

NINE WAYS TO



**YOUR
PRESENTATION**

– and how to fix it!

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NINE WAYS TO KILL YOUR PRESENTATION

The power of your team to deliver results lies in their ability to influence others. Whether it's a sales presentation, a department meeting or a conference speech, success comes from being able to connect with people.

So often the speaker's message is lost due to poor communication skills. People often say that you either have the confidence and ability to present yourself well, or you don't. That's not true. Confidence, and effective presentation skills, are learned – and there is a process to learning those skills. We aren't born with the skills to drive a car, play a musical instrument or speak a foreign language. In order to master those skills they need to be learned and developed. There is a faster and more efficient path to transform your team to deliver their presentations with influence, and I'd like to share the secrets with you.

After many years of working with corporate and government organisations, it has become very clear that there are predominantly nine threats that sabotage successful presentations.

They are:

1. No audience engagement
2. Giving in to nerves
3. No clear message
4. Poor structure
5. Lifeless presentation
6. Getting stuck
7. Losing control of the room
8. Failing "the look" test
9. Not being real



Let's look at each of these threats and the best way to handle them.

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT



In many situations, presenters fail to connect with their audience for the following reasons:

- They don't look at their audience
- They speak too quickly or too slowly
- They speak in a monotone voice
- They fidget or make repetitive movements

These are all physical issues that can be corrected. With your awareness of these problems you can help your team members improve by offering them balanced feedback after they present. Remember to make your feedback predominantly positive with only one or two points for improvement.

Your team members are more likely to progress steadily if they are not overwhelmed with negative feedback. If you encourage them by noticing their strengths, they will build on those strengths and the weaknesses will improve.

GIVING IN TO NERVES

Giving in to nerves is a very common problem with new speakers, and even some speakers with experience feel nervous when they present.

Usual symptoms can include:

- Increased heart rate
- Sweating
- Shaking
- Anxiety
- Rashes
- Difficulty concentrating

The best way to help your team deal better with nervous energy is to approach it in two ways.

1. The mindset around presentation anxiety
2. Techniques to deal with the nervous energy

Mindset

Most people think they need to get over their nerves altogether. However the idea you have to fight nerves to stop them happening is counterproductive. The harder you try to stop the nerves, the worse those nerves get.

Instead, coach your team by giving them permission to be nervous. I always tell my students they have permission to shake, sweat and stutter as much as they like. Once they have permission to do that, they tend to be less anxious.

Anxiety busting technique

Here's a great method to help team members deal with extreme nerves before a presentation. As a breathing exercise, it is designed to bring the heart rate down and it can be done anywhere, even while waiting to be called up to present.

Here's the exercise. It's quite simple. Breathe in for two seconds, then out for two seconds, in for two seconds and out for two seconds. Repeat this cycle without breaks for 2 minutes. The key is to hold the pattern of breathing consistent for the 2 minutes. This is a very effective way to reduce anxiety and it is easy to learn.



NO CLEAR MESSAGE



The message is the driving force, or the focal point of the presentation. If this message is not clear, the presenter will lose their connection with the audience very quickly. The reason this happens is that the planning hasn't been done properly. They haven't considered what their main purpose is for presenting to their audience.

Often speakers prepare by writing the speech from the beginning to the end without considering what the main point of the presentation should be, let alone the structure and the flow of their presentation.

As a rule of thumb, you should be able to write your message on the back of a business card. This keeps the message statement short, succinct and to the point. This way every word of the presentation is written to support that message and the temptation to go off topic is avoided. Keeping the presentation on track is far more interesting for the audience. A speaker who meanders around the main topic without actually addressing it directly can be very frustrating, and this usually happens when the message has not been properly defined.

You can help your team members by getting them to define their message before they sit down to write their presentation.

There is a very handy tool you can share with your team that helps support the message in their presentations. Ask them to include these three points in their next presentation and you'll definitely see the difference.

