

Getting to Know You – Getting To Know All About You!

Preparation, preparation, preparation – that is the key to a successful presentation. Preparation begins with knowing your audience. You may have wonderful ideas, bang-up activities, and an incredible delivery style, all of which mean nothing if you don't know your audience.

To get started, think about your upcoming presentation. Use the following questions as a guide. Make a list of the answers to each of the questions. Keep this list in front of you as begin to build your presentation.

- Who is the audience?
- Why will they attend your presentation?
- What do they expect from the presentation and from you?
- What experience or knowledge do they already have about the content of the presentation?
- What will their attitude be? Enthusiastic, bored, hostile?
- Have they seen you in action? If they have, how do you think they feel about you? About how you present?
- Will they be willing to be active participants?
- What do they really want to know about the material that you will be presenting?

Now take a quick look at each of the questions listed above and how you may have answered each.

Who Is the Audience?

If you provide professional development in a school district, community college, or in the workplace, your audience may very well consist of your peers, people you work with on a daily basis. If you provide training on a regular basis at home and "away" – you may not know anyone in the audience. However, to be successful you better know the type of people who will make up the audience.

If you have been asked to present outside of your home area, take time to talk with the person who has hired/invited you to do the presentation. Ask him/her about the people who will be in the audience. If it is for an educational group, ask whether the group will consist of teachers, administrators, or support staff. If you are presenting to a group in another field, such as business or industry, ask the training facilitator about the makeup of the group. The last thing you want to do is go in with a presentation prepared for the administrators and find out that you are training clerical and support staff. Each group has its own needs and your presentation must recognize what those needs are and how the participants will take the information and use it.

Why Will They Attend Your Presentation?

You may have a sparking personality and a wonderful sense of humor – but that is not the only reason people will attend a presentation that you give. Most people attending professional development activities or other types of presentations come for specific reasons, such as a:

- Personal interest in the subject matter
- Personal referral about the presentation or you, the presenter, by someone they know and respect
- Requirement of the job/position that they attend a specific number of workshops each year for personal or professional growth
- Chance to get away from the office for a few hours or a day
- Change of scenery or the chance to try something new

Each of the reasons listed above is generally positive and shows a desire for professional growth. However, some people will attend because they have been ordered to attend – no questions asked. If you know ahead of time that a group of people is there under what could be considered hostile circumstances, then you can plan accordingly and work to take the “sting” out of their attendance and hopefully get them positively engaged in the learning activities.

What Do They Expect from the Presentation and from You?

Most people have very specific information they want to take away from a presentation. To ensure that you are able to meet a participant’s objectives, you must have a clear understanding of what is expected from the presentation and from you, the presenter.

To do this, it is extremely important that you spend the time and energy talking with the training facilitator to make sure that what he/she wants you to do and what he/she expects people to know after the presentation lines up with the presentation that you are going to give. If expectations and your presentation don’t match, there will be a lot of unhappy people at the party. If your presentation is clearly aligned with the expectations of the facilitator and the participants, then everyone can leave happy.

What Experience or Knowledge Do They Already Have About the Content of the Presentation?

Have you ever been totally turned off by a presenter because he/she talked to you as if you didn’t know anything? It happens. The presenter as the “knowledge expert” may talk down to you and the rest of the audience. Rarely does a presenter do this because he/she feels “superior,” but rather because no time was taken in finding out the experience and knowledge level of the participants.

It is important that you talk with the training facilitator about the experience and knowledge level of the audience. A good facilitator will know the group and be able to give you solid information that you can then use to build an appropriate presentation. Think about it, you don't want a presentation that is so elementary that it insults the audience, nor do you want one that is so far over their heads that their eyes glaze over after the first fifteen minutes.

What will Their Attitude Be?

Every audience has its own distinct attitude. Some audiences are thrilled to be there and ready to learn anything they can. Some audiences take a wait and see attitude. They are going to check you out and see what you have to offer them. Some audiences are just waiting for the right time to pounce. They don't want to be there, but they had no choice in the matter. They expect the worst and will probably let you know it up front.

By talking to the facilitator, you can find out if there are any problems that you may encounter. If everyone has been "told" to be at the session, there is a good chance that you will encounter some hostility or resistance. If you are addressing a sensitive topic, such as the reorganization or downsizing of a program expect some challenges. If you know it ahead of time, you can adjust your presentation to acknowledge the feelings of the group and work them through the process.

For more information on dealing with a hostile audience, read ***How to Deal with a Hostile Audience*** by Lenny Laskowski at <http://www.powerpointers.com/printarticle.asp?articleid=86>

Have They Seen You in Action?

If you are presenting to a group for the second or third time, they know you. They know your style and generally what to expect. Do you know them? You should. Whether you conduct your own evaluation at the end of a presentation or the facilitator does – you need to know how the group responded to you.

Reading through the evaluations and examining the comments generally made at the end of the evaluation can help you correct any problem areas and recognize areas of strength and how to build on those areas in your next presentation. Keep in mind that generally speaking 25% of the people will like you no matter what you do, 25% of the people will not like you no matter what you do, but 50% of the people take the time to see what you do and make their judgments accordingly. Some people say don't take any negative comments personally. Not true – take the negative and the positive comments personally, both will help you be a better presenter.

Will They Be Willing to Be Active Participants?

Some groups will just jump in and do whatever you ask. Some groups are more reserved and need time to warm up to what you expect them to do. Some groups love to role play, others despise it. Talk to the training facilitator to find out how the audience has reacted in the past. The facilitator knows more about the group than do you – unless you work with them on a daily basis. Encourage interactivity, but if you have a few people who are uncomfortable in certain situations, such as role playing, don't push them. Assign them another task such as evaluating the role play.

What Do They Really Want to Know About the Material that You Will Be Presenting?

Last, but not least – the content. Be sure that you have clearly aligned the presentation to the audience's need. Be content specific in your agenda and in any pre-presentation materials that you provide. If you are providing a workshop on teaching algebra to young adults, then outline exactly what you will be covering. This will ensure that people have a clear idea early on as to the content and the sequence of the training itself. If the audience knows the focus is on algebra, they won't be expecting you to cover geometry.

For more information on understanding your audience, check out the following websites:

Ten Tips for Presenters

<http://www.teach-nology.com/worksheets/computers/powerpoint/tips/>

Your Most Essential Presentation Collaboration Partner

http://www.presentersuniversity.com/courses_content_most_essential.php

Audience Analysis

http://www.ou.edu/cls/Current/Research/R_Audience.htm

