Presenting
with Impact

hello@focusu.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1:
Putting your best foot forward: Presenting with Impact

In a business setting, strategically churning out superb ideas is only one side of the coin. For all-round performance, one also needs to focus on how to present these ideas in a manner that is effective, clear, engaging, and impactful.

Getting your ideas across in a coherent manner is crucial for them to go places. You might prepare the best slide deck there is, use the best fonts, the best images, and yet, if you can't get your ideas across, all that effort is for nothing. Great ideas don't just require birth, they need nurturing and refinement.

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Whether you are presenting something new to your colleagues, explaining updated guidelines to your juniors, or conducting a pitch for your clients, you need excellent presentation and delivery skills to drive the point across perfectly.

No matter the department you are in or the seniority level you are at, there comes a time when you need to take the stand and do the needful. However, is it really as easily done as said?

IT IS ALL ABOUT CONNECTING WITH THE AUDIENCE

Like the famous American essayist and lecturer, Ralph Waldo Emerson, says, 'All great speakers were bad speakers first'. The fear of public speaking is real. It can be quite daunting to speak loud and clear in front of an audience and be perceived as knowledgeable, skillful, and engaging.

The fear of public speaking or poor skills for the same isn't just an issue for new employees or young professionals. Numerous C-suite professionals face this problem too. As much as it is important for senior managers, stakeholders, and business decision-makers to present impactfully, it is equally important for mid-level and entry-level employees to be skilled at this.

This not only enhances their soft skills but also enables them to be seen more in the workplace and be identified as future thought leaders. Good orators in the workplace receive more opportunities to be seen and heard, present their ideas, and interact with their seniors.

The benefits are many. Yet, the art that we are aiming to excel at here isn't very simple. One cannot simply follow the advice 'be confident' or 'speak clearly' to present effectively. It's not easy, but it isn't rocket science either.

To be compelling and influential when presenting your ideas, you don't necessarily require a 50-page slide deck. Even discussing the technicalities of a project can be done without a slide deck. Even then, corporate and business presentations are almost always lengthy presentations.

The key here is to connect with your audience. You don't need personal relationships in the audience to be able to do so. However, we also agree that simply advising so isn't enough, which is why we're going to understand why it is difficult for many to present with impact and how we can change that.

![focusu logo - ALL ABOUT YOU!]

Chapter 2:
Factors which undermine your potential to be impactful presenters

Let's have a look at why presentations in the corporate or business environment are generally lengthy, lacking engagement, and poorly presented.

THE PARANOIA OF 'ALL EYES ON ME'

We are naturally wired to be wary of when all eyes are on us. We feel caged, cornered, and the pressure to perform well is at an all-time high.

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This is why when we are standing in front of an audience, even when they are just four people in the room, we feel the paranoia of 'all eyes on me'.

Our internal fight or flight response kicks in, and all we want to do so is finish off the presentation as quickly as possible. We hurry through the content, forget the flow and structure, muddle up words, and even feel under

confident about the entire subject matter. This not only makes us deliver a bad presentation but also makes us look unqualified to talk on the subject matter.

THE 'THREAT' OF EMBARRASSING OURSELVES

There is possibly nothing more feared by humans than looking like fools and embarrassing ourselves in front of an audience. Especially if that audience has people who are your colleagues, your seniors, or someone you look up to.

When presenting, we feel the pressure to perform and do a marvelous task. With this comes several side thoughts such as:

"Did I just say something wrong/stupid?"

"Is my content making sense?"

"Why is Ms. XYZ not looking at my slides?"

"Am I audible enough?"

"Did I pronounce 'route' correctly?"

When your speech is interspersed by such thoughts, you lose the flow and

begin to make mistakes. In such conditions, even the tiniest of mistakes make us feel like the biggest fool. And when we feel on the spot, we begin to falter.

