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## Presentation Skills

### Structure and Content

#### Telling Your Story

When presenting or communicating any message in person, we have covered previously how to overcome your fears and achieve an 'emotional connection' with your audience. But what are the fundamentals of giving a highly effective presentation or communicating any important piece of information that people will remember?

We all lead very busy lives. At any one time, we are all thinking about a myriad of things. So how do you get someone to stop thinking about everything else and listen exclusively to you?

The first thing to recognize is that your audience wants to know from you 'what's in it for them'. In other words, why should they listen to you? What information are you going to tell them that they *need* to know? By doing this, you will help or benefit them in some way or other.

Everyone likes a good story. Effective presenters are good storytellers. While the content of your 'story' is of course important, your delivery is equally important. Your audience are more likely to remember your message if it is delivered in a personal, authentic and energized way. However, like all good stories, your content must have a beginning, middle and an end.

#### BEGINNING

People like and remember a good opening. How should you begin? There is no right or wrong way. You can stand still in the middle of a stage, walk around, start in the audience or even use humour. The point is what is going to get your audience to sit up and take notice, ahead of the first words you speak?

#### MIDDLE

This section is where you deliver your key message (depending on the length of your presentation, up to three key messages are enough). What is it that you really want to say? People can often put the 'book' down or switch off in this section, so make sure that your audience remains hooked by giving them plenty to think or make notes about.

#### END

It is true that people remember first what they heard last. So, like your beginning, ensure that you finish on a 'high'; something memorable – maybe a cliffhanger?



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## QUESTIONS

You want people to read on, maybe buy the sequel right? Do not attempt to cover off everything in your presentation; leave room for plenty of questions.

You cannot be expected to remember every detail of your story. To assist you, have some bullet points written out on a small card (A6 postcard) to act as a prompt. Remember, if you are using any audio-visual aid when presenting, these should be a tool to support you. Your audience has come to see and listen to you and not to look at a fancy slide show; the aid must assist you and not the other way round.

Let's look at a practical example. The next time you find yourself at a business networking meeting and you have to introduce yourself to a group of strangers. Try the following four practical tips for creating a memorable impression:

1. Find a space where you can see everyone and they can see you
2. Take a step forward; make eye contact with your audience, smile and pause. In the pause...
3. Take a deep breath (to control any nerves) and project your voice (this may seem like shouting but you're not!) to announce your name, the name of your business and main benefits (up to three) of your product/service. If time allows...
4. Tell your audience what you are looking for eg 'I am looking for a recommendation to an excellent local accountant/solicitor'

Remember to practice, practice, practice the delivery of your message at home, either in a mirror or to your family (get them to stand at the opposite side of the room to you). Can they hear you? Are you articulate? Do you speak with clarity, confidence and conviction?

*People will always want to hear your 'story'. Tell your audience in the most stimulating way you can and remember to leave them wanting more!*