Preparing an effective presentation

It’s the unseen part of every presentation—successful or otherwise: the time spent preparing. You may only be in front of a group for five minutes but put five hours into the message you’ve crafted. While no one may acknowledge all that extra work, it will show. Just as it shows when someone hasn’t bothered to prepare properly.

Productive preparation requires the following:

- A clear understanding of the audience and their needs or interest in the subject.
- A clear focus—a key message that you can articulate in 25 words or less so that both you and your audience can repeat confidently what it was you talked about.
- A clear call to action—what’s the response you want from the audience. If you can’t tell them they’re not likely to think up extra work for themselves!

Once you’ve got that framework in place, you can develop your presentation with an attention-getting introduction (perhaps a story); some supporting data, facts, or research that you can organise into a couple of key points; and finally some illustrations, examples or anecdotes to help people “see” what you mean.

Your audience may not see all the work you’ve gone to to prepare an interesting and informative presentation, but they will appreciate it—and they’ll be much more likely to respond.

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