

Tradeline's Guide to Better Presentations



Here's 35 years worth of speakers' wisdom condensed and packaged into five success-determining sections for your easy reference and use. It represents ideas gleaned from watching and listening to over 1,500 professionals speak to other professionals. **The intent of this Speaker's Guide is to help you become a star – or a bigger star.** Follow The Guide to make yourself a popular, sought-after and maybe even famous public speaker. Ignore it at your peril.

So, step this way, please...

Step One:

Your Audience

"They're pros!"

The people you are talking to are experienced, knowledgeable facilities planners and managers who have built facilities before or are managing good-sized facilities portfolios. Don't cover the basics. Presenting elementary or basic material to pros comes across as talking down to the audience, and that's one of the big mistakes you want to avoid. Go for the news about the latest ideas and findings. Your audience is looking for new insights, news on what others are doing, and news about the implications of the latest developments and trends. Be an analytical reporter, not a tour guide.

Audience Criticisms to Avoid

"They tried to cover too much. Should have stuck to a very few major issues and given those the attention they needed."

"The material covered was different from what was advertised. I expected certain things to be discussed, and they weren't."

"The presenter READ his/her talk"

"His (her) presentation was essentially a sales pitch instead of the presentation of helpful data and information"

"Too general... not helpful to a seasoned audience."

"Graphics were of poor quality, mostly word slides. Numbers and diagrams were not readable. The two-projector presentation was especially troublesome."

**Step Two:**

Structure

"'Tis a gift to be simple"

Structure is the single most important element of all successful presentations. Structure is the foundation and framework upon which your presentation is built. You may have a ton of relevant information and abundant examples, but without a clear, memorable structure it all could end up a muddle in your listeners' ears.

Here are a few examples of clear, memorable structures:

- For a presentation on "New HVAC Approaches to Lab Buildings," compare the system concepts, costs, and user feedback on six different projects and then draw conclusions and recommendations.
- For a presentation on how Web/Intranet systems will impact facilities management, identify four key FM processes and show changes in staffing, communications, and speed of response for each process.
- Reminder: Project history is NEVER a clear or memorable structure.

Avoid Showcasing

Showcasing is of little interest to the audience because it doesn't convey take-away information or ideas. Worst of all, showcasing does little to convey the wit, intelligence, and analytical ability of the presenter: You!

"Showcase" presentations are those that simply describe a facility or organization, or tell what was done historically. Showcasing is characterized by the repeated use of phrases like, "This is a floor plan." Or, "This is the organization chart." Or, "This is the Coke machine."

Uniquely site-specific and project-specific material might also be considered "showcasing" if there's not a generalized lesson to be learned. Similarly, the fact that the program was spearheaded by a particularly decisive or inspirational top manager is not information that is applicable to the situations represented by the members of your audience.

Difficult as it may be to accept, project or company history is rarely of interest to anyone. Speak only in the present and future tenses. Consider this: While every program was done in the past, it exists in the present. The "here and now" and the future are exciting: so position yourself there, not in the past.

How Many Presenters?

One person is the optimal number, both in terms of structuring a presentation and keeping the audience's attention. Two can also work well if they are rehearsed and smooth in 'passing the baton' back and forth. In a Forum Session three is possible, but can make the session seem more like a Marx Brother's movie. Four? NEVER!

If you do use multiple speakers, the rule is "one speaker standing at a time," and only the standing speaker speaks (no remarks from the peanut gallery). The ONE exception would be if you have two speakers who are passing the presentation back and forth every two or three minutes. In that situation, have both of the speakers remain standing.

Give 'em' a Road Map

Just as it's important for you to have a clear structure for your presentation, it's just as important for the audience to know what the structure is. This will help them to organize and categorize the stream of information coming at them.

Right up front, tell them how you've organized (structured) your presentation. Tell them what you hope to achieve and how you plan to go about it. (Don't keep your structure a secret.)



Good Speakers capture their audiences in the first 30 seconds...

Get a Fast Start

Good speakers capture their audiences in the first 30 seconds. What you want is a fast start that screams, "Substance and Weighty Ideas Coming!! Stay Alert!!" Avoid "easing into" the topic with introductions, background information, stories about your childhood and the like.

End with Audience Dialogue

End your session with the audience talking to you. This will mean allowing TIME for some questions at the end and providing a quick and effective "BRIDGE" to put your group in a question-asking frame of mind.

TIME: If you're talking to a large plenary-session group for 25 or 30 minutes, allow two or three minutes for questions within your time allotment at the end of your report. If you are talking to a smaller forum-session group for 55 or 60 minutes, a minimum of five minutes is recommended.

