

Advisor

The Newsletter of Effective Communication

Looking Forward, Working Backward

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Presentations ▶

The Performance Factor

– It's more
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Concern + Compassion + Control . . .

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Experience

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Looking Forward, Working Backward

A Great Way To "Beef" Up Presentations



Some presentations are make-or-break opportunities. Not only will your business be impacted, but you personally may be when review and promotion time comes. Your job description may not say the word sales, but we are all in sales. We sell our ideas to those we work with and for.

Think of giving a great presentation as serving a great meal at a fine restaurant – most of the work would take place beforehand and out of sight. Who has time for all that preparation? Here's an efficient way to get the meal, or deal, on the table.

Step 1 – Start at the end. What do you want people to think or say afterward? Do you need their help, their vote or something else? Focus on your specific objectives. To reach your goals, what do you need listeners to know? What do they expect to hear?

Step 2 – What are my points? Limit yourself to three to five key points, then decide how to make them: data, illustrations, mini-case studies, etc. Determine a specific strategy for each point. As in the restaurant analogy, choose the order and presentation of each dish, and offer it with a flourish.

Step 3 – Review your visuals. PowerPoint has become the default. Question that. In many instances, slides sabotage a presentation. The audience feels they could have read it on their own and they mentally disengage. Make sure your visuals contribute to understanding. If you aren't sure, get feedback from someone you trust.

Quick Bites

Is it Sunset for "At the End of the Day?"

The UK based Campaign for Plain English has just declared, "At the end of the day," the most irritating phrase in the language. A spokesman for the group, which claims 5000 members in 70 countries, says that the use of overworked clichés in daily business is "about as professional as wearing a novelty tie or having a wacky ringtone on your phone." For a list of the other nominees [click here](#).

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Step 4 – Decide how you will capture audience attention. People usually decide in the first few moments whether to actually listen. They ask themselves – is this interesting? Useful? Your goal should be to engage the audience immediately with good energy and a strong beginning. As in a restaurant, consider how the right atmosphere adds to customer satisfaction.

Step 5 – Plan for customer service. Your listeners are your customers. An engaged audience will have questions, but don't surrender control during Q&A. Anticipate the questions and plan your answers. Be clear and succinct, but remember to reinforce your key points. If you promise further information, give it promptly, before the entrée has a chance to get cold.

By following these five easy steps, you may find that your effectiveness is greatly enhanced. When asked for your secret to success, you'll be able to honestly say, "Piece of cake."

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The Toughest Presentation Environment

Concern + Compassion + Control . . .

"I came here today because my child is dead."

How would you respond to that?

When a company seeks a new license, a zoning variance, a rate change or a building permit, the public wants to know. From environmental risk assessment to school boundary issues, people want to participate. In an increasingly transparent democracy, the number of public meetings is increasing as well. While public or Town Hall meetings are not a new concept, there has been a dramatic change in how these meetings proceed.

The public is far more informed. The Internet allows everyone to locate and cull vast quantities of data quickly. This means that the public is armed with substantial information. They are not waiting to be educated by you, and they will not be placated with generalizations. They are prepared to do battle on your turf.

The public is far more misinformed. There has been a parallel rise in access to bad data, vague rumors, undocumented claims and just plain hogwash. You must be abreast of the bad info as well so that you can prepare your defense.

Quick Bites

Intellectual Property– It's Not Always Intellectual

From the slightly silly Fashion Papoose to the inexplicable Toilet Snorkel, here is the scoop on crazy patents. The site claims that all the items illustrated here hold real US patents. Hard to figure why the Subliminal Glasses and the Greenhouse Helmet haven't made it to market! And there is an unusually large amount of nutty inventions for golfers, like the Putt and Reel, for when you want to snag a couple of guppies from the water hazard. [Check them out.](#)

Real World Questions, Real World Answers

"I work for a contractor trying to get an expansion of an airport approved, but every time we do a community meeting to explain the project, one of the engineers on our team becomes belligerent when he feels attacked by the local residents. How can I help him refine his skills to handle this high-pressure environment?"

When an engineer or other technical expert must communicate to the public, or to consumers, they typically use technical jargon and communication patterns people fail to understand. The result is the audience struggles to comprehend what's being

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The public is easily organized. As the flashmob phenomenon shows hundreds of people can be gathered on an hour's notice using text messages. With email and instant messenger on cell phones and WiFi growing daily, anyone with an inkling to join the fray has easy opportunity to do so.

