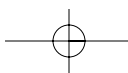
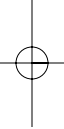


Connect to Your Audience



The title of this book is *Point, Click & Wow!* But the “Wow” is not because your audience is looking at your slides. The “Wow” is because, at the end of your talk, the audience connected with you. They liked you because you spent time listening to them, not just talking to them. Today there needs to be more human connection and fewer technological “let me show you the latest feature” presentations. The technology features should be used to enhance the connection with your audience. If they don’t, then don’t use them. Presentation slides don’t connect, people do.

You or your company may have spent a fortune buying the latest electronic equipment and creating exciting presentations, but it’s not the equipment or design that counts as much as your relationship with your audience. We have clients who’ve been told, “Please don’t bring a presentation. We’d like *you* to come and speak.” This is due to the fact that people are no longer connecting to their audience. They spend more time looking and talking to the slides than to the audience. Make sure you connect with your audience. Be spontaneous; don’t program every moment. Let your audience’s reactions determine your presentation’s moment-by-moment experience.

You need to be a living and breathing person up there in front of everyone. Show your humanness, and your audience will like you. When you think of your audience first, your preparation and delivery will be authentic. Your audience will react favorably if they sense you have put some thought into caring about their interests. Make this your motto when you present: “First and always I must establish and keep rapport with the audience. It’s me they have come to see and hear, not my fancy computer presentation.”

In this chapter you will begin to put yourself in your audience’s shoes in order to create a presentation for them. You will also consider how to customize the talk.

Focus on Your Audience

Many people are afraid to present. They stand in front of an audience truly believing that the audience dislikes them and wants them to do poorly. They

are uncomfortable thinking of themselves as the center of attention. They give the impression of wanting to get the talk done as fast as possible. Such people liked to do 35 mm slide shows because the room was dark and they thought (incorrectly) how they talked and acted didn't really count, since the focus was on the slides. With the advent of overheads, presenters actually had to look at the audience and realize that people were paying attention to them. This was difficult for many people because very few presenters rehearse their talks out loud before the actual presentation. Because they have no idea how they will sound or what specifically they will say about the slides, they may feel nervous.

At first electronic presentations were being given in dark rooms so the unprepared, nervous presenters were happy again. They thought that nothing counted but their creative laptop slide show. They believed that fancy laptop presentations precluded a need to connect personally with the audience. They also thought that the sophisticated graphics, gorgeous colors, and incredible effects would convince the audience that their products or ideas were the best in the business. This is no longer always true.

Nothing takes the place of a sincere, compassionate presenter who really cares about the audience and their response to the presentation. And now, since most presenters have all the fancy effects, the presenter who stands out is one who is enthusiastic, genuinely expresses interest in the audience's reactions, and modifies the presentation content accordingly.

The computer is only a tool to enable communication. You, as the presenter, still have to communicate using your voice, your body, and the positive energy that you send to your audience. Yes, it's great to have a creative laptop presentation. But if you show no true interest in your audience, you won't get far. This interest comes from your heart and your desire to truly meet your audience's needs. Because the slides can sometimes be overpowering, you have to work harder to let your audience members know you care about them and about your subject. In particular, you have to work on your voice. Your voice must sound confident and enthusiastic, and you must pause at the end of your sentences so your audience can digest what you have just said. Also, if you are in a dark room, you need to spend some time with the lights on. Your audience must see you and your gestures, or else all they will remember about you is your voice. But you shouldn't be in a dark room any more. The latest technology lets you have the lights on while talking and showing your slides. But still some rooms have only on and off light switches. Try not to present in those rooms.

Care About Your Audience

No one can make you act gracious and pleasant toward your audience. This is your job and your job alone. Your audience needs to feel that you care about them. When you focus more on the audience than on yourself, you will find that you are also less nervous. You are no longer the focus. When you make your audience center stage and work on keeping them interested and comfortable listening to you, they will respond in kind. Audiences can feel your positive energy.

Here are some behaviors to avoid and preferable ones to use instead.

1. Don't Spend Too Much Time Discussing Yourself and the Agenda.

When presenters stand up and go on and on about themselves or their company, audiences lose interest. Usually they speak in acronyms and phrases that few people in the audience can understand. Frequently, at the end, people in the audience still probably couldn't tell you what they just heard. Second, explaining the agenda in great detail is boring, especially when you use phrases such as, "Later, I'm going to show you. . . ." or "You'll hear more about this soon." Those phrases won't engage your audience.

2. Do Start the Talk Right Away. Within thirty seconds of your scheduled start time, you should begin your talk. The audience needs to be engaged right away. Engaging the audience can mean instantly imparting opinions, facts, and feelings about your subject. If it's appropriate, engaging the audience also might mean asking them to comment on and shape the agenda for the three hours. When you start on time, imparting and sharing knowledge you are passionate about, you will feel confident.

3. Don't Read the Information and Be Done with It. When all you do is read your slides word for word, you're not adding anything. Presenters seem to think the most important thing is to spend the whole talk giving every bit of information to the audience. They race through the slides, mumbling and rarely pausing to let the audience digest certain key points. They are disappointed when the audience doesn't look particularly interested.

4. Do More Than Read the Words on the Slide. Display just a few words so you can look at your audience and use your voice and passion to



Position Yourself

Before your listeners hear the value of your message, they want to hear your value. How do you introduce yourself?

The “traditional way” involves facts and fluff. “I’m John Smith. I’m the lead software engineer on the Delta Project. I’ve been with ABC Software for five years, and I’ve been in the industry for ten. I’m really pleased to be here with you this morning and to share ideas that my company has put together. This looks like a very exciting project, and we’re excited to be here with you.”

With this approach, you miss the opportunity to sell the value of your experience and perspective.

Instead, communicate “features and benefits” tailored to your audience. For example, “I’ve worked on the supply chain software implementation for ten years (feature). As a result, I’m able to shorten implementation time by five to ten weeks (benefit) and reduce internal staff hours dedicated to the project by 10 percent to 20 percent (benefit).”

