

10

Steps to Prepare & Deliver a Powerful Presentation

Dedicated to every person who needs to stand up and speak to groups of people with the intention of making their world a better place for us all.



Courtesy of **David Price**

Setting the Scene

I am going to show you how to fast-track the preparation for a powerful presentation that will leave your audience with a strong impression, thus making you and/or your product or service memorable.

I'm assuming you probably want to learn about how to get a message across to your listeners in the best possible way, but in the shortest possible time - not in terms of the actual presentation length, but the shortest time in terms of preparation.

Why?

Because no one ever has more time than there is work; everyone has more work than there is time. So I'm assuming that you, like most people I work with, want to find out how to prepare an effective presentation in the shortest period of time.

I work with organisations and individuals, giving them the skills to do just what I am sharing with you here, to prepare a presentation that is powerful. You see, almost anyone can give a normal, everyday, pedestrian presentation.

What you will learn here are the skills and tools needed to give a *powerful* presentation. I've noticed several things about business people, community people, people who simply stand up in front of audiences, including churches, when they have to speak.

First of all, good speakers have two attributes.

They have *competence*, but they also have *confidence*. Now, the competence is not about their own area of expertise, because they already have that. And I'm assuming you already have the competence in your subject area. What they have is competence when it comes to getting a message across. They also have *confidence*.

One of the reasons that people are often not *good* presenters is that they're driven by fear. That fear really needs to be understood if you're really going to "make it happen" for yourself and for your audiences.

Let's look at that fear. The primary source of fear for people is that they think they'll make a fool of themselves. That's the basic fear that almost everyone says that they have - "I'm going to make a fool of myself."

If you ask yourself how many people you have actually seen make fools of themselves, the answer will be "very few." But, nevertheless, it's a powerful fear you need to deal with.

So, let's look at the reasons that make people fear that they'll make a fool of themselves. The two reasons are these:

- lack of preparation, and
- lack of rehearsal.

You can't get up, unless you're very experienced, and give a really good presentation without *preparation*. But just the same, you can't get up and give a really good presentation, without a lot of experience, without *rehearsal* as well.

There's a certain mindset you need to adopt before you really get into rehearsals. And the mentality is this: picture yourself as a speaker in front of an audience. You may not relate so much to the word "speaker," but let's just use that as the generic term. You're the person standing in front of an audience speaking, so we'll call you "the speaker".

I want you to think of the audience out there. More importantly, I want you to think of the gap, the chasm if you like, that exists between you and your audience. In order for you to get a message across that gap you must build a bridge.

How do you start building? Partially, this can be accomplished through your introduction when the person who introduces you establishes your credibility by citing your credentials, references, and successes.

What if there's no introduction? No foundation for the bridge? Then, you'll need to build that bridge from scratch.

Remember: the stronger you build the bridge, the stronger the messages you can send across it.

I'll come back to this metaphor of the bridge a lot throughout this book because it's a very important mindset to have. Most speakers fail because they don't actually bridge that chasm between themselves and the audience. They don't give the audience a reason to listen to them... and that's what you must do!

So as you read this book, have the mentality of a bridge builder.

The tools you'll need

First, go out and buy a pack of 3" x 5" index cards. They can be lined or blank. Make sure that they're the small index cards so they can fit in a pocket or in a purse. They are excellent to use for your preparation.

They also double up because they're excellent to use for your speaking notes, if you're going to use notes. You may or may not choose to use notes. It's really up to you. You won't know at this point, until you get to the end, whether you'll need notes. For now, what you will need is something to do your preparation on.

The second thing you'll need is quiet space.

The third thing you'll need is time. Even though this is a fast-track method for preparation, you still need to devote *some* time to the process.

As you work through the process try to avoid the temptation to skip any of the 10 steps the formula relies on.

Step ONE

Define your purpose

The reality is that you only have three possible purposes for presenting material. You will be informing, *and/or* entertaining, *and/or* persuading your audience. You'll need to know which of these you want to focus on, and you'll need to decide what proportion of each will suit your needs.

If you're going to inform and entertain, is it going to be 60% information and 40% entertainment? Is it going to be 90% information and 10% entertainment? Have a clear idea of your purpose.

The best presentations are the ones that have a mix of entertainment and at least one of the others. The common link in all memorable presentations is that they entertain, at least to some extent. By the way, I am not saying that you must tell jokes. Most of the best speakers don't tell jokes, but they are very humorous. This will be covered later.

Now what do you do with those index cards you've been out and bought? Take one and write your purpose on the card. Write it at the top of the index card like this for example:

Purpose

90% information

10% entertainment

Now, if you're like most people, you've just been reading along. You may not have a pen or pencil handy - please go and find one. Take out your index card and write down your purpose.

You'll find you get much more benefit from these notes by actually using the process as you go along. You'll also find that this formula is universal. You can use it for any type of presentation. There's also an unintended bonus. Clients have told me that this formula works just as well for writing papers or assignments or reports!

Defining your purpose has enabled you to build a foundation – a starting point.

Step TWO

State your message in a nutshell

If you skip this or get it wrong, the rest does not matter.

State the kernel of your message in one paragraph – preferably, one sentence. You must be able to state your message in a nutshell – in a succinct statement.

Your message is different from your purpose. Your purpose is to inform, entertain or persuade, or some mix of those. Your message is what it is you really want the audience to actually take away with them.