Message Impact Tool

1. Define exactly what it is that you will be talking about
2. Explain why this is important to you as the speaker
3. Explain why it should be important to the audience

This is a simple tool you can use for every presentation. It not only makes sure the message is defined, but the relevance to you and the audience is confirmed.



POOR STRUCTURE

Have you ever attended a presentation, and wondered what the speaker was trying to communicate? This happens when the speaker hasn't planned out a logical flow for presenting their material. If the speaker meanders in and out of themes and concepts that are not logically connected, the presentation will lose impact and they will create confusion.

Mind mapping is a great way to help your presenters get their structure right.

Here's how it works. On a piece of paper write the main topic in a thought bubble in the middle and then decide on the points to support that topic.

The key here is to group points that are relevant to each other.

If the main topic was "Physical Exercise" you could choose different paths to direct the presentation. You could choose from a number of paths including:

- Types of exercise
- The benefits of exercise
- Exercise equipment
- Exercise research

Once you have decided which path to take (which theme to use), you can put that in the thought bubble, immediately under your main topic. From there you can assign the main points and related sub-points to support that theme.

If for example we used the theme "The benefits of exercise", we might break that into 3 main points:

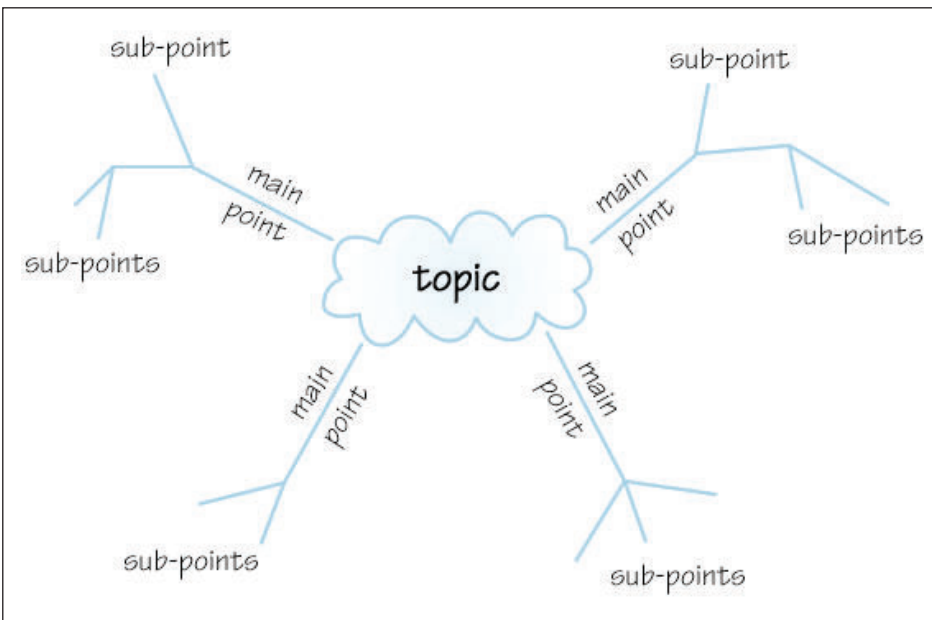
- Well being
- Strength and fitness
- Weight management

Then we could break each of those three points down further into sub-points, making sure to group like with like.

This process is very important, otherwise the lack of structure can cause the audience to be confused as the speaker's intention isn't clear. For example if the speaker mixed more than one theme during the presentation (say "Exercise equipment" and "Types of exercise"), the take home message may not be clear.

By following a logical mind map process, the topic, supporting points, and take home message will be very clear and the audience will really appreciate it.