This introduction will clearly position your right to deliver the message you’ve brought. It defines the value of your experience.

—Nick Miller, *Clarity Advantage*
www.clarityadvantage.com

convey information not listed on the screen. You want people to focus on what you are saying as you add valuable information to what is being shown. You must speak about information that is not shown on the slide. If you don't, then you might just as well give the slides to your audience and save them the pain of sitting through you reading every slide word for word.

5. Don't Stick to Your Standard, Off-the-Shelf Presentation. Frequently, your content will have to be modified. For example, two colleagues went to give a two-day course to a nonprofit agency. On arrival, they were told that the course had only been planned for one day. One colleague suggested they cover the key elements of the course, but the other colleague thought they should just do the material for the first day! Many presenters do this; they never stop to modify the talk based on a changed time frame or their audience's needs. In theory, the whole point of giving a laptop presentation is that it's easy to customize, even at the last moment. Yet many presenters simply don't bother.

6. Do Tailor Your Presentations to Your Audience. The talk you give to the executive committee won't be the same as the one you give to peers in your department. Each audience is looking for different types of information and levels of detail. Ask ahead of time to find out what your audience wants to hear.

Put names and logos from the client's company on the screen. This shows you care enough to include them in your talk. Take time during the talk to find out about your audience's expertise and interests. Put questions for your audience on a screen so you won't forget to ask them. This is especially important if you weren't able to learn much about your audience before the presentation and you really wonder who is sitting out there listening to you.

7. Don't Talk About What Interests You but Rather About What Interests the Audience. One group of technical specialists was asked to make a presentation to top management. They included all the interesting (to them) technical data. They overwhelmed these executives with their world of details. Not only did the executives not have time to listen to all the details, but they were frustrated because they could not fully grasp the details of the projects enough to know whether they should be funded for another year. Frequently, technical people present along with the salespeople. The technical people need to have at least two presentations—a presentation

for the executives in the company and a presentation for the technical gurus in the company.

8. Do Consider Your Audience and What They Would Like to Know.

In the above example, the executives wanted to know such information as how the proposed project would help reduce costs and how it would keep the manufacturing line running. You can find people who know about your audience's interests. Ask them. Force yourself to leave out the details that are not high priority for that particular audience.

9. Don't Consider Every Question as Being from an Adversary.

Suppose that, as you start your presentation, someone asks you a simple question. You realize that you should have included that information in your screens, but didn't. You decide the person is hostile and out to make you look incompetent. Be careful not to go down this path. Your audience will sense your negativity, and the mood and dynamics of the room will become negative. Be positive with your answers. You can be as prepared as possible, but realize that some questions may surprise you.

10. Do Think That People Who Ask Questions Are Genuinely Interested.

People who ask questions are usually the most keen and attentive participants. And keep in mind, someone can question your ideas and still think you have given a fine presentation. In some companies, people see it as their jobs to question every detail. For example, as Ph.D.s in a biomedical research company listen to a colleague's research, questions are asked to be sure the researcher followed certain procedures and arrived at the most logical result. The Ph.D. believes it's his or her job to make sure the research met the high standards of the company.

11. Don't Assume You Will Have All the Time You Were Allotted.

Suppose your audience has been sitting all day, and now you are the last speaker. You go on too long. You never rehearsed the talk out loud to test how long it would really take. If you keep going, you show a lack of consideration for your audience. Being last in a day's program may mean less time for you to talk. A one-hour speech may have to be cut down to thirty minutes. Be prepared in advance if you know this may be a possibility.

In some companies no one ever gets all the time they are told they will have for a presentation. If this normally happens to you, then only create a talk that you actually believe you will have an opportunity to give. Another factor that affects length is your audience. If they are tired, cut down your talk. If they need a stretch, cut down your talk by five minutes and let them stretch. They will appreciate it.

Customize for Your Audience

Audiences love to feel they are part of the presentation. They become more involved and retain more of what you say. They also realize that you spent some time thinking about them when creating your presentation.

Companies spend hours and lots of money trying to keep up with the latest slide technology. But sophisticated slides will not be enough in the future. An effective presentation will not be judged by comparing its bells and whistles with those of a competitor. The difference will be in how well the presentation was focused on that audience. Greg Rocco, a technical systems engineer of Mercury Computer Systems, has an elaborate, effective way of talking only about his audience's interests. Here's what he says he does: "First, the businessperson from Mercury puts up the agenda. This has been discussed in advance. It may now change due to whomever is in our audience, which may be different than what was planned for. We never just start with the first point on the agenda. The businessperson asks, 'Are these the topics you want to discuss? In what particular order do you want to discuss them?' I start with a PowerPoint slide listing all my favorite customer presentations with hypertext links. But I do have another slide with less frequently used presentations just in case someone mentions something during the opening agenda discussion. Based on what I hear, I make suggestions about what we cover first.

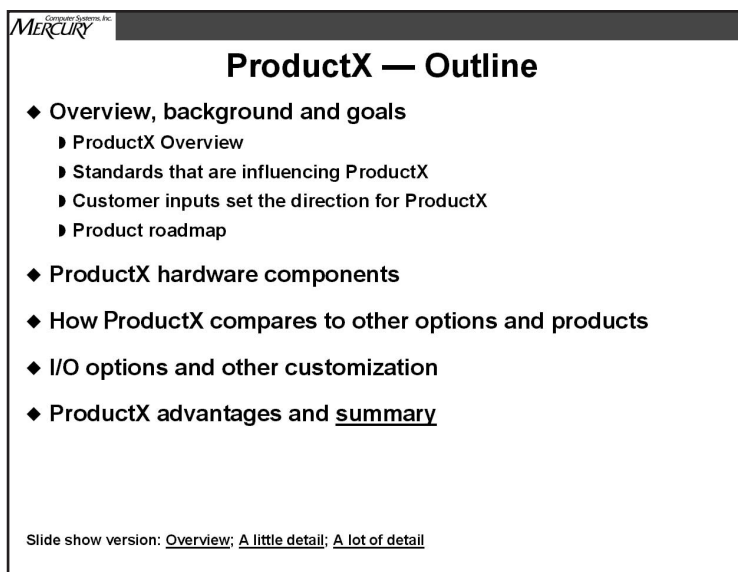
"Now I start with the first presentation. On that opening slide is a detailed outline of the presentation. My outline slide has links to various parts of the presentation so I can quickly get to particular details. Based on what they say at this point, I choose which show version of that topic to present. For every presentation, I create one or more custom shows of those slides. I explain that there are multiple versions of the subject and assess what level of detail they want to know about these subjects. At this point I look for nonverbal cues from the customer as well as from Mercury people from the local office, as

