your own slides you will lose eye contact; you will direct your voice towards the slides and away from the audience and you may start reading aloud rather than speaking, which can sound stilted and boring. The general rule is to use no more than 1 slide every 5 minutes. This sounds very few, but it means that each slide can have maximum impact. Text should be in bullet points: no more than 5 bullet points per slide, with no more than 5 words per bullet point.

Creating rapport with your audience and delivering an inspiring, relevant speech means people are much more likely to listen, remember and act. After all, they are not just buying dry information, they are buying you. The Nobel Peace Prize winner Ralph Bunche famously said 'If you want to get an idea across, wrap it up in a person'. If you follow these six tips and let your personality come across as the wrapping, you should end up with more stimulating, successful presentations.