

CHAPTER 6

See It. Save It. Say It.

Delivering from Notes and Visuals

When you are using notes or visuals to help remember your content and inform the audience, your main job is to make it *effortless* for your audience to receive the information. Keep that idea in mind. Anything you do in the room that forces the audience to concentrate on something other than your content is a distraction. It makes it harder, not easier, for the audience to pay attention. You'll minimize the distractions if you manage your movement around the room, the volume of material on the slide, and how you connect your words to the material the audience sees.

As you read in earlier chapters, eye contact is the most important skill for connecting to your audience. How do you maintain eye contact when presenting from notes or visuals? Follow three steps:

SIMPLY SAID

1. **See it**—look at your notes or slide.
2. **Save it**—remember what the bullet point says as you look up from your notes or out from your slide toward your audience.
3. **Say it**—make eye contact with one individual in the audience as you share your content.

In this chapter, we'll look at specifics for applying this process for both notes and visuals.

Embrace the Silence

Many people are concerned about silence when they're in front of the room. Being comfortable with silence is a sign of maturity and composure. When you stand silently in front of an audience, the only thing you are sharing is your integrity and credibility. Think of the effective disciplinarian in your grade school or middle school, whether it was the principal, vice-principal, or other authority figure. When she walked into a rowdy classroom, she didn't start yelling. She stood perfectly still with that "Don't even think of throwing that eraser" look on her face. Very quickly the class settled down and order was restored. Her presence, and her silence, spoke volumes. She then gave her warning in a calm voice that emphasized her authority and comfort with her role. The same is true for the power of your silence in front of an audience. Obviously, you won't stand quietly for long. You're there to deliver content. But the silence you demonstrate between bullet points and between slides emphasizes your comfort with yourself and with your role at the moment.

"Ummmm." "Ahhhhh." "Ya know."

Filler words creep into everyone's delivery, regardless of how good we are at presenting. Fortunately, communication skills aren't about "right" and "wrong." Think instead of "less effective" and "more effective." We all communicate

SEE IT. SAVE IT. SAY IT.

somewhere along this spectrum. Saying “um” isn’t “wrong.” In fact, if you use filler words two or three times in a presentation, who cares? There are no points taken off on your delivery. This isn’t the gymnastics competition at the Olympics. However, if you have “ums” and “ahs” and other filler words *in every sentence*, that’s a problem. The cumulative effect of these behaviors makes you appear uncertain, unprepared, and unsure of yourself.

It’s very difficult to look someone directly in the eye and say, “Ummmm.” We tend to use filler words when we are in between pairs of eyes, looking back and forth from the screen, and while moving forward to hit the button on our laptops to advance the slides. If you apply the techniques outlined below, you are less likely to use filler words.

DELIVERING FROM NOTES

Most business professionals spend more time conveying content from notes in small group meetings than they do delivering formal presentations before large audiences, so let’s start there. Using notes helps us feel prepared and less nervous. Audiences, even in small, more intimate settings, appreciate that we bring notes to a meeting. It means we’re prepared and have given some thought to an issue. No manager ever said, “Please, come in my office and ramble.” That said, there are ways to use your notes that enhance your credibility in the room—and ways that detract from your sense of presence.

When delivering from notes, you want to be both organized and conversational. You’ll be more organized if you use a format for structuring your content, covered in Chapter 3, “A Place for Everything: Organizing Your Content.” If you are like most people, chances are when you are done gathering your thoughts, there will probably be too much on the page for you to use effectively. After you figure out what you

SIMPLY SAID

want to say, you will be better served if you create a set of notes to use as a “delivery tool.”

Create a “Spot Word” Outline

Create what we call a “Spot Word” outline, a set of notes sparse enough that you can glance down at the page and easily spot the words you want to say.

A Spot Word outline involves *layout* and *content*.

Layout

Place all your notes down the center of the page in a single broad column. If you start at the left margin of the page, you will be tempted to write a longer bullet point. If you adopt the habit of writing a column of bullets down the center of the page you will, of necessity, write shorter bullets.

