

# **CLEAR, CONCISE & COMPELLING**

**How to Present to Change Minds  
and Influence Outcomes**



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and Influence Outcomes**

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This book is dedicated to the people in my life who made it possible:

My husband and business partner, Myron, whose ever-present support and continuous improvement mentality helped create our presentation skills workshop and this book

My sons Colin, Kevin and Chris who inspire me daily to pursue new goals

My parents, Pat and Bill Garrity, who encouraged me to embrace life fully

My clients, who eagerly embrace the Clear, Concise & Compelling skills and prove that being an influential presenter changes careers



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## CHAPTER 1



# The Journey to Great Presentations

### *Lessons from Wine Tasting*

“So, it’s settled. We’re off to northern California for three days of wine tasting! Thanks for being our tour guides.” Somehow an evening out with two couples ended up with my husband and me in charge of a long weekend getaway. Not that we objected. We’ve visited the wine country many times; it’s one of our favorite things to do. And we were looking forward to sharing some favorite wineries with our friends.

The planning process was fun. We made a list of our favorite places. Then we visited websites to explore additional vintners to add to our list. Because we only had three days, we planned on visiting seven wineries each day. After much deliberation, we narrowed the list to 21 wineries in the Sonoma region. Because our friends indicated they wanted to learn about winemaking, we also booked two stops with behind-the-scenes private tours focused exclusively on that craft.

Next, we mapped out each day to make sure we made the best use of time. We did our homework, picked two exceptional restaurants and made reservations for the evenings we'd be there. After probably 30 hours of research and planning, it all came together. We even created an itinerary for each day with timing and information about each stop.

Day one was amazing. A beautiful northern California experience. The first three stops were right on schedule. The first behind-the-scenes tour was incredible with respect to the level of information we picked up. But then we started falling behind. Lunch took longer than expected. And the hosts at the tasting bars of the next two wineries were so engaging that it was four o'clock before we knew it. Our group decided they were done for the day.

That created a bit of a dilemma. Do we change our itinerary for the next two days to fit in the two places we missed on day one? We decided to ditch those and do better at staying on schedule on day two.

No such luck. We accomplished our morning plan, hitting three terrific wineries. After lunch we made two more stops. But by midafternoon, our group was ready to relax by the pool.

On day three, we made it to only four of the seven wineries. As we sat in the airport waiting for our flight, we reflected on our wine getaway. While everyone loved the wineries we visited, we all agreed we tried to do too much in too little time. The group also decided that for the next trip, we needed to factor in time to enjoy some hiking and resting and spend a little less time on wine.

Why didn't all of our research and planning result in a perfect vacation? What went wrong? It turns out the focus of our trip was off. We didn't do a good job of identifying exactly what our group wanted to accomplish

on the trip and tried to do too much. We thought it was all about learning as much as possible about wine. In reality, we didn't understand what they wanted to do. Our friends were more interested in a relaxing weekend with some great winery experiences rather than a weekend overstuffed with learning. We also learned that the in-depth private tours were way more than our friends wanted or needed. While they were great, our friends did not find it a good use of time.

So, my husband and I made a few notes to guide our planning for future trips:

- What do our travel companions want to make it an unforgettable trip?
- What experiences does our group want to have?
- How much do they know about wine?
- What do they want to learn?
- What will contribute to them raving about the trip when they return?
- What are their limitations? What would be too much?

As I reflected on what we learned from taking our friends on this trip, it occurred to me that leading a group on a journey is quite similar to what I teach clients about designing and delivering effective presentations.

## **An influential journey**

Like a journey, good presentations are intended to accomplish something: provide new information to change thinking, get a commitment, secure a decision,

obtain support or close a deal. Presentations are primarily about influence—defined as the power to change or affect someone or something without directly forcing it to happen. The presenter’s goal is to influence an outcome. To achieve this, you must...

- *Be clear:* Know exactly where you want to take the audience—your influence objective
- *Be concise:* Include only as much information as necessary
- *Be compelling:* Understand the needs of the audience—why will they go on this journey with you?

Let’s take a quick look at each of these.

