

Presentation Tips to Help You Give a Successful Talk: It's all about the Audience, the Message and You.

Giving a presentation is like having a conversation with your neighbor about your farming practices. You are the expert about your farm and have a story to tell about what you do. Having a passion for what you do and speaking from the heart will emotionally connect you to your audience.

When first gathering your thoughts about presenting at a meeting, workshop or conference session, consider Practical Farmers' Values: welcoming everyone; creativity, collaboration and community; viable farms now and for future generations; stewardship and ecology. Consider why they are important to you and you're off to a great start in beginning the conversation you will have with your audience.

1. It's All About The Audience – Connecting With Your Material & Being Intentional Through Preparation

- a. **Who is your audience and what is the purpose/topic of your presentation?** *It's all about the Audience. At a workshop or conference session, they are a voluntary audience—they came because they wanted to learn something from you. Because PFI welcomes everyone, your audience could comprise a wide background. Be careful when using jargon or slang that may not be recognized by all audience members. Ultimately, what's in it for the audience? Keep them in the know!*
- b. **What is the intended outcome?** *What do you want the audience to do with the info you share? Remember, you are serving as an example, not a model. Genuinely sharing your experience (what went well, what didn't) will help your audience form their own conclusions about how your example might apply to them. Example from a previous speaker, Russ Brandes: "This is what I do on my farm. It's not the right way, just my way. Other farms have different soils and different circumstances."*
- c. **What's your timeframe?** *How long do you have to present and get your point(s) across? This will guide the amount of info you share. If time is short, you may need to determine and present essential info only. Respect your audience's time—stay on schedule, end on time. Confirm with your host or whoever invited you to speak as to how long you will have to present.*
- d. **Presentation slides as a visual aid (i.e., PowerPoint).** *That's exactly what presentation slides are: an aid. They should not act as your presentation script for all to see. Use more pictures and fewer words; one to five words per slide is ideal. These slides can list dates of field operations, seeding/stocking rates, on-farm research trial results, photos from other times during the year, etc. But remember, the handout/visual aid is secondary to you. Link the visual aid to your talk but avoid reading everything on it. Refer to the slides and photos during your talk; use a laser pointer or your hand. If you get a draft of the slide show to PFI staff early enough, we can provide feedback. Begin working on this 2-3 weeks prior to the event. **Bring at least TWO copies of your slides with you: consider bringing the slides on two flash drives or email the presentation to yourself.***

2. It's All About The Message – Developing Your Story & Knowing Your Material Through Practice

- a. **What's my objective?** *Repeat this to yourself; know this! It's all about the Message.*
- b. **Develop structure.** *Always know your first and last lines of your presentation and know your structure in between. Craft a story—think about the fundamental elements of a story: conflict and resolution. Or, perhaps more appropriately, challenges/problems and solutions.*
 - i. Introduction (10-15% of talk) – Strategize and organize: HAVE a hook!
 1. **H**ook: Grab the audience's attention. The hook must link to your topic and tone.
 2. **A**pply Authority: Show your credibility, why you are qualified to speak. (Tip: you are!)
 3. **V**erify Rationale and Purpose: What's your talk about? What's in it for the audience?
 4. **E**stablish Main Points: Clearly list your 2-5 main points. Keep the audience in the know! (Tip: Avoid starting with "Hi, my name is," or "Today I am going to talk about..." Instead use a visual image, anecdote, quote or rhetorical question to hook them.)

- ii. Body (75% of talk) – Identify and discuss 2-5 simple and discrete main points. These main points can be the challenges/problems you faced and the practices you used to attempt solutions.
 - 1. Main Point 1
 - a. Sub-point 1
 - b. Sub-point 2
 - 2. Main Point 2
 - a. Sub-point 1
 - b. Sub-point 2
 - 3. Etc.
- iii. Conclusion – (5-10% of talk) Signal it's the end of your talk, end with a strong idea. RAP it up!
 - 1. **R**estate Your Main Points: Remind us your main points.
 - 2. **A**cknowledge Rationale and Purpose: Remind your audience the importance of the topic. Why are they there?
 - 3. **P**owerful Pow!: End as powerfully as you began. Many fail to end presentations; they trail off or end abruptly. Instead, end meaningfully and intentionally. Your last lines can influence people to think or do something differently. (Tip: Be creative here and end with a poignant thought that will resonate with your audience. No one in your audience will walk away saying, "My, I'll never forget how the speaker said, 'Thank you,' at the end." Do better than "Thank you"!)
- c. **Word choice is important.** Use terms like "we," "us" and "you" throughout your presentation to tell your story and connect with the audience.
- d. **Use repetition in your speech.** Repeat key phrases, words or concepts throughout to highlight your main message. This adds a memorable cadence and rhythm to your talk.
- e. **Use signposts and transition phrases.** Be the road map or GPS unit for your audience as you guide them through your message. Use phrases like "most importantly," "keep this in mind," "the key takeaway is..." etc. to underscore topics and to move on to other points.
- f. **Practice saying the words out loud.** *Focus on knowing by heart the hook, your main points and your powerful ending.* Focus on your meaning and what you are saying—this will set you up for a smooth and confident delivery so that the message becomes a story you are telling; a conversation you are having with the audience.

3. It's All About You – Increasing Your Authenticity By Being Present

- a. **Trust yourself and the reason you are speaking.** *It's all about You. Be yourself. Know what the audience is expecting to hear from you and that you are qualified to speak. Consider what PFI co-founder Dick Thompson once wrote: "Talk about FACTS, let somebody else do the editorials. These are the results from my farm; leave it to the audience to decide what fits their farm."*
- b. **You are in charge of the tone and your emotions.** *Your attitude (positive or negative) has an influence on your audience. Likewise, your body language is also very telling—don't be afraid to "own the room." Have a "forward" presence by making eye contact with the audience and standing and speaking with confidence.*
- c. **Set your intentions.** *Think confidently, have fun, be present and clear your mind of any negative talk. It's all a mindset. We are what we think. Engaging speakers are interesting; on-topic; invested; trustworthy; humble; relatable.*

Remember, think about your presentation as a conversation with a neighbor. Be engaging and audience-centered. It's all about the Audience—put yourself in their shoes (we've all been part of an audience) and think of what your audience needs and wants. It's all about the Message—know your objective(s) for the talk and share your information in a trustworthy manner as a story. It's all about You—you are in charge of your feelings and setting the tone for the presentation. Relax, envision success and then deliver!

The information provided above is summarized from the booklet, "Emotionally Connected, Intellectually Charged: How Your Speaker Style Gets You There," prepared for Practical Farmers of Iowa by lifetime member Tina Bakehouse. To request a full copy of this 20-page booklet, contact the PFI office.