

# Preparing for the Big Presentation

www.shaughnessyhowell.com

Trainers are sometimes asked to do a dry-run presentation before being granted a big project, or they are asked to present some training as part of a large event. These presentations are a chance for you to gain some high exposure while reaching many decision makers at once. Allocating strategic time to preparing for such a presentation can pay off many times over. The following strategies are offered to help you effectively prepare for your presentation.

*"These presentations are a chance for you to gain some high exposure while reaching many decision makers at once."*

## Plan it out.

If you're not sure where to start with your presentation, ask yourself:

- What is the central theme, objective or subject of your topic? Can you sum it up in a sentence or two? You must be clear with yourself so you can be clear with your audience.
- Why is your topic important enough to be on your audience's busy agenda? Be prepared to answer that question early on in the presentation. Describe 'what's in it' for them, and why they should listen to you.

## Know your audience.

Know what's happening in the host company and in their competitors'. Ensure you've taken time to find out who your audience is and that you clearly understand the company's goals and objectives so that you

may tie them into your proposal. Before saying a word about the issue you'll be presenting, find out:

- The group's personal preferences regarding presentations (listen now, questions later; or rapid fire questioning from the start)
- The group members' opinions regarding the issue
- The group's history with the issue
- Topics or hot points to avoid
- Other presentations that were made about the issue
- The group's reaction to those presentations
- If there's a strong champion against your proposal
- The opposing champion's arguments

The challenge will be to address their issues with new information that is different from past presentations. You will have to be clear about why the last plans for this issue failed, and how your recommendations can work. You will have to try and change entrenched minds, without becoming defensive.

## Practice, Practice, Practice.

Find a peer that you trust to be honest and forthcoming with you, and ask them to provide feedback as you practice your presentation. As uncomfortable as practicing in front of a peer may be, you don't want to hit the wall in your presentation by saying or doing something inapt. Ask your colleague to interrupt you frequently, to simulate what you may encounter in your presentation. This allows you to practice how you will deal with interruptions in a way that doesn't disorient you.

## Familiarize, don't memorize.

Don't try to memorize the whole presentation. You may memorize your introduction, key points and conclusion, but make sure you practice enough so that you know what you want to say, without sounding robotic. This helps you keep the presentation natural and



spontaneous. It's important that you cover the important points, without going into too much detail.

### **Prepare for questions.**

Anticipate questions as if your career depended on it. Some audiences are more interested in the answers to their questions than to the presentation itself. Think of possible questions you may be asked, and organize them into three categories:

- Good questions: lead you to give positive answers that are part of your main message
- Neutral questions: neither help nor hurt your presentation
- Bad questions: raise controversy or uncover negative issues

Practice answering good questions to reinforce your main message. Practice answering neutral questions in a short, concise way. And practice answering bad questions honestly, but keep your answers short so as not to appear defensive or argumentative.

### **Remember:**

Inside scoop plus preparation is an unbeatable combination. By doing your research, you will be in a better position to speak to your audience, and the practice you get will help you refine the presentation and keep it focused. Good luck!

