

A Guide to Effective Presentation Preparation

By Nick Washienko

Nick Washienko is founder and president of Washienko Communications which specializes in preparing senior level executives for critical business presentations. Nick is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and his work has brought him into every field of business. His extensive experience, his highly engaging and entertaining style, and his creative use of videotaped exercises make his training greatly productive and enjoyable. He is currently working on a new book *How Leaders Connect: The Key to Successful Executive Presentations*.

Linkage partners with Nick Washienko on *How Leaders Connect: Crafting and Delivering Impactful Presentations*-A two-day immersion program that gives you the knowledge, the skills, and the attitude that you need to add that extra 15-20% that gives you your competitive edge in delivering impactful messages.

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You are accomplished in business. You are a successful leader. Naturally, you want to project the same level of success and confidence in your presentations as you do in your executive position.

Being an effective speaker takes more than natural talent or charisma. Like any other skill, the more lessons you have and the more you practice, the more accomplished you become. One way to accomplish this goal is by working with a professional speech coach. Through video-taped practice sessions and constructive feedback, the right coach can help you become an effective and powerful speaker.

Under the direction of professional coach, you will be able to do three things more effectively. First, you will learn how to control your nervousness and even use it to your advantage. Second, you will learn certain physical skills of delivery that will help you project confidence and credibility. Third, you will learn to package your thoughts in a way that makes them easy for you to deliver, and easy for your listeners to remember.

The "Executive Summary: A Guide to Effective presentation Preparation" was written with you in mind. It provides you with a quick and easy-to-read reference of important techniques, ideas, and tips to remember the next time you deliver a presentation. All of the information is based on one simple idea. the most important element of any presentation is YOU.

Before you speak.

1. **Don't Give A Speech**

Television and telecommunications have changed the model of presentation. The days of the formal, dry speech are gone. Today, people want a more informal, more conversational style. When you begin your presentation, remember that your listeners are not expecting a speech. Think of yourself as speaking conversationally with a few friends or a group of business associates. Talk to them but do not give a speech to them.

2. **Write The Way You Talk**

Most people write more formally than they talk. If you prepare by writing your talk out, your tendency will be to deliver the talk with more formal-sounding words. Unless you are a very practiced reader, you will usually talk better than you read. Remember that the audience will be listening, not reading. If you write out your talk, be sure to write the way you talk.

3. **Meet And Greet Your Audience**

Your natural inclination might be to avoid your listeners, since on some level you consider them to be the source of your fear. But the real source of your nervousness is internal. So go out and meet them and talk with them. Your nervousness will actually be reduced and it will be easier for you to talk in a normal, conversational tone. If at all possible, make it a point to meet and greet your audience.

4. **Release The Tension**

A great way to reduce pre-performance tension quickly is with a very brief and easy to say comment. This could be something simple, like inviting people to take their seats. If you are not in a position to make a statement, then ask a question of someone who is speaking. Above all, do not let nervousness and tension mushroom. Release the tension.

Once you've begun.

1. **Avoid Jokes**

If you are nervous and worried about the audience reaction to you, then the natural inclination might be to try to warm the audience up and become "friends" with them. A good joke seems like an excellent way of accomplishing that task. But the risks are just too high. First, it is hard to be funny. Second, if the joke offends anyone, then you have lost the audience before you begin. Finally, if the joke is not funny, then you have a very weak beginning. Remember, the audience did not come to hear a comedian. Begin your material and until you are really relaxed, avoid joking.

2. **No apologies**

Never begin with an apology, unless, of course, you are late. Then, apologize. But don't tell the audience that you are nervous, or that you are new on the job, or that you don't feel well. When you begin in that way, you are really saying that you are not going to do a very good job, and that does not make the audience feel very good. At any cost, avoid apologies.

3. **No Flowery Intros**

Avoid those long, flowing introductions where you tell the audience how happy you are to be here, and what a great place this is, and how wonderful the audience is to take time to listen to you. It takes too long to say it, the audience does not think that you mean a word of it, and it sounds like you are not prepared to begin. Tell your listeners exactly why they are here and exactly what you are going to talk about within the first minutes of your talk, and avoid flowery introductions.

4. **Know your Four First Sentences Cold**

Your listeners make up their minds about you almost immediately. Therefore, you cannot afford to appear uncertain or disinterested in the first minute of your talk. Your words must come out strongly and clearly and your first ideas must be concise. You have only one chance to create an initial sense of urgency. Know what you are going to say so that you can say it strongly. Know your four first sentences cold.

Preparing Effective Visuals.

1. **Visual-Not verbal**

Keep your overheads visual, not verbal. Show them graphs and pictures, not words. Develop your overheads so that your audience can intuit what they mean in a few seconds. If the overhead is verbal, the audience will split their attention between the overhead and you. Keep it visual, not verbal.

2. **Use Bullet Points**

If you must use slides or overheads that contain only text, then use bullets. A good rule of thumb is this: use only four lines down the overhead, and use only two or three words in each line. For example:

- ◆ Cost Reduction
- ◆ Increased Speed
- ◆ Reliable Information
- ◆ Improved Quality

While the overhead is verbal, it is not overwhelming. Just direct them to the bullet points.

3. **Use Visual Sparingly**

Limit your visual aids. For a 15-20 minute talk, you should use only 7 or 8 slides or overheads. Your rule of thumb should be this: only use an overhead, slide or video to display something that cannot clearly explain verbally.

4. **Check The Mechanics**

If at all possible, either the night before, early that morning, or sometime before you give your talk, check your visual aids one last time. It will help you to focus and give you peace of mind. There is absolutely nothing worse than having technical difficulties in the middle of a presentation. So follow this checklist: know how to operate the equipment; check out the projector bulb to make sure it works; put an overhead on the projector and focus the lens so that when you are presenting, all you have to do is turn the machine on; and check the order of the slides/visuals. You don't need anything going wrong in the middle of your presentation. Check the mechanics.

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