### **Be clear: Know exactly where you want to take the audience**

Every presentation is an opportunity to take your audience with you to a specific destination. On our wine trip, we needed to narrow down the destination from learning about wine tasting to having a fun and relaxing weekend with friends that included wine tasting.

What is it that you want the audience to know, feel and do as a result of attending your presentation? What is the *why* of your presentation? It is important to be specific about this destination. Unfortunately, many presentations are more focused on the *what*. Average presenters do not have a specific influence objective for their presentations. Great presenters, on the other hand, design their entire presentation to accomplish their influence objective—it is made clear in the introduction, supported by foundational points in the body and driven home in the conclusion.

## **Include only as much information as necessary**

In hindsight, it was easy to see that fewer wineries would have been a better design for our trip. Great presenters are careful not to present extraneous information. They present the right content in the right amount. They don't try to do too much.

The digital age is exploding with information. Because it is so easily accessible, it is tempting to include too much. Your challenge when designing a presentation is to determine what to include—and what to leave out. Average presenters overstuff their presentations with too much information. This leaves the audience wondering what is most important. Great presenters know that less is definitely more and better when it comes to presenting influentially.

## **Understand the needs of the audience**

On our wine trip, had we taken the time to understand what our friends already knew and what they wanted to learn about wine, we would have designed a very different experience! We needed to ask better questions.

People who attend a presentation usually do so because they need something. They are looking to solve a problem, identify an opportunity or confirm their beliefs. Great presenters take the time and do the research to understand what the audience needs and wants relative to the presentation topic. They present in a way that reaches the audience by helping them solve their problem, understand your opportunity or provide evidence that confirms their beliefs.

## **Be clear, concise and compelling on purpose**

Think about the last presentation you attended (or gave) that was only okay. Chances are that one or more of the following conditions existed:

- The presenter lacked a specific objective
- The presentation did not meet the needs of the audience
- The presenter tried to do too much and included too much information

All too often in presentations like these, the presenter misses the opportunity to help the audience take away something useful, and also misses the chance to be memorable for all the right reasons.

The good news is that everyone from nervous introverts to overpowering extroverts can develop influential presentation skills. Our workshop participants have proven year after year that these skills are learnable. We've seen incredible skill development with novices and seasoned presenters and entry-level to C suite professionals in marketing, sales, science, engineering and many other functions. This book distills down our experience into actionable steps that can transform anyone into a great presenter.

## **Strong presentation skills can lead to career success**

The Center for Creative Leadership identifies *influencing others* as one of the four core leadership skills needed for success. “Without the capacity to influence others,

your ability to make what you envision a reality remains elusive.” And presentations are one of the most common and effective ways to influence.

My company, Bottom Line Technologies, exists to help individuals develop the skills they need for career success. About twenty years ago, we had a thought-provoking conversation with a highly respected client. She identified that many of the top performers in her company did not get the respect they deserved because they appeared average when presenting. Lack of competence, nervousness and obvious lack of confidence prevented these individuals from shining. She asked if we could help. This was the beginning of our journey in designing our influential presentation skills workshop.

I could certainly relate to my client’s observations. Early in my corporate career I noticed that many company “stars” were great presenters. In some cases, they were better at presenting than they were in completing job responsibilities. One individual comes to mind. Sarah was ten years into her career and on the fast track. She was a competent product manager but a brilliant presenter. People looked forward to her presentations. She was engaging, compelling, logical and an excellent storyteller. Because she delivered presentations with poise and polish, she gained respect—perhaps even more than her job performance deserved. Yet she advanced to the vice president level quickly.

Through the years, I’ve heard many similar stories of how excellent presentation skills have helped people advance in their careers. I’ve also had individuals tell me they feel as though their lack of presentation skills has held them back.

Our influential presentation skills workshops, distilled down to the following chapters, provide the techniques to help presenters eliminate the things that

get in the way and strengthen those that make for a great presentation.

## **What makes a presentation great**

In developing our workshop, we started by exploring what makes a great presentation great. That list included the obvious: strong delivery, interesting content, ability to hold attention. We also looked at the common pitfalls that make presentations ineffective. You can easily guess what made this list: dull, dry, boring, over-stuffed, rambling and the lack of a clear presentation objective. There are two major components to a presentation that can make or break your attempt to influence your audience: the content and the delivery.