Here are some examples of what I mean by a message in a nutshell:

My message is: "This development is good. It will increase property values for everyone in the area."

That's a message that could be used by someone in local government, by a politician, or by a real estate developer.

"This is the best insurance plan on the market. Buy it."

Bear in mind that the actual message, the words you will write down, are not necessarily ever going to be said.

This is simply the message that you want your audience to remember – and perhaps act on. If you don't have your message in a nutshell foremost in your mind, you will lack focus

If you have the succinct message you wish to impart firmly in mind before you start your main preparation, imagine how much *focus* that will give.

Take out another index card and start crafting your own message. Write at the top...

My message in a nutshell

Then below that, write your message in no more than a very short paragraph, and preferably in a sentence. If you can state it in a sentence, the rest of your preparation will be easier.

Step THREE

Write your last paragraph first

Your opening is important. There's no doubt, but you can't have a good opening, good middle, and then a weak end because your presentation won't be memorable and it won't be powerful.

Similarly, you can't have a very weak opening, a reasonable middle, and a weak end. No impact. Further, you can't have a weak middle; your audience will lose interest.

Nor can you have a mediocre opening, mediocre middle, and powerful conclusion and still end up with a powerful presentation. You may put yourself ahead, a little, but you can do better.

Let's look at that last scenario again: Mediocre opening, mediocre middle, powerful ending. Your audience will remember something. They won't necessarily remember everything you *want* them to remember, but they'll remember something.

A powerful ending is so important that words really can't describe it. While preparing, aim for a powerful ending. Your conclusion is the ending where you will give your audience the "call to action" that you want them to take, and the key points you've covered.

The ending is your most important part, your most important component. Keep this in mind at all times while you are preparing your presentation. So write your last paragraph, word for word.

You may be thinking, "How can I write my last paragraph? I haven't done anything else yet?" Ah, but you have! You have defined your purpose and you have defined your message.

Your last paragraph will be an encapsulation of your message, of exactly what you want your audience to do or think. Don't worry too much about the exact content at this stage, just write down what you think will be an appropriate and an effective last paragraph.

Basically, write something that will be an effective conclusion. And write it on one of your 3 x 5" cards. Don't worry about grammar or syntax; just get a rough conclusion written. But... get it written word for word. Script it.

Once you've written your last paragraph, you have given yourself a *destination*, an end-point, something to aim for and work towards.

Your last paragraph now becomes your destination. That it is the conclusion toward which you will aim the rest of your preparation.

TIP: No thanks

Let me give you another little tip about your ending: don't say "Thank You."

When you say "Thank you" at the very end, it weakens your message. Just think about it, how do you feel when someone says, "So, I really want you to vote for me at the election. Thank you."

Or:

"So, I really want you to buy this insurance policy, because this is going to secure a future for you and your family. Thank you."

You see, the "thank you" actually weakens your message. Your premise is that you are sharing important information with your audience. They, in fact, are lucky to be receiving it.

Indeed, your mindset for a powerful delivery is that you are imparting wisdom for which they should thank you. Therefore, if you do feel the need to thank an audience (and most of us do have a need to thank the audience at some time), my suggestion is that you thank the audience in the *second or third to last paragraph* of your speech. For example:

“And so, ladies and gentlemen of the Farmers’ Federation, I’d like to thank you for inviting me here tonight. It’s been my pleasure and it’s been my privilege to come and speak to you here in Mukinbudin. The message I’d like to leave you with is this:

This community needs the project I have spoken to you about tonight. More than anything else, though, the project will need your support if the community is to benefit.

Without your support, the project won’t go ahead. I’ve given you the address that you should write to. I’ve given you the fax number that you’ll need to fax your opinion. I’ve given you the phone number that you’ll need to call to express your concerns and to demonstrate your support.

That’s what I’d like you to do - tonight. Go home and fax, phone, or write. Take the necessary actions to get this project off the ground... a project that is good for your community, a project that you need, and that I know you want.”

Now, with that sort of conclusion, you’ve thanked the audience politely, as you need to, but then you go into your final paragraph. That’s what keeps your message powerful.

Step FOUR

Identify your main points

This is where most people start – they miss the first three steps completely. But, you are wiser; you are at Step 4.

The most common mistake is to include too many points. If you’re standing up in front of a group or at a meeting to give a presentation for, say, 6-8 minutes, the maximum number of points that you’re going to have time to get across successfully is probably three or four and more likely, one!

The reality is that three or four strong points that made well are much more effective than eight or nine points that are not. Why? Because none of the latter will be memorable! Conversely, there’s a good chance that all three or four points will be memorable because they’re well-constructed.

How do you develop your main points?

Imagine that you’re building something, or imagine you’re making a cake and following a recipe. What you are doing here in step 4 by identifying your main points is listing your ingredients. You’re listing the building blocks that you will need.

Take out your 3 x 5” index cards again. Use four or five or six cards ... how ever many you think you’ll need to have one card for each main point. At this stage, don’t worry if you wind up with more main points than you need.

On each card, write one main point. I suggest that what you do is write each main point at the top of the card, only one per card. No more.

Imagine all of your components or building blocks and write them down. Don’t worry about their order yet. Write each main component and include the main things that will go into the recipe, the ingredients or main components that are necessary for whatever it is that you’re building. In this case, you are building a presentation.

