

What Can You Do for Your Audience?

by Marjorie Brody, CSP, PCC, CPAE Speaker Hall of Fame

Most business professionals know that when you give a presentation, you have to be conveying some value to audience members, remembering to answer their unspoken WIIFM question: "What's In It For Me?"

It doesn't matter what you are trying to sell or what information you are sharing. Whether it's widgets or watermelons, annual company performance or a new product launch, we all face the same challenge -- connecting with our audience/customers and getting our message across.

I've devised a simple way to do this. Never forget your PAL™: the Purpose, Audience and Logistics of every presentation you give and every sales call you make. This is the same method you can use when preparing for any kind of presentation -- from a one-on-one meeting to a full-fledged "dog and pony show" with visual aids.

Purpose

The first point to remember is the P. Always keep your Purpose in mind. Do you want to generate sales leads? Sell a new product to an existing customer? Get a first order from a new customer? Or, merely inform them about your services?

What do you want your audience members to know, feel or do when they leave your presentation? Without this clarity, typically nothing happens. With a specific end result in mind, you will be more able to outline and develop your presentation more easily.

Being clear about the purpose of sales call or sales presentation will help you prepare the right information to get your message across and keep you focused.

Audience

The "A" in PAL stands for Audience. Find out as much as you can about your audience before preparing your presentation. Even seasoned professional speakers sometimes forget to do all their homework and wind up feeling foolish or losing a sale. There have been numerous examples of speeches given with information that was either too far above or too far below the knowledge level of the audience.

You want to ask yourself: Who is in the audience? Are they colleagues, or prospective clients? Why are they there? What are their demographics (Where are they from? How old are they?). What is their attitude toward your objective? What knowledge do they have and do they need? The “right” information to the wrong audience limits your chance of achieving your objectives.

Where and when can you learn about your audience?

Before the presentation, you can do a Web search, read annual reports, and talk to others that have spoken to the group. Ask the right questions of the person who invited you to present – or, better yet, ask some of the attendees. This type of advance preparation helps you customize the material and organize the content.

Arrive early at the presentation; observe and talk to people. This is a good opportunity to make last minute changes. Never forget what Yogi Berra said: “It ain’t over ‘til it’s over.” In other words, if your presentation isn’t going well, change course. Doing a proper audience analysis and coming with the attitude of “serving” your listeners, will enhance your chance for success.

Logistics

Logistics represents the “L” in PAL. Knowing the logistics of your sales call or meeting in advance can save you a lot of grief later. Are you part of a team or panel of speakers? What will the other speakers be discussing? How large is the audience? What visual equipment is available? How much time do you have to present? What time of day will you be speaking? The answers to these questions are crucial factors in helping you tailor your presentation

If you will be using visual aids, be certain you have the proper equipment including replacement bulbs, extra extension cords, or anything else that might botch your presentation. Better yet, be prepared to limit the use of slides, and be able to speak without them. You also might want to make a pre-visit to familiarize yourself with not only travel time but the office setup. Once you have determined your PAL, write your overall objective in one sentence or less. In other words, begin with the end in mind.

Be prepared for the unexpected. Be prepared to answer questions you might never have encountered before. Be prepared to be at your best. And don't forget your PAL.

With good preparation and practice, you will be prepared.