Use lots of white space. Picture yourself glancing down at your notes during a meeting. If all of your notes are crammed together, or if there is too much on the page, you will spend time trying to find your content. As you search for your information, you’ll start to feel awkward about the silence; you’ll start to fill in with great big “Ums” and “Ahs.” Now imagine that you glance down at your notes and the bullet points are spaced out down the center of the page, where it’s easy for you to find each piece of information. You’ve made it easier for yourself to look comfortable and confident during your talk, and you’ve shortened the pause. (Remember, pauses are not only good, they’re important.)

Content

Divide your content into major topic headings. If you have 15 things to go over with an audience, don’t list them

SEE IT. SAVE IT. SAY IT.

1 through 15. Nothing will kill a meeting faster than to say, “I have 15 quick things to go over with you.” Instead, challenge yourself. Review your points for themes. Chances are items 2, 7, and 12 are somehow related. Group them at the top and slap a subheading over them. Now you don’t have 15 things to cover; you have four or five, each with some sub-points. In addition, when you talk about those points, you will talk about them in relation to each other and in relation to a common theme. That’s much easier for your audience to process.

Use “Anchor Word” Phrases

Write bullet points on your pad, not long sentences. Remember, you’ve already done your research or spent hours working on the project you are discussing. You know your topic well. In addition, you created that first set of notes to figure out what you want to cover. For this “delivery tool” you need very little on the page to remember what you want to say. There are two guidelines for how much to write in your notes.

First guideline: Your Spot Word outline should contain every word you need to remember what you want to say. . .

Second guideline: . . . and nothing more.

Your notes carry all of the burden of remembering the content so you don’t have to. List only what you need so you don’t trip yourself up.

Maintain the “Arc of Silence”

The main thrust of the Spot Word technique is to maintain what we call the “Arc of Silence.” The arc is the distance from the eyes of someone in the audience down to your pad

SIMPLY SAID

and back again to a pair of eyes. Don't talk on the way down. Don't talk to your notes. Don't talk on the way up. All sound is delivered to a pair of eyes.

You want to maintain the Arc of Silence for three reasons. The first reason is for *your* benefit. When you're speaking during a meeting, you're the power in the room. Power is never rushed. Power is comfortable taking its time. When you are finished delivering point one, and you look to your notes in silence to grab point two, that silence gives you greater presence. You come across comfortable with yourself and your integrity.

The second reason is for the benefit of the *audience*. When you're delivering information at a meeting or on a conference call, you know your information inside out. You've been preparing this for hours, weeks, or months. You could rush through it quickly because you know it so well. Don't. This is the first time your listeners are hearing it. They need time to digest it. When you're done with point two and you glance down to grab point three, that silence allows your listeners time to digest your ideas. They need silence in order to process what you just shared. If you keep talking on the way down and on the way back up, you cheat your listeners of the silence they need. You'll overwhelm them with information, and they'll eventually stop listening because they can't take in any more.

The third reason is that we tend to save the most important information until the end of the sentence, and if you deliver that point when you are looking back toward your notes, you diminish the impact of those words. In some meetings, you'll end your main point by saying, "And that's why it's so important that you hire us." *Hire us* are the most important words you have to say. If you deliver them to your notes, you lose the impact. The subliminal message we send when

SEE IT. SAVE IT. SAY IT.

we deliver a line down to the page is, “What I’m getting to next is more important than what I’m saying right now.” You undermine your own relevance. Instead, finish your thought to a pair of eyes. Then, drop your eyes in silence to grab the next point.

Use the “Spot Word” Technique

Applying the “See it. Save it. Say it.” method to the use of notes is fairly straightforward.

First, look down in silence and read the anchor word phrase to yourself.

Next, look up and find a pair of eyes on which to focus.

