



PRESENTING WITH IMPACT

By Chris Atkinson

Presenting is an art form that's all about connecting with audiences. Time to pack away that tired 50-slide Powerpoint?

In business, technical expertise is simply not enough to secure a successful career. The need to speak in a clear and compelling way remains at the heart of being truly influential and successful.

Sadly, all too often corporate communications are focused on delivering slides and discussing technical performance rather than how effectively we connect with the people we are talking to. The result is that much of the effort we put into communication is wasted because the critical messages are lost, unclear or perhaps forgotten.

There is a clear need in business to create a narrative in presentations that sells the commercial context to the audience without the 'weight' of typical management presentations.

Unfortunately, the general standard of presenting in organisations is poor due to a number of critical factors which undermine your potential to be powerful:

You ARE the presentation



WWW.STRATEGICLEADERS.COM

1) FIGHT OR FLIGHT

You will most likely be familiar with this principle. In the context of presenting we can see the fight or flight response in the impact of having 'all eyes on us'. The more primitive part of our brain is wired to respond negatively to being in this situation.

When we are stood in front of an audience we perceive a **potential threat** and are put into a fight or flight mind-set, often accompanied by adrenaline and anxiety. Of course in today's world the 'threat' is looking foolish or embarrassing ourselves.



2) SLIDES & TECHNOLOGY

Given my previous point about anxiety we, as human beings, look for ways to reduce these negative emotions. To our great misfortune we found a fantastic solution in technology. Slides give us a fantastic escape route from these negative emotions, we can step to one side and have the audience focus all on the screen.

We don't even have to remember our words because they are all up there on the screen for us to read! Presentation slides have become the cultural norm for communication even though many people readily acknowledge the negative impact they have on engagement.

The impact of these two things is potent. Engagement levels have plummeted and precious time (therefore money) is being poured down the drain. In addition, these things chip away at the culture of an organisation which impacts successful implementation of strategy.

On a personal level it is very hard to stand out from the crowd to progress your career unless you are noticed.

Here is how to present your ideas with impact:

Take a strong stance and stand still.

Presenters always seem to want to move around rather than planting their feet. Use your upper body for movement don't walk around unless it has a purpose, movement distracts audiences and reduces your impact.

Imagine your legs have roots growing into the floor; now use your upper body to create emphasis and impact with powerful gestures.

In her Harvard Business School article, Power Posing: Brief Nonverbal Displays Affect Neuroendocrine Levels and Risk Tolerance, social psychologist professor Amy J C Cuddy demonstrates the impact of strong posture. She found that simply holding your body in expansive, "high-power" poses stimulates higher levels of testosterone and lower levels of cortisol (the "stress" hormone).



YOU ARE THE PRESENTATION

Quite simply, if you adopt the traits of a confident person your mind actually starts to feel more confident. In other words, our behaviour impacts our attitude. The result? The power poses led to increased feelings of confidence.

You ARE the presentation.

The slides are there to support you, NOT to 'be the presentation'. You are the presentation. Unfortunately, most meeting rooms place the technology centrally at the front of room. To avoid standing in the beam and in order to ensure all the audience can see the slides, presenters have to stand off to one side.

When a speaker is out of the spotlight in this way they tend to relax and forget they must still be present. All too often their delivery becomes a low energy, monotone narration of the material on the slides. So, without standing in the projector, ensure you remain the focus for the audience. Take a strong position at the front of the room.

Don't read the slides! This is probably the best known mistake made by presenters when using technology, and so it's a mystery why, despite knowing this, most presenters still end up doing it? If all you have to tell your audience is what's written on the slides, you should e-mail the slides and save

everyone an unnecessary meeting.

You should never read the words that are on the screen. It adds no value to the audience as they can do that much faster than you and if you are speaking whilst they are reading, they will retain less of the information. By reading from your slides you demonstrate a lack of creativity, skill, moreover you risk ridicule from your peers. Commit to doing better.

We can't expect software to engage or inspire. If anything, technology is likely to hamper your efforts to engage. For many, less experienced presenters it is a challenge to overcome rather than a tool to enhance. Technology can't deliver inspiration, nor can it engage, because these are emotional responses. The thing that stands the very best chance of eliciting either of these responses...is YOU!

Amy Cuddy says: "People tend to spend too much energy focusing on the words they're saying — perfectly crafting the content of the message — when in many cases that matters much less than how it's being communicated.

People often are more influenced by how they feel about you than by what you're saying. It's not about the content of the message, but HOW you're communicating it

”