they usually know the customer better than I. When talking about Mercury people in this context, I think it is worth pointing out that I am a person from corporate and generally do not have as close a relationship with the customer as the local account manager and application engineer. I also let them know that I can send them a copy of the slides so we don't have to cover every single detail about a product."

On his agenda slide, Figure 1.1, hyperlinks (underlined words) are set up so that Greg can go to any section of the talk. At the bottom he has created three custom show versions of the talk. Depending on the level of interest in the room, he can give an overview with much detail.

Greg states, "For me, I am always assessing how much or how little information my client wants right now. Then I can use my hyperlinks and custom shows to provide that level of information.

"Another technique I use is to have a link at the bottom of some slides, which points to a more detailed slide in case there is interest. I am constantly adjusting my talk based on what the customer is most interested in and where I think we should spend the valuable time we have."



The slide is titled "ProductX — Outline" and features the Mercury logo in the top left corner. The content is organized into a bulleted list with diamond-shaped markers. The final item in the list includes the word "summary" underlined. At the bottom of the slide, there is a line of text: "Slide show version: Overview; A little detail; A lot of detail".

ProductX — Outline

- ◆ Overview, background and goals
 - ▶ ProductX Overview
 - ▶ Standards that are influencing ProductX
 - ▶ Customer inputs set the direction for ProductX
 - ▶ Product roadmap
- ◆ ProductX hardware components
- ◆ How ProductX compares to other options and products
- ◆ I/O options and other customization
- ◆ ProductX advantages and summary

Slide show version: Overview; A little detail; A lot of detail

Figure 1.1. **Sample Mercury Slide**

The above example focuses on giving the customer a unique “sales experience.” As much as possible, the customer is directing how much or how little information is presented. This is as it should be.

Many people put the customer’s name and logo in the presentation. When you do this, be sure you size the logo appropriately and keep it its original color. Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.3 are both examples of this idea.

In Figure 1.2, S&K was presenting to Sara Lee. To customize the presentation for Sara Lee, they simply added the Sara Lee logo in the bottom right corner of the slide master. They went to Sara Lee’s website and captured their logo. Then they brought it into PowerPoint, enlarged it, and used the Set Transparent Color tool. Because they scaled it too large, the logo is grainy and the Transparent Color tool didn’t work very well. It left little red pixels of color all around the logo. Figure 1.3 shows the proper use of a customer logo.

The logo from the website came in a red box, and it looks fine if we leave it. It was also scaled up no more than 5 percent. Look at the different logos on the slides in the CD. You will see the color issues we are discussing here.



Figure 1.2. **Example of a Too Large Customer’s Logo**



Figure 1.3. **Example of a Smaller Customer's Logo**

Some other ways people customize their presentations include (1) using up-to-the-minute data (e.g., top management likes to know the very latest information and trends); (2) speaking only to the needs of the audience (i.e., the focus would change from one presentation to another, even though the basic information stays the same, for example, the management committee wants to hear what is being done to reverse a negative trend, whereas the technical people want to hear the details and process issues surrounding the negative trend); (3) showing photos and giving examples that directly relate to those companies represented in the audience.

Customize Across Cultures

As so many companies are global, many presenters will find themselves presenting in another culture. This is not a time to learn by trial and error. You really do need to prepare or else you and your company's credibility will suffer.

Ask for Advice. Ask for advice from at least two people in that culture. Ask what colors, images, pictures, gestures, acronyms, phrases, words, or

competitive references are offensive or not understandable. Find out what type of presenter will be acceptable—man, woman, age, and level in the organization. Ask what the audience is used to seeing in the way of visual content and presentation style. Ask about how people express their agreement or disagreement, both verbally and nonverbally. One survey respondent said, “I present three or four times a year outside North America. I’ve learned that, in some areas of the world (for example, Dubai, the Middle East), when people shake their heads side to side (what Americans know as ‘no’), that means ‘yes’ to them. And when they nod up and down (what Americans know as ‘yes’), that means ‘no.’ If I didn’t know this before going there, I would have been surprised and confused by their head nods.”

Acknowledge Them and Their Country. Be sure to open with something that shows you know where you are and your appreciation for the person or audience you are speaking to. Personalize slides to that country in some manner. Put a flag on the slides. Use the country’s colors. Find local or regional examples to enliven a concept. Go on-line and look at how that company’s presentations “look” and “feel.” Downplay the “Americanization” of a presentation. “Slick” may work in New York City, but not in Tokyo or London. Learn to say hello, thanks, and good-bye in their language. Make sure you really know the market dynamics and regulations of your business in that country before you offer advice. Read the local paper. A survey respondent said, “I read three papers *every day* (*The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, and the local paper) wherever I am. This allows me to reference local events in the presentation and remove things that might be offensive.”

Choose Your Slide Language. When deciding which language to make your slides in, consider which language most of the audience can first read and then speak. Another person responded, “I often have to make presentations in Spanish-speaking countries, but I use my English slides, as a small minority in the audience does not speak Spanish. Almost everyone in the audience understands English so they can read my slides. Then only a minority has to listen to interpreters through their earphones.” Also, one respondent recommended, “When traveling to Europe, change to some of the British spelling of common words like ‘colour’ and ‘theatre.’ This shows you took a little extra time to speak in their words.”

