

POWERFUL PRESENTATIONS: Three Crucial Success Ingredients

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This article is a preview of Jim Lukaszewski's next IABC web-based teleseminar, "Powerful Presentations: Secrets, Strategies and Skills," on Wednesday, 28 October 2009, from 12:00 to 1:30 p.m. EDT. Please visit www.krm.com/IABC to find out more about the program and to register.

If you have to speak, even briefly, before groups of any size, for any reason, at any time, or coach those who do, you're always looking for those techniques and topics that will help you consistently deliver powerful presentations.

Do all presentations have to be powerful? Of course! What gives you the right to waste anyone else's time by saying things that don't matter? If you want to matter more, if you want to be more memorable, if you want to be taken more seriously, and if you want to make a difference, there are some very important attributes, techniques and components you can utilize to achieve powerful presentations.

Three powerful techniques

Packaging and bundling

As I teach and coach executives, it's clear that verbal skill is the single most powerful tool leaders have. It's hard to think of a historic example where a crowd followed a memo, or rallied around a strategic plan notebook. It takes intentionally applied verbal skill to attract followers, get attention and accomplish something.

The most powerful verbal technique, in virtually every culture, every language, every circumstance, is the use of small, verbalized numbers. For example, if you tell an audience: "the three essential ingredients of your survival are..." you have their attention and you have their brains completely focused on what you're about to tell them. And more than likely, you'll have them reaching for a pencil—even their neighbor's pencil, if they themselves forgot to bring one. I often refer to this concept as "packaging and bundling."

A similar technique is to use a number with an adjective, especially when talking about very complex topics. For example, you could say, "the three crucial *elements* of this concept are..." or "the three *parts* you will need to learn are..." or "the three *phases* you'll experience are going to be..."—you get the idea. Using adjectives that divide or further enumerate can take the most complicated subjects and simplify them.

Using numbering sequences of five or less triggers a magically powerful effect in virtually any public speaking situation. If you are speaking to someone who is angry, you could interrupt and ask them, “What are the two most urgent matters we need to fix?” Or, “What single question do you have that we might be able to work on to begin resolving this matter?”

Keep the numbers small. In fact, the smaller the number, the more powerful the concept becomes. As you work up to using the numbers four and five, they are harder to follow. Audiences can't hold them in their brains. But it can be done, especially if you use descriptive words such as steps, elements, ingredients, phases, etc. that make your statements more understandable.

Now the question is, once you have your audience's attention, what do you do? How do you use it most effectively from their perspective and yours?

Stories: The second most powerful presenter's tool

Small numbers get people to focus. But we actually learn from stories speakers tell us.

It's entirely possible to write volumes, and some have, on the art of storytelling. And we will talk about this topic in depth during the upcoming web program. But it is important at this point to understand why stories are so powerful.

Stories have very recognizable and understandable structures. Stories have:

- A beginning, middle and end, each told in plain language (for 13-year-olds or younger).
- Non-technical language.
- Recognizable subjects like people, animals and living systems.
- Brevity (150-300 words).
- Urgency (power words such as “important,” “essential,” “crucial,” “urgent,” “new”).
- Positive language (very few stories use negative words or phrases).
- A lesson, a moral or a self-evident truth.

Of all the attributes that make stories powerful, it is the anticipation of an obvious lesson, a moral, or self-evident truth that draws us to people who tell stories. We are extraordinarily disappointed when a story contains all of the attributes mentioned above, but fails to have a meaningful punch line.

There really are, in a sense, two kinds of stories. One is an anecdote, and the other is a story. An anecdote is literally a story that contains useful information, but lacks a punch line. Here is an example of an anecdote:

We had a great visit to Cleveland last week; we saw many of the important sights of the city and its surroundings. We visited two or three university campuses and were quite impressed, as well as several university medical centers and their blood banks. All in all, it seemed like a very useful and timely visit and it will be a destination we will remember for a long time.

Now here is a story. It comes from an episode of the TV show *The West Wing*, where President Bartlett has sought the advice of the Pope, a local rabbi and a Quaker, while pondering whether or not to let a federal prisoner be put to death. At the last minute, he calls his old parish priest to counsel him. This is the story the priest (played by Karl Maulden), shared with him.

You know, you remind me of the man that lived by the river. He heard a radio report that the river was going to rush up, and flood the town, and that all the residents should evacuate their homes. But the man said, "I'm religious, I pray, God loves me, God will save me."

The water comes up, a guy in a row boat comes along and he shouts, "Hey, hey you, you in there. The town is flooding. Let me take you to safety." But the man shouted back, "I'm religious, I pray, God loves me, God will save me."

A helicopter was hovering overhead, and a guy with a megaphone shouted, "Hey you, you down there, the town is flooding! Let me drop this ladder and I'll take you to safety." But the man shouted back that he was religious, that he prayed, that God loved him, and that God would take him to safety.

The man drowned. And standing at the gates of Saint Peter, he demands an audience with God. "Lord," he said, "I'm a religious man, I pray, I thought you loved me. Why did this happen?"

God said, "I sent you a radio report, a helicopter, and a guy in a rowboat, what the hell are you doing here?"

