

## **The Polite Presenter**

by Carolann Philips

It is a common belief that good presenters are born. This however is far from the truth. Good presenters make giving effective presentations look easy although serious time and effort have been invested in the preparation of content and delivery. Presentations are no longer made only by CEOs or high level executives. Managers, supervisors, sales personnel and junior executives are now required to make presentations or give speeches. For this reason most employees receive a steady diet of presentation skills training. The two critical elements of giving a presentation are the message and the behavior. The message includes the content, how it is organized, selection and use of media and how it should be delivered. The behavior, which is commonly overlooked in most presentation skills training, includes presenter etiquette and manners.

In today's business arena, where there is an overload of information, it is no longer enough to simply communicate information. In order to accept the information being offered, the audience must first accept the person offering it. The manner in which a presenter acts and behaves adds to or diminishes the impact of the presentation.

This article emphasizes some of the seldom addressed guidelines of presenter etiquette.

Ensure that all arrangements for your presentation are in place well ahead of start time and be available to greet people. Introduce yourself as delegates gather. Enquire about them. Smile and make them feel at ease and comfortable. It is improper for delegates to

see you hurriedly making last minute preparations. It is also considered rude to silently preoccupy yourself with your slides or notes or worse still barge into the room just on time to begin your presentation.

If there is a small group at start time, then begin with a discussion. Those that are there will believe that you have started on time and those arriving late will take their seats quickly whilst feeling guilty for being late. Do not begin late. It is unfair to those who were punctual. For the same reason, do not repeat yourself for latecomers.

Do not make negative comments such as “It’s so hot in here today!”, “This is a bad time to schedule a presentation”, “I wish I had more time to prepare”. Such comments are either a reflection that you are unhappy to present, an insult to the audience, or an indication not to be taken seriously.

When a delegate is speaking, concentrate completely on what he or she is saying. Appreciate the question. Take a few seconds to show that you have reflected upon the question before responding, even if you could have answered it right away. This convinces the delegate that his or her question was valid and due though was given to the answer. It also encourages other members of the audience to ask questions they might have otherwise considered irrelevant or trivial. Do not finish a sentence for others or interrupt a question by saying “I understand what you are trying to say” or “I know what you mean.” It shows that you are either impatient or underestimate the delegate’s communication skills.

Never look at your wrist watch or draw the audience's attention to the time. Instead, position a small clock in a location where you can discreetly glance at it. Always ensure you finish on time. Even if it means leaving something out. Do not plead with your audience to 'bear with you' for a few more minutes only so that you can complete what was planned. Common courtesy may prevent people from actually walking out but they may have already "walked out in their mind."

Never end a presentation and then invite questions from the audience. This shows that you are not prepared to take on board any observations or inputs from the audience and the invitation is a mere formality. Instead announce that you will take five questions or as many as you can in 10 minutes before you close your presentation. State that if there are more questions, you would be happy to address them via e-mail or after the presentation. Then close off the questions and finish with your closing statement. Keep a small note pad and pen in your jacket pocket or near by to jot down any questions you were unable to answer. Assure the delegate that you will revert as soon as you have the answer.

The basics of presentation etiquette simply mean showing flexibility, kindness and appreciation for your audience.

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