

Melissa's Top 8 Tips to Be a Better Speaker

By Melissa Joy Dobbins, MS, RDN, CDE

As a seasoned communications and media expert, I have learned that being an effective communicator is much more than simply being comfortable in front of an audience and sharing good content. It's not just about *educating* your audience, but also engaging and empowering them!

Here are my top tips for delivering an effective and engaging presentation:

1. Prepare with your audience in mind

Don't assume that attendees have the same amount of education and experience; it could be a mixed group with varying backgrounds and knowledge. Find out as much as you can about your audience before you begin to prepare so that you can tailor your presentation with them in mind.

2. Take your ocean of knowledge and boil it down to a glass of water

Don't try to cover too much material or too many slides. One of the worst things you can do is run out of time before you've covered everything or fail to leave enough time for Q&A. Try to focus on the most important points and include resources for more information.

3. Create simple and compelling slides

Be careful not to use too many words or tiny font. When possible, use images instead of text-heavy slides. Make sure you aren't using copyrighted images and be careful with "royalty free" images – there may be a catch. Your safest bet is to use your own photos or purchase stock images online.

4. Share stories and real-life examples

People love stories and examples. When you tell a story, it triggers the part of the brain that processes experiences. Make a point to include some stories and examples in your talk to engage your audience. It helps them apply what you are teaching.

5. Plan a strong opening, an interactive middle and an inspiring closing call-to-action

You have about 30 seconds to make your first impression. People will remember the first thing and last thing you say. Start with a story or compelling statistic, use an activity or worksheet to engage your audience, and close with an inspiring message or specific call to action. If you "begin with the end in mind" you can tie your closing into your opening statement and bring it full circle.

6. Practice!

Consider your body language: are you standing or pacing, do you use your hands and arms, are you making eye contact, what's your tone? Video record yourself then review and evaluate your areas for improvement. It's easy to spend most of your time on the content and slide development, but the best thing you can do to improve your delivery is practice out loud in front of a mirror or friends.

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7. Presentation day

Allow enough time before your presentation to make sure your slides are ready to go and you aren't feeling rushed. Wear clothes that you can easily clip a microphone to like a jacket or sweater. If you need to, use the back of a dress at the neck or a belt. Avoid bulky/noisy jewelry which can interfere with the mic and audio. Speak loudly and clearly.

8. Promotion

Want to create a "buzz" and have a "full house" in the audience? Use social media to promote your presentation before, during and after. Find out if there is a conference or a session hashtag you can use. Ask attendees to post takeaways during the session and tag you.

Most people want to be a better, more comfortable, more effective speaker. Just remember, the presentation is not about YOU – it's about your audience, and the information and inspiration you are sharing with them.

"People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

– Maya Angelou

You can find more communications tips and tricks at www.SoundBitesRD.com