

NEXT STEP

BEST WAYS TO START A PRESENTATION



Seven seconds, fifteen seconds, half a minute, a minute. Different studies state different windows of opportunity to capture the attention of your audience. A research conducted by a Harvard psychologist found that a person watching a two-second video clip of a teacher he has never met will reach a conclusion about how good the teacher that is very similar to that of a student who has attended the teacher's class for an entire semester. This means you need to act quickly and take advantage of the average human being's short attention span to make a brilliant first impression that keeps your listeners glued to their seats.



How many times have you heard someone start a speech with something along the lines of, "I'm here to talk about the prevalence of heart disease in corporate settings?" Snore! While you might have the goodness in your heart to actually sit through this ordeal, most of us would probably be dozing off by the end of the first minute. A boring opener means you've already lost your audience's full attention and it's nearly impossible to win that back. While it's important to be direct and communicate your topic with the utmost clarity, don't be afraid to be unorthodox.

WOW THEM, SHOCK THEM

Tell a gripping story before flipping out the PowerPoint. Science tells us that our brains are hardwired for

storytelling. Sharing an experience or a quotation from your real life with the audience allows them to identify with you on a personal level. Your story needs to have a message or a moral, but it needs to be brief and relevant to the topic you're speaking about.

Ask a question. Or a rhetorical question. Get your audience thinking before you've even started. Questions stimulate the audience's mind and this is exactly how you want them – not as passive listeners, but active participants. Similarly, you can take a contrarian approach. State a universally accepted truth, then go against it and watch as your audience makes hesitant disbelieving faces as they inch closer to the edge of their seats asking for more.

And if you've got a soft corner for important-sounding quotations by important people, put a twist to them and provoke your listeners. Or use a quote from a movie or an unlikely character. Quotes also work as a way to establish the overarching theme of your presentation without draining the life out of the audience with the less-interesting sounding agenda you cooked up in your

head.

Last but not least, if you're the type that reads the papers, put your book smarts to use by starting your presentation with a shocking headline or statistic. The vice president of sales for a leading healthcare IT firm successfully sells software solutions to hospitals by starting her presentation with: "Medical errors leading to patient death are much higher than previously thought. Preventable adverse events cause up to thousands of deaths per year for patients who seek care at a hospital. That means medical errors are the third leading cause of death behind heart disease and cancer. Our vision is to create a world free of medical errors, and we need your help." Stats show that you seriously know your stuff, providing credibility as well as gravity to your presentation so that the audience listens and responds positively to your recommendations.

GET VISUAL

Wit and humour and superhuman powers of instilling suspense are all great tools to kick off a presentation, but some things

are best left to visuals. Instead of telling the audience how a new product works, show them – don't be afraid to bring a prototype in or play a video. When in doubt, let multimedia lend you a hand.

Even if you're not talking about a new product or a new project, visual aids or props can help emphasise a point. Remember when in The Wolf of Wall Street, Jordan Belfort takes a pen and asks a room full of salesmen to sell it to him? The point of the seemingly random visual metaphor was to set off a creative, productive brainstorming session – once again, to stimulate and engage the audience. When used properly, anything from a table clock to a balloon to a deck of cards can assist you to warm up to the audience.

Photographs and graphics in your presentation can add more than just aesthetic appeal – they can make drive home your message. A video of casual civilian testimonials can inject humour as well as introduce public perception on a topic. The real secret to winning over your audience is to invoke an emotional response.

So don't squander those opening seconds with a repetitive introduction because you've already been introduced before, or poorly prepared ice-breakers filled with 'ums' and 'uhs' or overused crude humour that does the job but is completely irrelevant. As Walt Disney put it, "I would rather entertain and hope that people learned something than educate people and hope they were entertained." Next time you're up there doing your thing, all one-hundred pairs of eyes gleaming in your direction, don't rely on improv – know what you're going to say, play the part, stick to the context and unleash the best you've got within the very first seconds.

