

Five essential tips for delivering a technical talk

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What tools are indispensable in a presentation "tool box"? How can you create clear, decodable verbal equations? How can you present a confident, competent, and professional image?

Perception equals reality

The audience forms a first impression within 10 seconds, and that impression colors whether members of the audience believe that the speaker and the message are credible, and whether the speaker is a good representative of the company.

When giving a presentation, we tend to focus on data. Naturally. We forget about establishing rapport and creating positive perceptions. We think content drives the presentation. It doesn't. Content may be the vehicle that gets us from point A to point B, but the engine is how we deliver the words — the verbal and non-verbal equations that promote positive impressions. When preparing your next technical talk, keep in mind several important things about your delivery:

- **Make sure your vocal and physical energy are congruent.** Your voice should reach the last row of the audience. The audience perceives a quiet voice as being unsure and uncommitted. Don't rely on the microphone to boost your volume. Physically, you need to match your vocal energy level with dynamic gestures, facial movement, head and neck movement, eye contact, and purposeful walking. That means you should only walk around when there is a reason to do so.
- **Pace yourself.** Don't adopt a rapid-fire delivery, even though you may be trying to present 50 slides when 35 would be more feasible. Every three or four words, pause for a quarter second by breaking down your sentences into **Rhythmic Pausing** units — shorter phrases within sentences that foster the impression of control and allow you to breathe and think.
- **Find an operative word or Word Anchor to emphasize every 3 words.** The audience will perceive that you are "talking to" them, not "at them." When everything is "mono-weight," nothing stands out, and the audience drifts off. Then, no matter how compelling your message is, the audience won't get it. Instead, don't just tell us, show us your conviction.

- **Maintain eye contact**, "spotting" individuals for about the length of a sentence. Spotting means looking at individual people for approximately three to five seconds, instead of panning the audience or gazing over their heads. You look self-assured, and the audience feels included when you remember to actually look at them.
- **Build a visual database of gestures** by indicating words and phrases in a context-specific manner. Prior to that, quiet the body down. Stop fidgeting and pacing. Speakers who pace or do the "presentation two-step" should remain at the podium with their hands lightly placed on the podium so that this distracting movement is masked and unobtrusive. Movements like wringing the hands diminish your professional image and displace energy non-productively that could be channeled dynamically. Now that you're ready to proceed with gesturing, begin by isolating nouns and verbs, placing your nouns spatially around you (as if you were holding an object in your hands) and linking them to verbs. Does the verb "to examine" look like the verb "to access"? Make them look different by gesturing with your hands to create a visual representation of the word. Little by little you build a gesture database of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and phrases that you can return to again and again in talk after talk.

Spice up your next talk with a little humor, a personal example, or an analogy. And remember, always relate to your audience by personalizing your message so you give them ownership of your content. By the way, during demos, let go of the mouse between clicks so that the audience doesn't see a cursor "noodling" around on the screen — unless you are planning on passing out Dramamine to the entire audience!