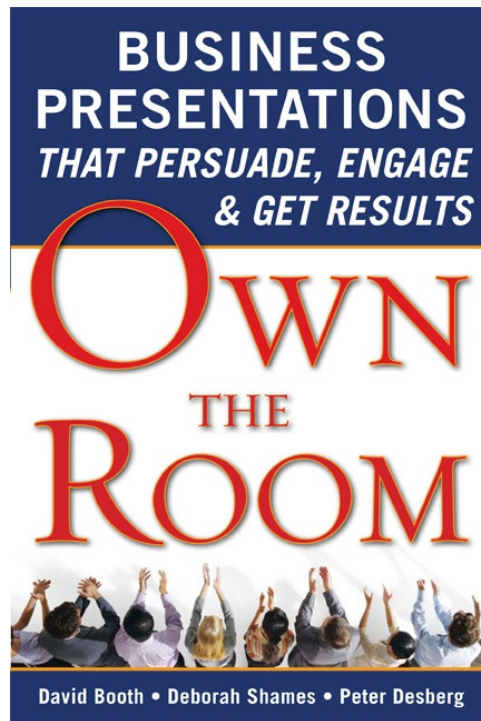




# Own the Room

Business Presentations That  
Persuade, Engage and Get Results



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## The Big Idea

Don't simply present. Persuade, inspire and perform!

Research shows that a memorable presentation is a combination of stirring your audience's emotions while appealing to its intellect. This team of authors has developed techniques that do just that and will engage, inspire, and jumpstart your audience to action. Their creative techniques have been used during the past ten years by Fortune 500 companies such as TD Ameritrade, Mattel, Fisher-Price, Merrill Lynch, Siemens, and Pfizer.

This effective method brings you:

*An award winning actor who applies performance techniques used onstage to engage and move an audience.*

*A television and film director who demonstrates how to craft and deliver your message with authority, credibility and authenticity.*

*A psychologist who specializes in memory and stage fright and reveals how to overcome fear and activate an audience's attention and memory.*

## Why You Need This Book

This book will allow you to come up with presentations that will always get your audience's attention – and their buy-in! By combining performance techniques and cognitive science with the best research in psychology, *Own the Room* will guide you in delivering any presentation, provide tools to manage anxiety, and ensure that audiences will remember you and your message.

## INTENTION

Intention is one of the more subtle concepts speakers need to identify and employ. Defining your intention is crucial for goal setting. It becomes your scorecard and road map for making future decisions.

- Set goals that are directly under your control. Identify what you can realistically accomplish through your own actions.

- Be specific so you can recognize when you have successfully met your goals. Figure out when you have met each of your objectives by measurable actions. These may include completing tasks you have assigned yourself by specific dates.

Think of intention as the leading edge of sail: taut and focused. Like the sail that engages the oncoming wind, an intention lifts and drives you to your goal. Your speed and efficiency are based on properly setting your sail or intention. Pick one intention and commit to it. Develop creative ways to express and achieve it. Currents and reefs may provide obstacles, but with a strong intention, you will always reach safe harbor.

Once negative intentions take hold, these are the results:

- Rushing and cramming in additional material shows the audience that there is no focus or main point to the presentation.
- Displaying little desire to connect with the audience exhibits discomfort and a lack of confidence, even boredom.
- Making the presentation all about you loses your listeners because they feel unimportant or used.
- Leapfrogging from one topic to another demonstrates a lack of focus and preparation.
- Drowning the audience in data diffuses your message and degrades your intention.

A strong, clear intention at the core of any presentation is the foundation for success. If the presentation is veering off course, remind yourself of your intention, and your delivery will regain clarity and force.

## **ROLES**

A role, whether performed by an actor or a business professional, requires that all aspects be observed and executed with great care. And presenting with others demands an even greater need to be specific and distinct.

To be optimally effective, presenters should always assume a role when they speak, whether in front of a large audience or during a client interaction.

The role you choose is determined not only by your intention, but by your audience and the forum where you are presenting.

## *Rules of Roles*

- From the first spoken word, your language and behaviour must be congruent with the role you assume.
- Choose only one role and exhibit its characteristics throughout your entire presentation.
- Fully commit to the role and do not “break character” during the presentation.
- Every role requires expertise, but we strenuously suggest that you avoid assuming the role of technical expert unless you are an expert witness of analyst in a firm where you are focused on the science or in-depth analysis of a subject.