BRIDGE: End with a black-out slide ("black" means black – no logo, not the word "Questions?"; nothing). This brings each member of the audience back into personal one-on-one contact with you. Then make a "bridge" statement to let them know you're available to talk. "I've got N minutes to flesh out any details you may be curious about concerning... [and here throw out some key words from your material to remind them of what they just heard. Then wait for 10 seconds. If you get no questions, and you are speaking to a

Take another step...

large plenary session, then end with, "I'll be happy to talk with you anytime during the conference. Thank you very much." (Applause). If you get no questions, and you are speaking to a small forum-session group, then start asking your audience questions that you seriously want to get answers to.

Deliver your "Tradeline Three"

What are the three big ideas of your report that you want to be remembered for and about which you hope people will be talking (referencing you by name, of course) long after you've spoken? Make those your Tradeline Three summary takeaways. So, just before you wrap up and open it up for final questions from the audience, the appropriate statement would be, "Here are my Tradeline Three..." (Of course, if you are not speaking at Tradeline, but somewhere else instead, you might say something else.) If your Tradeline Three are really eye-opening, tangible, novel calls to action, or specific findings that are genuinely "big deals" that people need to come to grips with, then you will have created the vital "bridge" to ending your session with the audience talking back to you – which is what you want.

Start on Time, End on Time

Starting late is an insult to the people who got there on time. Ending early can make your audience feel they've been shortchanged. If you go overtime, people get angry (at you) for keeping them from their next session.

Step Three:

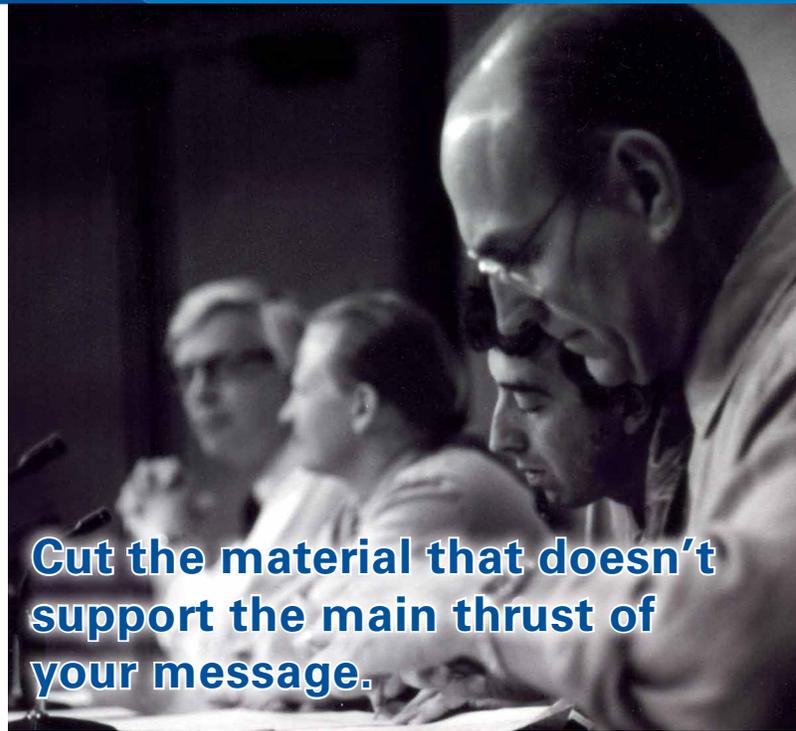
Content

"Bring on the Beef"

Don't Try to Cover it All

Since there is no way to completely cover your weighty and interesting subject in the amount of time allotted, don't even try! If you do, you'll end up being too general.

Narrow and deep is better than broad and shallow. Decide on a small number of key issues (ones that are controversial, often overlooked, or represent the latest developments in the area) and concentrate on those. Focus on the NEW issues and the LATEST developments. If you have



a list of 12 such issues, cover six of them in this session, tell people to come back next year (or contact you personally) to get the other six.

Be True to Your Topic

Ask yourself, "Is the main thrust of my message relevant to my advertised topic?" If not, back to the drawing board. During your presentation, keep reminding people as you go how your remarks are related to the advertised topic. This will also help to keep you honest and true to your topic – and your audience happy.

Action-Item Conclusions and Recommendations

Avoid such generalized, mom-and-apple-pie conclusions as: "You need good project management" or "Get a strong management commitment," or "Make sure you do careful planning." These are not helpful conclusions. If that's as specific as you get, you're not thinking specific enough. Such statements are called "tombstones" because they squelch audience participation.