Rehearse with a Native. Give the presentation to someone in that country who isn't that familiar with your language. Ask him or her to raise a hand every time you use slang, jargon, offensive words, or colloquialisms. Certain words can have different, very embarrassing meanings in other countries. At the same time, ask to be told if any of your voice tones, gestures, or slides are offensive and whether you are speaking at the right speed and clearly enough. If you used humor, ask whether it is appropriate in that country. Ask whether you spoke about a topic that is taboo in that country. Usually, you will want to speak slower and clearer than you do in your own country. If you can't find a native, try this idea. Run an ad in a local college newspaper and hire a student from the country where your presentation will be given. Have the student sit through your speech and also review your slides.

Ask About an Interpreter. Before you leave, find out the language proficiency of your audience and arrange for an interpreter. Here are some more comments from the survey: "We had a wholesaler fly to Japan to give a presentation to a number of different investment firms. He forgot an interpreter. It didn't take much to summon an interpreter in this case, but imagine the potential chaos attached to such a scenario." "We have had some funny translations occur when the words were translated but not the concept. For example, blended cup yogurt became 'yogurt mashed in a teacup.' Somehow you need to find a way to trust the interpreter and find out whether your humor works, and test it ahead of time. Practice with an interpreter before you give the presentation. Tell the interpreter to please tell you what you should or should not say to the audience in order to establish rapport." "One presenter told a joke that did not translate well into Russian. The interpreter knew this and said something like, 'Okay, he's telling a joke now that isn't very funny in Russian. When I tell you, everybody laugh with me.' On cue, the Russians laughed and the presenter laughed too. The presenter went to a different city with a different interpreter. The new interpreter simply translated the joke as it was told. Nobody laughed. The presenter concluded that the residents in the first city had a better sense of humor."

Remember some of the cultural habits. In the United States, people are used to saying yes or no when you ask them to do something. In Japan, they do not say no; they will usually say "yes" if asked. But this doesn't mean they will do it. Avoid yes-or-no questions. And don't take head nodding as understanding

or agreement. You need to know your culture. Ask the interpreter to help you if you are unsure about what type of questions to ask your audience.

Bring Paper Copies. Here are some comments on this topic from our survey: “I have found that international companies are not reliable when they promise you that they will have equipment ready for you. I use 35 mm slides.” “I always carry hard copies of my slides and format them for A4 paper.” “I carry paper copies as there is frequently a loss of electricity.” If the presentation is technical, hand out a definition of terms to the audience before the presentation. This is good advice for any audience.

Use Text to Increase Understanding. Make the text on the slides useful if the audience speaks your language as a second language. This doesn't mean sentences. It means parallel phrases that all start with verbs or nouns. It means organized content. People can frequently read better than they can understand the spoken word. This is not the time to have only two words for each bullet point. But make sure the words are in your basic language without many syllables. Use about eight bullet points with about eight words per point on a slide. Also, audiences usually more easily understand written diagrams and numbers than text.

Check the Translation. Ensure that anything that is translated means what it should. How to do that? Some people who have lots of time have it translated back. If you don't have the time, have a native speaker go through the slides. Explain technical terms to translators ahead of time.

Plan for a Multiple Country Presentation Tour. One respondent advised, “When preparing to give the same presentation in multiple countries, create slides in which you can easily drop in images, illustrations, and photos representative of the country in which you are speaking.” In many countries people don't ask questions and interact during the presentation. Plan accordingly. A three-hour presentation could take only one hour if there is no interaction.

Ask Questions

One of the most important characteristics of an effective salesperson, consultant, or technical specialist is the ability to ask questions, then listen for

the answer, and change plans based on that answer. You need to ask many questions of your audience unless your presentation is in the category of conference talk, project update talk with pre-formatted outline, or motivational speech to a large number of people. The worst mistake presenters make is to assume they know the needs and interests of their audience and to give a talk based on their perceptions. To succeed in the future, you need to be able to ask questions of your audience—before the talk and during the talk. If you are a “performance presenter” who just likes to give the talk and take questions at the end, your tendency will be to not ask questions. If you are an “interactive presenter,” then you’ll love the idea of asking questions and building the presentation around the responses. You’re more comfortable interacting than giving a formal presentation.

Here are some “before” questions to ask:

- 1.** What do you want to do that you aren’t able to do now with the system?
- 2.** What goals do you have that you aren’t able to reach due to . . . ?
- 3.** How do you see our product helping you achieve certain goals?
- 4.** What is frustrating you right now in your business?
- 5.** What one “major fix” in your business would make the most difference to you?
- 6.** Tell me about how the system would work in your ideal world.

Now you’re in the middle of the presentation and you wonder how to create interaction. No one is talking. Of course, in some cultures no one will talk, but let’s assume that, in the culture in which you are presenting, people will interact during a talk. How do you get that going?

Here’s what not to do. Don’t ask, “Do you understand?” Most people will say yes, even if they do not. What can you ask? You can ask closed questions to find out whether you are on the right track. Closed questions usually require a yes or no answer: “Do you want more details about this now?” “Am I giving you too many details?”

You can also ask more interactive, open questions. They usually leave the answer open and let the responder frame a response. Here are some examples:

1. How do you see this solution fitting into your business?
2. You mentioned a problem with x during our discussion on the phone last week. Here's some information about that problem. How does this information fit with your view of the situation?
3. What additions or changes do you have for this recommendation?

To be an effective presenter in the future, you will need to sharpen your question-asking abilities. If you're stuck about what to ask, sometimes silence and a pause will get people talking.

Make the Graphics Inviting

Why is this information in the chapter on connecting to your audience? Poor graphics aggravate audiences and, more importantly, people stop listening to the talk. They may look attentive, but they are really no longer engaged. Most people have acted this way during a talk. You don't want that to happen to your talks, so be judicious with your graphics. Presenters take pride in the fancy, colored, bells-and-whistles presentations they've put together. This is especially the case if they've spent much time making them. They want to show off their "baby." To some extent this is acceptable, but keep in mind that, whether or not you have a fancy presentation, you still have to back it up with your knowledge about the topic. You have to talk to your audience. Your audience is first. Keep your attention and enthusiasm directed toward them. You will read throughout this book that many audiences do not want sound within a presentation. They don't want bullets and images flying in from all directions of the screens, and you don't want to compete with your presentation for attention.

