



Points for presenting well

by Robert Meinertzhagen, technical director, Anteon Corp.

I have often been surprised at the wide range of presentation skills that people exhibit.

They can range from dynamic, motivational, informative, etc. to slow, boring, uninteresting and more, or less, depending on how you see it! What's also unexpected is that those you anticipate will be your best speakers are sometimes your worst.

So how can you avoid some of the pitfalls of public speaking? While perhaps you don't see yourself as ever being a "professional grade" speaker, chances are that there will be times during your career that will require you to speak in front of a group. It is no secret that performing a presentation can be intimidating. So what are some of the things you can do in order to do your best?

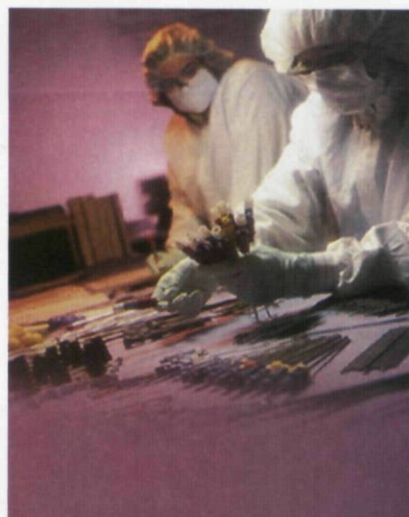
Start with planning and building your presentation by knowing your audience! You want to make sure your topic and information is as relevant to your audience as possible. Perhaps you're fortunate and your presentation hits the mark and it's just a matter of making sure you present in the best possible manner. It can be a bit more difficult if you are addressing an audience where your presentation is a subject that is not as clearly relevant. In this type of presentation you will need to be more focused on how you will capture and hold the listener's interest. Remember, you are there because someone made a conscious decision that your message is important enough to be heard. Use your creativity to bridge the gap between what you're presenting and the needs of the audience. This is an opportunity where your knowledge and experience can lead the way! Organize your presentation for understanding and retention. Seek to be consistent with your message staying at the listener's knowledge and authority levels. Remember, as you are developing your presentation, work to create a focus that helps to identify your objectives and the specific results you want to achieve.

While all of your talk will have important aspects, when it comes time to give your address two of the most important points in any presentation are the beginning and end! Your introduction should capture the group's attention and be used to establish your credibility. You need to answer the audience's unspoken ques-

tions of why listening to you is important and "what's in it for them"! The introduction is also the time when you will want to preview your topics and main points. This will help the listeners to understand the organization of your presentation and where you plan to take them. The other major point of your speech is its conclusion! This is where you have the opportunity to provide closure and it also represents your last chance to influence your audience. Your closing should be strong, concise, and well prepared! Remember to signal your conclusion! Many presentations leave a weak final impression with the speaker wandering into the conclusion without peaking the audience's interest. Finish strong, encourage action, use a story or example to illustrate your message, but most of all leave a strong impression!

For many people developing the presentation represents the easier part of the job as the act of presenting is what really sets them on edge. You know the symptoms; the presentation isn't until next week and already you're having trouble sleeping and daily anxiety attacks. However, every speaker I have ever known has admitted to dealing with what I call the "A" or Anxiety Factor! How can you overcome this? Good presentations are centered on the art of extemporaneous speaking. We all know the person who can speak about many topics and make it look so easy, as if from memory. With practice, you can achieve the same result. You already have a good start because you have taken the time and made the effort to create a good presentation while along the way you learned much about what it is you want to say. The next step is to practice your delivery. Going through and practicing your presentation; whether by yourself, with people you trust, or on videotape, is a terrific means of establishing your timing, developing your delivery, anticipating questions, and provides many other benefits.

On the day of your presentation, arrive early and make sure everything is ready to go. Identify some thing(s) that help you to stay calm and focused. No one I have ever known has ever perished from giving a presentation. However, I do understand there have been surveys where a good number of people have indicated they would rather die than engage in public speaking. You do not need to be one of them! You are ready to go, change your attitude and visualize your success! **HPN**



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