

# Speak Like a Professional

You can have brilliant ideas, but if you can't get them across, your ideas won't get you anywhere.

- Lee Iacocca

**P**icture this. A deafening silence fills the conference room after a formal presentation to members of the board. The presenter appeared prepared and reasonably confident at the start, yet the presentation failed miserably and everyone was lost in a sea of data, bored and distracted.

No one understood the points raised, and worst of all, the senior manager presenting ended up looking like an awkward young apprentice making his first-ever public speech.

*Does this sound familiar?* The good news is that help is readily available. Distilled from the hundreds of useful tips in books and on websites are the three key steps to unlocking the secrets to speaking like a professional when delivering a formal presentation.

The three steps are: *Determine the desired outcome; avoid death by PowerPoint; and, rehearse.*

Here's how it works:

**Determine the desired outcome:** Preparing a presentation without a clearly

defined outcome is the same as a commercial plane with a final destination of "somewhere in China." The result? A planeload of lost passengers. A presentation with no defined outcome is the same, except the lost passengers have the ability to influence the presenter's future!

There are two levels of outcomes to clearly state during the preparation stage:

Level 1 is to state the purpose of the presentation. Examples include *to inform, to seek approval, to seek consensus, to educate, to motivate, or to discuss.*

Level 2 is a personal outcome as a result of the presentation and must serve as an exciting destination for the speaker. Examples of a personal outcome are *"to do well so that I gain the respect and recognition from the team as the leader," or "to impress the audience so that I prove to myself that I can be an effective public speaker."*

Designing a meaningful personal outcome is often the key to a first-class presentation as it provides motivation to do one's best. Sadly, this is usually done as an afterthought.

**Avoid death by PowerPoint:** Presentation slides are just an aid and must never take center stage. The focus should always remain on the speaker. The basic rules of thumb when using slides are:

- Use key words only. Sentence structure is not important
- Include only essential information
- Ensure every slide answers the desired outcome of the presentation
- Apply 6x6 rule – maximum 6 lines per slide and a maximum of 6 words per line

**Rehearse:** Very often, practice involves repeating or mumbling the speech numerous times at an abnormally fast speed and from the comfort of a cozy armchair. Practicing in this manner does not simulate the actual event, is ineffective and a complete waste of time.

A rehearsal, on the other hand, is similar to flight simulator training pilot trainees must undergo proficiently *before* they are allowed in the cockpit for an actual flight. Preparing for a formal presentation is the same and must simulate the real thing.

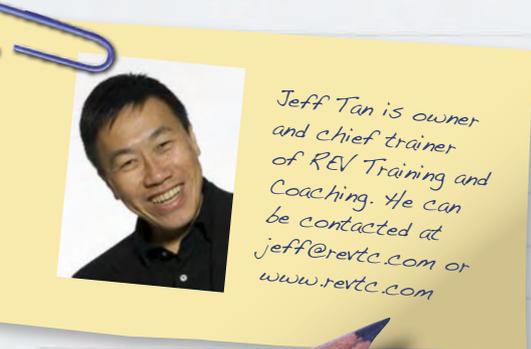
A proper presentation rehearsal will have the speaker standing in front of a full-length mirror going through the speech at the correct speed, punctuated with gestures at the correct moments, riddled with prepared jokes that look spontaneous, and spoken to a live but imaginary audience.

This type of rehearsal, as opposed to the usual ineffective practice, irons out the kinks of the speech and allows the presenter to hone the message to perfection.

If possible, rehearse at the actual venue using the presentation slides and videotape the session and seek feedback from others. More rehearsals equal more confidence on the actual day.

Just by incorporating these three simple points, presentations can come to life. The speaker can deliver a knockout presentation that the audience will understand, leaving everyone engaged and satisfied. 

Got an article idea for "Manager's Notebook"? Contact *Insight* Editor-in-Chief Justin Chan at [justin.chan@amcham-shanghai.org](mailto:justin.chan@amcham-shanghai.org).



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