Step FIVE

Illustrate your main points

Step 5 is where you take your main points and illustrate or elaborate on them.

One of the mistakes a lot of people make is that they simply state their points, but fail to illustrate them. Hence, as the audience has no hook upon which to hang the main points, they don't become memorable.

What you have to do then, is to build hooks - and the hooks are built by the illustrations of your main points. Here's a handy tip that I'm going to share.

There are three powerful ways to ensure that your main points are memorable:

- Analogy
- Anecdote
- Metaphor

But there's also a blanket one that overlaps these three, and that's visuals. You can use visuals to make your points more memorable. Remember, the more senses you appeal to, the more memorable your message!

Meanwhile, you can implement the analogy, anecdote, and metaphor tools. I'll give an example of each one.

ANALOGY

An analogy is taking a concept and relating or comparing it to something that's well-known. For example: "I was working in an oil drilling plant way out in outback Australia. We were working in the training room which was about 200m or so away from the main plant which, as you can imagine, was a vast array of steel, aluminium, plastic, and so on.

It was just a huge refinery. I looked out the window and I said to the group of mainly engineers, *"Tell me, in a nutshell, what does that plant do?"*

Most of the people weren't quite sure what I meant. They gave me very technical answers. Bear in mind that most of them were engineers, or had an engineering background, so the answers they gave me were technical or engineering-based.

One person in the group could see exactly what I meant and he said, 'Well, basically, what you're looking at outside that window is a giant washing machine.'

I said, 'Ah! That sounds good. What do you mean?'

He said, 'Well, that plant takes raw material out of the ground, washes it just like a washing machine, and then it sends the clean material down the pipeline. It also sends some waste out another pipeline. It's a washing machine!'

My response to that was: 'Now that really explains, to a non-engineering person, what this plant does.'

Now, you may think that's simplistic, but consider this scenario. Those same people were people who may have needed to go into the boardroom at a large bank in a capital city somewhere, and persuade bankers that they needed to expand the plant. Bankers aren't engineers. They are ordinary, lay people in terms of engineering concepts. So, the simplest way would be to explain the plant using the washing machine terms:

'Don't underestimate simplicity as being something that is weak. There is power to be derived from simplicity.'

METAPHOR

There's a metaphor we've already used: the concept of the bridge.

The dictionary definition of metaphor is to apply or relate something to something else that is not literally or usually applicable. In light of that, you will see that the bridge builder I used earlier is a metaphor. I'm correlating the bridge as a metaphor for sending a message across. The metaphor draws a parallel between concepts. "The Internet is an information superhighway" is a metaphor. It makes a difficult concept easier to understand and is a very powerful tool.

ANECDOTE.

An anecdote is a story that you tell in order to make a point. They can give your message impact. You'll find that anecdotes are very powerful as well. I'll give you an example.

Just imagine that I wanted to make the following point with my audience: one single occurrence can happen that will change someone's behaviour for the rest of his or her life.

This is my message: whatever happens in one experience can in fact change a person's behaviour from then on. Here's the anecdote:

"This happened to me a few years ago. I was sitting in an aircraft that was in Broome. I'd been in Broome doing some work at a conference, and I was flying back to Perth. I was seated in row 3 in an aisle seat. In row 2, there were a couple of people seated - normal, everyday people, except for one thing that I didn't yet know:

They had decided that meat was cheap in Broome. They had stocked up and were taking some meat back to Perth with them.

None of us knew this at this stage as we waited for the engines to start. The aircraft began to taxi down the runway. As we reached the end of the tarmac, and started down the taxiway towards the beginning of the runway, something happened...

Blood started dripping from the locker above!

Fortunately, it was above the people seated in row 2. It was their meat that was dripping on them.

Amidst the screams of the people on the aircraft, who assumed there was a body in the locker or something like that, these people attempted to explain, 'It's ok! It's ok! It's a leg of beef that we're taking back to Perth!'

Meanwhile, of course, we were on the taxiway and just about to reach the runway to take off, so they could not simply stand and stop the source of the blood dripping. So, it was dripping down onto their laps. Now, I'll guarantee you that this is one experience that they will remember for the rest of their lives. It was for me as well!

I'll also guarantee you that never again will they put meat in the locker of an aircraft! Or, if they do, they'll wrap it a lot better than they did for that flight."

You see, that's a simple anecdote. It has a bit of humour in there. Most audiences laugh at that story perhaps because of the way I tell it. I embellish the story with other descriptions if I think it will add to the impact. Normally, I get a reasonable laugh from that particular tale. I can shorten it if I want or embellish it if I want. It is an *anecdote* - a story, but it makes the point I want to convey; my message is linked to the story.

The story on its own is just an amusing tale. Yet, if it merits sharing, it has to have a point – a 'moral to the story' if you like. So I would link it to the point, usually by the way *after* I've told the story. For you, here, I shared the point before the story.

But for audiences generally, I would tell the story and then make the point. That is building a bridge, as well.

This is a good place to talk about humour. Humour is vital for almost every presentation. Humour creates an emotional component to that bridge we're building. It creates a common bond between you and your audience. If there's an emotive component it opens up the channels of communication and retention of information.

TIP: Humour

Humour bridges the gap by creating a bond between speaker and audience.

Part of the reason for this is because you take in your information first emotionally, and then process it intellectually. That's another issue. For now, let's just accept that as a fact. The important thing to remember is that humour is vital if you plan to get a message across to your audience.

