

Powerful Presentations

Three questions to answer for your next speaker

BY VICTOR GRAY

IN ORDER TO BE EFFECTIVE, every speaker has to make an impact. Even humorists need to deliver a message that will last beyond the end of the event. To be enduring, the message should be consistent with the organization's goals or the theme of the event itself. The problem is that unless they have inside contacts, speakers won't know your company's individual culture and needs. But by providing them the answers to just three questions, you can ensure your speakers build powerful, focused presentations that hit the nail on the head every time.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH?

Often, decision makers and meeting planners don't know the results they are after. They may have an idea of what it is they want, but they may have difficulty expressing it clearly. To get around this problem, share key facts about things that recently have made an

current, real issues the company is facing.

If, on the other hand, meeting planners fail to provide honest, upfront information, it can lead to programs that do not achieve the desired result. For example, I recently was asked to help present a diversity and sensitivity seminar. In my experience, a request for this type of training usually has an underlying need attached. But when I asked the meeting planner about the reasons for requesting sensitivity and diversity training, I was assured this was part of the company's regular training curriculum and that no problems existed. Then, after I'd completed the third training program, the CEO revealed, "I have regularly overheard insensitive comments that are inconsistent with our company culture and harassment policies."

Clearly, the meeting planner did not understand the underlying needs for this type of program fully, or she was unwilling to be completely honest. An open approach would

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impact on the company such as: "We have adopted an enterprise software package that has changed everything we do. Senior employees have adopted an 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it' mindset, and morale is greatly affected." This type of information allows your speaker to understand

have allowed me to tackle the problems head on, rather than presenting a general approach to this important topic. When I asked the same question of a meeting planner from another organization, I was told, "We had a fist fight in the parking lot. The altercation continued off

the property, and a gun was drawn!” Because the meeting planner was honest with me, I was able to approach performance problems directly and provide a strong organizational message.

WHAT SHOULD THE PARTICIPANTS START DOING?

Answering this question will ensure the speaker has a clear understanding of what constitutes productive behavior. It helps the speaker understand what behaviors you want to model during the presentation. Often, participants do not perform in accordance with company policy because they do not know what that policy is. It’s similarly difficult to achieve success when a group does not receive feedback about how they are doing. Answering the “start” question helps the speaker guide the staff and communicate frustration in a productive way.

I once presented a program to a group that had been asked to perform at a high level for an extended period. Much to the company leaders’ dismay, the group began to demonstrate rude behaviors to internal and external customers. Armed with the knowledge of what behaviors the officials wanted to see the staff perform, I was able to develop a

presentation that illuminated high performance and courtesy.

WHAT SHOULD THE PARTICIPANTS STOP DOING?

Your answer to this question will help the speaker understand what isn’t working. A speaker skilled in identifying performance problems will help the organization identify hidden problems and recognize the root causes of known problems. I once worked with a manufacturer of a long-established product that was hard hit by competition. The company was honest in reporting that layoffs would be a result if sales did not improve. The news created a backlash against the company. I was invited to help the group refocus on ways to help improve productivity and prevent the need for layoffs.

To help your next speaker give a powerful performance, come prepared with the answers to these three questions. Nothing beats honest, open communication between a meeting planner and speaker. If you’re honest with your company’s needs, you’ll ensure your next speaker hits the nail on the head. ▲

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