Select a role and keep it consistent to engineer the perception you most wish to create. And remember the Kabuki example: make your behaviour and language congruent, lift your elbows as the king, and you will never be invisible.

## **PREMIERE**

A boring opening signals a boring presentation. You can make your opening more dynamic, vital, and, ultimately, persuasive.

Create a powerful framework in your opening so that the remaining content will be delivered within the frame you’ve constructed.

You can also tap into emotions through personal identification. An opening trigger will stimulate your audience’s imagination and make listeners more attentive.

- Once you have selected an appropriate trigger, flesh out a more robust opening.
- Use visual imagery to engage the audience’s imagination.
- Add graphic similes or metaphors. People relate to comparisons that stimulate their imaginations.
- Avoid lengthy openings. Most openings can be delivered in less than two minutes.

- Appeal to the five senses.
- Create segues to transition quickly from the opening trigger to the subject matter of the presentation. The key here is relevance. The best opening trigger piques the imagination and makes an intelligent link to your topic.

Communication psychologist Mark Leary points out the importance of engaging an audience right away. He recommends three things to consider in your opening:

1. **Tailor your talk to the audience.** Signalling that you understand the needs, perspectives, and/or expectations of your listeners lets you target what interests them and select the most compelling stories, anecdotes, and examples.

2. **Reveal your personal values.** Share what motivates or inspires you to move audience members and get them involved. Even though they may not agree, you have provided a revealing window into your thinking. Persuasion and influence are now more likely, because your listeners believe they know you.

3. **Present your point of view on the subject.** Revealing your perspective allows your audience to understand your intention, context and passion.

## FINALE

Your entire presentation should point you toward your closing. If you want your audience to feel something, think something, or, more importantly, do something, make sure your entire presentation leads up to that.

There are a number of effective ways to close. The seven described here will guide you to fulfil your intention and bring your presentation to a successful conclusion.

1. **Giving a Call to Action:** This closing device works especially well when your objective is to motivate your audience to do something specific. A call to action is more persuasive than selling. The emphasis in a call to action is on the client or audience. The more structure and specificity you give in your call to action, the more likely your audience will follow it. The simpler the task, the more likely the audience will make the change you are recommending. Your call to action should be simple and direct. When using a call to action closing, be brief and be bold.

2. **Bookending:** Another strong method of closing is bookending, or coming full circle and referencing your opening. Bookending is especially useful if you forget your close, never had one, or run out of time. It provides a sense of resolution and completion.

3. **Recapping:** Recapping is an effective way to take charge and redirect listeners' focus. A successful close recaps those elements that drive your intention. Recap the central three elements or key ideas. Listeners will appreciate hearing what you believe is most important for them to take away. With a recap, be economical and concise.

4. **Giving an Inspirational Quote:** To pique the imagination of your listener, end with an inspirational quote. You will be surprised at how effective a quote is when you link the words of someone well known to your message. Reference someone who is long dead or not terribly famous so that your audience doesn't have an opinion about his or her politics or lifestyle, which could adversely color your message. Or attribute a quote to a family member either real or imagined.

5. **Using triplicates:** This is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive phrases, clauses, or lines. The use of triplicate evokes an emotional response. When employing triplicates, save the best for last. Build the importance of your three statements, so that the third is the payoff. The same is true of your delivery. Build the emphasis according to the ascending power of the content. Using a triplicate is a great way to build the power of your message.

6. **Revisiting Your Theme:** In speaking, a theme is an easily repeatable phrase, such as: we try harder. Themes in presentations are the core or central idea. Ending your talk by revisiting your theme says, "This is what I want you to remember." Because themes are short and catchy, they tend to be memorable. Each time you revisit a theme, repeat it exactly, deliver it with a variation, or add something new to pique the listener's imagination. When you close with your theme, the audience feels satisfied. You have achieved resolution. Themes are often used to inspire or motivate. They need to be strong and emphasized when delivered rather than buried in the text. There is strength to themes that you want to convey to your audience.

7. **Telling a Personal Anecdote or Case Study:** At times the most powerfully persuasive ending is one that comes from your own experience. Telling a personal anecdote demonstrates your investment, your understanding, and your empathy. The other advantage of telling a story at the close is that it links together the key elements of your presentation. Narrative is the best way to explain general concepts and make them specific. We only remember details when they are grounded or embedded in associative images. When you end with a personal story, you lock the message into your listener's long-term memory. Be clear and strong in both the open and close of any presentation.

