

# Presenting to Persuade

By Dianna Booher

Everybody is in sales. Your job may be to sell your ideas, training topics, conclusions, budget, strategic vision, products, or services to an audience of two, 20, or 2000.

Many people consider persuasive presentations to a client or boss the most difficult of all because there is often much at stake in the audience's action or inaction—a commission check, a promotion, a career.

Yet practice in persuasion has been plentiful: Have you ever persuaded a professor to change a grade? A store clerk to give you a refund—against published policy? A traffic cop to let you off with only a warning ticket? A seller to negotiate a discount? A date to go out with you? A teenager to stay in school? A bureaucrat to make an exception?

## Consider Your Demeanor—Don't Confuse Boring for Sincere

Create flair and drama as you present a new idea, topic, recommendation, product, or service to your audience. Having wanted to shed the huckster image of the stereotypical “salesman,” many presenters have gone to the other extreme and removed all animation, inflection, and energy from their delivery style in an effort to come across as more “sincere.”

Instead of sincere, the result has been lackluster and boring. If you're not passionate about your topic, neither will your audience be. Never confuse genuine enthusiasm for lack of professionalism. If you want to see the power to move a world to action, watch the delivery styles of world leaders and listen to their vocal variety.

Don't let a passionless demeanor destroy your audience's confidence in your offering.

## Imagine You Were Going to Be Forced to Measure and Report on Your Success

If your purpose is to instruct a group of employees on taking credit-card applications over the phone, then you can measure whether you achieved that purpose fairly easily: Can they complete the applications without error? If your purpose is to motivate them to adopt a healthier lifestyle, you can determine your success by the action they take: increased exercise, reduced stress, more nutritious, healthier meals, and so forth.

Thinking of the pressure of having to measure and report on your specific success—what your audience members do or do not remember, do or do not do, understand or do not understand—will lead you to focus on the essentials of your content.

This focus ultimately helps you to weed out the “nice to include” ideas and information from the “must include” ideas and information—a particularly helpful practice when you know a lot about your topic and have less time than you would like to share it.

Visualize yourself measuring and reporting on your results with your audience, and sort and sift your information accordingly.

## **Identify and Use Meaningful Proof**

Many presenters have wasted enormous amounts of time gathering proof of their points—only to discover that their audience did not agree that the studies, surveys, focus-group findings, or work samples proved anything.

Make the proof meaningful to those whose opinions count. For example, you may prove that the new engine from vendor A is faster than any on the market and will solve all your backlogged welding projects. However, if your executive group says the backlogged welding projects are a minor blip in the overall profitability picture, then all your proof will be “beside the point.”

## **Create Immediacy to Generate an Emotional Reaction**

If you are a single adult reading a news story about a teenager killed on a motorcycle because he wasn't wearing a safety helmet, you may feel sorry, shake your head, and continue reading. However, if you just bought your 18-year-old a motorcycle and had an argument with him or her about the importance of wearing a safety helmet, you probably will tune in a little closer to the statistics to find out how you can convince your son or daughter to wear a helmet.

Bring your presentation issue as close to home as possible. Make your audience see, hear, touch, and feel the situation.

If the members of your management team hear about the low unemployment rate on the news, they will have a general awareness of the difficulty of retaining competent employees. However, if you cite the 38 percent increase in employee turnover at your Detroit plant, adding that the company's rehiring and retraining costs hit the half-million mark for the past year, these managers will quickly see the urgency of the employee-retention problem.

Whether you are talking about money, management, communication, or marital problems, appeal to your listeners emotionally. Then supply the information to help them justify their decisions logically.

## **Never Underestimate the “Like” Factor**

Have you ever noticed that the grocery sacker begins to talk to you about the weather, sports, or whatever as he or she pushes your grocery cart to your car? Or that the cab driver asks if you are in town on business or pleasure and where you are from and how your flight was? Or how often

the waiter at the restaurant comments on your cute kids? And then have noticed how much bigger the tip you give to these service people than to those who are sullen, grumpy, or reserved? It should come as no surprise that when your audience likes you, they are more likely to be persuaded about what you have to say.

Even if you're not in sales, your power to persuade is crucial for your personal and professional success—to get a job, promotion, or raise, to lower your cable bill, or to talk your way out of a traffic ticket. Use these principles to present your case with confidence.

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***Dianna Booher** works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and the author of more than 40 books (22 on communication) including The Voice of Authority, Booher's Rules of Business Grammar, Speak with Confidence, and Communicate with Confidence. Dianna is CEO of **Booher Consultants**, a communication training firm offering programs in presentations skills, business writing, and interpersonal communication. Successful Meetings Magazine named her to its list of "21 Top Speakers for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." Executive Excellence Publishing also named Dianna to its "Top 100 Thought Leaders" and "Top 100 Minds on Personal Development." [www.booher.com](http://www.booher.com) or call 800.342.6621.*

*For more tips on using visuals effectively, see Speak with Confidence: Powerful Presentations That Inform, Inspire and Persuade (McGraw-Hill) by Dianna Booher.*