

Ten Things Your Audience Wants You to Know BEFORE Your Next Presentation

Psst, you there. Yeah, you, with the PowerPoint slides up on the laptop screen. We're your audience and we have some things we need you to know.

We see you getting ready to deliver your talk to us, as you fly across the country to your meeting.

We hope we're not too late. Of course, we know some speakers don't think about the speech they are flying to give until they get on the plane to go give it. We really hope that's not you. Those speeches never go as well as the speaker thinks they went. Never.

There are a few things we want you to know before you come talk to us. The thing is, when you think about things from our perspective, you'll know we're right. After all, most of your experience of business presentations is as a member of the audience. SO pay attention to us now, and we'll pay attention to you later.

1. Don't just stand there and report the facts to us.

If that's all you intend to do, send us the slides in an email. Seriously. Don't make us travel down the hall – or across the country – to come get them. If we're going to be face to face, use that time to tell us how to use the facts. Use the facts to make a bigger point. That's worth my time. And if a colleague tells you your only role on the agenda is JUST to report facts, ignore them.

2. We matter more than you do.

We aren't thinking about whether or not you're doing a good job up there. We're thinking about whether or not what you're talking about will help us do a good job once we leave your meeting.

3. We don't need you to be charismatic and smooth.

What we need is for you to give us something new we can put to work when you're finished talking. Give us something new to know and do – a new perspective, a new strategy, new tools, a new directive -- and you are automatically a smart and useful speaker.

4. We don't grade on a curve.

You don't get extra points for telling us you really didn't have time to prepare, or that you just threw this together. We hear that statement for what it really means: "Don't judge me if this isn't very good. It's not my best effort."

5. We're worth your best effort.

Do the math. How many people are in this room, and for how long? And if we've had to travel to the meeting, factor that time in, as well. Can you see how much collective time you waste when it's not your best effort? So take the time to develop a real message. Then rehearse it.

6. It's not true that speakers are born, not made.

The people who connect best with their audiences develop their talent. They are deliberate about their message. They rehearse, whether you see it or not. Anyone GOOD at this who tells you they're just tossing it off isn't telling you the truth. It's like the actress who says she doesn't work out and eats whatever she wants.

7. We can read faster than you can speak.

That's why it's never a good idea for you to put your script on the screen, and then read it to us. We're out way ahead of you. We've already figured out when to listen, and when to return email on the iPhone.

8. We don't care about your slides.

We probably can't read them anyway. And if we can, we're not impressed by fancy artwork and spinning graphics and lots of color. We care about your ideas, and the way we can use them. P.S. Anyone who says you HAVE to have slides is someone who made a fancy cover for their book report in sixth grade, hoping that would make up for a dull report. It didn't then, and it won't now.

9. We like a story.

So tell us one. Tell us a story that will help us remember how to use what you are talking about, or why it's important. We like to know how you are connected to the material you are sharing with us. And make sure there is a moral to it – don't just entertain us.

10. We'll Remember One Big Idea From Your Speech

So you better decide what the most important thing is for us to remember. Then you better rehearse saying it, so it comes out right. Even better: make it succinct enough that we can repeat it at the elevators after your speech. Otherwise, we'll be left to guess what really mattered. And we probably won't get it right.

So. That's it. We want you to succeed. We've all sat in too many meetings and had our time wasted (admit it – you have too!). If you come in and just help us - in a concrete way - be better at what we do, we'll be grateful. And attentive.

What more can a speaker ask?