Take another step...

Throw out some nuggets

Prepare a list of 10 to 12 "surprise pieces of information," "nuggets of wisdom," "clever ideas," "tips," "rules of truth," "pieces of advice," or "recommendations," and scatter them throughout your presentation. Here are some "nugget" examples:

"A good metric for investing in a comprehensive Web-based system for FM is \$4,500 per facilities worker."

"You can save \$3-\$5 per square foot per year with operating improvements, but you'll save \$25 per square foot per year if you get rid of the square foot itself."

"Never bet on a long-eared nag."

The Rule of Numbers

Use them! Lots of them! People like numbers. They write them down.

Some facts to express in numbers are: cost/square foot (this is always an attention grabber), cost/worker/year, cycle-time, square feet per worker, net-to-gross, square feet of horizontal workspace, air changes per hour, watts per square foot, occupancy costs, floor-to-floor dimensions, planning module size, the added cost of flexibility features, etc. (If you can't add 20 more to this list, you're not really trying.)

Acronyms – reveal the secret meaning

"It was a great report – if only I knew what APR, PDRI, RAT, OLA, and GDIS meant, I could really do something with this." Hopefully you know what your acronyms mean, but to others they may be pure alphabet soup needing an Enigma decryption machine. Spell it out, and make unlocking the secret meanings part of your authoritative teaching.

Just for the record:

- APR, for the designer of a biocontainment facility, means Air Pressure Resistant – referring to a type of containment door.
- APR, for the user of a biocontainment facility, means Air Purifying Respirator, which is something you want to be wearing if the room you are working in is full of airborne pathogens.
- APR, for those of you with high credit card debt, means Average Percentage Rate.



Be Noteworthy

If your audience isn't taking notes on your presentation, you aren't saying anything noteworthy. Where are the "aha!" parts of your information? What's the news, surprise numbers, names of suppliers, useful rules of thumb, etc., that people will want to write down?

Don't Be Trite

Trite, obvious and old-hat material, comes across as talking down to your audience. Remember that these are experienced professionals. Ask yourself if there's anything in your material that people in the audience have seen 100 times before? Twenty times? Three times? If "yes," cut it out! HINT: One such item is the infamous "Planning-Impact-and-Dollars-Spent-versus-Time" diagram. Don't show this one... EVER!

The Rule of Take Away Ideas

Give as many as possible. These are what your audience is looking for.

Focus on Tangibles, avoid Generalities

Give your audience something they can hang their hats on. If you're talking about buildings, report on space utilization, building features, efficiencies, critical dimensions, interaction concepts, circulation schemes, and costs. If you're talking about management processes, detail organization structures, communication and control techniques, how key meetings are conducted, negotiating techniques, and cycle times. Avoid like the plague solutions such as "careful planning," "good communications," "effective leadership," "improved processes," and the dreaded "here's the history of our project." Instead, give your audience "tangibles." "Generalities" come across as talking down to your audience, and you don't want to do that.

Turn features into issues

If you are basing your message on a case example (a specific project, or a management initiative), turn the key features of the case example into expanded issues or discussion points. Thus, the "green lab furniture feature" becomes, "Does color scheme matter?" or "Why did we choose this color?," etc.. Avoid just reporting the features (we already made the point that "showcasing" is next to worthless), but rather MAKE something out of the features by turning them into thought-provoking content.

Step Four:

Style & Technique

"The product is YOU."

Be Informal & Conversational

A Tradeline conference is not a forum for professional papers or prepared written scripts. Instead, work from an outline, speak conversationally, and work to create dialogue between you and your audience.

Position Yourself as a Peer

You want to send the message, "We're all in this together." You want to work to avoid the "Me-versus-you" syndrome that creates barriers between speakers and listeners. To accomplish this, avoid the use of the words "client" (which conveys two classes of people), "our firm" (which reminds people you are from an organization that profits from the audience), and "we" (which refers to some invisible group of colleagues who aren't in the room.)

Sell Your Information (and Pictures)

For each truly significant piece of information (pictures, table, statement, fact, diagram) sell the significance of the information before you show it. "In this next diagram, you are going to see a radical departure from tradition." "This next set of numbers is key to lab planning - Write this down!" These kinds of lead-in phrases make effective punctuation to a presentation, and they help people to sort out what's important.



Be visible, make noise, move around, smile, make eye contact with your audience.

