

The Grave Digger's Shift: Presentations after 3 p.m.

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Is your presentation scheduled for 3 p.m. or even later? If so, you're in the Grave Digger's Shift. In fact, any time you speak in the afternoon, you run the risk of digging your own grave unless you are interesting and engaging. People are tired and typically have a lot to do before they end their day. You absolutely cannot present information the same way as you would in the morning when people are fresh and less distracted. Here are some key things to remember.

Be animated.

Amplify your energy. Speak up. With a louder voice, you pull people into your world. With a soft voice, you become background music in an elevator. Do bigger gestures. They help listeners to visualize your point. Remember to smile. You will seem more approachable and friendly. Nobody wants a "sour puss." Move toward your listeners if you have the opportunity. The mistake that many speakers make in an afternoon session is to sit down or to stand right next to the podium. That's deadly. When you move, eyes will follow. Finally, and this is most important, sustain eye contact. You will appear trust worthy and transparent. Also, there is an obligation with eye contact. When you look at people with intention, they respond by smiling or nodding.

Set some context.

Before you do a deep dive into the details, people need some background on the issue for discussion. Remember your listeners have been involved in other things all day long. Even if you have sent them an agenda, be sure to tell them as you start the criticality of what you are about to discuss and the impact on them personally. A boring opening, particularly in the afternoon, is one that starts with "Today, I am going to talk to you about..." A lot of people will shut down at this point because you have indicated that the message is all about you and what you want to accomplish.

State your "ask".

Hold your listeners responsible. Right up front, tell them what you want them to consider doing and why it would be beneficial. By giving listeners an action step, people listen more attentively, especially if they know you ultimately want a decision.

Tell people something they didn't know.

Not many of us can stay riveted on information we already know or accept. If you are giving an update, tell listeners what's different than last month or last quarter. Don't waste time going over data or numbers that are not problematic. If you are meeting with a new client, tell your client how your company or product differs from others. At that time of day, that is usually their main concern. A boring diatribe of the history of your company or your extensive client base falls on deaf ears.

Be a storyteller.

People are easily distracted and pre-occupied as the day intensifies. It is critical to make your points stand out. What better way than to tell your listeners a story? People love stories because they are entertaining and engaging. They evoke empathy. They help listeners to experience the same feelings for themselves.

Add a dash of humor.

If used well, humor can boost creativity, initiate conversation and build a trusting relationship according to research by the Hay Group. It can also reduce hostility, deflect criticism, relieve tension and improve morale. Can you imagine how welcome playful laughter can be when the day has been hectic?

Be short.

William Strunk, the writer, said a sentence should have no unnecessary words for the same reason that a machine should have no unnecessary parts, or a drawing no unnecessary lines. Don't overwhelm people at the end of the day. Give your listeners enough data or facts so they

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can make a decision and be done with it. If you have an hour, try to finish in 40 minutes or less.

Presenting an idea or product to an internal or external customer is always a challenge. It is particularly difficult in the afternoon. To insure that you are successful, make the necessary modifications to your delivery and style.

Question: *Think about you last presentation. What challenges have you faced when presenting at the end of the day? What have you done differently to be successful? 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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