

How You Sabotage Your Success as a Presenter

By Judith Filek—President
Impact Communications, Inc.

Have you ever left a meeting wishing you had a chance for a “do over?” The bad impression you left is often indelible, and it may leave senior leaders questioning your capabilities. When we queried managers, directors and VP’s from an assortment of industries as to why people implode, the top five things they mentioned were:

1. **No clear understanding of the listeners.** People are busy, and often they don’t take the time upfront to learn about their audience and the things they care about. They have only a vague idea about how their listeners feel about their topic or their understanding of it. This is a mistake. Even if you have no time, our team of experts suggests that you check out any assumptions as you begin by asking a series of questions. For example, *“If you are like most other groups, your need is for a better understanding of how the product works with your existing equipment. Is that also true of you?”* Without understanding your listener’s perspective, a speaker will have no clear focus. Our experts say a lack of preparation always shows.
2. **No real strategy.** Again because we are busy, we start by opening our laptops and creating a staggering amount of slides. With this approach, our story won’t necessarily be clear or concise. Listeners will struggle to connect the dots. Additionally, content can easily become too technical. Our experts suggest making your content simple and easy to follow. They warn not to over-talk an issue. You allow for a quick decision.
3. **Didn’t add value.** So often speakers talk about the things that are of interest to them. These may or may not be of interest to the listeners. All key points should relate to your listeners’ needs. Our experts say if you are

talking to them, you need to elevate the conversation to the business level. You need to tie your discussion to things like a return on investment, improvement in customer loyalty, or gains in market share. If you don’t quickly show value, our experts agree they will interrupt or look for ways to end the discussion early. Their time is too valuable to waste.

4. **Couldn’t answer my questions.** The way many decision makers decide whether to move forward is often based on how an individual answers their tough questions. After you create your strategy, think of the tough questions your listeners might have. Our experts advise you to listen to the question and pause to think before you open your mouth and misspeak yourself. They also stress that you should think of the person’s title and function and answer from that person’s perspective. If you can figure out what the decision turns on, you will know what the majority of questions will be.
5. **Didn’t look confident.** Those that don’t know their content well, display a lack of confidence. They look nervous. They tend to read from their slides or their notes and give very little eye contact to the attendees. They also fidget or speak too quickly or too softly. Our experts suggest practicing your content out loud two or three times. If the first time you say something out loud is when you are in front of your managers, it is likely you will stumble because you are choosing your words and altering them on the fly.

Nobody wants to do a poor job of presenting. While we are all busy, take the time to understand the audience, create a tight strategy, add value, anticipate the tough questions, and rehearse. There are no “do-overs” in business. Insure your success by paying attention to the tips from our experts.

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***Question:** Think about a time when your presentation did not go well. What happened? How are you compensating against another disaster? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click [here](#) – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

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