THE PRESSURE TO COVER EVERYTHING ON THE SLIDES

In an attempt to not miss out on points or due to the fear of not making sense, we have time and again depended on slides as our saving grace. We load them with information hoping that the audience will read through them in case you miss out on anything. However, the negative impacts of depending so heavily on slides are pretty well known.

We end up reading through the slides while making minimal eye contact with the audience. Rather than speaking to the audience and engaging with them, we end up sounding like we are reading a textbook. We forget that the audience isn't here to read through slides or listen to you read through them. They are here to engage with you on the subject matter and learn whatever information is the highlight.

THE WAY AHEAD

Understanding why we falter when presenting is important since it helps us identify which points we need to rectify. The idea here is not to point out everything one does wrong when presenting but to learn how one can become an engaging, compelling and impactful orator.

Chapter 3:
Tips on Presenting with Impact

Let's break down simple tips and understand how they can help you deliver your message in the most impactful, effective, and engaging manner.

1. Remember the 4 D's

The urge to pile content and images onto our slides is always high. We figure that we could read the text out loud, or our audience can simply read through them and understand. However, if that was true, the slide decks could easily be emailed to everyone, and no presentation would be needed.

It's crucial to cut out the clutter from our presentations and focus on the 4 D's.

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- **Development -** Before preparing your slides, you need to develop an understanding of the concept. Are you going to be delivering a shocking new concept that might garner a lot of resistance, or is it a simple update? Would you need to go in-depth about things? Does your audience need loads of data to be convinced of your proposal, or do they need reasoning? Figure out what the structure of your presentation should be before gathering content for it.

- **Design -** When we talk about a good-looking presentation, we aren't focusing only on the fonts, font-size, or template. While they are equally important, you also need to design the flow of the presentation. Identify which information is both relevant and important for the audience.

- **Delivery -** Figure out which way of delivery holds your audience's attention. If there is too much text on the slides (and you cannot avoid it), consider using a pointer to draw the audience's attention to specific portions of the text. Use your hands to point to important places on the slides. Use phrases such as "Let me focus your attention on this very crucial segment".

- **Debriefing -** Remember, for presentations to be engaging, you need to get the audience talking. Encourage them to ask their questions and doubts. If you

don't have the answer to something, let them know you'll get back to them and make sure that you follow up. If it is an internal audience, do remember to ask them questions on how they found the design and delivery of the presentation. Was the font of the slides readable? Did they identify which text on the slides you were referring to when you pointed it out?

2. Hook your audience visually

Hooking your audience, especially in the first five slides of your presentation, is crucial. Only when you can hold their attention from the beginning can you hold it till the end. Even if your presentation gets boring or irrelevant in the end, your audience will remember the big opening. Doing so by visual aids is quite possibly the best way to go here. Make sure you are using a title slide that only mentions the topic of discussion.

You could also consider starting by using an image in the first slide. Make sure that you can explain why you've used that image and how it fits the concept of the discussion for the day. Using such visual aids allows the audience to perceive a mental image. This further helps them stay connected to your presentation.

It's also a good idea to start with something unique, surprising or even shocking that grabs the attention of your audience in the beginning. When you claim something exceptionally different, the audience feels an urge of excitement to stick around and watch how it pans out. Remember, you need to keep your audience hooked throughout the presentation as well. Adding too much text on one single slide is highly discouraged.

Add more visual aids to your presentation. This doesn't mean you have to limit yourself to images, illustrations, or videos. Use charts, tables, graphs, and other such tools to transform the text into a visually appealing form of content. It's also a good idea not to use multiple fonts, that too from different font families. Stick to 2-3 font types and use one specifically for headings or subheadings. Bringing too much variation using fonts can make your slides look extremely cluttered and disorganized.

3. Know your complete presentation

No, this does not mean you are required to memorize each and every word of your presentation. This would make your speech sound robotic and tense. It is also difficult for one to remember every twist and turn. The idea here is to know everything about your presentation. After how many slides is your most important graph coming? Where exactly on the screen is the text you are referring to placed?

When you are aware of your presentation, you can confidently refer to items, not forget your content, and come across as a well-prepared orator who is an expert at the subject matter in hand.

