



**Helping individuals and companies
break out of their comfort zones
to become more successful**

Training | Coaching | Speaking
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Know Your Audience

The number one rule of successful presentation preparation is to know your audience. Here are some tips to consider when you're thinking about how to connect to your audience, whether it's an audience of 1 or 100:

- Know what's playing on station WIIFM. That's the station the people in your audience are tuned into - "What's In It For Me?" They're focused on WIIFM (pronounced "wiff-um") not because they are self-centered, but because they are bombarded with information and have to filter it in order to stay afloat. They can only retain a small part of what you're saying and they need to find which part is most relevant to them. State the WIIFM outright; for example, in a presentation about transitions, you might say, "If you understand the stages of reaction to change, you will be better able to understand what your employees will go through when the merger is announced next month."
- Know their style. Does this audience want to see the graphs? Do they want the big picture or the details? Are they geared towards defining the problem or hearing a solution?
- Know their background. Are they experts in the field you're talking about or novices? Will everyone understand the industry jargon that you're using? For example, if you mention "AEs" in a presentation, salespeople may interpret it as Account Executives, while those in the pharma industry may interpret it as Adverse Events (which are negative reactions to medication). You have to speak in a language that everyone can understand easily and be careful not to talk down to them or over their heads.
- Know their interest level. Are you trying to win over a hostile audience? Are you talking to an audience that is already passionate about the topic? Are they bored by the topic? If you're a tax accountant speaking to small business owners about the tedious details of the state tax code, you might have to work harder to keep their interest than if you were talking to other accountants. Similarly, if you're the speaker standing between the audience and lunch, there is a greater expectation that you will end on time (or better yet, even earlier).

Sometimes knowing your audience is easy because it's made up of people you know personally or work with on a daily basis. Even then, you should take a step back and rethink the audience in the context of this presentation.

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At other times, you don't know anything about them and you'll have to do some research. Do an internet search for the company or the individual and browse their websites. If they don't have a website, you can look for websites related to their industry to discover the hot topics or industry concerns. You also can get feedback from colleagues who know members of your audience.

What if you gather information about your audience, only to find out that they're a mix of different styles, backgrounds and interest levels? That situation is a challenge. You should choose the "relevant" subsection of the audience to focus on - for example, the decision makers, or the largest identifiable group in the audience. Be careful not to ignore everyone else. No one likes to be ignored and you never know what roles the other people in the room might fill in the future.

The next time you have to speak to an audience, whether it's an audience of 1 or 100, spend some time doing an audience analysis, using these tips. Then rework your presentation based on your analysis so that you can speak to them in language they understand and use material that makes sense to them. Ultimately, knowing your audience will make it easier for you to convey your message effectively. And it will ensure that the people in your audience understand your message and act on it, which is the point of giving a presentation!

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