To keep yourself mindful of the audience's reaction to your talk, here are some do's and don'ts. Know that you will never compete with the real world in terms of glitz and drama. According to *Business Week*, the average American is exposed to about three thousand ads a day. Your job is not to compete with

those ads. Your job is to create slides that engage your audience in a conversation about your recommendations.

1. Don't Use the Wildest Template You Can Find. Suppose you are bored with the templates you have been using, so you pick a lavender background with circular shapes on it for your presentation to convince the management committee to give you \$50,000 more for your project. The management committee members can't figure out how your subject fits with the bizarre template they see on the screen. There is dissonance among your project, the money you want, and the lavender and circular designs they are seeing. Maybe they can't tie their resistance to the template, but they are becoming concerned about giving you the money.

2. Do Remember That the Best Screen Is Sometimes the Simplest. Use a template that will appeal to your audience and that is appropriate for your subject. Think about what style appeals to them. You may need to change your templates, not the presentation content, depending on the audience.

3. Don't Become so Enthralled with the Beautiful Graphics and Special Effects That You Lose Sight of Your Message. You have made the slickest, most up-to-date presentation. You even paid someone to include video clips, and you've added fancy arrows moving all kinds of ways on the screen. It looks fantastic. You know no one will be bored with your talk. They will really have to keep their eyes open to see everything you have included. There is only one problem. The audience becomes so entranced with the special effects that they don't get the message. They walk away saying to each other, "Wasn't that exciting? I've got to get that graphics package." Not only has the message of your talk been lost, but also the audience never had an opportunity to experience you as a person. You took no time to let the audience get a sense of you as the presenter. The audience will remember the graphics, but you as a sincere presenter, focused on a key objective, never got across.

4. Do Keep Your Message Center Stage, Not the Presentation Slides. Keep reminding yourself to create the slides around your central objective. And, at least at the beginning and end of your talk, you should be center stage, with the lights on high and the screen blank.

5. Don't Organize the Charts, Images, and Pictures in a Haphazard Manner. You may have beautiful slides, but they won't have much meaning without structure. If the material is presented in a stream-of-consciousness style or if you have not organized the data in any logical sequence, your audience will feel frustrated that you did not take the time to present the information in such a way that they could easily follow it. Some audiences just give up. The information comes across so disorganized that they don't waste their energy attempting to figure out how it all fits together.

6. Do Organize the Data! All forms of communication need to have some kind of structure to be effective. Over three-fourths of the presentations that we see are not organized, and even more are not organized to appeal to the audience—they are organized to appeal to the presenter! In the next section you'll learn how to organize your data using the Communication Staircase.

Do More Than Share Data

Presenting information is a challenge. Presenters frequently click through their slides while talking, as if no one were trying to understand or process the information on the slides. They think, "I just have to show them all this information so I'll do it as fast as possible." Here are some ways to stop talking as fast as possible and actually make the information understandable and relevant to the audience.

Provide Analysis, Not Just Raw Data

Imagine that your ten-year-old son comes home from school and tells you he scored 82 percent on his math test. How do you react? Do you congratulate him enthusiastically? Or do you express some other view?

Although your son has shared some raw data, it's not useful information on which to base a decision. If he goes on to tell you that the class average was 89 percent and that only three kids got less than 85 percent, the information starts to become useful. If he adds that he studied extensively for the test but was feeling ill on the day it was given, this information adds a whole new

perspective to the situation. You are now emotionally involved and even moved by his story. The additional data provides a perspective that is dimensions above the initial 82 percent data point he provided.

Quite frequently we see presentations with fancy screens used to glorify the communication of raw data, such as the 82 percent math score. After seeing tables filled with numbers, people walk out of such presentations asking, “What did all that mean?”

The Wall Street Journal reported this tendency in an article titled “What’s Your Point, Lieutenant? Just Cut to the Pie Charts.” The article stated: “Congressional support for new weapons programs isn’t as strong as expected. Army Secretary Louis Caldera suggests that PowerPoint presentations are alienating lawmakers. ‘People are not listening to us, because they are spending so much time trying to understand these incredibly complex slides.’” One senior official, Mr. Danzig “announced last year that he was no longer willing to soldier through the slide shows. He maintains that PowerPoint briefings are only necessary for two reasons: If the field conditions are changing rapidly or if the audience is ‘functionally illiterate.’ He now asks to receive all his briefings in written form.”

Jim thought he had a winning presentation, but he was in for a surprise. Jim spent days putting together a presentation for a prospective customer. He worked with the multimedia group in his company and added some video clips. He was very proud of his colorful screens and fancy pie charts. As he was giving his talk, he began to notice the prospect’s lack of enthusiasm and interest. He wanted them to be impressed by the statistics and the pictures of the product. Plus, one of the audience members began asking aggressive, in-depth questions about his statistics. What was happening?

On first glance the presentation screens looked fine: clear, lots of space on the screens, numbers big enough to read. But the screens mostly conveyed raw data. The people asking questions just wanted to find out more information. They wanted information that would enable them to make decisions.

