

Leading Your Team Using Effective Presentation Skills

Leaders face a dilemma. On the one hand, they need to delegate work to get results. On the other hand, they need to inspire productive relationships and motivate people to meet deadlines.

Effective speaking is the primary tool for getting all these things done. Bringing members of the group together to talk about the goal and progress of the project is the leader's best opportunity to keep things on track.

Speaking has a unique power to influence. An effective speaker can hold and direct attention, lead people to accept specific points of view, instill confidence and rededication to the mission, and answer questions so that immediate action can follow. At every stage of the team process, leaders should strive to be comfortable and effective when speaking at meetings.

What makes that happen?

Communication must be "receiver-oriented" to get things done. The secret is to know your team well—what do they know and how do they feel? A team leader can affect both of these in a well-planned message. Classic team wisdom teaches that people will only change or take action when they perceive it in their interest to do so. An effective speaker adds two things: 1) a message that frames members' interest in a way that evokes attention and leads to action, and 2) a personal presence and energy that inspires enthusiasm and beliefs and values they all can share.

Ask two questions to assess how close you are to capturing that "power to influence":

1. What is attracting and holding the members' attention?
2. What benefits are there for the member in the message?

Holding Attention

Members on the team have a choice. They can pay attention to the speaker, their own internal needs, or to the message. The speech, and especially the opening, should be designed to draw attention to the message. Compare these two sentences as part of the opening at a team meeting.

"I want to talk to you about how we are doing on the time line. My plan is to motivate you to keep better records so that everyone has better information about how their work is affecting others."

Or

(2) "We are making steady progress. Each of you needs information from someone else in this room to get your work done on time. Let's spend this meeting clarifying and specifying how each one of you can help someone else stay on schedule. Your recordkeeping has the power to help everyone else. Soon we will be able to celebrate the results."

Notice that in the first example the leader is talking about himself and how he has planned his message. His statements are self-reflexive and refer to the structure of the message. This draws attention to the mechanics of speaking and away from the project. The mechanical focus also reduces the potential for inspiring through presence and vision.

In the second example, the leader speaks directly about the members to the members. He begins drawing a picture of their work and their potential to help each other. Because the message is not self-reflexive, the speaker can deliver it with energy and expressive power adding personal persuasion to the mix.

Speakers succeed when they convey that they understand what the group needs and feels. Time spent collecting information about individual members or subgroups will help you tailor a message that is truly "receiver-oriented" and useful to members. People can "hear" better when they perceive a speaker cares about them.

Ask yourself

1. What background information do they need? How long has it been since they have heard the language of the team mission and vision? What jargon may be confusing?

2. What new information do they need? How are they affected by other parts of the organization?
3. What are members feeling? How interested are they in the project or its parts? What are their biases? What are their attitudes toward other parts of the organization? What kind of recognition do they need? What objections or hidden feelings may they have?
4. What help do they need so that they can believe your message?
5. How difficult is it for them to accomplish assignments?
6. How do they perceive benefits from paying attention? From complying with requests?
7. What language do they use?

Showing Benefits

The next step is to use the analysis of how members are thinking and what is important to them in the organization of the message. Show “what’s in it for them.” The speaker may choose to frame the message with any combination of motivational points of view:

1. Show a tangible payoff. This may range from food rewards and tee shirts to trophies and a monetary bonus. It does not have to be elaborate or expensive. The goal is to give the message a concrete outcome and to frame it as the result of the teams’ effort.
2. Show a recognition payoff. People respond to proposals that recognize their contributions and personal worth. Frame the message so that the audience sees the possibility of achievement and the development of their self-esteem.
3. Show a challenge-achievement payoff. Most people want an opportunity to meet a problem and solve it. Frame it as a puzzle. People respond when their imagination is engaged and some of the most serious work is accomplished when a playful and creative spirit is evoked.

Team members have a continual need for constructive feedback about their performance and to re-focus on the vision and mission of the project they jointly pursue. It is the leader’s role to regularly offer help to individual members to develop the technical and relational skills they need to accomplish accurately what is expected of them and to give them the inspiration and motivation to see the big picture and how what they do contributes to the success of the project.