Then, say the anchor words in a sentence or a phrase. Make sure you say the words you wrote down. You are trying to prompt your memory about what you want to say. When you look down, you *read* the words. Then you look up and *say* the words. When you say the words aloud, your brain *hears* the words. You’ve now read it, said it, and heard it. That’s all the prompting your brain needs; your content will come flooding back.

Finally, add your commentary. This is where you get to shine as the content expert.

Demonstrate with Your Hands

Use the desk as a stage and put objects in the space in front of you.

Depending on your profession, you may be talking about a widget or about an idea. If you’re discussing an object, something that has a tangible, physical presence that someone can see or touch, your job is easier because you can more readily demonstrate what you’re discussing. But if you work in the professional services world—law, accounting, consulting—you sell

SIMPLY SAID

ideas. You discuss concepts. You'll be more effective the more you make those concepts real or tangible for your audience.

When sharing information from notes, don't be afraid to use your hand gestures to demonstrate what you are discussing. You have two simple goals. First, you want to add energy to your talk. If you're talking about concepts, it's easy for your voice to fall flat and for you to come across as dry. The more you use clear, definitive gestures, the more likely it is that your voice will hit particular words harder, which increases the energy of your talk.

Second, you want to isolate ideas for your audience by making them "live" somewhere on the table in front of you. Let's say you have three points to convey. Think about how an outline works.

I. Large Roman numerals

A. Capital letters

1. Arabic numbers

a. small letters

If your hand gestures mirror that pattern, your audience can follow your content more easily.

How Does That Work?

For your broader points, use large gestures and start with one hand outside the width of your left shoulder. Let's say you provide your audience a quick agenda for what you are about to share. Put A to the left, B in the middle, and C to the right, again, beyond the width of your shoulder. When you go back to A, you gesture back toward the left. Now you provide your sub-bullets in smaller gestures, but all to the left. When you get into the minutia, tick off each item

SEE IT. SAVE IT. SAY IT.

on your fingers. Check in with your client. “Any questions on A?” If not, go to B, back in the middle.

By using hand gestures this way, you will help your audience visualize your content. That’s important, because no matter how fascinating we think we are, while we’re talking, people drift off. They think about any of the 50 other things going on in their work or personal lives at the moment. When someone mentally returns to listening to you, he needs to plug back into the content. If you’re using gestures that help your audience see your outline, you make it easier for people to step back into the conversation because they can visualize where you are in your content. If you’re not using those gestures, it’s more difficult for someone to reconnect to the discussion.

DELIVERING FROM VISUALS

When we address an audience, we often project a PowerPoint presentation on a screen or wall. Since your goal is to focus on the needs of the audience, you must create a constant connection between the audience, the visuals, and yourself. The slides are not the presentation; you are. Audience members didn’t come to the room or log onto the webcast to look at complex graphs and impressive flowcharts. They came to hear you speak—to hear your ideas and conviction. The slides are there to support you, not the other way around.

To have the greatest impact in front of the room when using slides, stand as front and center as you can. Since most rooms are set up with the screen at the center, this means you will need to stand off to one side. You don’t want to stand in the middle of the screen, since you will be both blinded by the projector and in the way of the material. Stand off to the left of the screen from the audience’s perspective. Assuming

SIMPLY SAID

you are delivering in a language that reads from left to right, by standing to the left of the screen you are standing at the start of each bullet point and can guide the audience through your material.

Stand close enough to be able to gesture toward each bullet point as you introduce the content to your audience. Obviously, this will depend on the size of the screen and the audience, but for most presentations in most conference rooms, you should be able to stand just to the side of the screen and effortlessly reach each bullet.

Stand with your back parallel with the back wall of the room. Many people start to pivot in toward the screen, as if half of their focus is on the audience and half is on the material. It's ALL about the people in your audience, so give them your full attention.

Some people like to present from the back of the room or wander around the room while speaking. Here are the challenges with that.