Humour does not mean jokes!

Jokes aren't the best source of humour. They work for some people. You may have heard Allan Pease, the famous Australian speaker. He speaks about topics such as body language, men's and women's peculiar behaviours, and sales. Allan Pease is brilliant at telling jokes but there are not many people like Allan.

How can you inject humour in other ways? The best speakers use humour, but they don't tell jokes.

Their humour is added through the use of anecdotes. Where do these humorous anecdotes come from? Think about any popular comedian. What gets the most laughs? Stories about real events that happen to real people. The best anecdotes come from their own lives, their own experiences. The best anecdotes for you will come from your own life experiences. Start noticing what goes on around you.

Become alert to what's happening around you every day. When something humorous does occur, write it down in a form that you'll remember. Go back to the trusty 3 x 5" cards if you like.

I keep a little file of humorous events that I have witnessed or experienced so that I can refer back to them. I know people who have indexed all of their humorous events; others keep a journal of their humorous events. I'm not necessarily suggesting that you go that far. However, you do need to look back through your own history and pinpoint major events that have occurred to you or in your presence that are humorous. You will speak best about topics you know well.

I'll give you an example of a humorous story that could be used in a presentation to make a point about embarrassment.

Let's imagine that you were talking to salespeople, relatively inexperienced salespeople, and you wanted to help them overcome their problems with feeling embarrassed about – let's say – making cold calls. Maybe you also want to help them with their fear of talking to clients and worrying that things will not go as well as they could. So, easing one's embarrassment is the point you want to make. Here's the story (which is true):

"You think you might be embarrassed about going in and making a cold call? Let me tell you what embarrassment really is! And after this story, you won't ever worry about being embarrassed again.

Picture yourself at the airport. You're seeing off some friends who are flying away on a holiday. Suddenly, you experience the "call of nature." Accordingly, you go to find the toilets

there at the airport. As you walk in, you notice the floor of the restroom is tiled. You also notice one of those little caution signs, "Caution! Floor is Wet!" ... so you walk carefully. Yet, sadly for you, the janitor on this particular day has put just a tiny bit more detergent in the mop bucket than perhaps he would otherwise have done. As you walk over to the urinal, (because you happen to be male in this story), your foot loses its grip and you slip. Worse, you don't merely slip onto the floor; you slide sideways into the urinal!

(Urinals at airports used to be long stainless steel troughs, not individual units like they are today.)

So, there you are, suddenly lying in the urinal. Of course, there are gentlemen standing next to you...doing what people normally do at the urinal. All you can do is pick yourself up, and do what you went in there to do. Now, as your friends are still getting on that plane, you have absolutely no option but to go outside and see them again. When you get there, your friends can't help but notice that, not only are you a little more moist than you were when you went in, you also have a different fragrance. Now, that's embarrassment!"

Now, come back to the step in the process. Imagine if you told that story in a presentation with the point being how to ease one's fear of embarrassment or how "you think you've been embarrassed?"

Listen to this one!" If you wanted to make that point, that story works brilliantly, and I've used it a lot. It's a true story too, by the way; that makes it even better. It didn't happen to me, but it happened to one of the participants in one of my programs.

Humour is memorable. I still remember the story, and I still use it.

You may not always be in a situation where it is appropriate to use that sort of a story. Only you can decide. Only you can decide which story will best suit each situation. The bottom line is that if you are going to be powerful in your presentation, you should use some humour.

You may be thinking that there are some situations where humour is not appropriate. Most people would agree with that, but I don't. The reason why I don't is derived from personal experience. Let me tell you something about myself. I'm a Civil Marriage Celebrant. That means I conduct non-religious weddings.

Maybe you're thinking, "Well, you certainly can be humorous at a wedding; many of them are.", but that's not my point. You see, as a Civil Marriage Celebrant, I am occasionally called upon to conduct funerals. I don't do many now, but I used to do a lot...and I used to have people laughing at those funerals. Now, don't think "Oh! That's just tasteless!" because it's not – read on. I'm not suggesting that at every funeral I had people laughing. But, at most of the funerals I conducted for adults, there was laughter at some time during the ceremony. How can you build humour into a funeral? My task as the Celebrant at a non-religious funeral is to give a eulogy about the person who's passed away. I speak about their life, about their past. Of course, when you're doing that, you don't look back at the bad things; you remember and share the good things... and the good things nearly always contain some humorous memories. That's how you can get some humour into a funeral.

You don't keep people laughing for long, maybe only a matter of 10 or 15 seconds.

My point is simply this: if you can have people laughing at a funeral, you can have people laughing anywhere. Humour is appropriate in virtually every situation. It builds such a powerful component to the bridge you are building (between you and your audience) that it enables you to send across amazingly powerful messages. I repeat: humour is crucial to any presentation if you want it to be powerful. Make sure it's in there.

Now, what do you physically do with your illustrations or examples? You put them on the card that has the corresponding point. So, if you have one main point on each card – which

hopefully you do from the earlier step – simply write down the illustrations for each main point. You might choose two or three illustrations for each point. You might end up only using one; that doesn't matter. Just be sure to put them on the card to which they correspond.

Remember, you don't have to write down the entire illustration. For instance, the story I mentioned about the toilet at the airport, I need only use two key words to bring that entire story back to me – “airport toilet”. Those few words are what you will write on the card. This will give you the ability to illustrate the main points without a) sounding ‘canned’ and b) with power.

