Presenting with Confidence

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the heart of work

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Introduction

Giving a short talk or presentation is a great way to raise awareness of your business, establish your status as an expert, and reach new leads and clients.

It is also often required when you go for a job, or pitch for a new piece of work.

Presentation skills are therefore well worth learning and practising.

This short guide focuses primarily on the preparation phase. It covers planning, rehearsing, vocal warm up and posture.

This guide doesn't cover the production of visual aids such as slides. These can be a very useful way of illustrating your talk, but if you are using visual aids, please don't rely on them too much. Technology can let you down, even at high profile events. Learning to present without visual aids is a useful discipline and will build your confidence in your abilities.

How to plan your talk

Even a short talk needs a clear structure, with at least three separate elements, an introduction, the body of your talk, and an ending. It usually makes sense to start by developing the body of the talk, but not always. You may get a flash of inspiration on how to kick off a talk and the rest will flow from there.

Planning the body of your talk

For the body of your talk, think first about what will be useful to your audience. What do you want people to go away with?

Can you bring your talk to life with a story from your own life, or perhaps a client story. Make sure your story is relevant to your topic, with useful insights that can inspire others.

Can you leave your audience with some practical tips to help them in their business or life? Practical ideas are very popular, and show people the value of what you offer.

A starting point is to brainstorm and write down all the useful things that you could include in your talk. Then pick out the two or three most relevant aspects, and base your talk around that. Trying to cover too many areas in too short a space of time is likely to leave an audience lost or confused.

Think about what you want out of the talk too. If you want people to contact you for more information on your services, then let them know how to do that.

Planning your introduction

Be clear about how you are going to start as that will help your confidence levels. Although I don't learn every word of my talk before delivering it, I do often learn the first couple of paragraphs so I can start with impact.

You could start with a quote, or a story, or an overview of what the audience will take away from what you have to say. You could briefly share something relevant about yourself, which demonstrates why you are worth listening to on your topic.

However you start, your introduction should make it clear that your talk is going to be interesting or relevant to your audience.

Planning the conclusion

Your ending can be just a simple summary of the main points covered, or a final strong thought, or a call to action. It is important to think this through in advance so that you don't just peter out at the end. A planned conclusion will help you end on a strong note.

If you want to leave the audience with a call to action, then make sure you have rehearsed this so that it flows naturally from your talk and doesn't come over as an awkward afterthought.

There is a worksheet to help you with your planning on page 12 of this guide.

Once you have decided what you are going to say, then the next step in building your confidence is to rehearse your talk.

How to rehearse your talk

Actors rehearse before they step on stage, and if you are giving a talk for the first time, it will undoubtedly be worth your while to rehearse it in advance. That way you will know how the talk flows, and that you have got the timings right. A common mistake that inexperienced presenters make is to talk for too long.

A good starting point is to write out what you are going to say, and then read your whole talk out word for word. This will give you an idea of timings, and it may highlight areas where you would like to make changes. A suitable length for a 10 minute talk, given at a relaxed pace, is around 1200 words.

One you have read your talk aloud a couple of times, try giving your talk to a chair, or a wall, without looking at your notes, or just glancing down at the for reference. How much can you remember? I'm not suggesting that you memorise your talk word for word, but do allow give yourself time to get familiar with the main points.

If you can find someone to give you feedback, that's really helpful. Or you could talk into a Dictaphone or voice recorder, and then play back.

At this stage in my speaking career, I don't read talks out on the day. If a talk is complex or I haven't given it before, I sometimes write a few bullet points on an index card, outlining the structure and key points. It's also useful to make a note of any quotes that you use, to make sure that they are accurate.

If you are new to speaking or nervous of speaking off the cuff, then you might want to type out your talk – word for word or in bullet points – and read from it. In which case I would recommend using quite a large font and dividing your words into short paragraphs of sentence or two. That's so you can look down at your page, then up at your audience. It will be easier to find where you are if you don't have a solid block of text.

Even if you are going to read your talk, it is important to rehearse it in advance, so the words flow and you feel confident in looking up.

Once you have rehearsed what you are going to say, the next step is to think about HOW you are going to say it, and so it makes sense to think about and warm up your voice.

How to warm up your voice

You voice is the tool for communicating your presentation, and spending some time on warming up your voice can pay dividends.

