

For a speech to be immortal, it need not be interminable

Mrs. Hubert Humphrey

HIGH STAKES PRESENTATIONS

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The Fate of the Red Delicious... ...and how to avoid a similar trap



The Red Delicious started out red and delicious, and ended up thick-skinned, mushy, and flavorless. As a result, it lost its #1 position in Appledom. Why?

Each presentation is also an audition for your next position

Because the growers, distributors, and retailers engineered it for themselves, not the buyers!

A sad saga

The Red Delicious apple emerged from an Iowa orchard in 1880 as a round, blushed yellow fruit of surpassing sweetness. Now, of the two words in the name, only one can be believed.

What happened? Lee Calhoun, an apple historian and retired orchardist in Pittsboro, N.C. says, “They eventually went too far and ended up with apples the public didn’t want to eat.”

Presentations are apples

For a bushel of reasons, many tend to create presentations in the same way—for the presenter’s benefit, not the listeners’. We tend to make our talks about us, not about them.

Our sales talks boast of our accomplishments. We tend to design our presenta-

tions to demonstrate the extent of our research rather than the results and implications of our research.

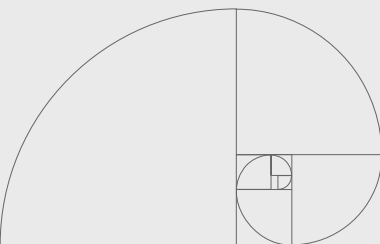
Our presentations are too long. We use our visuals as teleprompters. We fail to take into account how people absorb information while listening.

The right place to start

A more effective approach is to start where *they* are, not where you are.

I recently worked with a pharmaceutical consulting firm presenting new research on best sales practices in response to Medicare Part D. The client’s draft presentation began with, “We recently completed a statistically relevant study of the impact of the MMA and the response by the pharmaceutical industry,” or words to that effect.

Notice, it’s all about them, not about the challenges their listeners were facing.



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Put your
audience in
the center of
the story

Take this test

Count the number of your slides titled About us, Our Mission, Our Strengths, etc.

Then compare it to the number of slides titled Your situation, Your challenges, How we can help you, etc.



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My suggestion

I suggested they start with the story of change and the problems it caused, then offer their research as a *targeted solution* to the problems their audience faced. I asked if something like this might work:

In late 2005, the healthcare market was abuzz with the advent of Medicare Part D. It brought the possibility of new markets, and most companies spent considerable time and money training their sales reps for the new opportunity.

Few companies, however, have yet seen a return on that investment. Although the market changed, sales practices did not. Formulary wins have not necessarily led to increases in market share. Formulary messaging to prescribers has remained ineffective.

As a result, what could have been a promising new market has not reached its potential.

The report you are about to hear points the way to success. You will learn what most reps are doing wrong, and what effective reps are doing right. And you will learn what you can do to succeed in this new, more complex marketplace.

What's changed?

This approach makes the audience—those in charge of a pharmaceutical sales force—the heroes in the middle of a struggle to adapt to a new market.

This works because it is engineered for the audience, not the speaker. The presentation is not about the research, it's

about the problems the audience faces and how they can solve them.

It also works because it shows that the speaker understands the audience's struggles. This enhances the speaker's credibility.

Know your audience

The audience in this case is the pharmaceutical decision maker, and the one thing he or she has overdosed on is data.

Much better to take them by surprise by dramatically presenting the situation they find themselves in, the money they've invested and the opportunity they've lost.

Once they feel the pain, they are motivated to listen, to drill down into your data, and engage with you, the speaker. They are emotionally, as well as intellectually involved. And that means they will value the presentation more highly.

All about them

Children purr with pleasure when their parents tell them stories about themselves. They delight in the love and attention—to see themselves as characters in a story.

Business audiences purr when speakers tell them stories about themselves too. They enjoy being the center of attention.

Avoid the apple's fate

Design your presentations for the audience, and you'll avoid the dismal fate of the Red Delicious Apple!