

PRESENTATION IS EVERYTHING

Take Your Career to the Next Level

Have you ever spoken to a group of people only to get a blank stare? Remember the time someone fell asleep? Is it your subject? Or is it you? Whether presenting one-on-one or to a group, many speakers drone on, unaware that people are tuning them out. In today's presentation savvy world, it takes far more than organization to keep audience's attention. Pharma executives, who have long gotten by on expertise alone, are realizing that knowledge is no longer enough. In order to succeed, then need to hone their speaking skills.

"I work with a lot of terrific people who are exceptional at what they do. But in order for them to take their careers to the next level, senior management needs to see them as leaders who can command attention and respect." That's what a top pharmaceutical executive recently told me before I coached key members of his team. When delivering presentations, he said it's essential for them to be able to "hit it out of the ballpark" if they hope to take their careers to the next level. The executive says a person's ability to present key information clearly and concisely is critical to their credibility, and the respect they earn both internally and externally.

Yet, even top tier managers will privately admit they are not sure how to deliver more effective data packed presentations that contain fewer slides and more personality. They acknowledge that their PowerPoint driven presentations are too long, lack organization, substance, style and sometimes fail to provide perspective, context or direction. Sheepishly and slightly embarrassed, they divulge that this is the way it's always been done and they're afraid to leave out important information or personalize their presentations for fear of not being taken seriously.

While most communications coaches, including this one, will teach you to craft strong opens and closes, organize material, develop powerful messages, improve delivery and body language, you will be hard pressed to connect with higher ups if you do not learn how to impact them emotionally. Based on hundreds of coaching sessions and conversations with scores of executives, we have compiled key tactics and presentation strategies in an effort to help you advance your career.

GET OUT OF YOUR OWN WAY

You know your business which is why you are delivering information. So, stop trying to jam ten pounds of information into a two pound bag just to prove that you know your stuff. Figure out how to appeal to their emotions. If you're talking technology, how will the technology save them time and money? Step out of your shoes and into theirs to talk from their perspective and address their concerns.

DROWNING IN DATA

People remember impressions, not facts. They remember how you made them feel. When we see stories about the December's tsunamis, we don't remember all of the facts. But, we'll never forget the stories, the images and how we felt when we saw almost indescribable pictures of death and devastation. People will not warm to your words if you don't appeal to their hearts. You must support facts and information with examples, anecdotes and visual images that leave a lasting impression.

STUMP THE CHUMP

It is almost inevitable that management will interrupt your presentation to ask a question. As distressing as this can be, they are not trying to stump you. Think of the question as an opportunity to address their concerns and use it as a stepping stone to reinforce key points or deliver additional information. It's helpful to anticipate questions and prepare answers in advance. If you are presenting to investors to obtain financing, just giving the numbers is not enough. You must be clear, concise and credible. Quickly articulate what your business will provide, how the company will make money, what you are doing to address problems, and how your strategy will drive future profits.

BE BRIEF, BUT NOT BORING

Senior executives are a bit like television reporters: They want you to get to the point—and quickly. When they ask a question, they want the facts, not long winded answers. If they interrupt you in the middle of a slide to ask a question, they want you to answer the question and then move on instead of answering the question and repeating all of the information on the slide. Often, presenters over-answer questions from management to buy time, or because they think a brief response may appear too simplistic. The philosophy of "less is more" still holds true. Long answers frequently dilute messages, lack examples, and open the door for unwanted questions.

Visuals should reinforce what you say, not serve as your script. The fewer slides you use, the more impact you'll have because you will be free to look at people and engage them.

DON'T DULL IT DOWN

Consider this scenario: A pharmaceutical company has an opportunity to tell a *New York Times* reporter about a promising medication. Instead of offering compelling case histories and sharing impressive results, the presenter bores the reporter with endless diagrams and medical flow charts. The story never gets written. It is important to step away from your expertise to put the information in perspective. Instead of tackling tactics and strategies first, start by presenting the significance of the problem so that the audience understands why the solution is so important.

VOICE VISION WITH VOLUME

When you speak, you're on! Even if it's a small meeting, you want to project so your voice is strong and authoritative. Many people who are soft spoken, and others who start out strong, but trail off at the end of a sentence. Presenters should visualize a person in the back of the room straining to hear you. Speak directly to that person, in an effort to better project. And, whenever possible, stand up to maximize the richness of your voice.

Recall a couple of memorable business presentations where you've been a member of the audience. What do you remember? What did they have in common? Chances are these presenters were personable and energetic. They were able to quickly cut to the chase and clearly address audience concerns. And, while they probably rehearsed their remarks over and over again, they probably made you feel as if they were simply speaking off the cuff for no one else's benefit but your own.

Karen Friedman brings 20 years of on-air television experience to media and communications training. Her Philadelphia area company, **Karen Friedman Enterprises, Inc.** prepares people to take advantage of media interviews, presentations and public appearances. Friedman recently earned the International Association of Business Communicator's prestigious "Recommended Speaker" designation. She can be reached at: 610-292-9780 or at www.karenfriedman.com