**Key Takeaways**

- The process for creating a presentation can be broken down into five stages: determining objectives, planning the presentation, managing stage presence, understanding technical support, and conducting follow-up.

- Objectives are two-fold, seen from both the perspective of the speaker and the perspective of the audience.

- When planning the presentation, individuals should conduct the appropriate research, create an outline, write an introduction that establishes objectives, develop the body of the presentation in a logical order, and end by connecting conclusions to the objectives.

- Workers can conquer stage fright by knowing the material well, taking deep breaths, and memorizing the first paragraph of the presentation to give time to adjust to being before an audience.

**Competency Definition**

The development of effective presentation skills at all levels of a company is critical to the ability of the business to prosper. Presentation skills include the ability to: write a clear, dynamic presentation that informs, inspires, or persuades; speak before an audience; and manage the logistical components, such as equipment and location. Employees, managers, and executives who possess effective presentation skills are an asset to the company; these skills can contribute to the company's ability to bring in new business, strengthen teams, and enhance the corporate reputation.

From helping employees to run more effective meetings to preparing the chief executive officer in the task of promoting the company to stockholders, effective presentation skills are critical to the business. Sales people will sell better; information-systems professionals will be better able to articulate the benefits of new technology; and executives will have the skills to communicate the company's vision.
Techniques for Development

The process for creating a presentation may be broken down into five stages: determining objectives, planning the presentation, managing stage presence, understanding technical support, and conducting follow-up.

1.) Determining Objectives

Objectives are always two-fold – that is, they are seen from both the perspective of the speaker and the perspective of the audience. The speaker should first define why he is giving the presentation. Is it to present facts, to motivate, or to persuade? It may be a combination. Once the “why” is understood, the speaker should get specific – e.g., “I need to communicate the parameters of the new distribution policy” or “I want to persuade the audience that the new benefits program is in their best interest.” The speaker should then ensure the objectives can be accomplished in the time frame allotted.

Next, the speaker should determine the audience’s objectives. Are they line employees, managers, or members of the board of directors? Why are they attending the presentation? Is it to gather information that will allow them to do their jobs better? To be inspired to generate more sales? To determine if management understands their issues?

2.) Planning the Presentation

When the speaker has a clear understanding of what she needs and what the audience wants, she can begin preparing the presentation. Allow as much time as possible in order to make revisions and become comfortable with the material. It is the speaker’s job to make it easy for the audience to grasp all the ideas. The more effort the speaker puts into creating the presentation, the less effort they will need to put into benefitting from it.

The speaker must determine if he will be reading the presentation (for example, a teleprompter), looking at notes, or memorizing. While writing the presentation may seem like a time-consuming task, it is the best preparation for the next step in the process: managing stage presence. The better the speaker understands the material, the easier it will be to present it.

When writing the presentation, the speaker should consider the content, style, and visuals.

Content. The first step the speaker takes is to research the topic. With that information, she determines key messages – that is, the primary topics she wants to cover. Again, it is important to keep the scope reasonable so that the presentation fits the time frame. The next step is to create an outline. This will help to organize the material and provide a logical flow for the finished product.

The speaker then writes the presentation. He should begin with an introduction that previews for the audience what they are about to hear. He should then lay out the body of the presentation in clear, logical order, making sure one topic flows to the next. Finally, he provides a conclusion that reconnects with the introduction, showing how he has followed through with the topics. If there is a question-and-answer period, the speaker should repeat the question if the audience member does not have access to a microphone and provide clear, concise answers.

Style. The style is up to the speaker and the nature of the presentation. Perhaps it is formal, given at a retirement party. Or maybe it is a working session in the conference room. Whatever the style, it will be important to cover the basics:

- Clarity – No matter how inspirational and persuasive a speech is, clarity must be at its heart. Imprecise language or rambling sentences wastes the audience’s time.
Painting a picture – The speaker should choose words that help the audience see what she sees, telling stories or anecdotes that will make them remember the presentation.

Rhythm – Rhythm comes from creating transition phrases to tie one section to the next and using repetition to put increased emphasis on important points.

Engaging the audience – A speaker keeps the audience’s attention through stories and audience participation when appropriate.

Visuals. Up to 50 percent of information is taken in through the eyes. (Adair, 2003). Visuals will help the audience retain the content presented. However, it is important to make sure the visuals aid the presentation and do not distract from it. Visuals should include only key information, about 25 words each, and should be changed often so the audience is not left staring at the same thing for too long.

3.) Managing Stage Presence

The audience wants to connect to the speaker, and if he is genuine, they will. Tips include smiling, making eye contact, and (oftentimes) talking in a conversational manner. Even for the most formal speech, the speaker will want to appear comfortable, which will make the audience comfortable. Finally, the speaker should always be respectful. Audiences will not respond well if they sense manipulation or condescension.

