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Tips for Technical Presentations

By Judith Filek–President
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Many people find it difficult to sit through a technical presentation. One colleague said she would rather have a root canal. How then can technical speakers make people feel they got the point and that their time was well spent? Here are some suggestions for those of you that present technical information.

- **Feel for your audience.** Know what they know. The knowledge level of your audience often varies. It is important to frame your ideas in a context your listeners will understand. Upfront, don't be afraid to ask questions to better understand them. By identifying their knowledge level, you can provide the appropriate amount of detail. For example, you can decide whether particular technical terms are appropriate to use or whether analogies or examples are needed to educate them.

- **Give a quick overview**. People appreciate knowing what your talk is going to cover so set the context. Define the problem or issue. Make a recommendation. Give benefits. Suggest an action step. Listeners stay more engaged when you tell them where you are headed.

- **Keep your focus** on what you want from them in the end. Do you want them to follow a new process? Purchase technology? Accept your conclusions? What exactly should they do with the information you are giving them?

- **Be logical.** Clearly tell how you arrived at any conclusions. If they can't follow your strategy, your presentation is for naught.

- **Simplify.** Steve Jobs once said, "Decisions are easy when ideas are simply explained, but you have to work darn hard to keep your thinking simple." Definitely, do not overwhelm listeners with too much information. If you can, limit what you cover to three well-supported ideas.

- **Dump the technical jargon.** You might use technical acronyms every day on the job, but your listeners may not be familiar with them or only have a vague idea of what they mean. Be sure to define terms more than once if you must use them.

- **Spare us the details.** People want to know that the watch works, but they don't want to know how it works- unless it is absolutely critical. Determine what they need to know and no more.

- **Put numbers and percentages in perspective.** Nobody will remember $700, 768.00 unless you put it in terms people will remember. Instead, you might say, "That is an increase of 3X's what it was in 2015."

- **Clean up your slides.** Slides need to have meaningful titles. They also need to be simple with lots of white space. Too much information on a slide is never a good idea. Review each slide, story, or graph carefully. Ask yourself if it adds to the presentation, and remove if it doesn't. If the audience has to read a lot of text, they will miss what you are currently saying.

- **Push the "on" switch.** Be passionate. Don't hold in energy. Work the room by moving. Allow yourself to be animated. Smile Use a variety of gestures. Speak up and have inflection in your voice.

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- **Practice, practice, practice.** If you practice 5-6 times out loud, you will know the key points you want to cover and how to transition to each slide. If you try to memorize, you will inevitably forget something and become discombobulated.

The brightest person in the room can be overlooked if he cannot adequately share his ideas with those around him. Being able to communicate a complex concept in a manner that is easy to understand by those less technical is truly a skill that is as highly sought after. You can become that person if you follow the suggested tips.

Question: *If you speak on technical issues, what do you find difficult? How have you handled your concerns? Do the points listed in our article seem helpful? For next time, what will you remember? 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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