Be Personal

Your audience is interested in what YOU THINK about things. Don't just give the facts; give your opinions as well. Your audience has already conceded that you're an expert, or at the very least have seen lots of things they haven't, so they want to hear what YOU would do if you were in their shoes. Don't be afraid of the personal words, "I" (as in, "I think"), and "my" (as in, "my opinion" or "my recommendation").

Watch Your Language

Straight talk is a Tradeline policy. Avoid "off-color" humor or language, blasphemy, or derogatory labels directed at persons or organizations. Anything other than straight talk is a barrier to communications. This brings up **The Rule of Joke-Telling**: Don't. They are seldom relevant, funny or new. Nothing is worse than an old, unfunny, irrelevant joke.

Be Gender-Inclusive

(Particularly addressed to male speakers.) Remember that there are both men and women in your audience. How you use nouns and pronouns like "he," "guys," "men," and "gentlemen" may send a message that you aren't talking to the female side of the house. Big mistake! Try words like "folks," "y'all," etc. When using a personal pronoun in reference to a prototypical person, use "he or she."

Take another step...

Be Energetic

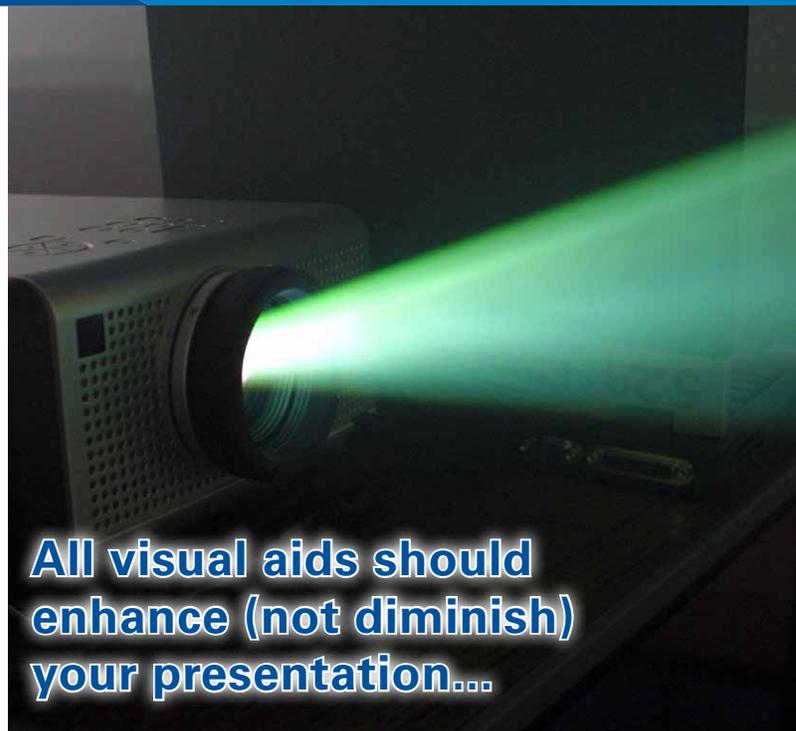
Be visible, make noise, move around, smile, make eye contact with your audience. This means you should be front and center. Stand in the light so people can see you. Speak loudly so the person in the back of the room can hear you at all times, or better yet, use the mic to add decibels to your voice. Make use of the room or stage. Move to interact with your slides. Move toward the audience when responding to questions. Move for no apparent reason.

Rules for "Questions from the Audience"

- *Make "questions from the audience" happen. Interactive presentations are usually the most popular ones. People enjoy sessions in direct proportion to how much THEY get to talk. For large, plenary-session talks, questions will come at the end. For smaller, forum-session talks, they may come throughout the session. (Remember, the people in your audience are pros, and they love to share their opinions.)*
- **REPEAT THE QUESTION.** *Always restate the question and then speak to the entire audience when answering. Repeating the question pays a public compliment to the asker, and it assures that the whole audience benefits from the answer.*
- *In the small-group forum sessions decide whether you'll take questions as you go, or provide a Q&A time at the end (or both). Let the audience know your rules at the beginning of your session. The best sessions we've seen take questions as they go, thereby keeping the audience engaged throughout the session. Questions saved until the end seldom get asked and are often forgotten.*
- *Make your answers short and sweet, not more than one minute long. Remember: "The MORE you say, the LESS people remember."*

How to Stand and How to Move for the Best Effect

Position yourself center-stage, preferably in the light. If two or more speakers are involved, decide where each will stand and what their area of travel will be. When not speaking, the other person should be off to the side or seated with his or her attention focused on the speaker. If two or more speakers are up front at one time, the person speaking should step forward. Try to keep the stage balanced (i.e. don't huddle together on one side.) **RULE:** Don't speak unless you are standing.