4. Be reasonable and genuine

You don't need to be cracking your audience with the best jokes there are. Your audience is here to gain information on an important subject matter, and you should deliver to them exactly that. Be reasonable and genuine right from the beginning of the presentation. Give them a brief of what exactly you are going to be talking about in the presentation.

Also, give them a quick rundown of all the sub-topics that you'll be covering. You need not go in detail about it. Simply list out in bullet points the scope of topic coverage for the day and begin your presentation. When you do so, there would be numerous people in the audience who would stick till the end in case the first few topics don't interest them, but the latter half of the presentation does.

An important aspect of being reasonable and genuine is to introduce yourself properly. State your name and designation and let them know why you are qualified enough to be speaking about the topic. Consider introducing yourself first and then the topic.

However, this doesn't mean that you need to be stating your high school or college credentials. Simply state what experience you have in the past that makes you a qualified person for speaking.

It's also a good idea to ask them right at the beginning if you are audible enough in the back or if your microphone is too loud. This helps you make adjustments in the beginning itself so that you don't need to interrupt yourself in the middle of the presentation.

5. Know what information to include

The art of presenting good content orally depends heavily on what you choose to omit. Once you've prepared all your slides, go through them once again, and identify which slides can be removed. If something doesn't sound relevant or needs supporting proof, consider omitting it out completely. After this, rearrange the information to create a logical flow.

Identify if there are any breaks in the content. Does something not make sense? Do you need to add an extra slide to explain what's coming up next? Do you necessarily have to add text to be able to do so? Would adding a graph or a chart do the job? Also, it's a good idea to start with lighter slides and then move on to the heavier information.

6. Learn how to tell stories

Even the driest topic can be turned into an engaging discussion by using storytelling. This means that one can use analogies, metaphors, or even personal experiences to draw similarities or differences. Doing so gives a character to your information and engages the imagination of your audience. Instead of trying to understand heaps of dry information, they are now grasping the information by drawing a conceptual and imaginative analogy.

Along with using metaphors or analogies, you also need to figure out the outline of your presentation. Doing so helps you place your analogies and metaphors in the right place so that they don't sound irrelevant or out of place. Do you need to draw a comparison right in the beginning? Does a specific theory have too many jargon words and could be simplified by using a metaphor? Identify such points in your slides and introduce storytelling elements accordingly.

CONCLUSION

Presenting with impact might not be a cakewalk, but it doesn't have to be impossible either. It requires practice, understanding, and adapting to the needs of the audience. While maintaining 'state of the art' items - a robust content structure, an engaging narrative, the right font, soothing colors, appropriate images, charts, and so on, is crucial, one also needs to figure out the 'state of the heart' requirements.

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Is the audience looking for in-depth detail on a specific topic, or do they need a generalized idea of a wide-scope topic? Do they need numbers and figures, or do they need theoretical understanding? Understand the objectives of the audience and model your presentation accordingly. This clear understanding also enables you to be confident about the subject matter. When you know the outline, you won't get anxious about what comes next.
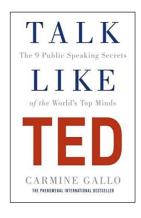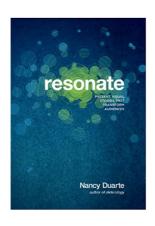
Pay more attention to how you are saying something rather than what you are saying. A mispronunciation can easily be overlooked by the audience if your delivery is so engaging that they don't have the time or mental space to ponder over it. It takes practice, but you can get there. Every great orator has had to identify their weak points and turn them into success.
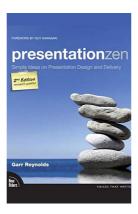
Remember, you do not need to hold onto your slide deck to deliver perfectly. With time, you'll begin to use those slides only for charts and images rather than any text information. The slides are simply there in a supporting capacity. They aren't the actual presentation. The real presentation is you!

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A few books that we recommend:

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