

# So you've been selected! Five secrets for conference presenters

*By Guila Muir*

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*"Someone's got to do something, and it's just incredibly pitiful that it has to be us." -- Jerry Garcia*

Some are chosen, some are forced....but in the end, most business leaders present at industry conferences, annual meetings, or other events. You were chosen out of many, and are now charged with a fantastic opportunity to enhance your reputation as a leader in your field.

These "secrets" will help you give the best presentation possible, while fulfilling your responsibility to your audience. Use them, and you'll come off like a pro!

## **#1: PREPARE.**

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Demonstrate your respect for the audience by spending quality time preparing and practicing your presentation....out loud. Experts in the presentation field estimate that 3-5 "run-through's" are required for a polished presentation.

If you're on a panel, make a solid plan with your co-presenters about what specific aspects each will address. Talk with ALL of them at least twice before the conference. Make sure you are all clear on time limits. Put your plan in writing, and meet once more before your session to make sure everyone's clear on what's going to happen. Don't "assume" anything.

## **#2: Get off the WHAT. Tell them HOW.**

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The sad truth is that no one really wants to spend an entire session hearing about how great your program, discovery, or event is. But everyone wants to know HOW it got to be that way! Be ready to provide at least 3 specific, tangible HOW-TO's that others can use in their businesses, organizations, or communities. For example:

How did we get 2,500 people to donate? (What specific actions did we take?)

What were the most important 5 steps we took to accomplish.

Mistakes we made--things NOT to do.

## **#3: Make it active.**

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As an audience member, do you like sitting there like a lump on a log? On the other hand, few of us enjoy participating in meaningless "fluff." Here are some easy strategies to bring your content alive while keeping your group energized:

INTEGRATE "Q-A" throughout your presentation. DON'T wait until the last 5 minutes to ask "Are there any questions?" But always bring the conversation back on track. (That's when your preparation will really help you!)

ASK the audience questions. They can either answer you or talk with their neighbor about the issue. Be ready to pull them back to order.

MINIMIZE your PowerPoint slides. A good rule of thumb is to use only 3-6 slides for a 60-minute presentation. Use your time to look at and discuss relevant handouts, materials, case studies, financial reports, etc.

BREAK THE GROUP INTO SMALL GROUPS to discuss and solve a problem. Don't ask for reports from each group--5 top responses from the entire group may suffice. Remember, people can often learn as much by talking to each other as they can by listening to you.

#### **# 4: Begin and end ON TIME.**

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Tough luck if people are late. You are responsible to those who got to your session on time. Maintain your awareness of time throughout the session. True professionals never "run out of time," because they have practiced thoroughly beforehand.

Plan the last five minutes for an overall summary, written evaluations and last-minute questions.

#### **#5: Relax and Have Fun.**

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If you've followed the preceding tips, this one will be much easier to achieve. Remember that your presentation is really not "about you," it's about your audience. Give them what you promised and what you practiced. The audience wants you to succeed!

When you're done, give yourself a pat on the back. Think about what went right and what you might change next time. Find a friend, buy a coffee, and enjoy the rest of the conference!

# Linkage

Linkage is a global organizational development company that specializes in leadership development. We provide clients around the globe with integrated solutions that include strategic consulting services, customized leadership development and training experiences, tailored assessment services, and benchmark research. Linkage's mission is to connect high-performing leaders and organizations to the futures they want to create.

With a relentless commitment to learning, Linkage also offers conferences, institutes, summits, open-enrollment workshops, and distance learning programs on leading-edge topics in leadership, management, human resources, and organizational development. More than 200,000 leaders and managers have attended Linkage programs since 1988.

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