

A black and white photograph of three business professionals in a meeting. A woman in the foreground is pointing at a document on a table, while a man and another woman look on attentively.

# Communicating with a Winning Presentation

A black and white photograph of two business professionals, a man and a woman, sitting at a desk. The man is pointing at a laptop screen, and the woman is looking at it with interest.

Use presentations to communicate  
information and ideas in a direct,  
effective way

## Learning Objectives

At the end of this module, you will be able to create a presentation as the means of communicating vision, progress, and plans for your small business.

## About FDIC Supplier Diversity Effort

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (“FDIC”) recognizes the important contributions made by small, veteran, and minority and women-owned businesses to our economy. For that reason, we strive to provide small businesses with opportunities to contract with the FDIC. In furtherance of this goal, the FDIC has initiated the FDIC Small Business Resource Effort to assist the small vendors that provide products, services, and solutions to the FDIC.

The objective of the Small Business Resource Effort is to provide information and the tools small vendors need to become better positioned to compete for contracts and subcontracts at the FDIC. To achieve this objective, the Small Business Resource Effort references outside resources critical for qualified vendors, leverages technology to provide education according to perceived needs, and offers connectivity through resourcing, accessibility, counseling, coaching, and guidance where applicable.

This product was developed by the FDIC Office of Minority and Woman Inclusion (OMWI). OMWI has responsibility for oversight of the Small Business Resource Effort.

## Executive Summary

Many business leaders choose to use a presentation to communicate their vision, progress, and plans. The audience for such a presentation might be the business’ employees, its management staff, sales operation, current or prospective customers, or an industry group. Using presentations as a way to communicate can enhance your team’s knowledge and spirit, while providing them with information and ideas in a direct and consolidated manner. They can also help others understand your business model and plans. Preparing a presentation is generally not a simple task and may involve several speakers as well as support talent. The following module highlights ideas for creating a winning presentation.

## Communicating with a Winning Presentation

Public speaking and presentation skills are critical to the business executive. Even well written material will be ineffective if not presented in an enthusiastic and engaging manner. Your convincing pitch will not reach the ears of your potential clients if you mumble unenthusiastically. Your audience will daydream through your discussion of the business' goals if you do not maintain eye contact. Your proposal may not capture the attention of a selection committee if they are struggling to understand your presentation. No matter how interested you may be in your own speech, unless you can engage the same amount of interest from the audience, your speech will fail.

Public speaking skills do not always come naturally. Successful speakers are not created overnight, nor are they merely "talented." Like any skilled or specialized professional, they learn through training and practice. Several methods can increase your effectiveness, whether you are presenting at a seminar, a training class, a motivational speech, or even a small meeting with colleagues.

Executive presentations are high-risk, high-reward activities, and you should look forward to them. Preparing such a presentation is generally not a simple task and may involve several speakers as well as support talent. Here are a few ideas for communicating with a winning presentation:

1. Be Interesting.
2. Know your audience.
3. Don't read, remember.
4. Train and rehearse to develop your presentation skills; good ones are no accident.
5. Time your remarks and stay on time.
6. Don't be surprised if your equipment fails. Be prepared.
7. Use simple graphics and text that your audience can easily read.
8. Speak to your audience, not to your boards or screen.
9. Dress, look, and act the part.
10. Don't forget to ask for the job but don't beg, brag, or mention the competition.
11. Make your closing memorable.

### 1. Be Interesting

First and foremost, a presentation has to be interesting if it is to keep the attention of the audience. You will never read this requirement in a Request for Proposals (RFP), but it is an unspoken rule of every selection. A selection committee struggling to make a choice will choose the business with the most engaging presentation.

Bells and whistles multimedia won't make your presentation interesting. Your message and your people will. The client, or government agency, wants a project manager who has a track record, knows and

understands the subject, is a strong communicator, and has some great ideas even before getting started.

- **Start early.** Preparing a presentation can be a major physical and emotional drain. Break the project down into tasks that can be done in a few minutes and can easily fit into the daily schedule. Starting early allows you to refine the presentation and solicit input from colleagues and business partners.
- **Get the support crew involved up-front.** Use the help you have on staff to develop your presentation. Their expertise can ensure creation of a better product and reduce stress on the speaking team.
- **Put time to practice on the preparation and development schedule.** Practice may not make your presentation perfect, but it can greatly improve it. When trying to inspire the team or convince an audience, you don't want to stumble your way through the presentation. A poor performance sends two negative messages: (1) the audience is not especially important to you, and (2) presentations are not very important.