The ‘Big Picture – Little Picture’ concept

Another way to enhance the use of Step 5 and the index cards is a tool I learned from my colleague Matt Church (www.mattchurch.com).

For every point you have to make, think of a “big picture” illustration of it as well as a “little picture” illustration. In other words, think of an illustration that makes the point in a more global way – that's the “big picture” It's for the roughly 50% of your audience who are “big picture” thinkers.

Also, think of an illustration or illustrations that make the point in more detail, with more specifics. That will satisfy the more detailed people in your audience – the other 50%. With your cards, put the big picture illustration key words on one side of the card and the little picture illustration key words on the other side of the card.

There is a huge advantage in this method – you now have more material than you need and you can use whichever example suits your particular audience. Most people will start with the big picture illustration and then move on to the little picture illustration.

It makes you look really “slick” and highly professional.

This is where you put all of your main points in order. Having decided what your main points are, you now need to decide in what order you're going to share them with your audience.

The logical sequence is not necessarily the best one to use to persuade your audience.

In fact, it's sometimes better to use a sequence that is *not* logical in order to persuade an audience. Think about what will best motivate the audience to continue to want to hear what you are saying. I can assure you that the answer will lie in the sequence upon which you decide to deliver your main points.

Step SIX

Plan your sequence

You may be thinking, “This sounds a bit out of kilter. Why didn't you decide on the order before you illustrated the main points?”

That's a good question. The answer is that sometimes it's the illustrations that give you, the speaker, a better understanding of the sequence you will need to use.

Therefore, I suggest that you decide on the actual ordering after you've worked out the illustrations and examples you plan to use. So, how do you do this? Having put all of your illustrations (“big picture” and “little picture”) on the index cards with their matching main points, now you simply juggle them on the table in front of you until they are in the order that you want them, the order that makes the most sense, has the most impact. You are building

your presentation physically by taking the index cards and placing them in the order in which you want them.

You have your “Purpose” on the far left then your “Message in a Nutshell”. You have your “Conclusion” on the far right, because that’s where you’re heading, your destination. You have your “Main Points” with their illustrations on the corresponding cards in the middle. And now, you have them in order.

You have on the table before you your cards laid out in the sequence in which you will present them. This is the fast-track method. Remember, what we’re doing here is building that bridge so you can get your message across.

Step SEVEN

Write your introduction

There’s a trick to this. You have already written your most powerful introduction. You don’t *know* that you have, but you have. Have a look at your cards and look at your main points and at the illustrations of those points. If you choose the most significant, the most powerful main point out of all of them, you will find that there lies your most powerful introduction.

If you’ve illustrated them well, you will find a wonderful anecdote to go along with that point and that is your introduction.

You have found your most powerful introduction.

That anecdote or illustration will be your most powerful opening. This is the beginning of a truly powerful presentation. Remember the stronger the bridge you build, the stronger the messages you can send over it. The introduction is your most significant bridge building opportunity.

So, have a look at that anecdote, or that illustration you’ve used, and now weave that into your opening. There’s a Golden Rule here. It is: “Don’t do the obvious” or “don’t do what everyone else does.” If you want to be a powerful presenter, if you want to make a powerful presentation, if you want to be memorable, choose to do what everyone else *does not* do.

That’s what will make your presentation powerful and memorable. Don’t start by saying, “Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen.” or “Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank you for inviting me here today.” Please please please *don’t do that!*

Do this: Take your speaking position. Pause. Silence... and after about 3 or 4 seconds, just start a telling story.

The scenario could unfold like this:

The speaker is introduced.

“Will you please now welcome our speaker today, Mr David Price.”

Walk to where you will speak.

Pause.

Silence.

At this point, the audience is watching you walk up to the stage or dais. They also watch you stand, and they watch you look at them. They watch while you say nothing for a matter of three to four seconds.

At this very moment, you have the audience in the palm of your hand, literally in the palm of your hand. Why? Because, they are wondering what you’re going to say.

And then you proceed to tell a story:

"It was 12:45 p.m. on the 15th of March. It occurred on a suburban street, a strip retail area. I walked into a hairdresser's because I needed to have my hair cut. When I entered, I noticed there was another person standing there, also waiting for a haircut. The lady who ran the salon walked over to me and said, 'Can I help you?'

Well, because I'd walked in second, and the other person was before me, I said 'Thank you, but this person was here first.' So she walked over to him and said, 'Can I help you?' And he said, 'I want a haircut.'"

Now, let's just sidetrack for a minute. Where is the audience now? They're still in the palm of your hand because they're wondering what on earth this story has to do with anything you're going to say. And that's where you want them – in the palm of your hand.

Let's switch back to the story now:

He said, 'I want a haircut.' So she went across to her appointment book and said, 'Well, I can fit you in at 1:30 or at 2:00. Which would you like?'

She looked at him. And he said nothing. I stood there and looked at him also. And still, he said nothing.

So, eventually because I was in a bit of a hurry, I said to him, 'Which would you like, the 1:30 or the 2:00? Because I'm here for a haircut as well and I'll have whichever one you don't want.'

He looked at me and said, in one of the most timid voices you can imagine... 'I can't decide!'"