For many presenters, the most daunting part of giving a presentation is stage fright. Everyone experiences stage fright, even the most seasoned performers. Some tips to managing stage fright include:

• Breathing. Taking deep breaths and slowing slow down.

• Knowing the subject matter. The more confident the speaker is, the more relaxed he will be.

• Taking strength from the audience. They are on the speaker’s side.

Memorizing the first paragraph. Regardless of whether the speaker is reading the presentation or going by notes, it is a good idea to memorize the first paragraph. Stage fright lessens the longer a speaker is on the stage. Knowing the first paragraph by heart gives the speaker time to adjust to the first minute in front of the audience.

Practicing – a lot. The speaker should rehearse often – if possible, in the room where the presentation will take place. Some experts express concern about over-rehearsing and losing spontaneity. But, given the time pressures of corporate life today, under-rehearsing is far more likely to be the typical business person’s concern. She may want to rehearse in front of a colleague, making sure it is someone who knows how to provide constructive criticism. Taping the presentation can sometimes be helpful.

4.) Understanding the Venue

Just as it pays to be knowledgeable about the material, it pays to understand the environment in which the presentation will be given. A conference room is different from an auditorium. The speaker should visit the site ahead of time, find out where people will be seated, what the acoustics are, and what type of lighting is available. It is also important to determine how to deal with equipment, to know where the electrical outlets are, and to become familiar with any other details that could become a problem. Will there be someone responsible for the technology, or will the speaker be handling it? If there is a staff person, the speaker should meet him or her.

5.) Conducting Follow-up

To follow up, the speaker should review his performance afterward, assess his strengths and weaknesses, and plan how to improve next time. It may also be helpful to seek feedback from trusted associates.
**Individual Contributors**

Developing effective presentation skills can help individual contributors advance their own careers and enhance the profitability of the business. It can help them build self-esteem, establish credibility, increase visibility, and strengthen leadership skills. While at one time, employees in areas such as engineering or information systems worked in the background, today these same employees are expected to communicate to other team members, managers, sponsors, and the public. Creating the visual side of presentations is easier than ever with computer programs like Microsoft PowerPoint. If an individual contributor is concerned about her ability to speak in front of an audience, she should ask a manager if there is a budget for presentation-skills courses. Groups like Toastmasters can provide practice, particularly in front of an audience.

**Managers**

Presentation skills are essential to a manager’s ability to manage people and processes. Presentations are an efficient method to provide team members with information they may not have the time or inclination to gather from written reports. When question-and-answer sessions are included, a presentation is also a good way to hear what employees and executives are thinking. Presentations can motivate and serve as a call to action. Managers should also think about how strengthening the presentation skills of their team members can enhance the credibility of the department. Helping employees to find the right courses to enhance their own skills will benefit everyone.

**Executives**

Communication is a big part of every executive’s day. Developing effective presentation skills is critical to an executive’s ability to articulate vision and promote the company to its various stakeholders. Employees and managers who possess effective presentation skills are an asset to the company. These are skills that contribute to the company’s ability to bring in new business, strengthen teams and enhance the corporate reputation. Executives should consider providing the time and budget for employees to attend courses or join groups such as Toastmasters.

**Obstacles**

Employees may feel they do not have the time to prepare and give presentations, but the bigger obstacle to giving a presentation is stage fright. In October of 1973, the Sunday Times of London published a survey about the fear of public speaking. Of the 3,000 participants, 41 percent said public speaking was their number-one fear. To put that in context, 19 percent said death was their number-one fear. (Tracy, 2003). Preparation and training will help mitigate employee’s misgivings.

**Case Study**

A technology-services vendor wanted to obtain larger accounts and thought one way to help would be to improve the presentation skills of the company’s young salespeople. A presentation already existed, which included 70 fact-driven slides, but the sales director wanted something that would make a stronger impact.

The first step was to revamp the presentation. The team responsible for this began by interviewing the sales manager to get his account of the benefits customers received when using the company. As a result, the team was able to focus on the most important messages. They reduced the number of slides and created a presentation that was more vibrant.

Next was training. Divided into small groups of 10, the staff spent a half-day at a presentations-skills program. They broke into pairs and took turns...
giving presentations before a consultant and colleague. Each presenter received feedback about what he or she did right and which elements could use improvement.

The program included sections on non-verbal communication, which was designed to increase the sales staff’s awareness of body language, and technical issues, such as the layout of the room and visuals. When the training was completed, the sales director was confident that the team knew how to communicate the company’s messages effectively.

**Related Resources**

**The Power Presenter**  
*Technique, Style, and Strategy from America’s Top Speaking Coach*  
By Jerry Weissman  

**Speak With Power and Confidence**  
*Tested Ideas for Becoming a More Powerful Communicator*  
By Patrick Collins  

**Talking to the Top**  
*Executive’s Guide to Career-Making Presentations*  
By Ray Anthony with Foreword by Dr. Warren Bennis  

**References**


