



May 2007

[Home](#)
[Mission](#)
[Services](#)
[Testimonials](#)
[Clients](#)
[About](#)

Focus

A Newsletter published for clients and friends of Wagner Consulting Group



Page Links

[Case Studies](#)
[Signup for FREE Newsletter](#)
[Newsletter Archives](#)
[Downloads](#)

Making Winning Presentations

Remember “show and tell” in kindergarten? Most of us made our first presentations in that setting. Unfortunately for audiences everywhere, many people have not improved their presenting skills much since grade school. Besides bored listeners, who cares? You should, because effective presentation skills help you get more of what you want in life.

I'll bet you were absent from your second grade class the day Miss Smith discussed the five cardinal presentation sins to avoid, and you probably daydreamed through Mrs. Clapper's lecture on WIFY triggers. Have you forgotten Coach Meek's discourse on flow structures? Me too, but help is at hand! By the time you finish this *Focus*, you'll know how to make a more effective presentation.

“Presentations” covers more than the ubiquitous PowerPoint slide shows that have covered the business landscape like kudzu on a Mississippi hillside. You are presenting when you deliver a progress report at a staff meeting or make an appeal for participation in a volunteer activity. Effective presentations are built on just a few fundamentals, and I'll begin with what Jerry Weissman dubbed *The Five Cardinal Sins*, namely:

1. No clear point,
2. No audience benefit,
3. No clear flow,
4. Too detailed, and
5. Too long.

Regarding Sin #5, for example, have you **ever** heard someone complain that a presentation was too short?

Avoiding these presentation mistakes is a great start, and you'll be better than most if you do nothing beyond this. But there's more to presentation excellence, as illustrated in the following three disciplines.

1. Start strong

It's hard to recover from a bumbling start. An effective presentation immediately captures the audience's attention with a 90 second launch phase. The launch phase contains:

- An **opening gambit**. This can be a striking statistic (1 out of 4 American workers have been with their current employer less than 1 year), a question directed at the audience ("Why is it so hard to find a decent ...?"), or a familiar saying or quotation.
- **What's the point** of the presentation? Typically, you want to persuade people to take some action. That's the whole reason you're speaking, so be up front and crystal clear. As you develop your presentation, begin with your goal in mind. Avoid Sin #1
- **Summarize benefits** to the audience. Answer the "Why should I care?" question by telling the audience what's in it for you (WIIFY). For example, "Why should you care if your subordinates are motivated? Because it makes your job easier if they are."
- Give an **overview of your presentation** (also known as, tell 'em what you're gonna' tell 'em) so the audience knows what to anticipate. For example, "I'm going to describe the four factors that motivate people and give you practical techniques to increase the motivation of your subordinates. When we're done in about an hour, you'll be able to take what you've learned this morning and immediately apply it on your job"

Notice what this last example accomplished: It provided a road map so the audience knows where it's going, an ending time was set, and the WIIFY statement was repeated.

Again, your opening should be carried out in 90 seconds or less. Staying within this time limit ensures a crisp beginning because you won't have time to hem and haw. **Tip:** Practice your presentation *aloud* until you get it right.

2. Use reference points

- Internal linkages are reference points within your presentation that help your audience tie the pieces together. Use forward ("In a few minutes I'll show you ...") and backward ("You'll recall the statistic on employee turnover.") references to emphasize key points. Also, intermediate summaries keep the audience on track. For example, "Let's recap. We've discussed Problem A, I've proposed three potential solutions, and now ..."
- External linkages are designed to strengthen your argument for the "Point." These references to people, ideas, or data outside your presentation include direct references to audience members ("For example, Mary Smith discovered ..."), current events ("Today this very thing happened right here in River City."), and questions ("Has anyone here ever had a Nebraska Nutgrass infestation in their lawn?")

3. Maintain a focus on benefits to the audience

This discipline requires that you know your audience. As obvious as this sounds, it's easy to spend too little time thinking about what is important to the audience.

Do some advance research if you're not personally familiar with your audience.

"WIFY triggers" help you drive home key points and move the audience to where you want them to end up – at your Point. These include:

- "This is important to you because..."
- "Why am I telling you this?" followed by the answer
- "What does this mean to you?" followed by an explanation

Use WIFY triggers throughout your presentation to emphasize to the audience the benefits of your Point.

I'll close with a final comment on Sin #4 – too much detail. Your audience doesn't care about the nitty gritty details as much as you do. They also don't care about extraneous personal experiences or mind-numbing data dumps. For example, avoid long narratives, like a step-by-step recitation of tasks you carried out; this wastes time and bores the audience. Instead, summarize key events and accomplishments, or address topics where a decision by the group is necessary. A classic example of too much detail is a slide with lots of numbers and words in a tiny font. Focus on the Point and WIFY triggers.

For more ideas on making compelling presentations, consider the following books.

Beyond Bullet Points, by Cliff Atkinson

Presenting to Win, by Jerry Weissman

The Leader's Guide to Storytelling, by Stephen Denning

Working the Room, by Nick Morgan

You can also call me for help with presentation design, content development, and delivery.

Tom Wagner

We help our clients accelerate profitable growth

Call us at 800 422-1374 to learn more

If you do not want to receive this newsletter, reply to this e-mail with REMOVE in the Subject field.

Copyright 2007 Wagner Consulting Group, Inc. - (800) 422-1374