AMIYA HALDER

WATER COOLER CHRONICLES

TEAMWORK FOR WHEN YOU HAVE NO CHOICE



There are those who thrive in a team – they compartmentalise their work, summon synergy through wacky team building exercises, develop rapport with the team, bask in collective glory when the work is done and at the end of the day go out for a celebratory meal, usually at Star Kabab. Then there's the guy who freezes up at the sight of other people, is visually repulsed by the unnecessary small talk and hours of team meetings that get you nowhere, and then spout a thesis on individualism on social media. Needless to say, such people do not have a very pleasant life in the office – especially at a time when even the most mundane work has a group which is part of a larger team which is overseen by a committee which answers to the board.

If you are one of those who prefer and probably excel working alone, then the workplace will be tough for you. You have probably managed to get through university on your solo efforts. Now you need to learn working in a team – and this is for your own good, otherwise one of two things might happen. The bad scenario is that

sensing your need to do things your way, a big share of the work will be dumped on you. The bad-er scenario is that your co-workers sensing your snarky, sarcastic attitude will mess up your chances of ever progressing, no matter how awesome your work is.

You will need to tone down your ego, even if only on the surface. Sure, it is clear to you that your method of cracking the egg is far more efficient and will save the company millions, but if your boss insists on another way, you will have to defer. Be polite in your recommendations. If disregarded, carry on. Sometimes, you just need to go with the flow.

You will also need to remember, even if it means writing it down on your hand, your team members are not all incompetent. Learn to interact. If social pleasantries are not your thing, keep it professional. But when it comes down to the work, keep them in the loop. Instead of pitching your ideas as if they are holy, ask for their opinion. Listen to what they have to say – maybe their input will actually improve on yours.

Some social research shows

that even when people are not competing, being around a team who are doing similar work, makes them excel. Call it our instinct to "show em who the alpha dog is", even minus the interaction, teams actually help.

Of course you cannot change your attitude towards group work overnight. If it's social interaction you fear, be specific when dividing up the work – focus on your part and let the others do theirs. Ultimately, if any form of criticism or input from your peers gets to you, then you will be the one to lose out.

In short, learn to accept feedback and evaluate it. If you have suggestions for how others might better do their work, being cordial actually helps. People are more likely to listen to you if you don't come off as condescending and high and mighty. If this is what works to get your point across, then it's better that you learn to accept that you will have to work as part of a bigger team rather than storming out spouting diluted Nietzsche.

MOYUKH MAHTAB

Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

4 things that could kill YOUR AMBITION

The outcome of most things that you do in life is often influenced by your mindset and how that makes you interact with the world. Oftentimes it is an involuntary action of yours based on an overlooked influencer: negativity. It implants road blocks to your thought processes. Negativity is the single biggest hindrance to problem solving. Many smart, successful people push on by forcefully distancing themselves from negativity. Here are four things that could be secretly blocking you from moving forward.

They say

This brings us to what other people think. People have opinions. And often these carve the times into what they are. But the truth is successful people take other people's opinions with a grain of salt. For more than a year I'd been told that an automotive publication cannot run profitably in a major Bangladeshi daily.

That it is possibly one of the worst ideas I could have. If I listened to all of them, I would not have started it. It ended up bringing in new readers and business to the organisation.

You're too old/young

My father recently decided to get another Masters degree because he felt he could. It also helps him widen his reach for his students at the college he teaches in. That too at 60. Someone somewhere will advise that you are too young or too old to do a certain thing. Age has nothing to do with success where your body and/or mind is aligned with the task you want to complete. In 1984, at age 70, to mark his 70th birthday, legendary bodybuilder Jack LaLanne swam and towed 70 rowboats in Long Beach Harbour



California.

Past

The past has a strong hold over us because it is a record of things that didn't work or couldn't be done. Like age and the people talking, this often holds us back. You can't let it shape your actions and beliefs. The past can only offer guidance on how to avoid certain mistakes. You treat it as a learning tool to improve upon.

Toxic nation

We're back to people again. Avoid the group that talks of failure, pulls down others for their flaws and thrives on the sad facets of life. You're as good as the people you are surrounded by. If the people you work with or hang out with can't have a positive mental attitude, they will bring you down. How do you feel after you've had a session of complaints with a group of friends/co-workers? You never come out of it feeling recharged. Negativity drains. Successful people

distance themselves from others that spew negativity. You are allowed give vent of how your boss doesn't pay you much but then that same boss also allows you full freedom with your work. Focus on the latter. Your mindset is your determinant for success. All your 'doables' are solely dependent on that and not on random whispers in the air.

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