



PRESENTING WITH IMPACT

Attention grabbing openings

If you are giving a presentation, a high impact opener gets you off to a great start. It gives you the opportunity of establishing your credibility, and setting the tone of your presentation.

Choose the right opener – a game may not be the best way to start a presentation to your Board. But don't stick only to the low risk options. As long as you deliver your opener with enthusiasm and conviction – the audience will relax and enjoy something different.

Don't forget that HOW you are seen is as important as WHAT you say. The 'set piece' opener comes after your 'entrance'. It must be accompanied by appropriate body language. Stand up slowly and gracefully. Stride to the lectern (where appropriate). Pause, look round at your audience. Smile. Then start.

Here are some possible ways of opening:

A quote

A quote can provide a strong, powerful opening if read, or recited with a bit of drama, good pauses etc. Short quotes can be put up on a PowerPoint etc slide, and read, pause, then read again.

The quote should be long enough to be a quote (rather than a sound bite - probably more than one line) but not so long that it gets boring.

Try the following:

- A quote from a guru in your field (e.g. in the Hospice movement, a quote from Dame Cicely Saunders – the founder of the hospice movement – is always good value).
- A quote from another field, but with resonance for your talk (e.g. a Shakespeare speech, a poem)
- A quote from a customer or stakeholder (e.g. a letter from a customer)
- A quote from a report, diary, or other related written material (e.g. an Amnesty International spokesperson on China used a quote from the diary of a mother who lost her son in Tiananmen Square).

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Remember you don't have to read the quote yourself. You could have a tape recording to play (eg customers' views). But be careful, the recording must be clear enough and long enough to be understood.

A DVD or tape recording

Sometimes a DVD or tape recording can take your audience to another place and show them something in a powerful way. You can also change the mood or uplift your audience with music.

Joke

A joke is often regarded as the classic opener for a presentation – and for some kinds of presentations (eg a best man's speech at a wedding) it is essential. But beware – jokes can be high risk. Make sure your joke cannot be seen as sexist, racist, irrelevant or trivialising. Unless you are very good at telling jokes, and unless you are absolutely sure that the joke will be enjoyed and understood by everyone present, don't do it!

If you need inspiration for jokes, there are lots of joke websites where you might find what you are looking for (eg www.jokes.com)

Adding touches of humour to your presentation throughout is usually a far better strategy than a full-on joke at the beginning!

Props 1- real props

All of us enjoy 'show and tell'. Having some real props can make a talk come alive. Props can also provide the opportunity for using other senses – not just your ears to hear the presentation. You can see and touch them, too.

Taking along an example of what you are talking about is a very good way of creating interest, and aiding understanding. Props make the subject more real, they change the pace of the talk, they are memorable.

Police presenters almost always take handcuffs, body armour and extending truncheons with them. The speaker uses them to demonstrate aspects of police work, and the audience can pass them round, try them out. (Police speakers are often a 'prop' themselves – they tend to go in full uniform, even the plainclothes officers!)

When preparing your presentation, consider whether there is anything – a piece of equipment, an example of something your organisation makes, a typical example of an artefact from your field - that you could introduce to good effect.

Aleya was giving a talk about Sudanese refugees living in East London – she brought along some examples of Sudanese fabric, and some cooking utensils both to provide some visual references for the audience and also to explain the importance of familiar things for a community far from their country.

Jim was explaining to a tenants group about the gardening service's programme for cutting the grass and keeping weeds down. He took along the spraying equipment they would be using.

Props 2 – symbolic props

The aim is to find an object/prop that will convey the essence of your message. You can use practically anything to symbolise your main message. Look around the room you are sitting in at this moment – choose an object at random. Now try to work out how you could use it to introduce your talk. Here are some real life examples:

A representative of a small charity that helps women with AIDS, held up a mirror, and started walking round the room, asking members of the audience to look into it. After a minute or so, she stopped and said to the audience, 'You have just been doing something simple, looking at yourselves in the mirror. But that is something that women with AIDS find it hard to do, because sometimes they don't know who they are any more.'