At that point, the audience usually laughs because I've supplemented my story with body language showing how the gentleman was standing, for he was standing in a very non-assertive manner. Still, he was not able to make a decision as simple as choosing a 1:30 or a 2:00 appointment; also, bear in mind that the time was then 12:45.

Now, having told that story, I would then proceed with a line something like this: *"Have you noticed, in your life, that some people cannot seem to make decisions?"*

Their answer is always "Yes!" They always nod. Their body language is such that they show their agreement. I have them now. I have started to build the bridge.

Now, I go on to tell my story or to give my presentation, about decision making in business or in life, or whatever it may be. It's an introduction built primarily upon an anecdote. It gets into the story immediately.

And it gets into a story which has some emotive value and some entertainment value, but also has a point. And that's what's important... that your story has a point.

My opening is not: *"Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. I'd like to thank you for inviting me here today. I want to talk about decision making."*

That's a predictable and bland opening and, therefore, not powerful. You must be unpredictable to be powerful. Write your introduction bearing in mind that your most powerful anecdote will be found in the illustration of one of your main points.

Physically, how do you do this? You'll have guessed by now. You put it on an index card!

Laid out in front of you now, at your desk or table, is your entire presentation. It's not polished yet, but your draft is now virtually complete.

You now have:

- your opening,
- your main points in sequence,
- the illustrations of your main points
- your conclusion.

Step EIGHT

Revisit your last paragraph

When you wrote your last paragraph, you hadn't done any prior preparation, so it was a *draft* last paragraph. That's why I said, "Don't spend too much time on it; don't worry very much about it. Just get something down." What you had written before has served its purpose. It was a draft last paragraph. It has provided the destination that you needed. It's done what it was supposed to do. Alas, it's likely that this particular last paragraph will no longer be useful. It won't be quite right. It won't be powerful.

It won't be the spot-on point that you need to reach. So what do you do? Rewrite it. Have a look at your introduction. Have a look at all of your main points. Examine the illustrations of your main points. Now, rewrite your conclusion to "fit" the rest of the presentation you have prepared.

Here's a tip for you: **Your most powerful conclusion will be found in your introduction.**

Come back to your introduction. You'll probably find that if you change or rearrange the wording of that story, or even simply refer to the story, you'll find that you'll be able to state your message clearly. So, look at two cards now. Look at your message and at your introduction.

See if you can, by referring to the introduction, hammer home your message in a nutshell. You'll normally find that you can. In addition, this will help give your presentation a nice, well-rounded feel for the audience. It will sound as if it is well prepared. Most importantly, it will be powerful. Here's an example of a conclusion, using the example I gave as an introduction for the hairdresser story:

"It's been my privilege to speak to you today about decision making in business, about focus, and about how you can move towards greater profits, greater efficiency, and greater success. I told you when I started this presentation that I walked in to a hairdresser's in a retail strip shopping centre to get a haircut. It was as simple as that. I told you about the person who couldn't make a decision. '1:30 or 2:00?' 'I can't decide.' I've shown you how you can make the simplest of decisions, from what time you'd like to have a haircut through to whether you want to go into a joint venture with a new partner.

Decisions have to be made daily.

Today, we've looked at decision making and how it can work for you, not against you. Make your decisions. Make them strongly, wisely, and then stick with them."

Now, there you've got an example of a conclusion. Sure, you had to imagine that there was a whole pile of information in the middle, but can you see how I've linked the first paragraph with the last paragraph? That link provides the strength. It is what gives your presentation that vital power.

What you do now is literally tear up that 1st last paragraph you wrote, the draft one. Rewrite it and place it on the far right hand side of all of the cards on your desk. At this point, you have your finished product... almost. I say almost, because you still need to do an edit. I'll show you how to do that in Step 9.

Step NINE

Rehearse

You must rehearse. There is simply no getting around it!

One of the things that amazes me as I work in the business community and observe people giving presentations is that so many people, and sadly it's the majority, actually stand up in front of an audience and speak at an important presentation giving an important message without ever having given the presentation aloud before. The first time the speaker hears that message is while it is being delivered... at the same time that the audience hears it!

In other words, what they do to practise is to *read* what they've prepared. Wrong.

The skill that they're going to use when they actually present information is to *speak*. You don't have to be Einstein to figure out that the way to practise or rehearse an oral presentation that will be spoken is to *speak* it!

So, practise by speaking. Where do you do that? Anywhere. At home, in a bedroom, in the car, in the bathroom, in an office, in the boardroom... it doesn't matter. Do it where you're alone because it's easier that way. Just practise to blank space, to a wall, but practise out loud.

Practise as if the audience were there. If you can find an audience, that's great. Even better! In order to be good, you'll probably need to practise aloud, a minimum of two to three times. If you want to be really good, practise four to five times. If you want to be excellent, practise ten times.

Let's look at this concept of rehearsing. What you do is this:

Gather your cards, in order and stand. Don't do this sitting down because when you present, you'll be standing. So practise your presentation just as you will be sharing it with your future audience.

Stand, and start speaking as if the audience were there. Don't mumble. Give it the full volume. Give your practise runs with the same enthusiasm that you would if the audience were there. Simply gather your cards. At first, you'll find that you'll stumble a little as you go through. That's ok. It is one of the reasons you practise. You'll also find that links you may need to connect your illustrations aren't necessarily there. That's when you need to use the golden four-letter word of preparing:

E-D-I-T

Stand up. Speak aloud. Go through your cards and mark where there is some little hiccup in the process. Then, go back to the table and look at how you can link your points together better, more effectively, more powerfully. You'll be able to do it. *Note: you won't be able to see any missing links unless you rehearse aloud.*

This step is really rehearse, edit, rehearse, edit, rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!