There are three aspects to your voice - breath, resonance and articulation. Sound is made when the breath travels over your vocal chords. It resonates in the chambers of your body and the words are articulated by the movements of your mouth, lips and tongue.

Breathing from the diaphragm

A strong voice comes from diaphragmatic breathing – where the break comes from deep in the lungs, pushed out by diaphragm, rather than from high up in the chest.

To feel this, sit up straight or stand and put your hands on your lower ribs. Breathe out as much air as you can, pulling in your stomach so that the lungs empty, and feel this under your hands.
Then relax and feel your stomach pushing out, this creates a vacuum in the lower part of the lungs and pulls in fresh air.

When we get nervous we often breath in a shallow way. Breathing from your belly will give your voice much more power.

Sensible warning – if at any time you feel dizzy when practicing breathing exercises, STOP, and breath normally.

Some forms of exercises like yoga and pilates will help build up your capacity for deep breathing.

Resonance

Sound resonates in chambers of body: chest, throat, mouth, and head. Imagine your body as a musical instrument. If you play a violin for example, the tone is produced as the sounds from the bow crossing the string resonates in the body of the instrument.

The simplest way to warm up your voice and improve resonance is to hum. Make a mmmmm sound with your mouth light closed. Feel the resonance in your mouth. Imagine the resonance moving down your throat and into your chest. And then imagine it moving up and around inside your head.

Articulation

Clear articulation is helped by exercises to strengthen the muscles in and around your mouth, including your lips and tongue. For articulation, practice a few tongue twisters.

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper will exercise the lips.

Two toads totally tired of trying to trot to Tetbury will provide a workout for the tongue.

How to get your posture right

Even with great preparation, there comes a moment when you have to get up in front of an audience. I know only too well that when you aren't used to this, it can suddenly seem scary and you probably want to get it over with as quickly as possible.

In fact, you would do better to do the opposite. Stand up and plant your feet firmly on the ground and put your attention in your feet for a moment. Feel the safety of your connection with the ground.

Then look up and at one or two friendly faces in the audience, and take a breath…

Then start (with your well prepared introduction, that's why it's worthwhile memorising your first couple of sentences – even if you are planning to read the rest of your talk).

Top tips – a summary

- The best way to learn to give a talk is to just do it.
- Put yourself forward, even if you feel nervous.
- Plan and rehearse your content.
- Include a couple of useful tips so you know you are offering value.
- Warm up your voice in the morning.
- And remember where your feet are.

Presenting with Confidence programme

Presenting with confidence is a focused programme, which will help you to plan and deliver a strong business talk or presentation. The programme is completely practical, tailored to your needs, and at the end of it you will have a talk ready to go.

Part 1 Planning your presentation

You will start with an individual session to help you plan your presentation. This is normally via Skype.

Part 2 Preparation and delivery

The planning session is followed by a second session to practise your presentation. This is normally an in-person meeting.

You will receive feedback, advice and training on voice, posture and dealing with nerves. The training is tailored to your specific needs and I offer a satisfaction guarantee. At the end of this session, you will have a talk ready to go, and have increased your level of confidence and skill.

Email felicity@heartofwork.co.uk for more information

In house training for companies and organisations also available – please contact me for more information and to discuss your requirements.

About Felicity Dwyer

Felicity is a career coach and leadership trainer. She has 12 years' experience in the field and has helped hundreds of women and men develop themselves and their careers.

In her twenties Felicity trained in acting at the City Literary Institute in London. She was then involved in a community theatre for many years.

Felicity sadly no longer has time for acting. But this early experience, transferred to a business context, has proved useful when giving presentations. She finds public speaking complements the coaching side of her work where she does more listening than talking!

Felicity can help you gain confidence and skill in making presentations, drawing on both her theatre training and her coaching skills.

Felicity also offers interview coaching, and career transition services. Her programmes are designed to help you to both be more successful, and to get more enjoyment out of your work.

To find out more...

Visit www.heartofwork.co.uk

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Planning and Preparation Worksheet

This worksheet will help you think through what you want to include in your talk.

Topic

Main points

Stories/Examples to illustrate points

Useful takeaways/tips

Relevant quote(s) if using

Introduction

Ending

Call to action