This story is 217 words, which is just over a minute and a half speaking time.

We love stories and storytellers, it is truly the most powerful way we learn about those things that really have meaning in our lives. Powerful speakers are powerful storytellers.

Chronology: The most powerful simplifier

Chronology is the third most powerful tool for getting attention and building understanding. We all live our lives moment to moment, hour to hour, day to day, year to year. Even the most complicated subjects can often be explained when organized in a chronological fashion. Using chronology as a speaker is doubly powerful, because you have a wide variety of elements to bring into your description. You have summer, fall, winter and spring. You have

morning, afternoon, evening and night. You have breakfast, lunch and dinner. These are all powerful images that help simplify, focus attention, and help audiences stay with you and benefit from the time you are taking to explain things.

Below are two scripts about the same thing. One was written by a group of engineers with the best of intentions. The second was written by engineers who had become communicators. Both have the same mission: to help get people to make an important decision about their own lives, families and futures.

DRAFT LANDOWNER SCRIPT
by the Engineers

As you may be aware, on July 7, 2009, the Transmission Corporation (TC) filed an application with the Utilities Commission (UC) for reinforcing the electricity supply to Beal Island and the Southern Gulf Islands. Since then, the review of that application has been underway. More than 2,000 information requests have been submitted to the UC and the oral portion of the hearing, which lasted 35 days, concluded on March 22.

The Utilities Commission has directed TC to file an argument stating its final position on the ITR project by April 5, 2010. Interveners will then be required to file their responding arguments by April 19 to which TC will reply on May 5. These steps will conclude the regulatory process for the proposed ITR project, except for the UC decision, which is expected by July, 2010.

Earlier today, TC filed its final position on the Beal Island Transmission Reinforcement (ITR) project with the Utilities Commission. Our final argument will be available for review on the UC website.

Our closing argument reflects our proposal contained in the application, asking the UC to approve underground construction on the existing right-of-way on the 3.7 kilometre portion. We continue to believe this is the best long-term solution, as the line will not be visible once constructed and ongoing maintenance will be minimized.

If the UC approves the ITR project as outlined in our proposal, then TC will have an obligation to construct the project in a timely manner. This will require successful discussions with individual landowners to secure underground rights. Therefore, we have asked the UC for a 90-day window to have discussions with the residents along the existing right-of-way about exchanging the existing overhead rights for underground rights.

If, after the 90-day period, a majority of the necessary underground rights remain unsecured this will create a major obstacle in a project that is required to ensure a continued, reliable supply of electricity to 700,000 Beal Island residents and businesses by 2008. For this reason, our closing argument includes a request for authorization to construct overhead on the existing right-of-way if a sufficient amount of underground rights cannot be secured during the 90-day negotiation period.

We want to stress that this does not presuppose a decision from the Utilities Commission. We want to stress that we continue to believe that undergrounding the lines along the existing right-of-way is the best alternative and we want to begin the dialogue with property owners about underground rights.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this letter with us, please contact *insert name and number*.

Sincerely,

DRAFT LANDOWNER SCRIPT
by the Engineer Communicator

An important decision point related to reinforcing the electricity supply to Beal Island and the Southern Gulf Islands is coming soon. The public process undertaken to this point has been rigorous and comprehensive. Here is a timeline of recent and upcoming events related to this extremely important decision.

- July 7, 2009: The Transmission Corporation filed an application with the Utilities Commission for reinforcing the electricity supply to Beal Island and the Southern Gulf Islands. Review of that application is now underway.
- March 22, 2010: Concluded the oral portion of the hearing, which lasted 35 days. More than 2,000 information requests have been submitted to the UC.
- April 5, 2010: TC, as required by The Utilities Commission, filed its final position on the Beal Island Transmission Reinforcement (ITR) project with the UC. Our complete final argument will be available for review on the UC web site (www.uc.com).
- April 19, 2010: Deadline for interveners to file their responding arguments.
- May 5, 2010: TC will reply to Interveners' responding arguments. This is the final step in the regulatory process for the proposed ITR project.
- July 2010: The expected date for the UC decision.

If there is to be underground construction, TC will require underground rights from the residents along the existing right of way. For the UC to approve the ITR project as outlined in our proposal, TC will have an obligation to exchange overhead rights for underground rights. Therefore, we have asked the UC for a 90-day window to have discussions with residents along the existing right-of-way about exchanging their existing overhead rights for underground rights.

Our proposal is structured to include overhead construction as an option. If, after the 90-day period, TC fails to secure a majority of the necessary underground rights, overhead construction will be authorized instead should the commission give permission for the reinforcing project to proceed.

This approach will assure the 700,000 Beal Island residents and businesses a reliable source of electricity when needed for 2008. TC continues to believe that underground construction is the best long-term solution, as the line will not be visible once constructed and ongoing maintenance will be minimized.

In the coming days, we look forward to meeting with each resident along the existing right of way to discuss and work out the exchange of overhead rights for underground rights.

We are ready to answer any questions you might have now and are prepared to make appointments with each landowner starting this week. If you would like to schedule an appointment, please contact *insert name, and number*.

Thank you.

Chronology has extraordinary simplifying power.