## 2. Know Your Audience

**Your presentation doesn't have to be interesting to the whole world, just to that handful of people that make-up your selection committee or audience.** Every member of the audience will have a unique set of expectations for your presentation. Be sure to know the level of education and the knowledge of your audience members to help you prepare a presentation that fits their needs:

- **Customize the presentation for your audience.** The easy route is to work up the presentation and assume that it will fit any of the groups you're likely to be talking with. The trouble with this approach is that your presentation might fit well with Group A and not at all with Group B. It's worth the time and investment to customize portions of the presentation while also maintaining consistency in standardized content. Unless your audience consists of all subject matter professionals (which almost never happens), don't use jargon. And, if an audience has a "hot topic," you will want to know about it before you get to Q&A.
- **If appropriate, make your presentation personal and fun.** If this presentation is to your associates, such as an all-hands meeting, or a project team booster session, weave in some personal stories about the event, organization, project, or key players. On the other hand, if the presentation is to a selection committee, differentiate your business from the competition by highlighting the personal or client service differentiators in your business. Overall, acknowledge the seriousness of the discussion and incorporate personal and fun attributes, if appropriate.
- **Have an 'attention grabber' in your presentation.** Open the conversation with an interesting tale of success or woe—something that suits the meeting spirit and connects to the presentation theme. Be careful about opening with a joke, especially if you're inclined to forget

the punch line (as one CEO did before a significant industry audience). If your attention grabber reinforces your value proposition, remember to highlight the key differentiators throughout the presentation.

### 3. Don't Read, Remember

One of the most prevalent and damaging habits of presenters is to simply read the slides to the audience. It is more important to communicate key points than simply read every word of the written presentation. Winning presentations work best with spoken remarks that augment and discuss, rather than mimic what is written or on the screen. To create a memorable presentation:

- **Shape the presentation to convey the theme and core messages you want to communicate.** Organize your presentation into four to five segments, with clear transitions to make it easy for listeners to follow. To be convincing in your role, remain "in-character", that is, "be yourself" throughout the presentation. You don't have to memorize every word of the presentation, so select the words, phrases, and gestures you normally use when you speak.
- **Reinforce your main points with material that will hold your audience's interest.** Refer to a recent news report or other points, but be careful with your choice of examples. If a key team member met a critical challenge successfully, tell the audience the story and acknowledge that person if present in the audience.
- **Make eye contact.** Pick three positions in the audience (not individuals) and repeatedly make eye contact with your marked positions in the audience.

### 4. Train and Rehearse to Develop Your Presentation Skills

While presentation skills are acquired rather than natural, it takes training. Training to develop presentation skills has a huge payoff. As an employee, you will be developing the most marketable skills in your industry. As an owner, you will be ensuring the prosperity of your business.

In addition to learning your lines as individuals, rehearse your presentation as a group. The vast majority of businesses never rehearse as a group before a presentation, and, as a result, their presentations are not effective. The delivery of a well rehearsed team gives a selection committee a feeling of confidence and well-being. An unrehearsed delivery makes the audience nervous, impatient, bored, or disinterested. To train and rehearse:

- **Film and study the presentation.** By starting early, you will have time to study the presentation and even film a team dry run. If you want to perfect the presentation, filming the presentation for further study will provide for mental practice before the actual live presentation. The video camera is the ideal tool for effective rehearsal, and it will help you overcome presentation jitters. If you have never videotaped rehearsals before, you may be as nervous as at an actual

presentation. Many business presenters report that videotaping their rehearsals actually helps to confront and eliminate presentation jitters.

- **Put the project team (project manager, etc.) in front of the client as soon as possible.** Clients like to see the president and CEO of a business show up at a presentation to do a brief pledge of support from the home office and introduce the project manager. Any executive of the business can do this but clients prefer the "Big Boss." When it's done properly, this intro takes about 30 seconds after which the project team takes over.
- **Take only the key members of the team.** You don't need to bring small army of sub-consultants and team members to a presentation when they don't have speaking parts. This type of group can only be distracting to the presentation, and sends wrong messages. As a rule, all participating attendees should be critical members of the presentation.
- **Your team should support, enhance, and reinforce your agenda.** Every movement in the background, however slight, is a distraction from the center-stage presentation. Your team should be motionless except for an occasional gentle nod of agreement with the presenter's most important points. When not speaking, team members should sit or stand still, looking directly at the speaker.

