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Making presentations with confidence, control — part 3

This is the third article in a four-part series. Part 2 presented guidelines for how to prepare a successful presentation. Now in Part 3, you will find guidelines that will help you make the presentation effectively.

Before we begin reviewing the activities involved with delivering presentations, there is one piece of advice that deserves special emphasis. When making a presentation, above all else concentrate on communicating with each member of your audience. Each is looking for something in particular from you. Each wants to feel that you are striving to address his individual interests and concerns.

Many speakers forget that the purpose is to communicate. Their focus seems to be on following their notes flawlessly and handling the visual aids without mishap. Your goal, though, is to strive to make your audience feel that you are there for the express purpose of saying something important to them. Concentrate on those listeners. Don't simply display your visual aids; use them to help supplement what you are saying.

The guidelines presented here will assist you in many ways, all of which will help you achieve the important goal of communicating directly and effectively with each individual in the audience.

Guideline 1: **Prepare for the presentation**

Outline your presentation. Write key words on note cards, but never read your presentation. Also, avoid memorizing your presentation. Memorizing causes anxiety, which can cause you to draw blanks. However, since the beginning and end of a presentation are significant,

you want to be sure you have these parts clearly in your mind.

Guideline 2: **Set up your speaking area**

When you deliver a talk, you are a little like a stage performer, with some words to deliver and props (your visual aids, etc.) to manage. For your performance to go smoothly, you must be sure that your "stage" is set up carefully. Any difficulties can interfere with your listeners' ability to concentrate on and understand your message. Of course, always arrive early to ensure proper room setup and that the equipment is there and operating properly. (More about stage setup in part 4.)

Guideline 3: **Utilize effective eye contact**

One of the most important ways to let your listeners know that you want to communicate with each of them is to look at them while you speak. By looking at individuals approximately one to two seconds, you create a personal bond. You show them that you are interested in them as individuals, and you subtly encourage them to pay attention to you.

Guideline 4: Use your voice effectively

Another technique to convince your listeners that you are speaking directly to each of them is to speak as if you're having a conversation. Use your voice the way you do when conversing with a friend. Vary the pace, rhythm and volume to make your point clearly and emphatically.

Guideline 5: **Make a positive impression**

Make sure you are dressed appropri-

ately and in good taste for the presentation. You should look as though you know what you are talking about. Also, whenever possible, avoid standing behind a podium. This creates a barrier between you and the audience, and affects the effectiveness of your presentation. Refrain from pacing, rocking back and forth, fidgeting, putting your hands in your pockets, crossing your arms, clasping your hands behind your back or wringing your hands.

Guideline 6: Prepare for questions

You should anticipate most of the questions you will receive. Practice your answers, preparing for the worst. Specific techniques to remember include:

- Wait until the questioner has finished the question before you begin answering.
- Repeat the question. If there is any chance that someone in the audience didn't hear the question, repeat it for the benefit of everyone.
- Involve the whole audience in your answer. Don't focus on the questioner and ignore everyone else.

Guideline 7: **Rehearse your presentation**

Practice in front of other people or use a camcorder if possible. All your other good preparation will go for naught if you are unable to effectively deliver your presentation.

Since developing and using visual aids effectively can make or break a presentation, this topic will be the subject of Part 4, the last in this series.

To inquire about Dr. White's programs and publications, please contact her at (225) 769-2307 or visit www.successimages.com. □