Winning Strategies for Power Presentations

Jerry Weissman
Author of the Bestselling Presenting to Win

Jerry Weissman delivers lessons from the world's best presenters.
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Jerry Weissman
To my mentors:
Professors Harry Miles Muheim and Ormond Drake
at New York University

Ray Abel and Mike Wallace at CBS

Evelyn Grippo at Pinnacle Books
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Introduction

Natural and Universal

There is nothing new under the sun.
—Ecclesiastes 1:9

For businesspeople, presentations are an unnatural act. Presenters are not performers, nor are they graphic designers, nor do they have an abundance of time, and—what is most unnatural of all—whenever they have to deliver a mission critical pitch, their own elevated stress diminishes their effectiveness.

As a result, most business presentations devolve into a mind-numbing scenario in which a nervous person stands in front of a room giving a verbatim recitation of a disjointed set of begged, borrowed, or stolen slides to a bored audience for far too long.

In my role as a presentation coach, I sought to end this vicious cycle and found it in the commonality with other communication modes. Presentations are not unique public speaking situations practiced by a privileged few on special stressful occasions; presentations have the same goals and dynamics as meetings, conversations, telephone calls, job interviews, and interpersonal communications. They all aspire to convey ideas between two separate people or groups of people, to ensure that both parties connect, and to ensure that the “co-” in communication is achieved.
Presentations also have the same goals and dynamics of broader communication modes such as literature, cinema, media, and politics. Many of the expert practitioners in these fields have shared their secrets in public, so I have tapped into their advice and adapted them into a set of best practices that you can use in your presentations. In these pages you’ll find the wisdom of Mark Twain, Woody Allen, Johnny Carson, Ronald Reagan, and many other leaders in their field of communication, with special mention to Scott Adams, the creator of *Dilbert*, the wonderful comic that strip satirizes dysfunctional communications in business.

The place of honor, however, goes to Marcus Tullius Cicero, the great Roman statesman and orator, whose highly functional advice forms bookends in the first and culminating chapters of this volume, as well as here in the Introduction, where his words, written in 55 BC, support the natural approach:

*The special province of the orator is, as I have already said more than once, to express himself in a style at once impressive and artistic and conformable with the thought and feeling of human nature.*

This universal vision was reinforced in 2012 when Cheers Publishing in Beijing translated my first three books on presentation skills into Chinese and released them as a trilogy. Originally, I wrote *Presenting to Win: The Art of Telling Your Story*, *The Power Presenter: Technique Style and Strategy*, and *In the Line of Fire: How to Handle Tough Questions* as individual books rather than as an omnibus so that I could provide readers with a thorough methodology for each of the essential elements of every presentation:

- How to develop a clear and logical story
- How to design simple and effective graphics
- How to speak with confidence and authority
- How to handle challenging questions

Seeing the three books together and in Chinese (even though I did not understand the Chinese characters) validated my view that the essential elements of any presentation have the same roots and—except for PowerPoint—have existed since Cicero’s time in ancient
Rome, and even earlier, in Aristotle’s time in ancient Greece. The principles established by those classical philosophers are still applicable today. I have been using modern versions of them in the public and private programs of my coaching practice in Silicon Valley for almost a quarter of a century, and for a decade before that at WCBS-TV in New York in my role as a producer and director of public affairs programs.

To share these timeless and borderless practices with you, I’ve crafted them as individual lessons in succinct, bite-sized, chapters. I used the same approach in my previous book, Presentations in Action, as well as in blogs posted on the Forbes and Harvard Business Review websites, and on indezine.com, a dedicated PowerPoint site, where some of these new lessons have previously appeared.

Beyond presentations, you’ll also find advice on how to handle special speaking situations such as large audience formats, panel discussions, product demonstrations, interviewing, scripted speeches, and voice and speech quality. And for those of you fortunate enough to reach the top of the business mountain, I’ve also included ten best practices for my specialty, the Initial Public Offering road show.

I’ve had the privilege of coaching the IPO road shows of nearly 600 companies, among them Cisco, Intuit, Yahoo!, eBay, Netflix, and Dolby Laboratories. For each of them, I used the same techniques as I did with another 600 companies, coaching them to develop presentations to raise private financing, sell products, form partnerships, and gain approval for internal projects—further substantiation of the universality of this methodology.

At the foundation of all these applications is the larger message that you can access and employ the same best practices that have proven successful over time and across diverse geographies, cultures, and media, to help you to become a Power Presenter.

You have my very best wishes for success.
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