

Entrepreneur

The Do's and Don'ts of Giving a Killer Presentation

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One of the most valuable skills an entrepreneur or a company executive can have is the ability to talk about their product in an effective and engaging way in front of an audience. But for founders of a startup, mastering public speaking and presentation etiquette can also be crucial to the growth of your business.

When we launched our presentation tool PointDrive at tech conference DEMO this year, we quickly learned your presentation skills could either endear or alienate your future customers and potential investors.

Here are a few presentation tips we learned.

DO

- **Start with the problem.** Always begin a presentation by explaining how your product or service addresses the audience's pain points. If you empathize with their concerns and provide a worthwhile solution, you will be more likely to gain customers than forcing your audience to identify with a problem they may not have.
- **Edit yourself.** You could talk about your company forever, but don't. Presentations are meant to educate and intrigue, not to bore. Give your audience enough information to pique their interest and then direct them to other resources for more information.
- **Minimize word count.** If you are using PowerPoint, put no more than 10 words on each slide. Minimizing text on the slide also minimizes distractions, allowing your audience to focus on your speech and your message.
- **Relate to the audience.** Use personal stories, examples and custom demos to help your audience relate to you. Remember, their problem should be your problem, so don't be shy about letting the audience know you understand their concerns.
- **Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.** Do not just think you can wing a presentation. You need to rehearse and then warm up. Feeling comfortable and practiced will help calm your nerves and keep you from freezing onstage.
- **Follow up, stand out.** Once the presentation has ended, don't let your communication skills fall flat. Be sure to follow up with any individuals you met before or after the presentation, and make sure your electronic communication is as effective as your in-person communication.

“In presentations or speeches less really is more.”

-- Stephen Keague, The Little Red Handbook of Public Speaking and Presenting

DON'T

- ❌ **Try to be funny if you're not.** While well intended, humor doesn't always translate onstage, particularly if it's not practiced. Rather than trying to dress up a presentation with unnecessary elements, focus on delivering an impactful, engaging message and you will succeed every time.
- ❌ **Focus on a big stunt.** Often presentations, especially those where you are pitching your company, are limited to a few short minutes. Rather than waste time trying to execute a stunt that has nothing to do with your product or company, spend those precious minutes talking about what you actually have to offer
- ❌ **Leave your personality backstage.** People want to feel a personal connection to your brand. They want to feel like they are doing business with an actual person rather than a company. That human element has to come from you. Showing personality onstage lets the audience see the person behind the company, and makes for a more engaging presentation -- something every presenter should strive for.
- ❌ **Read your slides.** Do not ever do this. Even the most well-practiced presenter comes off sounding monotonous and boring when reading slides. Plus, breaking eye contact with your audience is a surefire way to lose their interest.

Practice, but don't memorize and don't read word for word. If you mess up or stumble, that's okay. If anything, it brings out that human element the audience is seeking.

- ❌ **Waste their time.** People attend presentations with a specific objective in mind: to learn. Don't waste their time by talking about irrelevant information or showcasing unnecessary "flair." Being succinct is your responsibility as a presenter and something your audience will thank you for.
- ❌ **Forget to prepare for questions.** Often speakers focus on the presentation so intently they forget to prepare for the Q&A session afterwards. Don't be that person. Try to anticipate the kinds of questions they might have and be prepared with answers. A poorly planned Q&A session can overshadow even the most successful presentation.

In presentation etiquette, it all comes down to one thing: valuing your audience. This means speaking directly to them, having all the information prepared and practiced, and above all, being worthwhile of their time. If you remain focused on providing value to your audience, you'll find yourself giving successful presentations every time.

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