The Communication Staircase shown in Figure 1.4 can help you to present your raw data in the best way. The staircase depicts three levels of communication, from the most basic form of conveying data to the highest level of suggesting its meaning for the future. This framework highlights your challenge: to use powerful new presentation tools not merely to regurgitate raw data in

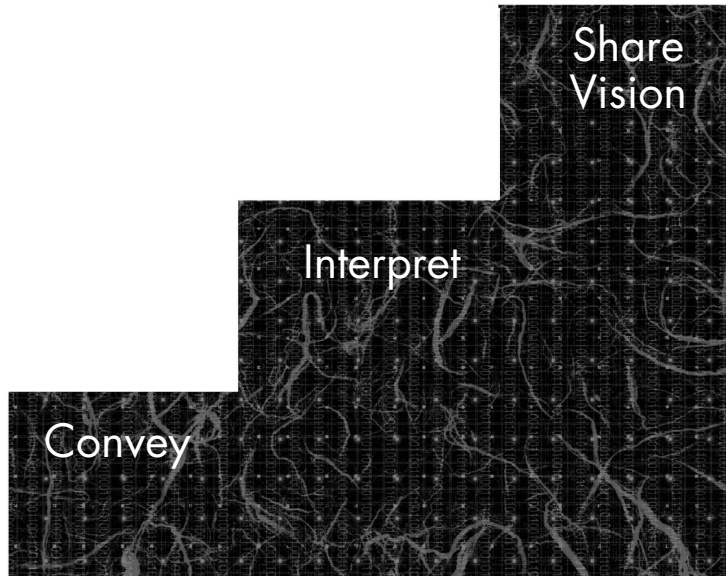


Figure 1.4. **The Communication Staircase**

fancy slides, but to convert data into higher level communication that will stir your audience and trigger a response.

When you stir viewers' emotions and entertain them in the process, their retention of information will be higher and your presentation's impact much greater. Your audience will be more willing to commit to action and support you and your recommendations.

Here's a sample of how to use the Communication Staircase when creating a slide. Renee Atkinson submitted the slides shown in Figures 1.5 and 1.6 to the Texas Legislature. The slides show what a mental health worker has to make in order to afford a one- or two-bedroom home.

In Figure 1.5, the bundles of dollars wipe up on the screen, conveying to the audience that mental health workers make \$7.50 an hour. But that doesn't mean much without an interpretation. The interpretation is next.

First, the one-bedroom home and five homes on the left wipe up with the \$10 an hour text at the top. The presenter says that in order to rent a one-bedroom home the worker needs to make \$10 an hour. Then the two-bedroom home

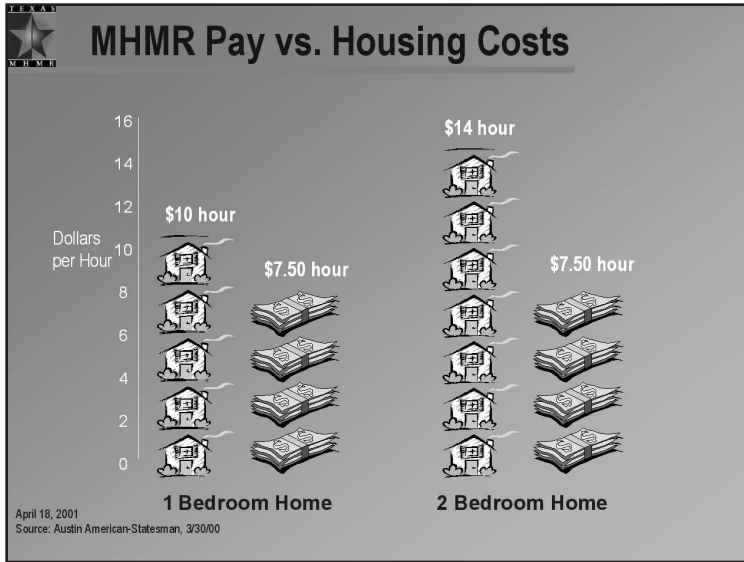
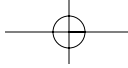


Figure 1.5. Slide Showing Pay vs. Housing Costs

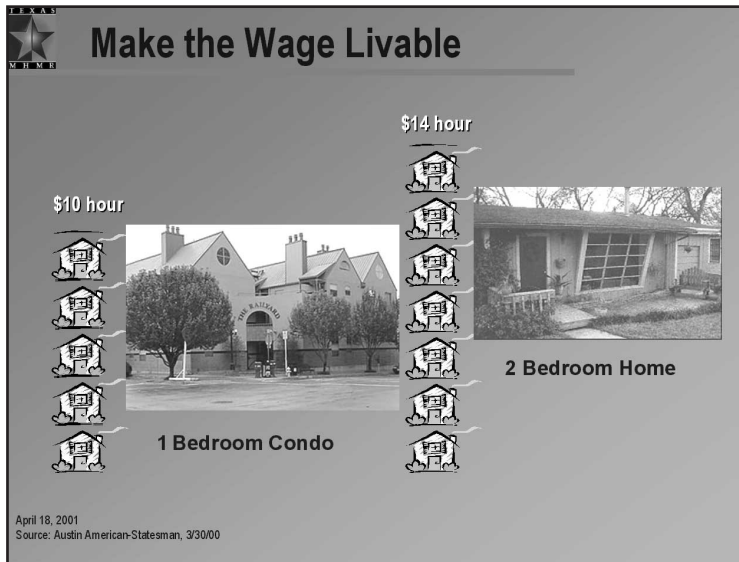
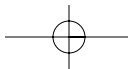


Figure 1.6. Slide Showing Different Homes



along with the seven homes wipe up with the \$14 an hour text at the top. This now tells the audience what's the problem with the pay of \$7.50 an hour.

This talk is about changing people's views of what is a fair wage. In Figure 1.6, the audience sees pictures of the homes. The presenter now discusses how important it is for people to be able to make enough money to afford to live in a home.

Frequently, a presentation such as this would only show the \$7.50 wage, perhaps in a chart. By interpreting the information and sharing a vision, these slides help build a stronger emotional case for a wage increase.

Tell a Story

Look at Figures 1.5 and 1.6 again. The presenter can just read off the statistics on those slides or tell a story about real people who find themselves in the situation the slides are showing. Many people will remember the story more than the statistics. Stories can more emotionally connect to a person and help them to remember your message long after the talk is over. People also appreciate hearing a story when it's relevant to the topic and enables the audience to more easily understand what you are attempting to say. If you can, use a story or a personal experience you or someone you personally know has had. Make it a story the audience can relate to. Use the story to illustrate your message. Don't use a canned story you read or heard from a speaker. Chances are someone in your audience will have heard it. When you tell a story, it takes your audience's eyes off the slide and gets them focused on you, the presenter. Here are several guidelines for telling a story.