Jenny worked on Best Value in her local authority. She was giving a presentation to staff about the enormous changes that Best Value meant for the way they worked. She took with her a waste-paper basket. She put it in the middle of the stage, and started to tear up pieces of paper and throw them in the bin. 'We've got to tear up the rule book and start again,' she said, 'Best value is going to change what we do, why we do it and how we do it.'

Picture

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. Choose a strong photograph, or a painting – copy it onto PowerPoint, or take a large version with you (or, in a smaller group, pass it round).

Open your presentation by putting up the picture. Look at it yourself, take your time. Talk your audience through it.

A senior nurse manager in a hospice was training nurses. She wanted to make the point that the patients themselves can contribute to each other's well-being, it is not all down to nurses. She put up a slide of a photograph of several elderly gents all having a good laugh wearing

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knitted hats in different colours. She explained that the men were all outpatients at the hospice, all were terminally ill (and had all since died), but they had had great fun as 'the hospice gnomes' after they had all been knitted these colourful pointed woolly caps but some of the ladies who came in for day treatment, too.

Party, party

Everyone enjoys the speaker who creates a party atmosphere. Being a showman/woman requires confidence and flair and can reap huge rewards.

The Director of a voluntary organisation had been asked to speak about SWOT analysis at a conference. He bounded onto the stage and called out to the audience, 'Who knows what the S in SWOT stands for?' Someone called out 'Strengths.' The speaker grinned, clapped and dug his hand in his pocket, pulling out a Mars bar which he chucked to the respondent, 'Well done, here is your prize. Now, who knows what the W stands for.' (It is a good idea to have a plant in the audience to ensure someone calls out the first answer!)

A playworker was giving a presentation about the way children learn through play. He called up a couple of volunteers onto the stage and gave them a ball, asking them to throw it backwards and forwards to each other. He walked round them talking about the range of things a game of ball could teach (e.g. hand eye coordination, cooperation, speed and velocity, arcs and parabola).

Visualisation

If you want to draw your audience into your talk from the beginning, get them to shut their eyes and take them through a visualisation. Give very clear instructions (Now close your eyes. I want you to think about.....Can you see.....)

A housing manager was talking to a tenants' committee meeting about the need to increase the service charge. He asked them to imagine he was taking them on a tour of the estate. "Let's go into this block. I am afraid the glass in the door is broken, and there is a lot of dirt and graffiti in the stairwell, as well as that horrible smell of urine everywhere. Oh and a couple of broken needles over there. Sorry it is so dark in here, one of the light bulbs is out..... It's not good enough, is it. Unfortunately, with the service charge stuck at the same rate for 15 years, we simply have not been able to give you the standards you deserve."

Question

A challenging, open question (Who, what, why, where, when, how) can make a powerful opener. Give the audience time to respond. Don't rush on. Wait for a reply (again, you might need a plan to give you confidence that someone will respond). Acknowledge all replies positively, this will get the audience on your side, because you are listening to them. In a smaller workshop setting, you might want to consider writing up the answers on a flip chart.

Statistic

Do you have a killer statistic that sums up your message? That will shock, entertain, or concentrate the minds of your audience. If you do, you might want to use it for your opener. The trick with using a statistic in this way is to play it for all it is worth. Don't say it once and rush on to the first tell-um. The audience will lose the significance – they may not even hear it (remember this is your opener, they are just getting used to the sound of your voice). You have got to ham it up a bit.

Say the statistic. Put it up on a PowerPoint slide. Repeat it (maybe expressed in a slightly different way (e.g. 53% - over half). Ask the audience if they realised this fact. Talk a bit about the significance of the statistic. Say it again.

A politician was giving a speech. "25% of children under 10 living in the UK live below the poverty line. 25%. A quarter of children living in families who are below the poverty line. Parents who can't afford expensive trainers, who can't afford holidays, who worry about where every penny is coming from. 1 in every 4 children lives like that in Britain. Now. Today."