You're trying to create the appearance of a relationship with the people sitting in front of you. You want their buy-in on an idea. They want to understand your commitment to what you are sharing. The relationship happens mostly through your ability to maintain eye contact with the audience. (We'll discuss the application of this idea to webinars and conference calls later.) If you're at the back of the room when the visual is projected at the front, the audience has to choose between looking at you and looking at the visual. Every time you change the slide, you challenge your audience to look at you or look at the bright light shining at the front of the room. You'll lose to the bright light every time.

You're trying to keep that constant connection between you, the audience, and the visual. If you wander around the room while talking, chances are at least some of your

SEE IT. SAVE IT. SAY IT.

audience members are watching you. Now you reference something on the slide. They divert their attention, try to find the bullet point or place on the graph you are referring to, and then return to look at you. They're continually swiveling their heads to stay with you and your material. You're making your audience work too hard.

Instead, keep your feet planted in one spot, so you look more stable and confident. By keeping your toes pointed straight out toward your audience, you'll look more present to the room. Channel all your energy into your hands, arms, face, and voice. In particular, your hand gestures are effective tools for helping tell your story.

Get Started

When you start speaking in front of the room, you want to set the right tone with your audience. Smile. Look like you want to be there. Even if you're sharing difficult news with the group, your facial expression and body language should convey: "I'm glad to be here to help you work through this issue." If your demeanor suggests you're uncomfortable standing in front of this group or that you'd rather be somewhere else, you'll create a negative environment, and it will be harder for you to connect with the audience.

If audience members *like* you, they will forgive an occasional slip in your delivery. If they *don't* like you, they will find a reason to disagree with your idea. A presentation is not a popularity contest, but it doesn't hurt to have a friendly audience.

Share Your Content

Communicating effectively means focusing less on yourself and more on the audience. Our natural inclination as human beings is to focus more on ourselves. Nowhere is

SIMPLY SAID

that more evident than when someone is using visuals. At Exec|Comm, we have been helping professionals communicate for more than 35 years. That means our more than 40 instructors have coached people through literally thousands of presentations. We've noticed a common tendency among presenters. When most people throw a complex graph or list of bullet points up on the screen, the first thing they usually say is, "As you can clearly see. . . ." Of course the main point of the slide is clear to the speaker. He or she created the visual. And, of course, the main point is anything but clear to the people in your audience. This is the first time they are seeing the information. They have to figure out what they are looking at and then decipher its meaning.

Here's the main concept behind effectively using visuals. Tell people *what they are looking at* before you tell them *why they're looking at it*.

At Exec|Comm, we often hear participants in our programs complain about "death by PowerPoint." They are overwhelmed by too many presentations that use badly prepared slides that are poorly delivered. Blaming PowerPoint for bad presentations is like blaming Outlook for badly written emails or your hammer for the fact that you hung a picture crooked. PowerPoint is a powerful tool. Its impact is in how it's used. Using visuals, if done well, helps you engage your audience and drive home your main points.

Slides with Words

There are two reasons to include words on your slides. First, they prompt your memory about what you want to say.

SEE IT. SAVE IT. SAY IT.

Second, they reinforce your oral message to your audience. Our sense of sight is stronger than our sense of hearing. People comprehend and retain 20 percent of what they hear (less if they are teenagers). They “get” 70 to 80 percent of what they both *hear and see*.

Given much conventional wisdom about how to use slides, this next piece of advice may sound counterintuitive. However, we believe firmly that it makes the most sense. If you have words on your slides, ***read every word to your audience***. The trick to being effective is in *the way you read* the slide. Although we like to think we can multitask, the truth is we all have certain limitations in the way we process information. We can’t hear one thing and see something else and process both. We either block out what we’re hearing, or we disconnect from what we’re seeing.

Now think about it: When you advance to your next slide and your word chart appears on the wall, what is everyone doing? They’re reading your slide. In fact, when you hit the button you implicitly told your audience: “Look at this new piece of information.” You now have three options.

