

# Who Me, Nervous? Then, Think Preparation!

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Do you struggle with being nervous in high stakes presentations? Almost everyone does! There is no magic pill to eliminate nervousness completely. In actuality, a certain amount of nervous energy is a good thing. It propels you to demonstrate your enthusiasm for your topic. The easiest way to turn nervousness into confidence is preparation. The more prepared you are, the more secure you will feel.

## **To prepare, you must:**

- Know your audience and their challenges.
- Provide a solution that not only addresses those issues, but offers a great return on investment.
- Create slides that are truly for your listeners.
- Anticipate their questions.
- Adapt on the fly.

Preparation begins with knowing your audience and their challenges. It is always a good idea to sit down with paper and pencil and do a complete analysis of what you know, what you still need to learn and how you will get the information. For example, who are your listeners? What are their titles and functions? What are their needs, and why they are willing to listen to you? What is their attitude toward you, your company and your product or service? Remember attitude is affected by the last person they saw. Also, what is their knowledge level? Is it more technical than yours? Do they have any frame of reference for your topic? Finally, what is the environment in which you will be presenting? What is the time of day? Obviously, presenting at the end of the day is different than first thing in the morning.

Sometimes there is an audience within an audience. If this is the case, try to look at your topic from the perspective of **all** of the various players, not just one. It is true that we can't know everything. As speakers we may need to make some educated guesses, knowing that we will have to verify our assumptions and adapt on the fly on the day of the presentation.

People are only interested in themselves and how you can help them. As you prepare content, it is critical that your content addresses the issues that are relevant to your listeners. It should not be a "nice to know" infomercial. Every word that comes out of your mouth should be to show people how you can solve their problems and, in addition, save them money. Obviously, cost is always an important consideration so what you are proposing must provide a strong, rather than tepid, return on investment. By doing your homework, talking to people on the inside, studying the company's annual report and reviewing articles from analysts and news reporters, you can glean the information you need to create powerful content that will motivate them to take action.

Once you have analyzed your audience and created pertinent content, you should create visual support that will aid audience comprehension. Visual support can be power point slides, whiteboards, flip charts or handouts.

The mistake that many presenters make is to create a presentation around an existing, generic slide deck. When listeners are shown slides that aren't relevant to their personal issues or slides that are too technical, they have a tendency to start day-dreaming about things in their personal and business lives. Once this happens, it is hard to get an audience back. A slide deck should never be speaker notes.

Well-prepared speakers should anticipate 95% of the questions they will be asked. Consequently, it is a good idea to brainstorm, both alone and with others in your organization, not only the questions you might be asked, but the answers you should give. Then, practice saying those answers out loud so that your voice sounds confident.

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Finally, things happen in a presentation. One must know the presentation inside and out so that if someone pulls you away from your point, you can get back on track. Utilizing **Impact Communications' Presentation Planner** will allow you to think on your feet because you will have created a linear road map with post-it notes that can easily be moved around or eliminated. In addition, the use of post-its will help you to digest and remember key ideas and concepts.

Taming the beast within is important to any speaker. The pros will tell you that it cannot be done without adequate preparation. Every time you short cut or eliminate one of the steps, you risk becoming nervous. A nervous speaker hardly ever closes business or wins people over.

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