## REHEARSAL GOLD

One of the best ways to reduce stage fright is through practice. Many people procrastinate and avoid rehearsal because it is stressful.

**Frequency.** The flip side is, if you over-rehearse, your performance has a chance of becoming stale. The trick is not to rehearse your presentation the same way again and again.

**Close to Reality.** There is an abundance of research showing that you will perform better if you practice under performance conditions. This is referred to as “state-dependent learning.” Also, before you deliver a presentation, it is essential to find out as much as possible about the physical conditions to minimize surprises and the resulting anxiety. Ask your contact or personally check out the following:

- How many people will be attending your presentation?
- Will there be a microphone and amplification?
- Will you be introduced?
- Will you be sitting at a table, standing behind a podium, or free to walk around?
- What are the incidentals and details?

**Distraction Training.** Distractions lead to internal thoughts that can throw you off during a presentation. Practice being distracted and getting back on track. Work at identifying where you left off each time and then continue.

**Accustom Yourself.** During a few practice sessions, stop and run in place for a minute or two until you get slightly out of breath, your heart rate increases, and your palms get sweaty.

**Expect the Unexpected.** For most of us, being prepared and knowing what is expected of us reduces anxiety. However, surprises can create havoc for speakers, especially in the most vulnerable first few minutes. Seldom does a presentation come the way you’ve planned it.

## PRESENTING IN TEAMS

Typically, team presenting is thought of as multiple speakers, each taking their turn to present a section of content, or as one person driving the majority of a pitch with minimal participation from the other individuals in attendance. Neither of these scenarios qualifies.

True team presenting mirrors everyday conversation, when we bounce ideas and concepts off each other. It is closer to a dialogue than a series of monologues.

Team presenting done poorly can lose business. Working as an ensemble will make your team and the individuals on the team successful.

When you present as a team, the audience listens to each individual but takes in much more. Listeners observe how you work together. When your handoffs are smooth, when you demonstrate that you like and respect each other, and when each of you has a clearly defined role, your audience can't help but generalize that you do business the same way.

Presenting as a team can project the image of a harmonious organization and is a way to highlight up-and-coming talent in your organization.

Athletes are not the only ones who are slow to respond or who experience failure before re-examining their process. Following are ten dumb things we've seen smart companies do to lose team pitches:

1. Spending the majority of prep time compiling the content for the pitch and little or none rehearsing the delivery or handoffs
2. Having the most senior person in the firm deliver the majority of the presentation
3. Failing to look at the presentation as a team production that warrants finesse and orchestration of individual parts
4. Bringing along associates and junior staff who sit mutely at the table or nearby, while a senior staff member delivers the presentation
5. Leaving out why this particular team was assembled and what specific talents each person brings to the table
6. Disregarding the need to appoint a facilitator to drive the agenda, sense the client's engagement, direct comments, and elicit questions
7. Opening the pitch by describing the services and experience of your company in great detail
8. Constructing PowerPoint slides or a "pitch book" to serve as cuing device and reading nearly word for word to ensure that nothing is left out



9. Allowing anyone who is not currently speaking to stare at and assess the reaction of the client
10. Failing to support all team members by not giving them assigned roles, cutting them off, or disagreeing with their comments

## PHYSICAL GRAMMAR

Use whatever movement is natural and true for you. Just as your presentation should sound conversational and as close to your personal style as possible, your movements should reflect your normal behaviour.

Remember, practice makes natural. Shakespeare had Hamlet advise a local troupe of actors not to ham it up so they would be believable. Hamlet said, "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action; with this special observance, that you overstep not the modesty of nature." Although written in the late 1500s, this is still great advice.

The following movements should be incorporated into your own style and used only when you feel the impulse to punctuate a phrase, sentence, or thought. That is the formula for the art of effective movement.

**Speaker Moves** - The tendency of untrained speakers is to move indiscriminately. Unjustified movements and repetitive gestures draw the focus of the audience away from the message. Clean and economical movement keeps the focus on the message, so this kind of movement is always preferable.

