

How to become a more engaging speaker — part 2

When you are speaking to a group, it is important to be aware of how the people are responding to you and your message. Are they maintaining eye contact? Are they actively listening and showing interest? Or are they ignoring you and studying their smartphones?

In a health-care workshop I led several years ago, I started off with a long but, in my mind, hilarious story. No one else thought the story was funny, however, and one person actually got up and left. Not a good beginning. I soldiered on, but because I had failed to engage the audience at this point, I never really established a connection with them.

Later I realized that my long-winded delivery had drained the humour out of the story. I hadn't let my audience in on what they were going to learn in this session or how my story was relevant to their situation.

With that experience in mind, I want to share other examples of presentation mistakes to add to the list I provided in the column in the January issue:

- **Not getting to the point.** The technology explosion has left us with the expectation that all information will be delivered quickly. If you fail to do this, your audience will tune out.
- **Designing your presentation to suit you.** Many speakers are focused on what works for them, such as using PowerPoint as the foundation of a presentation rather than as a visual aid or delivering a monologue that prohibits any participation from others.

- **Squeezing too much in.** If you have expert knowledge of your subject, you may be tempted to share everything you know about it. Resist. There is a point at which the amount of information becomes overwhelming and the importance of any of your ideas is forgotten. Don't be a talking head at the front of the room.

Now, let's expand on the list of tools you can use to promote engagement:

- **Address WIIFM (What's in it for me?).** Many people show up for a meeting or a presentation with a "so what, who cares?" mindset. Your job is to come up with an answer to the WIIFM question as quickly as possible.
- **Present the positive first.** An audience will remember the first 30 seconds of a presentation, a pitch, a proposal, an endorsement — and *how* the speaker delivered the message, if not the actual words spoken. If you have only seconds to make an impression, use them wisely.
- **Generate energy.** Remember to monitor your own energy level and the energy level of others in the room, whether you are speaking out on an issue, delivering a 10-minute presentation or leading a multi-day workshop. If you appear listless during your moment in the limelight, your audience will pick up on it and respond in kind.

Becoming an engaging speaker is an art that can be mastered. Practise using the tips and tools I've discussed in these columns, and I guarantee that your audience will be tuned in to your message. ■

If you'd like Barb's help with a communication problem in your workplace, tweet her!



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