First, be sure the story is related to your topic and makes a point. And, just to be sure, start with a transitional sentence that clarifies the connection between your topic and the story you are about to tell. Make it your own story. Chances are, if you steal a story from another speaker, someone in your audience will have heard it. Make sure your story includes these elements: (1) A visual image, either on the screen or a vivid description; (2) feelings, shown through body language and the tone of your voice; and (3) auditory interest, for example, giving both sides of a dialogue can make the story come alive.

Most important of all, practice telling the story to several people before you tell it to a live audience. And finally, keep it short. Make most of your business stories one to three minutes. That's enough to engage the audience and

make your point. If needed, use a transition sentence after the story to tie it back to your presentation's message. Here's one example of a story.

“I was making a software product presentation to an important prospect. ‘Familiar and easy to use’ was a key bullet point on a slide. I asked the audience’s permission to use an example to describe what I meant. Asking the audience’s permission is a transition. Audiences also like to be asked about their own experiences. First, I questioned, ‘Do any of you ever travel?’ Most said, ‘Yes.’ Then I asked, ‘Do you ever rent a car?’ ‘Of course,’ they said. I told them when I rent a car I can always count on knowing exactly how to start the car and drive it. The gas pedal, key ignition, steering wheel, and brake are always in the same place. I am familiar with the user interface. It doesn’t matter what kind of car I get, all the user interfaces are basically the same. Our product is designed the same way. Users will not have to learn a new way to surf the Web. The toolbar looks exactly like Windows. Since they will be able to use our product without any training or fear of something new, this is a huge advantage in getting them to start and then continually use it.”

Summarize the Major Points

Even when you tell a story, you need to summarize its major point or points. You may say something like, “What this story points out is . . .” or “This story once again reminds us about how important our clients are to us.” You could tell a story of how you worked with a client, then summarize the story by using this formula from Nick Miller, president of Clarity Advantage Company. In his sales consulting, Nick reminds salespeople to focus on what’s important to the client with this formula: “Nick Miller, president of Clarity Advantage, helps companies generate more sales, faster, more efficiently.”

As with any formula, you may choose to say the words a bit differently. Here are some examples of how formulas are used.

Formula 1: Your goal is. . . : “Your goal is to increase your market share.” “Your goal is to revitalize your mature business.”

Formula 2: We're going to provide you with . . . : “We’re going to provide you with an ad in *Woman’s Day* magazine.” “We’ll provide trends analysis of your marketplace.”

Formula 3: This will enable you to . . . : “This will enable you to send people to your website.” “This analysis will enable you to decide which areas to expand into.”

Formula 4: You will gain . . . : “You will gain more sales.” “You will be able to gain more customers.”

Make It Fun

Finally, you can connect to your audience by having some fun. When that’s possible, try it. Some presentations have lots of information, so it is hard to get people to pay attention throughout the whole talk. Heather Steff with the consulting firm Computer Science Corporation does work for a federal agency in Washington, DC. She helped them create ways to get people to listen. For the last three years she has created games at the end of the agency’s presentations that cover information technology and data sharing topics. The example shown in Figure 1.7 is from a game based on the popular ABC game show

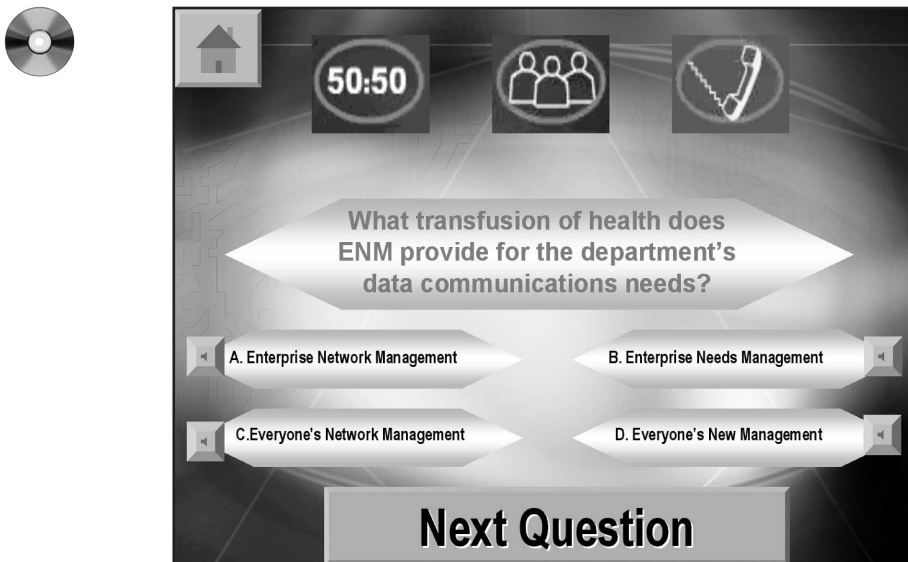


Figure 1.7. **Sample Quiz Game Slide**

“Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?” The game begins with the theme playing in the background and with a click of 50/50 or ask the audience (picture of three people) or phone a friend (picture of a phone). The questions and answers were all in the original presentation’s content, so the audience really had to listen. The questions get tricky as the game progresses. When a person selects a wrong answer, the slide gives them a buzzer sound. When someone chooses the right answer, the slide has a crowd clapping with joy. If the person makes it to the “lightning” round, he or she receives a prize that has something to do with the subject matter or something from a local vendor. People now request this agency’s talks all around the world. Most people really listen to the presentations, and the subject matter always sticks in their heads.

Connect to the Customer

Let’s summarize some of the key points discussed in the chapter here. Say you are going to call on a customer. Here’s what you need to do in order to engage that customer throughout the event. Even if you are not in the sales department, you do sell through your presentations. So don’t skip this section just because you aren’t a “salesperson” by title. Here is what we think creates the type of presentation that customers like.

