

Things We Forget That Affect Our Impact

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Little things matter when it comes to influencing others. Overlooking these may be costly since they cause confusion and delay a decision. The wise communicator avoids the Big Seven Sins or missteps like the following:

1. **Leaving research and preparation to the last minute.** A lack of preparation always shows. Without preparation, it is inevitable that the speaker will stumble. Often the person ends up reading from their slides since they aren't comfortable with the content. Listeners really want a conversation. The more prepared you are, the better able you will be to have an intelligent discussion.
2. **Coming in at the "Tree Level."** A common mistake that many make is assuming that everyone is up to speed on an issue. The speaker launches right into the details and forgets that listeners need context. Without background, your listeners will grope to follow the discussion. Always be sure to briefly define a problem and its criticality as you start. You may also want to send out a brief summary of an issue for discussion the day before.
3. **Asking for what you want.** Many speakers aren't clear on what their goal is and, consequently, hedge on directly asking their listeners for what they want; mistakenly thinking that it is obvious. Most decision makers prefer to hear the "ask" upfront since it helps them to follow your argument better. It makes a decision easier. As you think about how you open and close your presentation, directly state what you would like people to consider doing after the meeting ends.
4. **Forgetting Check-ins.** Most speakers know the importance of dialogue but often, in the heat of the moment, they just dump information on their listeners. Without check-ins, a speaker will not know if their listeners are in

agreement or have additional insights. They can also appear ego-centric and uninterested in what others think or feel. Make sure to pre-plan spots to check-in.

5. **Not connecting to your audience and the things they care about.** It is easy to forget that people have needs and interests different from ours. As often as we can, we need to make links to how this will solve their problems or add value.
6. **Weak transitions between points and slides.** Your content should logically tell your story. Your slides should help support or strengthen that story. Transitional statements are very important to providing on-going context. The way to avoid this mistake is to practice out loud with your slides ahead of time.
7. **Praying no one asks that question.** Some speakers go into a meeting hoping to avoid discussing a difficult issue. However, your ability to handle the tough issues makes listeners feel confident that you know your stuff. The best way to avoid a disaster is to brainstorm the tough questions ahead of time and be prepared with solid answers. It may mean you research the answers, ask others, prepare slides in reserve or have handouts ready.

There are no do-overs when presenting. To influence others, one must be cognizant that little things can trip you up. Keep a check list of these Seven Sins handy so that you don't commit these blunders.

Question: *Think about presentation mistakes you have made. What additional things do you think people need to avoid? 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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