## 5. Time Your Remarks and Stay on Time

A common mistake is to design the presentation to fit the allotted time and then cram other items into the program without making space. The only way to finish on time is to talk fast and eliminate all pauses, leaving a breathless, fruitless presentation. A better idea is to shorten the presentation and leave plenty of room for pauses. Some key points:

- **Stay on time.** Whether you are making a presentation to your business' executives, employees, sales operation, current or prospective customers or an industry group, never run out of time. A well-orchestrated presentation, timed appropriately, gives the audience a chance to digest the material, ensures key points are made in the presentation, and provides adequate and valuable time for follow up questions.
- **Come to the point (the client and the client's project) quickly.** By the time your business gets to the oral presentations phase of a selection process, all "qualifications" questions have been answered. An oral presentation that includes a restatement of qualifications and past experience, unless specifically requested by the client, is a waste of the client's time. The sooner a presenter moves the discussion from "us" to the project and the client, the more likely it is to succeed.

## 6. Don't be surprised if your equipment fails. Be prepared.

If you need to use electronic equipment in your presentations, be prepared for equipment failure. Common failures include: different software versions, restrictions on use of business systems, lamp burn-outs, and power supply failures. A checklist can help you ensure that you bring along the equipment that you need: a projector stand, extension cord, projection screen, etc. Select reliable presentation equipment that gets the job done, but be prepared to present the material completely on your own just in case.

## 7. Use simple graphics and text that your audience can easily read

A common mistake is to fill slides with text that no one will ever read. A better practice is to use simple graphics that your audience can easily read and add talking points in a presentation footer to coincide with the presentation. A general rule of thumb is one idea per slide and nine words maximum per sentence. The more complicated the subject matter, the more words may be necessary. However, a healthy mix of text and graphics to illustrate the point is highly advised. Make sure that your speaker comments coincide precisely with the appearance of the presentation slide so that you keep your audience's attention.

## 8. Speak to your audience not to your boards or screen

"Never turn your back on your audience." Clients like a "face-to-face" delivery, so project your voice toward your audience never toward your board. Rehearse your delivery: keep your shoulders squared to the client and when you want to point to something on the board, use your "near hand" with the palm facing the audience. You can, of course, occasionally turn your head to look at the board or glance at the material but turn your shoulders only slightly.

## 9. Dress, look, and act the part

When presenting, know the culture of your audience and try to dress and behave like they do. This type of presentation is not the place for avant-garde dress or unusual personal behavior. You don't want to be remembered for what you wore (or didn't wear) but for what you said.

During presentations, involuntary increases in pulse and heart rate can cause shaky knees, quivering voices, and other undesired responses. We feel out of control and helpless. In exasperation we do what humans often do in this situation; we utter the universal words, "I'm Nervous." However, don't call attention to it in your presentation. It doesn't change the situation and it doesn't make the audience take it any easier on you or pay less attention for that matter. Remember, we are all nervous in these situations.

## 10. Don't forget to ask for the job, but don't beg, brag, or mention the competition

You don't need to inflate your position or brag because the presentation will speak for itself. Be sure to let others do your testimonials; let a prestigious award or praise from a happy client do the bragging. Remember you are at the presentation because you were invited or are supposed to be there. Reminding the audience of the obvious facts to inflate your position or brag will not be an advantage.

Remember that begging is not the language of winners. Most businesses actually remember to ask for the job but many go too far and slip into begging. It is one thing to say that you have the personnel immediately available for assignment, quite another to say that there will be layoffs if you don't get the job. Both phrases may be true, but the client will see the former as opportunity and the latter as sign of trouble.

Don't beg, don't brag, and don't mention the competition. Even if asked a direct question by an audience, try to steer around talking about others. Your criticism of another business will hurt you and your praise may just help them win. Instead, make sure to differentiate your business from the competition by highlighting the personal or client service differentiators in your organization.

## 11. Make your closing memorable

Close your presentation with a summary that will stick in the minds of the audience. Remind them why you are here, and the key points you have made. After you are done speaking, prepare for audience questions and comments. Most audiences, such as selection committees and members of the press, will probe for additional information. If you are addressing your team, you may have to encourage them to ask questions. If they hold back, be prepared to start a discussion with some questions of your own.

## Key Takeaways from This Module

- A presentation can be one of your best tools for conveying important messages and inspiring your workforce to move forward to achieve your vision.
- Planning is probably the most important (and overlooked) step in creating a successful presentation of any kind. Planning helps you decide on the content and the order in which the information will be presented.
- Prepare, rehearse, and get coaching on your presentation.
- Determine the purpose of the presentation, assess your audience, and gather appropriate information.
- Know everything about the topic so you are ready for questions after the presentation.
- Sketch out the slides on paper and make sure the slides emphasize the main points to be made in the presentation.

- Follow the 11 points in this document to help you create a memorable and successful presentation.

## Sources and Citations

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