Call Ahead to Discuss the Agenda. Before you arrive you should have talked to one or two people about their requirements and what the group wants and expects to hear during the presentation.

Do Your Homework and Prepare Before Showing Up. Craft and customize your session based on their answers to your questions about the meeting and your understanding of their problems, projects, and requests. Inform the people who will be going with you about the audience’s desires. If it’s an important account, which means every account, the account manager will list the meeting objectives, help the team craft the key messages, and select the slides that support them. Create a set of question/objection slides specifically for this customer, with responses. Be prepared to use them during the meeting. Not to do this type of preparation for a sales call is inexcusable. Be sure your slide show will fit with their corporate culture. Keep the graphics in line with their expectations.

In training, surveys are sometimes sent out to gather this information. Figure 1.8 is a slide that is used for the opening of a training class taught by Priscilla Fraser for VESTAR. This is a training slide. The images at the bottom match the seven points to be covered. Surveys were sent out to the learners to ask what they wanted to focus on. The results are reported on the left side under “Your Priorities.” The right side, “Topics Covered,” lists the topics that trainer will cover. The trainer shows the slide and talks about how the learner’s priorities fit into those areas and how more time will be spent on certain points because of the results of the survey. At this point the trainer verifies that these truly are the class’s priorities.

At the beginning of your meeting, show the agenda and discuss it. Just because the customer said he or she was interested in “x” a week ago doesn’t mean that today the customer is still interested in “x.” Don’t assume the agenda you created is acceptable. Priorities may have shifted in the last week. Show the agenda and ask what they’d like to know about each item. Ask them what they hope to achieve by attending the meeting.

In a small meeting setting, if you don’t know the people well, go around the room asking each person’s purpose for being there. Put everyone’s name with



 **Your Priorities Deserve More Time**

Your Priorities	Topics Covered
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> ① Understanding, accessing, and managing customer expectations ② Listening skills ③ Problem-solving skills ④ Negative feedback ⑤ Fixing mistakes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> ① Know your customers ② Understand customers’ needs ③ Do what you promise ④ Let customers know what you did ⑤ Anticipate customers’ needs ⑥ Earn customers’ confidence ⑦ Offer common courtesy



Figure 1.8.

Sample Opening Slide

Designed by Melissa Rodgers

their purpose and questions on a flip chart or whiteboard. Refer to the list as you talk and make sure you address all the issues listed.

Once you have agreement on the agenda and objectives, decide as a group where you should start. This is important as someone may have to leave early and you want to be sure you have covered his or her interests.

If you are presenting and your customers want you to start immediately, go along. Stand up in front. But before starting your talk, ask them a few questions to get them talking. Be persistent in getting them to discuss their issues and concerns before you launch into your slides. You may not be able to formally go around the room and ask everyone, but you can ask and you can write down people's responses for all to see. Ask questions and get everyone involved discussing their key concerns first.

Confirm How Much Time You Have. State out loud how long the meeting will last. Ask whether anyone has to leave early. Between the time you set up the meeting and the time you arrive, a company meeting may have been scheduled at the same time as your visit.

Start Talking. If you have more than one or two people, you will be standing in front of them. If you are seated, you have a choice. You can hold the mouse or you can give it to the customer to hold and click when he or she wants. This might be threatening to some presenters, but this is certainly a way to let the customer/prospect/manager/trainee be in charge.

Consistently Confirm Interest and Agreement. As you talk, refer back to their requirements and needs and discuss your ability to fulfill those needs. Before you go on to another product or service description, ask whether they want to hear more about any of the specifics.

Be an Open Speaker. Leave time for silence so that people feel they have time to ask a question. Cultivate a bi-directional exchange of ideas that will address the needs and wants of the client.

Point Out How Your Product or Service Answers Their Needs and Requirements. Be sure you state clearly how your information relates to their situation. Customize your words to their situation.

Briefly Respond to Questions. Sometimes you truly know what the questioner was asking and you just answer it and stop. If you aren't clear about the question, don't ramble on and on. Some of your colleagues in the audience can ask follow-up questions to discover exactly what the person is asking before someone responds. After answering, ask, "Do you want more details now?" Let people know that any and all questions are worth your time.

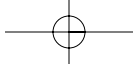
Ask Questions About the Meeting's Direction. Partway through a day-long or multiple-day meeting, check out what people are thinking or feeling about the meeting so far. Ask questions like, "Based on what we've covered so far and how we've discussed the issues, what shall we continue, start, or stop doing when we resume after lunch?" "What's been effective for you about our session, and what changes do you suggest we make after the break?" Even though everyone seems engaged and interested, it never hurts to check out what they are really thinking. Then you can make modifications right then and there.

Keep a Running List of Action Items. As action items arise, list them on a flip chart. First, this shows that you heard a request and noted it. Second, when someone sees that a request is noted, he or she tends to go on to other items. This keeps the discussion moving.

Summarize with Next Steps and Set Follow-Up Dates. Before concluding the talk, give advice on what you think the client needs to do. Suggest next steps based on all you heard during the meeting. Conclude by going over the listed action items, making sure everyone's issues were discussed, people's phone numbers and email addresses are exchanged, and a date scheduled for the next meeting or conference call.

Some Final to Do's. Add humor that is appropriate. Get to know your clients as people, and establish a friendly atmosphere.

On the next page is an Audience Checklist to use to be sure you are speaking to the audience's interests. Your audience has to feel good about their experience with you. Whatever you are "selling" will not "sell" just because you show slides on a screen.



Audience Checklist

Yes	No	
___	___	1. Call several audience members and ask them what they wish to learn from the talk.
___	___	2. Ask someone to listen to my talk who will have the same type of interests as my audience.
___	___	3. Speak more about how this information affects my audience's work, decisions, or future plans.
___	___	4. Put several questions on my slides that I can ask my audience.
___	___	5. Create the slides and put them in a file that everyone can access.
___	___	6. Organize my information so it will be easy for the audience to follow.
___	___	7. Have at least three slides and three examples customized for my audience.

