

## Engage Your Audience

The process of engaging our audience goes beyond the simple act of speaking in public. Many public speakers fail to engage their audiences with their enthusiasm or knowledge of their subject -- just being on the podium does not guarantee that we will make the all-important audience engagement.

But, with an understanding of some techniques and a feeling for the dynamics of an audience we can become much more effective. In common with all effective presentation skills, there are organizational tools and techniques that we can apply to great effect. Mastering these techniques is crucial to forming the vital link with our audiences.

Here are three main pointers to becoming more effective when we reach the podium.

- 1. Appear knowledgeable.** There is a natural play-off between our presentation skill and subject expertise. When an audience knows we are expert in our field they do not expect our presentation skills to be so casually slick. In essence they are less demanding. Note, of course, that the reverse also applies -- if we are not knowledgeable then we had better be slick!

Being an expert presenter allows us to radiate passion and interest in a subject, enthraling an audience. It is true that no one can possibly be an expert in everything but most of us can expect to be expert in something -- the sweet spot of presenting success. With the combination of an appropriate subject, our own knowledge and expertise we become unbeatable.
- 2. Use a presentation theme.** Our audience will adopt a theme in the same way that they adopt a slogan or a logo; because it is simple and memorable. A consistent theme to our presentation, conveying practical benefit and familiarity will be remembered best -- proving most effective for helping our audience to follow the presentation. Themes are essentially memory aids.

They provide presentation continuity. When we develop a theme it is best to consider the main issues that preoccupy our audience and hook into these. In a competitive industry with low barriers to entry we might try themes along the lines of..."Compete to Win" or, "Perfection is Completion" or "Being First". These are suggestive of competitive survival. They imply benefit and are short enough for memory retention. Take some time when considering a theme and it will really pay off.
- 3. Present the right points.** We should expect our audience to retain no more than 10% of our presentation. If we present too much then it will either be forgotten or not absorbed at all. Typically we should aim to present some 3 to 4 main points during a 30 minute presentation. Yes,

there might be room for sub-points but the focus has to be on the 3 to 4 main points. When working out our main points we should also note that our audience is thinking ahead at a rate of 600 or so words a minute and we will be speaking at a rate of around 150 words a minute.

Such a speed difference has huge potential for the audience to disengage and wander off at a tangent -- probably jumping ahead of us dramatically in the process. Too many points will simply make this worse. If we add linguistic interpretation into this potent mix then we have even more room for uncertainty. The main points in our presentation should be:

- **Unambiguous.** They must be certain and clear.
- **Self-standing.** They must be capable of standing alone without the support of others. If we have points that merge into one another then they are not strong enough. We should edit these.

The task of engaging our audience can be easily and readily undertaken. With expertise, area knowledge and advocacy we can engage an audience and keep their attention. All audiences respect expertise even where it is in areas of arcane detail. Everything has its importance somewhere. It just goes to emphasize that prior to reaching the presentation podium we are fully prepared and well-versed in the detail of our subject.

It makes sense to use organizational techniques -- a presentation theme and 3 to 4 main points to assist absorption and memory retention by the audience. Our audience needs solidity and substance with which to engage. Thinking ahead at the rate of 600 words a minute our audience benefits from a clear and relevant presentation theme providing the means to place our main points into a mental framework of their own making. These points, strongly and purposefully made, will keep our audience on track, engaged. These organizational techniques can be boosted by other procedural devices for audience engagement -- but more about these later.