The public is media savvy. Nearly everyone under age 50 was raised on TV. How the news media works is common knowledge. Smart sound bites and appealing visuals with costumes, props and camera-ready stunts, are used well by modern dissenters.

Road rage? Try life rage. The research on whether people are angrier is inconclusive, but it's clear that public displays of anger have risen sharply. It is obvious to all that there has been a radical change in what's considered normal public behavior.

Too many organizations see public meetings as obligations to which they drag their feet. Others say they hope to educate the public but, in truth, they simply want to prove that they are right and anyone who questions them is wrong.

"A public meeting handled poorly can mean huge losses in time and money," says Ammerman VP Jeff Braun. "We help our clients understand that public meetings are really opportunities for organizations to show a willingness to listen openly and find a common ground. These meetings can be viewed as opportunities to begin negotiation, to see if steps can be taken to proceed with a plan without lengthy litigation. That's why public meetings training is starting to be taught in law schools."

If law school isn't in your plans, call [The Ammerman Experience](#) to learn more about our programs on public anger and how your company or organization can actually reap tangible benefits from public meetings. [Click here for more information.](#)

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The Performance Factor

It's more than just good body language

It's safe to assume that people who appear often on TV news and talk shows have been coached on their presentation skills. You might be surprised to learn that increasing numbers of executives who aren't planning on TV stardom are coached as well. At The Ammerman Experience, we work with clients who value such one-on-one coaching

said and then tunes out, or becomes emotional. This is especially true if the issue is related to real estate development, environmental concerns or regulatory issues. This "disconnect" with the audience can sabotage an entire community relations effort. It's important to understand technical people operate in areas traditionally isolated from the public or consumer contact. Typically, they are very good at talking with other technical people and assume those skills translate to the general public as well. No one has taken the time to prepare them for the public arena, or the pitfalls that challenge even the best of communicators.

Ammerman specializes in this type of presentation guidance. Role-playing, including emotional, out-of-control situations should be a part of this training to help prepare your team for what could occur. This serves to sensitize everyone to how challenging this type of presentation can be, and provides a vital opportunity for strategic discussion in advance of a problem. Otherwise, you are taking a huge risk by not knowing how the individuals on your team will respond to pressures that are prevalent at public forums. The worst case is that your engineer gets involved in a highly emotional exchange with an audience member that's captured by the media and used to define the image of your organization.

If you have a particular communications challenge and need expert advice, [email us](#) and we will

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and, we partner with companies that provide professional development programs. We are also called to prepare people for specific, sometimes urgent, situations. Examples include:

Top Brass Needs Polish

A consumer products company invests huge money on its annual sales rep meeting. Participant's feedback indicates the worst part of the event was the executive presentations. Ouch! Before the next meeting, we coach those execs during a dress rehearsal and show them how to better integrate multimedia. Rave reviews follow.

Assume the Position

A utility company exec wins the big promotion, but needs coaching and guidance on how to position himself as the new leader of the company. We equip him with specifics to help him move up with aplomb.

Keep the Dough in the Flow

A major medical institution with a multi-million dollar research grant must provide status reports to the grant provider. The main researcher – more comfortable with a microscope than a microphone – acts as primary spokesperson for the project. We coach the M.D. to top presentation performance levels.

Winning Was Only The Beginning

A high-profile political candidate's wife needs guidance and presentation skills coaching for the campaign. We provide solid feedback and direction on a continual basis to help her maximize her opportunity to define the candidate and the campaign. The candidate wins and our consultation continues.

Not Another Dog and Pony Show

A biotech firm raising capital needs to know how to maximize meetings with analysts and potential investors. We devise a plan to make their briefing stand out in the crowd. The result? They successfully emphasize their breakaway technology and build credibility with the analyst community.

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2004

Ammerman Individual Enrollment Training Dates

Effective Media Communications

June 15
August 17
September 14
November 9
December 7

Effective Presentations

June 16
September 15

Advanced Communicators

November 11 - 12

EMC Refresher

September 16

The above schedule lists Ammerman individual, public workshops. For available dates for private (buy-out) training dates, please contact The Ammerman Experience at 1.800.866.2026.

The Ammerman Experience public workshops are scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis, and are available to a limited number of attendees to ensure maximum personalized attention. To register for a course, contact our office at 1.800.866.2026.

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Our firm is a pioneer in understanding the link between effective communication and professional success. What we've learned and what we teach can improve your performance . . . and that of others in your organization.

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