



Top 10 Tips for Making a Great Technical Presentation

1. Don't say "But it's only a technical presentation"

"Actually no, you don't."

Of course, you may have to give a presentation that conveys messages and facts that are of a highly technical nature. But I contend there is no such thing as a "technical" presentation any more than there is such a thing as a "formal" presentation.

Presentations are either effective or ineffective; they either convey ideas in a good way or in a bad way. That's really all there is to it.

Here's my problem with the "it's only a technical presentation" mindset. Once someone puts themselves into this box, they invariably commit all of the following sins:

1. Dumping way too much data.
2. Failure to give examples.
3. Failure to give relevant stories.
4. Data saturated slides.
5. Poor stylistic presentation skills.

Sorry, but it's still a presentation. It's an opportunity for you to communicate a set of ideas, the significance behind the numbers, or the importance of a new safety initiative. Or not.

2. What do they want to know?

This can sometimes be fundamentally different from what you want to tell them! Do your homework; Make sure you know your audience –What do they want to hear from you? Do they want you to:

- a) Provide judgment and insight on what the most important technical issues, numbers and facts are?
- b) Give compelling real life examples and case studies involving these technical details?
- c) Show visually, the impact or results of these technical issues?
- d) Make sure your audience walks away knowing, understanding, remembering and able to tell other people the handful of most important ideas and facts about your technical issue.

2.1 What do they need to be persuaded of?

Well they don't need a full technical manual but instead, they probably need a relatively small amount of information that's important to them

2.2 What level of knowledge/ experience do they have?

You need to choose an appropriate level of complexity/ detail; you particularly don't want to baffle those with less technical knowledge than you!

2.3 What do they want to get from your presentation?

Why are they attending? What looks like a good outcome for them? Do they need to understand the technical detail? Or just the impacts and outcomes? Or both? What's the key insight that will make it valuable for them?

3. Don't drown in the detail

Most of us have a lot of presentations to listen to and senior managers more than most! They don't want and cannot handle a lot of detail. So give them the headlines, the big issues, some food for thought. Make only a few key points BUT make them well. Flesh them out; bring them to life with illustrations. A couple of good points memorably made are the key

4. Be yourself

Don't try and be somebody or something that you are not, don't try and be Grandma when really you're the Big Bad Wolf (or the other way around!) The truth will out. It will come across as insincere and unbelievable.

4.1 What should be done to come across to an audience as authentic & sincere?

- **Conviction / Believing in your message**

It will only come across as sincere if you are! You need to mean what you say, and say what you mean. You need to have the courage of your convictions.

- **Words and actions that add up**

The words you use, the body language you display and the tone of your voice all have to match up for other people to sub-consciously "read" sincerity in you. This mostly happens automatically when you're being yourself and have conviction. You need to check the signals you're sending out. Are your tone and body language matching your message?

5. Be human and not automaton

Avoid "techno-babble" and jargon; it won't make you sound better, more learned, or more believable, usually just DULLER! Use normal, day to day language. Express yourself as you would normally; don't put on a "Corporate Mask".

5.1 Why should you not use Jargon?

- **FACT:** Jargon has become a way of life in modern business & most of it gets in the way of clear communication. Clearly there are technical that are relevant, useful and universally understood, that do add value to communication. They can make complex concepts clearer.

- **BUT** technical jargon can confuse and obstruct understanding. It can be particularly challenging for people with less technical backgrounds. Even for people who understand it, too much jargon sounds dull. If you can explain something in simple, layman's terms then you're more likely to guarantee understanding and buy-in.

6. Master the geography

To pitch up 5 minutes before you're due to speak is a recipe for disaster. Get details of the layout sent to you and get there early! Familiarise yourself with the layout and logistics. Where is the podium? Is there room to walk about? Where are the monitors? Where can you put your notes down? What are the arrangements for the microphone? Is the slide advancing? You need to know!

7. Use Visual Aids

Use a small amount of appropriate visual aids to add value to what you're saying. Graphs, video, pictures can all be great. You can do that via PowerPoint but **don't** just publish your notes by bullet pointing text! Its visual valium! Please Don't Do It! That's what notes are for.

7.1 How to use visual aids?

- **Use PowerPoint**

PowerPoint is a *visual aid*; it is there to enhance the audience's understanding of what you're saying. It is **not** there for your benefit.

PowerPoint has acquired a very bad reputation, but as a visual aid tool its fine, the problem is that it is not being used as a visual aid, it's more often used as a script, a crutch, a security blanket or a handout.

- **Use Pictures**

A popular myth says, "A picture paints a thousand words". Research suggests that the majority of people are visual learners and that whereas people remember only 10% of what they just hear, they'll remember 60+% of what they see and hear together. That's why we use visual aids!

- **BUT Keep It Simple**

If graphs and diagrams are too complex, they distract the audience's attention. They're not listening to you when they're staring at the chart trying to work out what the Y axis represents, what the units of measurement is, what the blocks and lines are for and what the blue circle with the number 42 in it is!

- **Use handouts**

If you think that more technical detail, facts and statistics are really necessary, then think about providing them in a supplementary handout after your presentation, rather than trying to squeeze them into over busy slides.

8. Get Help

Don't be the lone ranger on this, get support and input. Ask people to input ideas for your content and structure, people to hear you rehearse and give you feedback, people to design your visual aids.

The best speakers don't do it alone, whether it's professional support or just colleagues giving you some feedback, getting some input is vital.

Particularly get some input where the group is unfamiliar to you – senior managers or people from other functions.

9. Use analogies

When trying to help people understand complex technical issues, you need them to understand quickly; for most people the way to build understanding is to link it to something they already know about. That's how adult learning works. For audiences of technical peers you can link it to another project that people are familiar with. For senior managers / non technical functions you may find that using analogies is a really good way to help people grasp a concept quickly.

When people talk about a merger being a 'journey' for example, everyone knows that it'll probably take a while and involve finding your way in uncharted territory. What can you liken your concept to?

LESS IS MORE!

So there is no number 10!

1 – 9 is a lot to take in and do something with anyway!

Let's not drown here!

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