All visual aids should enhance (not diminish) your presentation...

Avoid "Grandstanding"

"Grandstanding" is a speaking style in which the speaker makes himself or herself the central player. Grandstanding can be recognized by such phrases as, "I then chose..." "We (meaning the firm) presented three options..." "We came up with this solution..." "We put in this feature..." "Our design included..." Remember that your role in the project is not the subject of your session.

Use third person nouns and pronouns to avoid "grandstanding" such as: "XYZ Corp. decided..." "the Vice President set constraints..." "This facility uses..." "The module is..." "The circulation scheme is..."

Use "I" or "my" only when giving recommendations. "I strongly recommend that..." "My advice is..."

Step Five:

Audio Visual Guidelines

Less is More

Be an A/V Minimalist

The focus of Tradeline conferences is on the speakers, not pictures. All visual aids (LCD images, display boards, models, etc.) should **ENHANCE** (not **DIMINISH**) your presentation, and they should make **YOU** more credible and memorable. Avoid "long-lasting" images.

Leave images on the screen only as long as you are talking about them, **AND** while you are talking have only relevant images on the screen. When you're simply addressing the audience without making reference to a projected image, the projector should be on a blacked-out frame or turned off. Rule of Thumb: A single image should be left on for no longer than one minute.

Visual Images Preparation

- **EVERY IMAGE SHOULD BE READABLE AT 90 FT.** This means that the smallest character (letter or number) on an LCD exhibit should be 20-point type. It also means that you can't put very many words on a slide. (See paragraph that follows.)
- **DO NOT USE WORD SLIDES.** Word slides, contrary to popular belief, do not convey information. They just give your audience a chance to get ahead of you, and then they go to sleep waiting for you to catch up. If, however, you feel compelled to break this rule, have no more than 20 words (numbers count as words) on a slide.
- **PREPARE BOLD, SIMPLE IMAGES.** Graphical images need to be specially prepared to convey concepts and ideas. This means simple, bold, bright images. To show a floor-plan scheme, do a simple, colorful graphical representation of a section of the plan that makes the point. Do not use photos of actual drawings (color or otherwise): they yield images that are too complicated and visually difficult to comprehend.



The Argument for One Projector

To keep projected images from dominating or detracting from the speaker, we recommend single screen presentations. People process information serially, not in parallel. In a two-screen format two images compete for the audience's attention, and that causes confusion. Consider also that two projectors double the chance of mechanical failure.

How to Keep Yourself Visible

Use a single A/V medium for no longer than 15 minutes at a time. After 15 minutes, change the medium (black out the projector for a discussion time, or switch to a flip chart, etc) to keep things moving and to keep yourself front and center. Also, use A/V aids that work with the room lights on (modern LCD projectors allow you to run with the lights up.)

Interact with your visual aids. When an image is being displayed for your audience, use a laser pointer to point out what people should be looking at, and talk about specific things in the image to notice. **(Laser pointer warning: Use laser pointers to POINT THINGS OUT. Laser pointers are not Laser Paintbrushes, otherwise they would be called "Laser Paintbrushes." If you try to draw circles or lines on the screen with a laser pointer, the rapid motion of the bright point of light will only serve to make your audience nauseous. Hold the laser steady and POINT to where you want your audience's eyes to rest).**

Interpret your pictures. For each graphic exhibit explain to your audience why you are showing it, what is noteworthy, and what the take-away ideas are. Slow down to explain and get the most out of your graphic.

Take another step...

Never Go Back on Your Slides

That is, never back up to a previous image. You'll confuse yourself by such a movement and you'll kill the sense of making progress. Onward!! Once you've turned off the projector at the end of the series, never turn it back on.

Use the Mic

Microphones are there to be used! Even in a small meeting room with as few as 20 people, hearing can be a problem. Projector fans can cause significant background noise. Presenters also have a tendency to drop their voices in the later stages of their presentations, and, when they turn away from the audience to point out interesting aspects of LCD projector images, they are particularly hard to hear without a microphone. So, step up to the mic!

Check List

As a final step, ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have a clear and memorable structure?*
- Is my content appropriate to senior, experienced people?*
- Have I included useful NUMBERS and NUGGETS of information?*
- Am I staying true to my topic (cutting out the non-essential)?*
- If two or more people are sharing the platform, have we worked out the "baton-passing?"*
- Do I have a plan for getting the audience to ask questions?*
- Have I cut out as many word slides as possible?*
- Are all my exhibits bold, relevant and readable?*
- Do I have take-away ideas, and my Tradeline Three?*