So, rehearse it, then edit it, then rehearse it, then edit it; by this point, you'll have your finished product. Now, rehearse it, rehearse it, rehearse it.

You can't give a good presentation without rehearsal. This step will take time. I know it will take time. I've fast-tracked you through the preparation. I can't fast-track you through the rehearsal. You must spend time rehearsing. Sorry! There's no shortcut around this step. You must rehearse.

But there's good news! The good news is, the more practised you get at presenting, the less time you'll need for rehearsal in the future because you'll have more competence and more

confidence. You'll be better able to effectively build bridges between you and your audience. You'll be much more able to build strong bridges across which you can send powerful messages. Hence, the more you rehearse, the better you'll get.

If you want to be good, rehearse!

Step TEN

Perform

Give a *performance* your audience will remember.

Please take note of the mindset here – I have not said “speak.” I have said “perform.”

You may be thinking, “But I’m not a performer!” Ok, you don’t need to be a performer in your everyday life. However, if you’re going to make a memorable, powerful presentation, you must perform.

It’s a mentality, a mindset. It’s nothing more than that. Get up there and perform.

If you’ve worked through the previous nine steps and you’ve rehearsed, the performance part will be easy. You’ll also even be looking forward to it. You’ll still be nervous, but you’ll be looking forward to it. The feeling that you get when the audience listens to you while you give that powerful conclusion... the feeling you get when you know you have gotten your message across that bridge better than anyone else... that feeling is ecstatic.

FINAL TIPS AND STRATEGIES

1. Breathing

Very important: when you get out there and stand in front of your audience, breathe. Breathe well. Breathe deeply.

Start this breathing a few minutes early, two to three minutes before your presentation. Not only will this help calm and centre you, it also oxygenates your body. It helps you think more clearly, too. Get as much air into your lungs as you can; let that transfer of oxygen into your bloodstream work as efficiently as you can. Get the oxygen flow going.

2. Eating & drinking

Also, don’t drink alcohol and don’t smoke before your presentation. Both of these things cut down the capacity of the cells, and the blood particularly, to absorb oxygen. Don’t eat dairy products before you speak because they tend to coat the vocal chords. You need your speaking tool, your voice that is, working well for you.

If you are worried about a problem with nervousness, don’t drink too much of anything at all. There’s nothing worse than needing to walk onstage to present and having a very

uncomfortable feeling in your bladder because nature is calling. If you are going to drink water, drink small amounts of it and take it at room temperature.

3. Your introduction

Be very clear about your introduction and who's going to give it. If necessary, write your own introduction so they know exactly what to say. You can even ask them to read it word for word.

My introduction is a standard written introduction, one which I ask people to read word for word. If I feel that the person is not going to understand why it needs to be read word for word, I say, *"I use certain parts of my introduction in my presentation, so it's important for it to be read exactly as it is written. Would you mind reading this word for word?"* They always do this for me when I ask in that way.

It doesn't matter whether you are giving a sales presentation to your own staff or whether you're giving a presentation to external people, have someone to introduce you. It gives you credibility, lends a bit of a formal aspect to your presentation- both make it seem that much more important.

4. Know your audience.

By this I mean, know their level of familiarity with the content of your presentation. For example, if you are discussing accounting with lay people, use general terms that the majority of your audience will understand. If you are to speaking to a group of accountants, you can tailor your presentation to use more technical terms.

5. Plan where you are going to present from

Know where you are going to stand, whether there's a podium, whether there's a lectern. A podium is what you stand on. It's a riser that makes you stand higher if the auditorium is large.

A lectern is what people stand behind. My strong advice is: don't use the lectern. I would suggest to you that most of the top speakers that you've heard throughout the world, don't use lecterns. I'll also suggest to you that almost 100% of speakers that you've heard who are bad DO use a lectern.

A lectern creates a barrier between you and the audience; it makes the bridge building harder. It's much harder to build a bridge when there's a physical barrier between you and your audience. So, don't use a lectern.

If you do need to use some notes (and by the way, those cards that you've prepared are ideal as notes), you can stand *next* to the lectern and simply place the cards there. You can glance over to your left or to your right and pick up the information that you need from each card. You don't need to hold them in your hand.

Referring to note cards placed on the lectern gives you good impetus for moving around on stage a bit which helps hold the attention of your audience. So, you can use the lectern, but don't use it in the traditional way, that is, by standing behind it.

6. What will you do when you have finished?

Another thing to prepare in advance is what you are going to do when you finish your presentation. Where are you going to walk - offstage? Are you going to stay onstage, if there's a stage? Are you going to go back to your seat? If you're preparing a presentation

which is going to be delivered at a meeting, where are you going to stand when you deliver it? From behind your chair, or are you going to go to the front of the room? If you're going to use visuals, where and how are you going to use them?

7. Do a recce

Lastly, visit the room or venue at which you are to speak. Make sure you know everything there is to know about the venue. How will the audience be seated? Are there any obvious distractions like air conditioning noise or glare?

Don't forget things like parking. There is nothing worse than arriving and not being able to find a parking space – it's stress you don't need just before a presentation.

