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Structuring your Message A presentation is an important business tool as it could make or break an important deal and transaction. A bad one, for instance may kill the most excellent ideas or the most novel concepts. Therefore, it requires careful and strategic preparation according to the audience profile, their organizational culture as well the time at hand. A presentation may take several styles but it follows one linear progression of an idea or a concept which is structured in a logical manner. (Kaul 2005, p. 83) So, in the organization of the piece, three important parts are given importance in order to deliver the message effectively. In this paper, we will address why the opening of a presentation is crucial and some ways to prepare an effective one.

The opening, beginning or introduction of a presentation tells the audience what is to come and what to expect. According to Mary Munter (2002), one must remember to “ set the stage”, “ grab attention”, “ use humor with caution” and “ state recommendations” in preparing for the opening. (p. 43-44) She underscored the fact that this is the part where the presenter introduces the topic, sets the pace, and establishes credibility.

There are several styles in doing so, but it is recommended to use a formal introductory device. Effective formal openers include anecdote, humor and involving question. Steve Mandel (2000) explained these extensively in his book, *The Effective Presentation Skills*.

Anecdote, which is usually humorous though not always, tells of a short story to illustrate a point. Humor, on the other hand, uses a joke as a springboard to seize attention and break the ice. Mandel, however, warned against humor that has something to do with sex, race, religion, or any other personal topic. According to him the humor must be linked to the speaker,

topic, audience, or the occasion. It should be conservative.

Involving question is a bit tricky, so if one does not know his audience, he could ask for a show of hands after asking an open-ended question. This is a safe way since audience might give a wrong answer or crack a joke at the presenter's expense. (Mandel, p. 24)

Informative presentations do away with these devices and instead call for introductions that state facts and figures. (Asha, p. 96) In this case, statistical data or citing the agenda is used to open the presentation.

Confidence adds up to the impact of a presentation. That is the reason why practice and preparation is important. I have seen a very good presentation ruined because the presenter encountered a glitch in his notebook computer and spend a good deal of time facing the dilemma of fixing the problem and reassuring the growing impatience of his audience. Instead of a joke, his introduction became apologies and was too nervous to become credible at all. Apparently, it set the tone of the entire presentation with all the good points buried in the air of empathy mixed with impatience on the part of the audience.

Meanwhile, I could not forget, one delivery that made use of a half-filled glass of water to open a stress-management presentation. The opener was a combination of humor and open-ended question that elicited curiosity and involvement from his audience. The creativity of such an introduction captivated attention throughout with no dips in the audience's attention curve at all. As of this moment I could still remember his particular tip on not bringing home work-related worries.

References

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