1. You can stand silently while everyone reads your slide. This would be, at best, awkward, and at worst, a painstakingly slow delivery.
2. You can do what most people do, which is talk generally about the information on the slide or give your big conclusion about what’s on the slide. Here’s why this doesn’t work. When you show the slide, everyone is trying to read it. If you say anything other than what is on the slide when it first appears, the audience is seeing one thing—the words on the slide—and hearing something else—your main point or introduction of the content you are about to share. Either way, they

SIMPLY SAID

can't hear what you are saying because they are reading the slide.

That leaves option 3.

3. Read verbatim what is on the slide. It reinforces what audiences see, and therefore helps them process the content. If you do this well, and as outlined below, your audience will be grateful.

Many people hate it when a presenter reads his or her slides to an audience. That's usually because the presenter has too much on the slide and just reads it without further commentary. In that method of delivery, you might as well spare everyone the presentation and just email a memo. But if you keep your slides simple and add comments after you deliver the words on the slide, you'll have greater impact because the audience will stay with you and get the message.

Here's how to make reading your slides work well for everyone.

- *Slides with up to three bullets:* Read the heading and all three bullets. Go back to the heading. Re-read it and comment on it. Do the same with each of the three bullets.
- *Slides with more than three bullets:* Read the heading and the bullets one at a time, commenting after each.

You look smart in front of the room based on everything you say that isn't on the slide. The value-add for each bullet is what makes you seem like the expert. You can accomplish this if you keep your slides simple. Follow the "6 x 6" rule. No more than six words per bullet. No more than six bullets per slide.

If there is a bullet point on your slide and you speak vaguely about the content but don't speak the words verbatim, audience

SEE IT. SAVE IT. SAY IT.

members will go back and forth between you and the slide trying to figure out where you are on your visual. They're thinking: "Is she on point 2, or has she moved to point 3?"

You look smart in front of the room based on everything you say that isn't on the slide.

In addition, if you have content on the slide that you never cover, the audience is wondering what it's doing there. If you aren't going to mention it, delete it. Otherwise, it becomes clutter and a distraction to your audience. Presenters often have more on their slides than they can possibly cover because the slides are also a "leave behind" for the audience to take with them. We'll address this particular challenge later.

Remember the "Arc of Silence"

I mentioned earlier that when delivering from a visual, you should stand just to the left of the screen, close enough to reach out and touch the bullet point. From your position at the left of the screen, reach out and gesture toward your heading and the bullets, one at a time. Remember, your feet are planted firmly with your toes pointing out toward your audience, so you won't be turning your back on the audience. You'll just be turning your head toward the slide, grabbing one line at a time, in silence, and then turning toward your audience and delivering each bullet to a pair of eyes.

Now, access your information from the slide. Applying the "See it. Save it. Say it." method when delivering from slides takes more practice than learning to apply the method when you use notes. It takes longer to master the skill because the arc from the audience to your materials and out again is longer when you are standing in front of a screen than when you

SIMPLY SAID

are just dropping your eyes to a sheet of paper. Nevertheless, the method is the same:

1. **See it**—look at your slide in silence.
2. **Save it**—remember what the bullet point says.
3. **Say it**—make eye contact with one individual in the audience as you state the bullet point verbatim.

Then, depending on how many bullets are on the slide, you will either look back at your slide and grab the next bullet, or you'll elaborate on what you just read.

The arc of your eye contact from the audience to your visual and back out toward your audience again is called the “Arc of Silence,” covered in the section above on delivering from notes. With notes, the arc is down and up, from the eyes of an audience member to your notes and back to another audience member. When delivering from slides, the arc is from the eyes of an audience member in toward the screen, and then back out to another audience member. Don't speak as you turn your head. Every sound you make should be delivered to a pair of eyes. You appear to have one level of conviction when sharing a thought and looking at someone, and a lower level of conviction when you speak while looking away.

Once, at a client's conference, a colleague and I delivered an eight-hour program on marketing skills to partners at one of the Big Four consulting firms. About 30 participants attended. As usually happens at conferences, a number of people approached with questions or comments at the end.

