

Key Strategies for Making a Presentation Shine



Joyce Newman

Last week, an agency account executive called with the following request: “We have a client who needs media training this week, and while you’re at it, we’d like you to do some speaker training. And by the way, our client only has three hours.” Sound familiar?

We get this type of call all the time. The term “media training” has become a catchall for many types of communications training and is causing considerable confusion. People mistakenly associate media training either with presentation training or executive leadership coaching — rather than talking with the press. Although these areas all deal with speaking, each one requires different skills, and a different approach to training.

I knew we had to better define the goals for this particular client. Speaking with Bill Jones,* the account executive, we learned that his client, Mary Adler,* president of a large association, was preparing to deliver a keynote address in 10 days to the full membership. I arranged a conference call with Bill and Mary and found that the significance of the keynote address was to set the tone for the coming year. She told me that she was pretty confident with her ability as a speaker, but would appreciate help with delivery. Mary wanted to be sure that the speech “flowed” and that the audience would be able to track with her message.

In addition to working on the presentation itself, Mary wanted to focus on the post-keynote television interviews. I explained that this was a lot to do in one session, but that if she gave me four hours instead of the three she had planned, we would spend one hour on the keynote presentation and the rest on interview message development and videotaped role-play. Mary agreed.

Knowing the Client

Based on the illustration above, these questions can help you determine the type of training really needed:

1. What is the immediate purpose of the “talk?”
2. Who is the audience and how large is the group?
3. What is the speaker’s goal vis-à-vis the audience?
4. Knowing the Audience. Whether speaking in a one-on-one interview or in a public session of a thousand, the speaker must understand who the audience is and tailor the message appropri-

ately. For example, many clients preparing for a media interview mistakenly believe that the reporter is the audience, when the true audience is made up of readers, viewers or listeners to that reporter. (*PRN*, Oct. 1, 2001).

5. These questions can help a speaker know the audience:
6. What does the audience know about the topic and or the speaker?
7. How much do they need to know? (A speaker should assess the importance of the message points as they relate to immediate objectives and long-term goals.)
8. How will the information provided work for participants — that is, how will the presentation help them to work more efficiently, save them time, save them money?
9. What questions might the audience ask, and how can the speaker address those points in the presentation?

Questions About The Venue

1. Even after setting up a plan of presentation, disasters occur. Often overlooked, but in everyone’s interest, are the moment-to-moment details of each presentation. Here are questions that will preempt most speakers’ typical nightmares:
2. Are the speaker’s bio notes clear, or are they so fuzzy that the presenter will certainly “mangle” the introduction of the speaker?
3. Are the bio notes so “thin” as to make it obvious that the presenter has never met the speaker? (Tip: Write an introduction for the presenter to use, keeping it short and including something that might delight or surprise the audience.)
4. In a panel presentation, is the client the last of six panelists, each of whom might go over the allotted ten minutes? How can the client be coached to handle a two-minute talk when a ten-minute talk was prepared?
5. What color is the backdrop behind the podium? Clothing that lets the speaker stand out from the background is important.
6. What type of microphone will be used — lavalier, desktop or standing?
7. Who is the moderator, and has the moderator arranged a conference call so that panelists can meet and share information, ensuring no duplication of information?
8. What is the AV setup, and is there a technician on site to help with any technical glitches?

*names have been changed

Letting an Introduction Open a Door, Not Close It

Introducing Yourself

Use a simple spoken resume that includes your full name and the reason for introducing yourself. Your intro should be relevant to the group. Remember that titles among adults should be reciprocal.

Introducing the Speaker

Always state your name, the speaker’s name, the reason why the speaker was invited, and the title of his or her presentation. Pronounce the speaker’s name correctly and repeat it several times in the course of the introduction. Inform the audience of the speaker’s special qualities and abilities. Be brief!

Introducing Panel Members

Introductions must be vivid, provide appropriate information, and treat each panelist equally.

Social Introductions

Tell people enough about each other so they can begin a conversation; usually, focusing on a shared interest creates a starting point for them.

Responding to an Introduction

Keep it simple. “Thank you” and a smile, handshake or nod toward the presenter is usually sufficient.

Joyce Newman, a New York-based media trainer and a principal of The Newman Group, specializes in media training and customizes training sessions on presentation and speaking skills. Call 212/838-8371 or email joyce@newmangroup.com. See www.newmangroup.com for more information.