

Using Persuasive Communication Skills to Sell Your Ideas

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This report is one in a series of reports all geared to helping exhibiting companies achieve better results and gain value from exhibition participation. The complete series is available at: www.ceir.org

CEIR extends special thanks to Linda McKinney.

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“Brilliance without the ability to communicate is worth little.”

By Linda McKinney

Have you ever had an idea or gone to management to present your case and walked out wondering why they didn't get it? It may not be the idea but the way that it was communicated. Employees often spend years developing job knowledge and skills yet expend almost no effort studying how to communicate. The ability to present one's ideas is an integral part of business; how well it is done can have a major impact on business and personal success.

Just like planning for an exhibition or event, communicating messages effectively is all in the planning and preparation. Following a process creates more effective communicators.

DEFINE THE PURPOSE

Decide exactly what is hoped to have happen at the end of presenting an idea or plan. A useful tool is to complete the phrase... *“If I am successful, my audience will...”* Be realistic and focused. Write down the defined purpose and use it to keep the presentation focused and “stay on message.”

UNDERSTAND THE AUDIENCE

Spend some time thinking about who the communication will be with. What role do they play in the company? What factors are going on in the company that effect

how the message will be received? What is the presenter's relationship with the person or group? Find out how they like to be communicated with. Do they like a short written summary before the meeting or are they all about fact and figures? Remember – always approach the presentation from the audience's perspective.

BRAINSTORM ON PAPER

The brain does not work like the outline techniques taught in school. On a blank piece of paper write the purpose in the center and then write everything that comes to mind: points to be made, things needed in preparation, issues that effect how the ideas will be perceived, etc. This is called mind mapping. It facilitates getting all ideas on paper without trying to force them in outline order. Once all these thoughts are on paper, go back and group them into an outline format.

FOLLOW THE RULE OF THREES

Brain research shows that people remember in threes. The more points added, the more the message gets muddled and each point supporting an idea becomes less important. Determine the three most important points from the audience's perspective. What problems can be solved? How can company goals be advanced? In this case, less is more and no more than three.

CREATE THE BODY

Unlike the outline process learned in school, start by creating the body of the presentation first. Develop the three key points and the supporting information to be used in selling the idea or plan. Then go back and create the opening and closing.

ADD CREDIBILITY WITH SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Each point should have supporting information such as statistics (CEIR research), case studies, or examples of how the point being made will work

CREATE A DYNAMIC OPENING

Clearly state the purpose right at the beginning. It can be in the form of a question, a bold statement or even what you want them to do at the end. State the benefits to the audience (company, marketing team, etc.). Too often one stumbles into presenting ideas and loses the attention of the audience right up front. In the opening you want to tell them what you are going to tell them. In the body tell them.

USE A POWERFUL CLOSE

Announce the closing to let the group know the presentation is coming to an end. Restate the key points, review the benefits to the group and then tell them exactly what you want them to do. Never just stop. If something is forgotten, don't go back and try to insert it here. In the opening they were told what you were going to tell them, in the body you told them, now you tell them what you just told them.

QUESTIONS

Be prepared. Think of every possible concern or question they may have and have answers that align with the main message. Write the questions down in advance and develop the answers. Make sure to understand the questions and rephrase if necessary. If something comes up you truly don't know, don't fake it. Admit you don't know and get back with an answer. No matter how intense the questions, don't get defensive.

ENTHUSIASM

Enthusiasm can really help sell an idea or plan. Don't be afraid to use voice, gestures and expression to show how much belief you have in your idea. Nerves can sometimes cause one to speak too quickly. Remember to slow down and breathe.

PRACTICE

Talk through the points. Get comfortable with them. Like everything else it takes practice to get really good at selling ideas.

Taking the time to plan, prepare and practice a presentation of an idea or plan can make the difference between getting "yes" and getting "no".