



Don't Be Boring in the Boardroom Make Effective Sales Presentations

BY GARY DEMOSS

Addressing teachers around a conference room table requires its own set of rules and preparation.

There are three basic types of communication situations that advisors encounter in the course of their business. The one-on-one interview is a conversation with a client across the desk or kitchen table. The stage presentation is a one-way monologue to an audience of 20 or more.

A boardroom presentation is neither of these. It's more intimate than a stage but it usually involves more than one or two people. It often happens in a conference room around a big table. It's a combination of monologue and dialogue and the presenters themselves may constitute a team rather than a single speaker.

And it can easily turn into a disaster if you're not prepared for it.

There are four cornerstones for making an effective boardroom

presentation:

- Make a smooth opening.
- Make the most compelling points possible in a compelling way.
- Make sure you have a strong finish.
- Pay attention to delivery skills—eyes, voice, and body movement.

Much of what I talk about here is based on research by Maslansky Luntz and Partners that measures the emotional response of words and approaches. We used their methodology in testing plan sponsors to get their responses to how people react in a boardroom setting.

A SMOOTH OPENING

The first two or three minutes of any presentation are crucial. That's when the clients will judge whether they like you and whether they'll enjoy your presentation. After the basic introductions of the people present, there are three principles for making a smooth opening.

First, demonstrate for the client that you're prepared by reviewing what you're there to talk about. Make sure you're all on the same page.

Second, lead with the benefits of your agenda topics. Don't just say you're here to talk about service, participant education, and investment choices. That's a surefire way to watch their foreheads plop into the soup. Instead of focusing on you, focus on them.

"We're here today to help you create a comfortable retirement for your employees. First we'll talk about how we'll create satisfied employees through our service model. Second, we want to show you how we'll help your people better understand the educational tools that are available to them. And last, we'll talk about how we can make your employees retirement-ready through the various investment options we have in our plan."

Research shows that leading

with the benefit makes for the most effective agenda point. If you can't articulate the benefit, don't make it an agenda point.

Third, give your audience a chance to change the agenda. Ask if there's something else they want to have you cover. It invites their input and offers them the opportunity to participate.

MAKING COMPELLING POINTS

We call it storyboarding because it allows you to visualize in one area all the different things you want to say in your presentation and organize them in a well-connected manner.

Start with a flip chart, Post-it Notes, and an acronym: ICL.

- Identify all the things you can say about your topic, write each idea on a separate Post-it Note, and slap them all up on the flip chart. You may have 20 or 30 things you want to say to the client.
- Cluster your Post-it Notes into three common themes.
- Label those three themes.

Why only three? No reason, but it seems to work. It's the power of three: three little pigs; three wishes; three blind mice. You get the idea. It's simple and it's focused. Three.

If you have to talk about your company (and you should) don't give them the usual laundry list: how big the office is, how many employees, how long it's been around. They don't care about that. They care about what it means to them. So explain it in the context of how the features of your company affect the client.

And if the topic of technology comes up, remember that they're not looking for "new and improved," they're looking for "works as advertised." They're not interested in being a guinea pig for a beta test; they're interested in getting the job done.

A STRONG FINISH AND DELIVERY

Summarize your points with a list



of benefits and differentiators—what sets you apart from the rest of the field. And we always recommend a consultative close that says, "Based on what you've heard here today, what do you think the next steps should be?" This is the close that tested best in our studies.

Delivery of the message is as important as the message itself. Make sure you:

- Have focused visits with the clients and make eye contact.
- Vary your vocal inflection so you're not speaking in a monotone.
- Move with a purpose and avoid repetitive, distracting gestures.

And if you're working with a team, make sure the team members are ready for your handoff. Establish ahead of time who will be handling which topic and specific objections. Also establish the rules of the game up front—how and when you'd like them to pose questions, etc. Clients will watch how you and your team present.



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