

Nine Engaging Ways to Open a Presentation

Employ any one of these methods to instantly grab your audience's attention

AUDIENCES PAY ATTENTION AT THE START OF every presentation. They want to know the context and objective of your presentation and what they can get out of it—before they continue to listen. Even with a compelling reason to pay attention, they also want to determine if it is worthwhile to listen... to you.

You can determine when you have your audience's attention simply by listening to their nonverbal clues—their body language: they are sitting upright, looking at you, alert, bright-eyed. Ever look



around while presenting and see the tops of people's heads? Their heads are not bowed in deference; they are fiddling with their cell phones. And not listening to you.

You must connect your audience from the very start, employing an engaging and memorable opening, and giving them a compelling reason to listen. An effective opening:

- ◆ Captures, and retains, your audience's attention.
- ◆ States your objective and its benefit to your audience.
- ◆ Previews your call to action—what you want them to do when the presentation is over.

Consider using one of these techniques to open your next presentation with purpose.

A relevant story or anecdote. Audiences love stories. Telling a story or an anecdote that is directly related to your presentation, especially one that makes the

point you are trying to make, can be especially powerful and motivating (no 'war' stories though). Tell your story so that your audience not only hears your words, but more importantly, can visualize the story and action. In my experience, opening with a story is far and away the best start you can make. It is, however, also the most difficult.

Metaphor or analogy. Metaphors as well as analogies allow your audience to see your point through a different lens—a lens that is familiar and readily understandable. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable (your presentation as a journey). An analogy, on the other hand, is a comparison between two things, typically for the purpose of explanation or clarification.

Metaphors open people's minds to think differently, whereas analogies allow people to see concepts more clearly.

Provocative question. You can ask two types of provocative questions. The first, a rhetorical question, doesn't require an out-loud answer; your audience answers it in their heads. A second, real question requires an answer even if the answer is a show of hands. Both types of questions must be easily answered by the majority of your audience and, of course, must apply directly to your topic.

Contemplative quote. A well-chosen quote gives your audience something to think about. That's a good thing because a thinking audience pays attention. Consider a quote with a moral, especially when there is an obvious lesson and one that slowly unfolds as it sinks in; one that invokes that "ah-ha" moment. Also, a well-chosen quote that alludes to your objective can help compel your audience to act.

Startling statement or remarkable fact. Because you can impart a wealth of information, divulge information that makes your audience sit up and pay attention.

Surprising statistic. People love statistics. Offer a statistic that is designed to

elicit an "I didn't know that!" response from your audience, one that deepens their knowledge of your topic.

Bold promise. While this can be a dicey opening—you must be able to fulfill that promise, after all—it nonetheless impresses audiences to the point where they think to themselves: "Hmmm. I'd like to see that happen."

Trend report. An insight into the future is always welcome. Be sure to use a trusted source based on valid research. Beware any pie-eyed prediction that might garner skepticism.

"Write this down for future reference..." Using this technique enables your audience to become immediately involved and engaged in your presentation. Try one of these examples: a short, pithy quote; a list of features and benefits of a product or service; the top five reasons for some subject. Be creative. Make sure it relates directly to your presentation, is worth writing down, and most especially is worth reading later.

Finally. Your opening is crucial to focusing your audience on your presentation. Make sure your opening, first, relates directly to the content and objective of your presentation and, second, comes from your audience's point of view—stated in a way they can readily understand your topic and appreciate its benefit to them).

Prepare a tight opening, polish it to perfection, then practice it until you can deliver it flawlessly. After you have secured your audience's attention, you can smoothly transition into the heart of your presentation.

To succinctly summarize: Start by grabbing them, then don't let them go!

—RICH MAGLIANI

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Phone: 802.879.9330