One of the partners approached and said, “I just want to thank you for not reading your slides to me. I hate it when people do that.”

I wasn't sure of his intent with his comments, so I asked sincerely, “Are you being facetious?”

SEE IT. SAVE IT. SAY IT.

“No,” he replied. “I hate it when people read their slides to me. It drives me nuts.”

“We read every word on every slide to you,” I replied.

“No, you didn’t,” he insisted. “I was watching you.”

“I promise you,” I said, “we read every word on every slide. It’s what we teach people to do when we teach presentation skills.”

He looked puzzled. “I didn’t see that at all,” he insisted. “I felt like you were just talking to me.”

He didn’t see us reading the words because, if you follow this approach, people pay attention to your content and not your delivery. They aren’t distracted.

Slides with Graphs and Charts

Most business slide presentations involve graphs and charts. PowerPoint makes it easy to create both. Graphs and charts convey data through pictures that put the information in context for the audience. They show the data points in relation to each other and to the whole. They are very helpful, if delivered well. If not delivered well, graphs and charts overwhelm most audiences because of the sheer volume of information conveyed.

To deliver graphs and charts, apply the same approach as when you deliver slides with bullet points. Tell audience members *what* they are looking at before sharing *why* they are looking at it. For slides with bullets, that means “read and comment.” For graphs or charts, that means “preview and explain.” Preview what they are observing, and then explain the key points.

Time and again, when coaching participants on their delivery skills, I watch a presenter throw a graph up on the screen and start with the words, “As you can *clearly see*. . . .” He then delivers his main point and advances to the next

SIMPLY SAID

slide. This usually leaves me and the rest of the class thinking: “I don’t even know what I was just looking at.” It was delivered too fast for it to have any impact.

In the case of charts and graphs, **RIDE** the slide:

- **R**ead the heading.
- **I**dentify the type of graph.
 - “On this bar graph you see. . .”
 - “Here’s a pie chart showing. . .”
 - “Here’s a map of the world representing our regional hubs.”

By telling people what they are looking at, you are giving them a chance to orient themselves. This is especially important when some of the audience members are attending the meeting remotely. It gives them time in case there are any delays caused by technology.

- **D**efine the parameters and main points.

Start with the vertical and then the horizontal, since the vertical is usually on the left of the screen and the audience is reading from left to right. You don’t need to say the words “on the Y axis” or “on the X axis.” It sounds too clinical. Instead, your hand gestures guide their attention as you say, “Here we have the sales volume and here we have the months of the year.” If some of your audience members are attending remotely and can’t see you or you are delivering a webinar, say, “On the vertical (or horizontal) we have. . . .”

Once you define the parameters, highlight the key points: “You’ll notice in the third quarter last year we saw a decrease in sales.”

SEE IT. SAVE IT. SAY IT.

“Let’s focus on. . . .”

“Notice how. . . .”

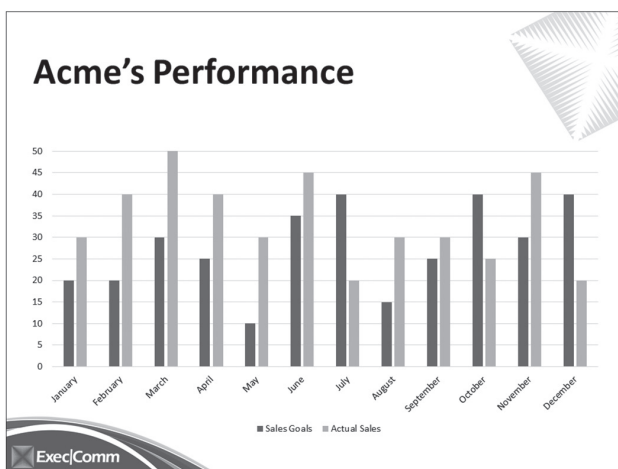
All of those steps are part of “Preview.” In the first three steps, you’re telling listeners what they could figure out on their own, but you are making sure they all finish reviewing it *at the same time* and that they all see the *most important points*. When finished, you can draw your conclusion without leaving anyone behind. You’ll deliver the entire slide using the Arc of Silence discussed earlier in this chapter.

