

The Five Es of Effective Presentation Delivery

Excerpted and adapted from *Architect's Essentials of Presentation Skills*, by David Greusel, AIA
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SUMMARY

An effective speaker displays energy, empathy, enthusiasm, engagement, and entertainment when delivering presentations. David Greusel explains how presenters can enhance their presentation deliveries with these key attributes.

ENERGY

Energy in a presentation, as with music, is simply a function of pitch and pace. To give your presentation energy, you have to either raise the pitch of your voice or increase the pace at which you talk, or some combination of the two. Most speakers have little ability to adjust their pitch, so the pace becomes important in the energy level that the audience will perceive. While talking too fast can be risky, most design presentations are more likely to convey too little energy than too much.

One important caveat: Assume that the rate at which you will speak in a live presentation will, like your heart rate, be faster than in rehearsal. But since you are also likely to say more, do not plan on saving time by talking faster.

EMPATHY

Establishing an emotional connection with an audience is among the greatest challenges of speakers who are design professionals. With a great body of technical information at hand, the tendency is strong to cover the material that needs to be covered without ever giving the audience a reason to care about you and to want to help you achieve your objectives. You want people to relate to you as a person, not as a dispenser of information. The following tips may be helpful:

- Talk about yourself. Let the audience know a little bit about you as a person before you ask them to know you as a professional.
- Tell a humorous personal story. Sharing a slightly embarrassing experience can be disarming—and charming.
- Use self-deprecating humor. *You* are the only appropriate target for this type of humor; when

used effectively, it can serve as a humanizing counterpoint to your vast store of professional knowledge, which may seem alien and intimidating to nonprofessionals.

- Find points of connection with your audience. Unless the room is full of men who are approximately your own age, football and golf may not be the best topics. Give some thought—ahead of time—to topics that you and your audience have in common and that might help bridge the gap.
- Share some esoteric or “local” knowledge about the client, the locality, the site, or the project that is not related to the technical or design aspects. Do a little research to find an affinity or personal connection with the audience. Because Americans are so mobile, you may be surprised how easy it can be to find common ground.

ENTHUSIASM

Enthusiasm is the visible expression of the spirit within you. Presumably, you are making the presentation because you wish to achieve an objective that is important to you. Unfortunately, enthusiasm can be stifled easily by nerves, tension, fear, anxiety, doubt, or detailed technical content. To counter these, do physical warm-ups; prepare yourself mentally to talk; take command of the space; keep your energy level up; and avoid sedatives, particularly alcohol. If you feel excitement about the project, you want to convey it pleasantly and naturally, and taking the time to “psych yourself up” can make a crucial difference.

ENGAGEMENT

For a presentation to be engaging, it needs to be more of a conversation than a dialogue. Engagement is the art of drawing your listeners into your story and making it a part of their experience. Your presentation format may be dictated by the client, custom, or circumstance, which will require you to employ other means of engaging the audience. Two principal strategies, interaction and

interrogation, will help you achieve a high level of engagement.

In theater, one form of interaction is called “breaking down the fourth wall,” the invisible barrier between you and the audience. To break down the wall, do one or more of the following:

- If you’re standing, sit down; if you’re sitting, stand.
- If you’re on a platform, get off it.
- Pull up a chair next to your audience.
- Find an excuse to make the audience stand up.
- Walk into or behind the audience.

Interrogating your audience is simply the art of eliciting a response. Pepper your presentation with questions for the audience. Begin with questions that are innocuous and that become increasingly weighty or serious as the presentation unfolds.

ENTERTAINMENT

Using entertainment properly can make your presentation more memorable, particularly in a competitive setting. It helps people relax and feel more at ease. Entertainment should serve as a counterpoint to your main theme and should not be the focal point of your presentation. Personal anecdotes, travel photos that are indirectly connected to the subject matter, references to amusing topical news, or appropriate humor are all forms of entertainment that can enliven a presentation.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTOR

David Greusel, AIA, is a principal of HOK Sport + Venue + Event, One of the leading experts in the field.

RESOURCES

More Best Practices

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 03.01.03 Five Basic Presentation Formats
- 03.01.06 Zen and the Art of Presenting in Public

For More Information on This Topic

Architect's Essentials of Presentation Skills by David Greusel, AIA, can be ordered from the AIA Bookstore by calling 800-242-3837 (option 4) or by sending e-mail to bookstore@aia.org.



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