

# Presenting Great Workshops

## Lesson Introduction

As leaders, we may be called upon to teach others. If this is the case, we need to be ready to be front and center; ready to connect with our audience; ready to convey not only the information necessary, but our own personalities. How does that happen? By developing the skills needed to present great workshops.

## Lesson Objectives

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Identify the four tenants to know when approaching workshop presentation
2. Describe key ways to prepare and control for the human element in presentations

## Lesson Content

If we, as leaders, have been called upon to teach others, we need to be aware of four tenants of workshop preparation and presentation: the workshop content, what we will teach others; the structure, how we will teach it; the wrapping, all of the extra things that go into workshop presentations; and the presenter, the ways we as individuals deliver our message. In this lesson, we will briefly cover the first three of those tenants, but focus mostly on the fourth. For more information on Workshop Planning, please see the workshop planning lesson and materials.

## Workshop Content

If we have been invited to present a workshop, chances are, you have also been given a topic. As you approach the research that you will need to do to prepare, there are two key questions that come to mind. First, what will you tell your audience? You want your audience walking away feeling like they have gained some important information. So you want your presentation to contain information that the audience needs, not a lot of extra "junk". Second, will this be a one time workshop, or many sessions? The answer to that question will help you to determine how much information you will share with your audience. If it is a one time session, you want to provide your audience with all of the information that they need right then. The flip side to that coin, however, is that you do not want to overload your audience and lose them. Practicing your workshop will help you gauge if you have included too much information. If you have multiple sessions with your audience, you can spread the information through your allotted time. However, again, it is important to note, you want your session to be "meaty". If you don't provide enough information, your audience will feel like they have wasted their time.

## Workshop Structure

You wouldn't start telling a joke in the middle would you? The same goes for presenting a workshop. You want to approach your workshop session as though it is a grand journey; starting at the beginning, taking your audience along the journey with you, sharing good information and then ending at the logical ending point. You should not try to travel the journey too quickly or else you will lose your audience along the way because they can't keep

up. Likewise, you should not try to move too slowly through the information or else your audience will get bored and lose interest in what you have to say. Practice will help you to determine how quickly you can transition from point to point throughout your session.

### **Workshop Packaging**

Someone once said that when thinking about presenting a workshop you should always remember the 5 P's: "Prior Preparation Prevents Poor Performance". Nothing could be more accurate! If you are not well prepared, what will your audience take away from your time together? More than likely, just a very poor impression of the speaker! How would you feel if you gave up your time, and potentially your money, in the hopes to hear someone impart to you information that you either wanted or needed to learn, only to be met with someone who had not prepared properly? Remember that the audience is essentially trapped with you, the speaker, for a set period of time, and you want to make their experience an enjoyable one. Preparation and practice will help you do that.

Something else worth mentioning about packaging your workshops is the use of themes. Themes can be a great way to strike up interest in your session, help tie together your points to one main concept, or just be a way to lighten your topic. But beware—it is easy to take a seemingly good idea or theme and overuse it! An overused theme can quickly make all of your preparation and practice for naught when your audience becomes bored or irritated by your overdone theme. Always keep in mind your audience (who they are, what they do, what is their age) and the context of your talk (is it a formal, business function or a more casual setting like a retreat) when thinking about implementing a theme, and remember that it is better to error on the side of too formal than too casual.

### **The Speaker**

How many times have you listened to a speaker and remembered more about the person than their lesson? It's true, people tend to remember more about the person making the presentation than the content of the presentation. Keeping that in mind, there are several things that a speaker can do in order to ensure that the memories that their audience leaves with are very positive.

The first is the speaker's voice. Have you ever been in a workshop or class where you couldn't hear the person speaking? It's not easy to keep focused on the message being given if you can't hear it. As a speaker, this is something very difficult to prepare for if you have not been to the space in which you are speaking. If that is the case, when you arrive at the location, do so early enough to have a test run at the volume at which you should speak, especially if there is no microphone for you to use. Audience members in the back of the room should be able to hear you without straining, but on the same token, those in the very front row shouldn't be blown away. While you're thinking about the volume of your voice, you should also be thinking about its tone. No one enjoys listening to a monotone speaker. By varying the tones in your voice, you keep the audience listening to your message. Remember the analogy of the workshop being like a journey? You wouldn't tell a story using the same voice throughout, you would change your voice to match what was happening in the plot in the story. The same should be done when delivering your workshop.

The next is the speaker's use of body language. Body language is one of the most important, but least talked about ways that we all communicate with one another. As a speaker, our body language communicates how we feel about ourselves, our audience, our message; so it is extremely important to be conscious of your body language when giving a presentation. You should be making eye contact with your audience. If you are speaking from relatively the same level as your audience, look people in the eye as you speak, and scan the room. If you're speaking from a raised location (like a stage), look at the top of people's heads instead of in their eyes. By looking at the tops of their heads, you're actually giving the illusions of eye contact while still keeping good posture. You should always smile. You wouldn't want to listen to someone who is unhappy to be speaking to your group! Smiling lets people know you are happy to be there speaking with them. Smiling also signals to people that you are approachable, this is key when making a connection with your audience. Your gestures should be natural, not forced. Be relaxed, and not frantic with your movements. Parents and teachers admonish us to "stand up straight" and not where is it more important than when speaking to a group! Stand up tall, look people squarely on and deliver your message.

### **Stage Fright—Or a Bad Case of the Nerves**

Even seasoned professionals get a case of the nerves now and then when speaking to a group. It's a natural part of being out in the front of a room full of people. However, there are some things you can do, if you're presenting to a group, that will help you to master the nasty nerves and use them to your advantage.

Use your nerves as a way to channel energy. When you become nervous, give yourself the challenge to overcome them and make your presentation just *that* much better. Your nerves are not as noticeable to the audience as they are to you! If you make a mistake, just move on! Don't draw attention to it, because more often than not, no one has noticed!

What are some ways to alleviate the nerves? Practice and prepare. There is no remedy better than good preparation. Once the day of your presentation arrives, get plenty of sleep! Don't be tired when you make your presentation or else your brain may be a bit fuzzy. Arrive to the location early so that you are not rushed to get started and already frantic because you're late. Take a few minutes right before you are introduced (or begin your talk) to just be by yourself, take some deep breaths, have a drink of water, and think positively about what you're about to do. Smile- then walk out to the audience and blow them away with your amazing workshop!

### **Some Final Thoughts**

Speaking in front of people is never easy. In fact it is the number one fear of most adults in the world today. But here are some final thoughts on ways to make your workshop a great experience for you and your audience.

- If you have handouts, do not read straight from them.
- If you are presenting to a small group (25 or less) try to learn the name of each participant as quickly as possible.
- Listen to your audience for feedback, positive and negative.

- Circulate around the room as you speak, if possible.
- Let the audience know how your workshop fits in with their goals.
- Remember to consider the time of day and how long you have got for your talk.
- Do not lean on the podium.
- Speak to the audience...NOT to the visual aids.
- Do not stand between the visual aid and the audience.
- It is better to finish slightly early than to overrun.

### Reflection Questions

- What are the four tenants to remember when approaching a workshop?
- What is something to remember when thinking about using a theme?
- How does a speaker's voice affect their message?
- What does good posture say about a speaker?
- What can you do to control for the human element (your voice, gestures, posture, etc) when doing a workshop?