**Overcoming Bad Habits** - Begin by letting your arms hang loosely at your sides. It may seem awkward at first, but resist the urge to put your hands anywhere else. Within seconds of speaking, you will begin to use your hands, because they are free and ready to gesture. When speaking, it's important to note that there is no right or wrong way to use your hands. Do whatever feels natural for you. The only caveat is that if you employ a repetitive gesture, like counting on one hand or pointing, be aware that your audience will notice it. The movement itself attracts listeners' attention and draws focus away from your message.

**Physical Neutral** - Before you speak, stand in physical neutral. (Many women prefer standing in ballet's fourth position, with one foot turned slightly out. Feel free to stand like this if it feels more natural.) A solid stance makes you open and accessible to your audience, without a defensive posture or signals. This neutral stance also telegraphs confidence and enables you to use your hands easily to express yourself. Being physically open and available encourages the audience or client to embrace your ideas.

**Theme** - move to the center of the space when introducing or visiting your

theme.

**The Exclamation Point** - When you want to make an important point, the most effective move is to cross downstage on an angle toward your audience. Put an exclamation point on your statement, cross energetically, add a pause or more vocal power, and include a gesture so the importance is accentuated. Since both the movement and statement are dynamic, you have now doubled the effect on the audience. The strongest use of this device is to end the movement at the same time you finish your statement. Plant both feet at the end of your cross. If you know the distance from your current position to the back of the space, walk upstage while facing the audience.

**Think Along with the Speaker** - Walking back and forth across the stage invites the audience to “think along with you.”

**Differentiating Topics with Space** - If you wish to enhance a transition, move to a different area of the stage; you literally create distance from the last statement or idea. Your next topic will appear fresh.

**Creating Intimacy** - moving closer to the audience signifies a need to share something personal or intimate.

## **POWERPOINT REVIVAL**

PowerPoint demands a marriage of art and science. Although the technology has advanced rapidly in the last few years, the tendency in most presentations is for the slide deck to be front and center, with the speaker fading into the background.

We must reverse this equation, so the presenter is always the featured act, with PowerPoint supporting, clarifying, and illustrating the content. A picture (or slide) can be worth a thousand words. Or so convoluted that it takes a thousand words to explain it.

PowerPoint is the most popular multimedia program used by presenters. If you want to or must use it, here are a few rules to keep in mind when preparing your slide deck:

- PowerPoint doesn't give presentations; it creates slides. You give the presentation.
- PowerPoint doesn't have to be tedious.
- PowerPoint is best used as a storyboard. Place individual slides in your slide sorter and arrange them in an order that conveys a narrative with

strong pacing and momentum. If a slide doesn't advance the story, cut it out.

- You are the interpreter or messenger of the PowerPoint information. In that capacity, consider the one idea you want the audience to take away from each slide.
- What you say and what you show must not compete with each other.
- Include mostly graphics and a minimal amount of text. Make sure the graphics are high quality. Determine where pictures will be worth more than words and use them accordingly.
- Avoid using wizards to plan your PowerPoint presentation.
- Insert a blank black screen whenever you want to deliver an example or anecdote. You can use the B key to black out the screen or W to make it white.
- Avoid too much text on any one slide. Direct the audiences' attention to one key message per slide.
- If you have a number of points to make, consider building them one at a time or breaking them into multiple slides.
- Construct slides that place items above, next to, or around each other and show graphically how they relate to each other.
- Create brief titles that tease the content rather than spelling out everything on the slide.
- Keep your slides simple and visually appealing. You are the center of attention. PowerPoint is your backup and complement.
- Reading slides to your audience is the single most annoying, ineffective, and damaging abuse of PowerPoint.
- Use one or, at most, two fonts on your slides.
- Find one transition style and stick to it.
- Use music sparingly.
- Be prepared to make your presentation without PowerPoint.
- The presenter is always the featured act, with PowerPoint supporting, clarifying and illustrating the content.

## **FINAL WORDS**

Becoming a great communicator is a fluid process. Once you become aware of your strengths as well as your weak points, you can correct or change behaviour to be better next time. The goal is not to be perfect. The goal is to be authentic and engaging and to enjoy speaking.

Once you enjoy speaking, the world is your oyster. Like a sport you love, you will actively acquire new skills to improve your game. As your palette of tools expands, you will feel the thrill that actors experience on opening night or in the flow of a dynamic performance. And although growth of your business may be your applause, you will also have the inner satisfaction of moving others with a human being's most fundamental tools: your body, brain, and voice.