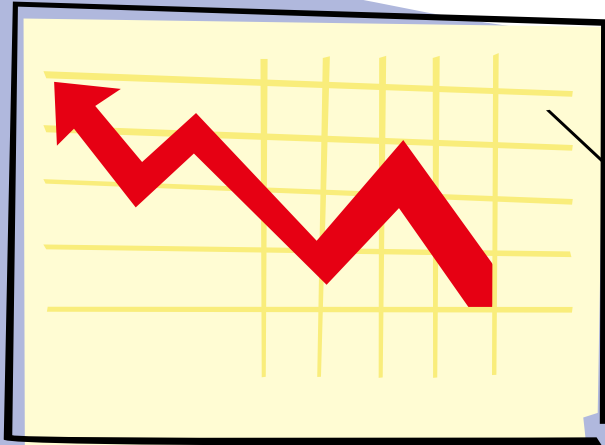


The best presentation is conversational in tone

By Weelan Ho



What is a presentation?

A presentation is not an essay; it is a communication between the presenter and audience with the intent of either conveying information or persuading the audience to take the desired course of action.

Four essential factors for effective presentation:

- Identify the central issue
- Understand and relate to your audience
- Structure your presentation
- Deliver the presentation, i.e. delivery performance

Identify the central Issue

There must be a purpose to a presentation and it must press the audience's "hot buttons". In other words, you need to understand why have you been asked to do a presentation, what the key issues involved are, and which critical issue resonates among your audience. These considerations are crucial when shaping the content of your presentation.

Understand and relate to your audience

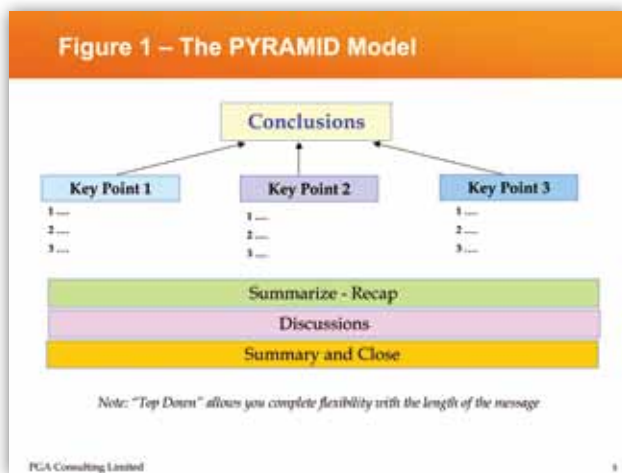
An effective presentation reaches out to the heart, mind and soul of the audience. Understanding the audience's preferences, level of understanding, knowledge and style will help you pitch your presentation at the appropriate level with style fitting the particular audience group. For example, a person who prefers a "helicopter" view of things tends not to like details; so (s)he is not likely to be interested in presentation slides with lots of numbers and details.

Structure your presentation

Begin with a conclusion. You read a book from the beginning and progress to the end; but when giving a presentation, you should begin with a conclusion and then elaborate with the details. The conclusion is the core message you want to leave with your audience, and this message must be able to address the central issue of the presentation effectively.

Most people have a limited capacity to remember, so try not to overload the audience with too much information. Three to four key points to support the conclusion should be sufficient. To help the audience recall, recap and retain the points highlighted in the presentation, a summary or a call to action (if the purpose is to persuade the audience) may serve as a good ending. The presentation can subsequently be opened for discussion, and an appropriate renewed summary and call for action can be reiterated.

Remember: *Less is more – only keep what is essential and important. Anything that is peripheral and superfluous should be deleted.*



This presentation approach is modelled on the pyramid and is therefore known as the Pyramid Model (figure 1). The advantage of starting a presentation with the conclusion is that it allows flexibility so that we can vary or modify the presentation material should the time available be cut short. The central question is answered despite the time constraint and the presentation remains coherent and meaningful to the audience.

Deliver the presentation (delivery performance)

People make the difference. People bring the presentation alive. A few guiding principles can make an effective presentation interesting:

1. The best presentation is conversational in tone.
2. Silence, or a pause, provides emphasis.
3. Clear and succinct sentences are easier to comprehend and remember.
4. Begin with a conclusion – the core message. If you cannot bring out the core message with one or two sentences, rethink your core message – it may be too complicated.
5. Appeal to the audience’s emotion and sum up with a powerful ending.
6. Create your space and develop your own style, be yourself.
7. Speak clearly with the appropriate volume compatible to the size of the room; do not murmur.
8. Have eye contact with your audience.
9. Use body language or gestures to emphasize the message. If used appropriately, they can bring the presentation to life.
10. You are your best visual aids.
11. Less is more – don’t over complicate the presentation.
12. Don’t bring up any points you had forgotten to mention after the summary. If you have forgotten them, they cannot be that important.

Overcome nervousness

Your audience is not your adversary. To overcome nervousness, you need to understand the underlying reasons for your concerns about the presentation. Then take a proactive approach and prepare well. Anticipate the kinds of questions your audience may ask and be prepared for them. Last but not least: rehearse, rehearse and rehearse!

T/D

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