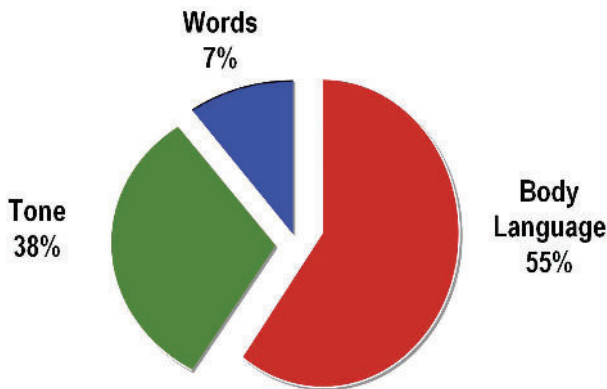
MIND MAPPING EXAMPLE



LIFELESS PRESENTATIONS

We've all seen speakers who present with little energy and enthusiasm. They can be excruciatingly boring. These are speakers that drone on and on, who read word for word from PowerPoints, or who stand lifeless behind their lectern and speak in a monotone fashion.

These speakers do not realise that their words are not enough to engage the audience. In fact the words make up only 7% of the power of their message. 38% of the message impact is delivered through vocal tone and 55% is delivered through body language. This is not to say that the words are not important. It is very important that your words are prepared well. However the most powerful element of your presentation skillset, as you can see by the chart below, is body language. Body language not only includes how you stand and move, but your facial expressions and hand gestures.



So how can you help a presenter who presents like a drone? Once again, awareness is the key here. Try to identify what it is making the presentation difficult to listen to. If it is their voice, then encourage them to modulate more. That is, to use vocal variety: changes in pitch, emphasis, pauses and variations in volume. If you notice they appear lifeless, encourage them to use their hands while they speak. This strategy alone can raise the energy in a presentation a great deal.

GETTING STUCK

Some presenters don't seem to get any better over time. They continue to repeat the same bad habits without improving. This is usually an issue of awareness. They don't know what to do and so they don't do anything to improve.



This is where you can help. If you take notes during the presentations you can discuss their performance and give them feedback in a private setting later to help them improve. The easiest way to do this is to draw a line down the middle of a piece of paper. On the top left side draw a smiley face, and an unhappy face on the right side. Everything you think they do well you can note under the left hand smiley side, and any improvements go under the right side.

However be very careful how you deliver this information. Consider the idea of at least 3 positive points to every point of improvement. Always start and finish your feedback on a positive note and drive the conversation with encouragement in mind.

Many managers deliver only negative feedback and this only seems to discourage speakers. It is far more effective to tell the presenter what they are doing well and give them only one or two points for improvement. This helps them understand how well they are performing. If the only feedback given is negative, the presenter will feel poorly about their skill level and be de-motivated.



Here's an example of how you could write up an **evaluation sheet** during a presentation

	
Confident start and clear introduction	Moved around without purpose
Clear structure	Fidgeted with pen (clicking sounds)
Smiled	Eye contact was lacking at times
Great facial expressions	
Connected with the audience	
Excellent descriptive words	
Used great hand gestures	
Vocal pace was good	
Used pauses to allow audience to process the idea	
<p>Summary Clear structure, friendly and conversational. Consider movement and eye contact for next time. Overall a very good presentation – well done!</p>	

LOSING CONTROL OF THE ROOM

There are a number of factors that might cause a presenter to lose control of the room.

These could be:

- Hecklers – people who rudely interrupt the speaker
- Presentation hijackers – those who want to take over
- A lack of confidence and assertiveness

The quickest way to fix this problem is to teach your team some new phrases to help them deal with difficult situations.

For example:

For interruptions

“I’m going to ask you to suspend judgment until I’ve completed my presentation.”

This needs to be done firmly and with strong eye contact.

To stop someone taking over

“I hear what you are saying John, (pause) what do you think Mark?”

This shifts the focus from one person to another.

Confidence and assertiveness

These are built by practicing the phrases. There is very little point just giving your team the phrases. Role play the phrases to get them used to saying them in presentations and meetings.

Make sure they understand the difference between being assertive and being aggressive. Losing your temper with an audience or audience member is a sure way to lose the audience altogether. However being firm while remaining composed will usually gain their respect.



