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# Don't Let A Good Presentation Go Bad!

## *Tips for preventing failed presentations*

**S**peaking in public is considered to be one of the biggest phobias known to humankind. Nothing seems to generate as much internal fear and feelings of panic according to some experts. The root of this, I believe, is fear of failure and of embarrassing ourselves.

This not an empty fear, either. Anyone who gives speeches frequently knows that something always goes wrong at some point. But there are things you can do to reduce the risk of failure and give yourself options when things go bad.

### **Be Wary of Technology**

With regards to technology, take nothing for granted. These days, it's common for the host to provide everything needed but don't just assume this to be the case. Ask and be specific about your needs. Regardless, I always bring my personal laptop and a presentation kit that includes my wireless presenter, spare batteries, and other odds and ends I might need.

I always try to see the room well before my speech and to test the technology. This isn't always possible

and I have had occasions where everything worked correctly right up until we started but it's a good habit to get into. It's better to be trying to figure why your presentation won't show on the screen when you're alone than in a room full of people.

Being wary of technology applies to your presentation as well. While video clips and sound bites are excellent tools, I personally avoid them. How many times have you seen a speaker click on an icon and nothing happened? I try to limit my points of failure whenever possible.

### **Save Your Presentation – A Lot!**

Unless I'm required to submit a prepared presentation, I will often make changes to my presentation as I rehearse and work on flow and timing. Once I have the final version, it gets saved to a thumb drive which goes to the facilitator or tech support person at the event. But I also save it to the cloud, my backup service, and my laptop. I've had my thumb drive lost by tech support and once saved my presentation in the wrong folder on my laptop and couldn't find it.

## When All Else Fails...

So what if, despite your best efforts, nothing is working? You go on anyway. People are there to hear what you have to say, not just to look at your slides.

The first thing to remember is that fixing the technology is not your problem. Let someone else deal with the mess while you begin your presentation. If they are successful in solving the problem, you can pick things up from where you are. If not, you haven't wasted your audience's time and increased your frustration.

In previous articles I have pointed out the importance of memorizing your opening. This will get you through your initial feelings of panic and launch you into your presentation.

You can prepare your presentation in such a way that you can speak without slides. When I started out as a speaker, I used the standard bullet point, death by PowerPoint technique. It saved me a lot of rehearsal time. However, I soon realized it was a crutch for me and offered nothing to my audience. Besides, if they are reading my slides, they're not listening to me.

Now I rehearse and my slides are visual images that serve as a cue for me and are interesting to the audience without being distracting. Since there are no bullet points I can speak for any length of time I choose. This comes in very handy if your time is cut short or suddenly lengthened.

Since my images are merely cues and not really necessary, I can use a printed copy of my slides for the same purpose. I always have a printed copy of my final presentation with me just in case I need to speak without a slide presentation. I find it also helps if I want to do a quick review or rehearsal. Depending on the

speech, I may also jot down notes to myself containing data or reminding myself to emphasize certain key points.

## Timing is Everything

One of the biggest headaches of being a speaker is last minute changes in scheduling or unexpected problems that disrupt your rehearsed timings. I once was asked to give my hour and half breakout session as a one hour plenary session. When the time came to give my speech, the moderator took 20 minutes to hold a raffle. Things did not go well.

On another occasion, a member of the audience got the message that she was a grandmother right at a dramatic moment in my presentation. It took a while for the congratulations to die down and for us to get back on track, costing me about half of my allotted speaking time.

This is why you never memorize your speech. You may need to shorten and expand it on a moment's notice while still providing your core message. You do this by knowing the key points you want to emphasize and where in your presentation you can add or delete material, such as stories, case studies, or examples. As I mentioned earlier, using visual cues rather than specific bullets allows you to do this. It also prevents you from skipping or rushing through a number of slides. No matter how well you explain the reason, the audience always feels cheated when you do this.

## Be Prepared

Sooner or later you will encounter a problem that will threaten to derail your presentation. However, by anticipating such problems and being prepared to adjust to them you can help eliminate some of the stress associated with speaking engagements. 