

The Five Biggest Mistakes People Make in Giving Presentations – and how to avoid them

1. **Lack of Clear Purpose**

I've seen lots of presentations that contained interesting, maybe even useful, information but still left me thinking, 'So what?' And I'm sure you have, too. This is what happens when the presenter lacks a clear purpose. The presentation rambles around, covers various topics but never really seems to come to a point.

To avoid this, take time before you start to prepare your presentation and clearly identify its purpose. Then, when you prepare your presentation, only include material that is relevant to that purpose.

2. **Preparing the Slides, but Nothing Else**

How often have you had to sit through a PowerPoint presentation that, frankly didn't need a presenter? You know the sort of thing I mean, each slide is densely packed with bullet points that the 'presenter' then reads out. I usually just read the slide and then wait for the 'presenter' to catch up!

To avoid this one, prepare the presentation first, then the slides. Too many people seem to think that their slides ARE the presentation. No, the presentation is what YOU say and do. The slides are secondary.

3. **Starting With an Apology**

Some people think that if they begin with an apology, "unaccustomed as I am..." or something similar, then their audience will expect less of them and be more forgiving if they're not very good. Wrong! Your audience expect – and I think they have a right to expect – you to be good. To be worth listening to. To deliver value.

Never, ever begin with an apology. Your audience are hoping that you'll be good. Act as if you will be good, even if you're not as confident as you'd like to be. Telling them you're nervous or inexperienced or just off a red-eye flight will only get them looking for

the faults in your presentation. Give them something else to think about.

4. **Trying to be Funny**

Some people have a gift for humour, others don't. We've all suffered at the hands of a presenter who peppers their presentation with weak jokes or tries to make witty comments and fails miserably.

So be honest with yourself, do you have the gift of humour or not? If you're in the latter category (like me) then accept it and don't try to be funny. It's a myth that people will like your presentation more if you tell jokes. Actually you're just wasting time. Have a clear purpose and fulfil that purpose and your audience will listen and will respect you.

5. **Not Knowing When or How to Stop**

This, for me, is the greatest giveaway of an inexperienced presenter. They might do a great job of presenting what they prepared, then when they get to the end they either repeat themselves endlessly or just tail away rather lamely. Some do both. If they're fortunate there will be a slick and experienced Chairman who can intervene. If not, we're all in trouble.

The answer? Prepare the ending as thoroughly as you prepare your opening. Decide on the final thought you want to leave your audience with and work out how to deliver it for maximum impact. When you've delivered it, STOP. What could be easier?

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