FAILING "THE LOOK" TEST



A presentation starts from the moment the speaker stands up and makes their way to present to the audience. It is then that the audience make a number of judgments about that speaker. They notice if the speaker walks with confidence and purpose. They notice if the speaker is well groomed, and dressed neatly and appropriately. Point out to your staff that the team's image is on display every time they are in front of clients, other departments or managers.

It may seem obvious, but it is prudent to keep an eye on how your team members present themselves personally. What you may think is inappropriate may not always match what others think. We are in a time that tattoos, body piercings and casual fashion are more present in the workplace and it's important to make your personal presentation standards very clear. Never assume they know what you expect if you haven't told them.

Make sure:

- Clothes are clean, properly ironed and suitable
- Hair is tidy
- Shoes are polished and in good condition
- Facial hair is tidy (Stubble is not a good look for presentations)
- Makeup is fresh and appropriate
- Jewellery is suitable

Even in a workplace where the dress code is more casual, it pays to dress one step better than your audience. For example if you present to a casually dressed audience, you could wear slacks and a collared shirt. If the audience was corporate, you could wear a shirt and tie. If you had to present at a conference, you could wear a suit and tie. The 'one step up' approach works very well and is a simple idea to convey to your team.

Another tip is to keep an iron and ironing board, a sewing kit and a shoe polish kit at work just in case they are needed.

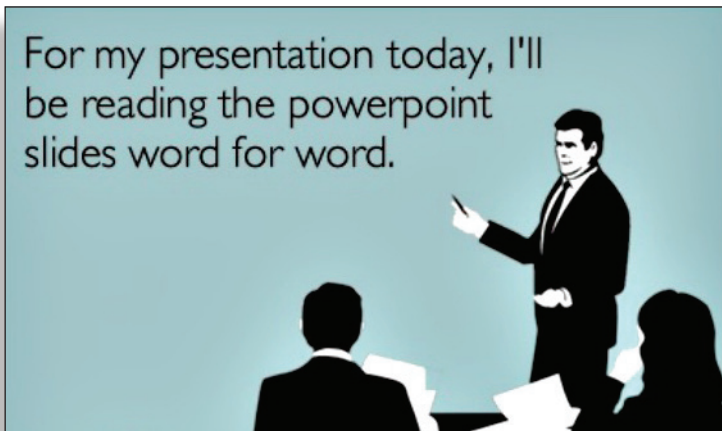
NOT BEING REAL

Presentations that are not natural lose their impact quickly. They are presented word for word, and not at all conversational. Although word for word speeches have a place, presentations should generally be natural and conversational so that the speaker builds trust and rapport with their audience.

There is a way you can help with this problem. Encourage your presenters not to use a fully typed out set of notes to present with. Instead use a simple structure with only the main points on a page.

Presenting this way, the speaker looks at the first point on their notes and this reminds them of what to talk about. Once they have finished talking about that particular point, they pause, look at the next point and then speak until they have said all they need to about that point. This process continues until all the main points have been covered.

This process will encourage a natural and conversational presentation. Plenty of rehearsal will ensure the speaker will present comfortably but there is no need to learn the material word for word. After all, no one knows what you didn't say, as long as the main points are covered.



SAMPLE SPEAKER NOTES

Here's an example of how a note sheet could be prepared. The purpose of the presentation below, is to recommend a new office layout. The notes support a simple but persuasive structure to keep the speaker on track. The 'bare bones' approach ensures that the speaker maintains a conversational style by embellishing the main points.

TITLE:	OFFICE LAYOUT PROPOSAL
Introduction	- The proposed changes to office floor plan
Point 1	- The problems caused by the current floor plan
Point 2	- The benefits of the new floor plan
Point 3	- How the new floor plan project would be implemented
Conclusion	- Reasons why new floor plan will fix the current problem - Offer personal opinion to support changes

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

If you'd like to know more about improving your team's presentation skills, Kevin offers:

- CORPORATE TRAINING PROGRAMS
- WORKSHOPS
- KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS
- COACHING

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