Check things like acoustics. Will you need a microphone or will your natural voice be sufficient enough to carry to the audience members in the back of the room. Check the sound system, if you plan to use it, prior to your presentation to be certain that it works.

8. Check your equipment

Check everything. Data projectors, televisions, audio devices and other mechanical or electrical equipment you will need. This is important to do beforehand. You can imagine the dismay of planning to share a powerful visual at a crucial point and having the projector malfunction.

Always have a backup!

Check your equipment. The check it again!

9. Avoid death by PowerPoint

Audiences today are tired of PowerPoint being used so badly. Using PowerPoint is a whole topic on its own, but here are some tips:

In recent studies it has been found that audience reaction to people using PowerPoint in presentations tends to be negative. (*The phenomenon of audiences applauding when a speaker announces that they will not be using PowerPoint is common!*) The studies show that audiences have judged the quality of most PowerPoint presentations themselves to be poor.

There are 3 major turn offs to presenters who use PowerPoint

Major turn off: Number 1 (*The "power" of PowerPoint is not in its ability to display text*)

Presenters tend to use PowerPoint to be their script and read to the audience.

Major turn off: Number 2 (*Presenters have not learned the power of the black screen!*)

Presenters who leave PowerPoint running throughout the entire presentation rather than making a point and then speaking about it. There is frequently text on the screen that is not directly related to what is being said at that time – eg. They begin speaking about a new point when the screen is displaying the previous point (or vice versa).

Major turn off: Number 3 (*Tech crisis when the equipment fails*)

Presenters who cannot cope when the inevitable “technical hitch” occurs and fall into a heap lose their audiences. You must be able to present professionally when the technology doesn’t co-operate.

Contrary to the belief of people who are not good presenters, PowerPoint is not a life raft. It will *not* necessarily make a poor presenter look good. Frequently, it makes them look worse.

A good presenter is a person who *can* present *without* PowerPoint – but uses it to maximum effect and impact in carefully chosen points in their presentation and skilful use of its capabilities.

There is a great resource for PowerPoint available at www.communicateusingtechnology.com

Fast-track summary

This is a fast-track book, so here’s do a fast-track summary of the whole process. We looked at the fact that the number of speakers who are out there - who are good - is small, very small... 10%, if that.

Most people are reluctant to get up in front of an audience because there is a bit of anxiety there, and perhaps the fear that they will make fools of themselves. There are two ways to overcome that anxiety/fear – preparation and rehearsal.

Preparing is the crucial part. There are tools that are needed: index cards (3 x 5” index cards); some space; some time.

You must adopt a certain mentality, and the mentality must be that of a Bridge-BUILDER. You are building a bridge between yourself and your audience. The stronger the bridge, the more information you’ll be able to send across, and the more powerful that information can be.

Step 1: Define the purpose

It can be one or a combination of the following: entertaining, informative, or persuasive.

Step 2: State your message in a nutshell

That nutshell should be a sentence or a short paragraph, but you must know your message in a nutshell.

Step 3: Write your last paragraph

Write it out word for word; it becomes your destination. It becomes the point you aim for and saves a lot of preparation time.

Step 4: Identify your main points

Not too many, just the points you need to construct the overall message that you want to send across the bridge. Imagine you’re building something. This is where you list your components.

Step 5: Illustrate your main points

Use **analogy**, **anecdote**, and **metaphor**. They make your illustrations and examples powerful. Remember, if you can visualize or create visuals for those, it makes them even more powerful. This is also where you bring in humour. The illustrations of your main points are great opportunities for including humour. Don't go to jokes, necessarily. You have to be really good to get a joke to go over well. Further, the joke must be precisely focused on the main point. Instead, use anecdotes from your life which are humorous, or draw from the experience of others. That's where you'll get your humour from.

Step 6: Plan your sequence carefully

Remember that the most logical sequence is not necessarily the most powerful sequence, so plan carefully. Also, give some thought as to how you are going to link from one main point to another main point, using your illustrations.

Step 7: Write your introduction

Remember, your most powerful introduction will be found in the illustrations of your main points.

Step 8: Revisit your last paragraph

Most of the time, you will need to rewrite it. Your most powerful last paragraph will be found in a link between your message (stated in a nutshell) and your opening. If you can link your conclusion to your opening, you will add impact and power to the presentation, no matter how long it is, whether three minutes, thirty minutes, or three hours. Link to your opening and you'll have that power.

Step 9: Rehearse, edit. rehearse, edit rehearse, rehearse, rehearse

Go through and practise your entire presentation. The crucial factor here is to practise aloud and practise as if your audience is there with you. Remember, when you are in front of the audience, you are going to be *speaking*, so you must practise what you're going to do – *speak!* Rehearse aloud.

Step 10: Perform

Make sure you give a performance that your audience will remember. If you get up to speak, then that's all you'll do. But if you get up to *perform*, then you will be memorable.

There you have it. That's the fast-track way to prepare a presentation that will have impact and be powerful, a presentation that will be memorable. Good luck!

About the author

David Price has written a number of books and has recorded audio CDs. Works include:

- How To Chair a Meeting
- How to Have More Productive Meetings
- Meeting Procedure Made Easy
- Minute Taking Myths and Mysteries
- Systems for Success
- Intrapreneurship
- How to Speak so People Will Listen

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