



Presentation paranoia

PREVENTION AND CURE

“The human brain starts working the moment you are born and never stops until you stand up to speak in public.” (Sir George Jessel)

Graham Yemm

Familiar feeling? Rest assured you are not alone. You might be one of the many who would rate your fear of public speaking alongside or ahead of death! Your fear may translate itself to ‘FEAR’ – forget everything and run!!

Having the ability to present yourself and your message to an audience, whether internal or external is a necessary skill for a good manager and leader. Most people when asked to make a presentation imagine it will go wrong but if you follow the following basic ideas on how to improve your skills it will build your confidence.

The secret is to remember that when you see good presenters, you are only seeing the tip of the iceberg. A great deal has gone on beneath the surface to enable them to be the person you see, so don’t let this put you off. To prevent the paranoia – make time to do the fundamentals!

Plan and prepare. Also, have a realistic level of expectation. Too many people, when preparing a presentation, spend too much time focusing on themselves. There is a balance to be met – and the secret to a good presentation is to keep the focus on the audience, your subject

and objective. Get the first two right and the third will take care of itself!

To get your planning underway, ask yourself some simple questions:

WHAT: Consider the purpose of the presentation, to inform, influence,





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inspire or generate action? Ask yourself what the objectives are from this and what are the key things you want the audience to take away with them – or to do?

WHO: Put your focus on the people you will be presenting to. How many will there be? What are their objectives? What is their level of knowledge? Will they be a 'willing' audience or were they sent? When you have the answers to these points, you have some idea of the level at which to pitch your presentation.

WHERE: Is the presentation going to be made in a meeting room, an office or large venue? What will be the layout? How flexible is it? (You can always ask to have it set-up to suit you) What equipment is available? What do you need to take?

WHEN: What time of day are you presenting? Are there other presenters before and after you? Ask yourself how this will make an impact on your presentation.

HOW: How long have you got? Remember, longer is not necessarily better! It is harder to plan and prepare a brief, effective presentation than to organise a longer one.

Put the answers to these together and you are in a position to begin the preparation of the presentation itself. Some areas to consider:

- Pull together the broad content – what is it you want to say? Think about the headlines for each part by using mindmapping, or just post-it notes rather than pages of notes.
- Gather information – get facts, opinions, research and anything else that might help.
- Check back with your objectives – and the audience's. Make sure there is a match.

- Organise all of this into a sensible sequence. Have a beginning, middle and end, preferably building up the emphasis of your message.
- Develop a story – make sure that there is a flow to the overall presentation. Look to build in hooks for key points or messages. People often recall stories and anecdotes more than dry facts.
- Check the plan against the time you will have. (You will speak at around 100-120 words a minute when your nerves are under control. A 15 minute presentation is around 1700 words or so, which is only 4-5 pages of A4.) Also remember, you are speaking so choose your language with this in mind, especially when making notes.

You can support your story or message with material such as visual aids and props. Remember, these things are there to support you, not to take over, therefore if using Powerpoint use slides sparingly and make sure they are easy to read.

When you are comfortable that you have the overall structure which flows, meets the objectives and is supported by relevant material, you may even start to look forward to the presentation. However do look at one vital part – your opening!

By concentrating on getting the opening right, you can achieve several aims in one. It is important to





create your own opening; it can become your 'anchor' to help you manage yourself. Practice introducing yourself, stating your reason for being there, what you want to achieve and when the audience can

the potential impact because of this. Work out how you want to summarise and then close things off. If all else fails, use the basic rule: Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em, tell 'em and tell 'em what you told 'em.

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ask questions. You can use humour, stories or a challenging fact to start, however do be careful with humour, as you never know who may be offended.

Don't forget your ending as many nervous presenters are fine with the middle, but let themselves down with the front and back – and often lose

"Begin at the beginning and go on until you come to the end, then stop." (Lewis Carroll)

Handle your nerves by realising it's OK to have them as they trigger a

chemical reaction which, harnessed properly, will help make your presentation a success. The trick is to use them to your advantage and not let them take over.

Visualisation (or 'imaginisation') – put yourself in the presentation and see it going well, you in control of the room and the audience. Experience yourself handling questions, making your points, generally enjoying it. Feel how good it will be at the end of the presentation when you realise that you have achieved your objectives.

Breathing – this is one of the most effective ways of handling the adrenalin buzz that comes with heightened nervousness. Take a deep, slow breath – feel your diaphragm moving out as you do this. Hold the breath for several seconds (approx seven) – then let it go (approx four). If you repeat this three times you will notice your heart rate slowing and begin to feel the oxygen levels rise in your blood. Don't overdo it otherwise you may start to hyperventilate!

When you move to start your presentation, take a deep breath as above, step to where you will deliver from, look around the audience as you breathe out and establish eye contact. Now you are ready to begin.

This is just a start to cover some of the basics as there are many ways you can develop your presentation and speaking skills through organisations such as The Professional Speakers' Association, www.professionalspeakers.org. You can also find a local branch of Toastmasters International, who will offer encouragement and training – although in a different style.

For more information visit www.solutions4training.com.



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Russia in sales, people and management skills. Graham has worked with many different organisations conducting both training and consultancy assignments – ranging from professional groups, pharmaceutical and financial institutions to computer manufacturers and dealerships. He has had many years of experience tailoring programmes to address organisational issues around sales, account management, negotiations, sales management and customer service – especially focusing on the communication and personal skills aspects.