The content—everything from the structure and organization to slide design to what you include and exclude—can carefully guide an audience to reach your desired conclusion. Poor content fails to engage the audience, loses them in the wilderness of a meandering story or complicated spreadsheet, even literally puts them to sleep.

Many presenters invest a disproportionate amount of time and energy into packing slides full of information, and far too little in thinking about an objective, the expectations of the audience and how to make the key points of the presentation stick.

Weak delivery skills also challenge many presenters. You've probably seen all of these behaviors in presenters: a monotone voice, use of filler words, weak eye contact, random movements, lack of positive gestures, low energy, no smile. In contrast, a strong presenter has good voice modulation and a dynamic energy in front of the room that engages the audience without overpowering. These

skills are not only the natural gifts of a lucky few; they can be learned and honed with practice.

In short: clear, concise and compelling. These are the key elements that take a presentation from painful to passable to great. The following chapters will help you create a presentation with these three concepts at the forefront, from planning to slide preparation to presentation day.

## **Why this book?**

I was fortunate to have received presentation skills training early in my career, and I'm passionate about helping others build the skills they need to succeed. I love seeing workshop participants become competent and confident in delivering influential presentations. That's why I've written this book—it contains the tools, techniques and tips we deliver in our two-day workshops so that you can present influentially.

This book is unique because you can apply these skills immediately. It provides the *how*, not just the what and why. It is intended to serve as a resource you can return to for every presentation. Each chapter identifies specific things you can do to influence the audience. At the end of each chapter you will find ideas on how to put the content to work. Dive into the specific chapter where you need the most help or continue reading from here to the end of the book. This is what we will cover:



## Chapter 2 Establish Your Objective

Learn to be specific about what you want to accomplish with each presentation. What is the *why* of your presentation? Be specific, clear and concise about what you want the audience to know, feel and do. Plan to take your audience on a journey. What's your destination? Why will people go there with you?

## Chapter 3 Make a Strong Audience Connection

Connect logically, emotionally and memorably with your audience so they will take this journey with you. Do your homework to ensure you know what the audience knows

about your topic and what they need to know. How does the audience make decisions? Learn what influence levers will work best for each audience. Only when you understand your audience and their needs can you create and deliver a presentation that will be compelling.

#### Chapter 4 Create Compelling Content

Influential content starts with a solid presentation structure. You must create and deliver a powerful, compelling introduction that grabs attention and establishes your credibility. Your structure will help you include the right amount of information and the focus you desire. You'll learn how to make your content sticky and memorable.

#### Chapter 5 Harness the Power of Stories

Learn to work with brain chemistry to use stories that hold your presentation together and make it both influential and memorable. Explore and learn to use three types of story structures.

#### Chapter 6 Design Powerful Slide Decks

Avoid four common slide deck pitfalls and learn to use twelve power tips for deck design. Slides are only tools—they support you, not the other way around. Applying these design tips will save you time and ensure your deck is clear, concise and compelling.

#### Chapter 7 Deliver Influentially

Prepare, practice and deliver with impact. Learn how to use positive body language and read your audience to adjust appropriately. Incorporate visualization, positive affirmations and other techniques to overcome anxiety.

Twenty-first century audiences have high expectations. They are giving you their very limited time and attention with the expectation that you will give them something valuable in return. The skills and tips in this book will help you design presentations with the right amount of information, with clear structure that captures the audience attention and leaves the audience feeling satisfied with the return on time investment in your presentation.

## **Read this book AND PRACTICE to be a compelling presenter**

As a result of reading this book, you will learn the skills to meet the expectations of your audiences and achieve your presentation objective every time. But reading a book will not change your presenting ability. To become a great presenter, you must apply these concepts and then practice, present and receive and incorporate feedback. It is my hope that you will become skilled at taking your audiences on presentation journeys. And perhaps you'll celebrate with a glass of wine after your next presentation.

Cheers!

## **Resources**

Lead 4 Success: Learn the Essentials of True Leadership  
by George Hallenbeck / Center for Creative Leadership