Now they’re ready to hear your key message.

- Explain why you are showing the audience this information.

Draw your conclusion. You’ve told them *what* they are looking at. Now tell them *why* they are looking at it.

Let’s see how this plays out using the Acme’s Performance example.



SIMPLY SAID

Read the heading:

“Acme’s Performance”

Identify the type of graph:

“Here we have a bar chart showing our sales performance compared to goal for last year.”

Define the parameters:

“Along the vertical, we have the sales in millions from \$0 to \$50 million. Along the horizontal, we have each month. The shaded bars represent our sales goals for each month. The solid bars represent our actual sales.”

Explain the most important data points:

“For the first six months, we exceeded our goals. In the second six months, we had mixed results.”

Tell me the “so what” of your slide.

“We’re here today to make sure we start this year strong and avoid the pitfalls we experienced in the second half of last year.”

If you “RIDE” the slide, the audience is ready to hear your main point. It stays with you the whole time. There is no disconnect between the audience, the visual, and you.

Combination Charts: Slides Containing Both Bullet Points and Visual Information

When you have both bullet points and a graph on a slide, break down the information into pieces easily digested by the audience. Walk them through the slide one step at a time. The bullet points should add value to the visual information, not repeat it. The Our Business visual provides an example. Here’s what to say as you present the slide:

SEE IT. SAVE IT. SAY IT.



“Our Business. Product Mix. Opportunities.

Product Mix.

Here’s a pie chart showing our product mix for our business with our relative sales volume of our four products A, B, C, and D. The pie chart shows that C accounts for a huge percentage of our sales. If we can increase our sales of other products to the same level as C, we’ll increase the size of the pie.

Opportunities.

We have two ways we can approach expanding the pie.

Increase Marketing—By marketing A, B, and D the way we do C, we can increase consumer awareness of those products.

Improve Distribution—We apply best practices to Product C. We should apply the same strategy for our other products. We need to make this a priority this year.”

Pull It All Together

Here are some helpful pointers to make everything move smoothly for your next presentation.

Familiarize Yourself with Equipment and Room

At Exec|Comm, we deliver literally hundreds of seminars each month. Our instructors teach and deliver from

SIMPLY SAID

PowerPoint slides every day. Yet, we never take for granted that things will go smoothly. We arrive at our venues at least an hour ahead of time to prepare the room and make sure we're familiar with the set-up and comfortable with the equipment. Not every laptop and projector combination behaves the same way. The distance from you to the audience and from the audience to the screen will be different each time. You'll be more comfortable in your delivery if you have a few minutes to practice using your material in the specific setting in which you'll be presenting.

Have Your Material Open to the First Slide

You don't want the audience to arrive and see your desktop image projected in the room with all of your program icons and your background picture of you and your family in their bathing suits. Have the first slide content ready and then black out the presentation with the "B" key. If you're in "slide show" mode, the letter "B" will turn the screen to black. Hit any key to bring the slide back. Then, step forward and engage the audience, up front and center.

Remain Face Forward

When you move forward toward your equipment and then return to be closer to the screen, stay face forward to your audience. It's usually only two or three steps. Don't speak on the way to and from the machine, just as you maintain the Arc of Silence when turning your head back and forth to your visual. Those pauses are important. They say you are confident, and they give the audience time to digest the information.

Use a Remote “Clicker” Only When You Need to

You will be better off if you change your slides by stepping forward and back to your laptop. Almost everyone talks too fast when presenting. The pause as you step forward to your laptop and back up again will force you to slow down and catch your breath.

That said, some room set-ups are too awkward for you to step back and forth to your machine. In those settings, use a remote. Just be conscious of finishing whatever you are saying on each slide before you hit the button. When you change the slide, everyone stops listening to you and starts reading the next slide. If you're still talking about the earlier slide, no one hears you.

