

Presenting Your Presentation the Right Way: Successfully

A goldfish can stare at something for nine seconds before getting bored. For a human, it takes eight seconds.

With this in mind, how can you capture your audience's attention and keep it when giving a presentation, either to a customer, your company or just to the rest of your credit department? Susan Fee, a presentation coach and counselor who offered a seminar on developing presentation skills at NACM's Graduate School of Credit and Financial Management in June, has the answers. According to Fee, the bottom line is, what do you want people to feel? And what do you want people to know?

In her seminar, Fee emphasized body language, which has more impact than tone of voice, while tone of voice has more impact than even the words we say. Stand with your shoulders above your hip bones and keep your hands above your waist. Stand still and move forward when making a point. Don't shy away and pull back when speaking. Any movement that pulls away from the audience shows lack of confidence.

It's important to open with confidence, and with a bang. "People remember how you start and finish," Fee says in her booklet *81 Tips to Prepare and Deliver Every Speech with Confidence!* "A strong introduction should grab attention and set expectations. Open with an anecdote, rhetorical question, shocking fact or thought-provoking image."

Don't rely too much on a PowerPoint presentation. "Resist reading," Fee says. "Be careful about turning your back to the audience and reading your presentation from the screen. If you have to read it, you put too much content into the slide show, and not enough into your delivery." The PowerPoint should be a back up to illustrate a point rather than something from which to read.

Nor should you rely too much on your memory. "Forget memorizing everything," she says. "Trying to memorize your entire speech creates too much pressure. Forgetting one word can trip up your entire delivery. Memorize your opening and closing and use note cards or a one-page outline for the rest."

One of Fee's Five Cs of Stickiness for creating memorable presentations is Core: a succinct message of seven or fewer words. "Prevent rambling by sticking to one clear point. Keep your answer brief by stating your point, supporting it and repeating it to close."

"Compelling" is another of the Five Cs. Tell a story to engage your audience. Every story contains a dilemma, emotion, characters, a problem to overcome and a universal lesson. "Keep it personal," Fee says. "Support your point with a personal experience, observation or example. You lessen the chance of going blank by relying on information you know well."

Close strongly. Know what your final line is and don't end with questions and answers. Answer questions before you deliver your prepared closing.

"Use silence," is another of Fee's tips. "Replace filler words like 'um' and 'you know' with pauses. They are verbal commas that give listeners a chance to digest your message. Silence can be very commanding."

Even with just some of these recommendations, you'll be prepared to handle a presentation with confidence and effectiveness.

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