Unless you are using antiquated equipment, your remote will work on a radio signal. You don't need to point it at anything—the slide, the projector, your laptop—to make it work. Just press the button.

If you are going to talk for a long time about a slide, you can slip the remote into a pocket or place it on a nearby table so that it doesn't become a toy that you play with while you speak to the audience. By getting rid of it, you free your hands to gesture more naturally.

Avoid using a laser pointer. Use words and your hand gestures to reference the details on the slide to which you are referring. If you use the laser pointer and you're the slightest bit nervous, any shaking in your hands will make the screen look like a laser light show.

Webinars

Let's say you're presenting your slides on a webinar or on a videoconference where the audience can see your visual but not you. In those settings, it's even more important to be

SIMPLY SAID

very direct with people about where you are on the visual, either with regard to your bullet points or your graphs. If it's a mixed audience, where some members are present in the room with you and some are attending remotely, speak to the remote attendees directly every few slides to keep them engaged. You can even direct your comments to them when the point is for everyone attending. It doesn't take much. Just a simple, "Everyone attending remotely, as you can see. . ." or "Those of you in the London office, you'll notice. . . ." Mentioning people by name, in this case, their location, or means of attending makes them feel included and highlights that you haven't forgotten about them.

Your "Delivery Tool" vs. Your "Leave-Behind"

Your slides are not a complete recitation of the content you want to convey: that's called a memo. Think of your slide deck as a "delivery tool" that keeps the audience focused, allows you to remember what you want to say, and helps reinforce your message. When presenting information orally, most of the content comes from you, not from the slide. A "leave-behind" has to be complete on its own. If you try to use one document to serve both purposes, you will struggle. You will either have a delivery tool that's too crowded and detailed or a leave-behind that's too sparse to have any value.

Yet often, audiences expect to be given the slides before the meeting to prepare, or after the meeting as a reminder. In either case, you should prepare the leave-behind first. Flesh out all of your content. Save that document as the leave-behind. Then, reduce the content to a simple delivery tool that includes the key points and only the key points. The rest of the material comes from you as the expert.

The Eyes Have It

The first time I came in contact with John he was a participant in a two-day presentation skills class for in-house lawyers at a large insurance company. During the class, John had been abrupt with his comments and confrontational with his questions. In addition, he rarely made eye contact when speaking to us, making it harder for him to pick up on any cues from those around him. My co-instructor and I know how to handle all types of participants, and with John we were drawing on a whole host of classroom-management skills.

At the end of the first day, John was mulling over his presentation and called me over for some advice. Having grown up in a lively house where Irish temper and Portuguese passion collided with some frequency, I took no notice of John's gruff nature . . . at first. But when he started to raise his voice in earnest, I had to tell him that I couldn't help him if he was going to speak that way. To his credit, he calmed down and we spent a few minutes reviewing his presentation. The next day he arrived contrite, like a dog with his tail between his legs. He said thank you for every piece of feedback we gave him. I knew it wasn't his intention to lose his temper, especially over something so trivial. I knew he wasn't a bad guy.

The truth is that, as gruff as John was, many people still found him smart and likable. He was doing *something* right. So when I was asked to work with him years later, I welcomed the opportunity. I shared with

SIMPLY SAID

my client my earlier experience with John. She said that what I described represented a pattern and she was glad to have it out in the open. I made a promise to help.

We helped John create a deeper connection with others through the simple and highly underrated skill of maintaining eye contact. If John could learn to connect more with others, he wouldn't depersonalize his interactions. And he wouldn't let the expression of his frustration, no matter how valid, override the relationship at stake.

Months later, when teaching again at the client, I bumped into John. He told me what a positive impact eye contact was having on his interactions with people at work *and* at home. His eyes welled up as he thanked me, and I have to admit, my eyes welled up, too.

Christine Healey de Casanova, Partner, Exec | Comm