

Winning the Audience Over Right From the Start

based on the work of Patti Hathaway, *The Change Agent*

How do you "grab" the audience from the start of the presentation? Is there a sure-fire way to relax your nerves and connect with the audience at the same time? How do you ensure that the audience is tuned in and turned on to what you are sharing? Openings are the toughest part of a presentation for most presenters. The research tells us that a presenter has only about 30 seconds to make a good first impression. Think about typical openings you have heard presenters give: jokes, thanks for inviting me, I'm glad to be here, housekeeping items, name dropping, etc. Most of us don't tune in at all until the presenter starts the "real" content, do we? Yet, many presenters start talking immediately after the applause ends to cover up their own anxiety and to project confidence. Consider this... Open by nonverbally noticing and receiving your audience for at least five seconds. Why? Because speaking is an act in which you give and receive. Most presenters tend to give, give, give or push, push, push more information at you. Take a deep breath and center yourself. Allow room for give and take.

OPEN WITH A PERSONAL STORY THAT REFLECTS YOUR HUMANNESS

The opening line is the most critical line which should connect the presenter to the audience. Opening with silence followed by a sentence that grabs the audience's attention compels people to listen immediately. Tell your story only to individuals, keeping soft eye contact with each participant for 5 - 10 seconds, before moving on. Avoid sweeping eye contact with the entire audience, yet look at no one in particular. Individual eye contact lessens the fear factor with larger audiences. You are merely having a conversation with individuals who happen to be in a group. Speak in short sentences and pause frequently to really connect with individuals. Use humor based on your own experiences and limitations as a human being. In this era of political correctness, jokes can get you in trouble. Personal stories endear you.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Think about your presentations. What is your message? Tell your organization's OWN stories and anecdotes to coincide with your main points or content. Consider the following and how you might adapt them to your subject matter. Incorporate your answers into your presentation in order to build more meaning, great rapport, and genuine connection with the audience.

- Who was the most influential _____ in your life?
- What's the most poignant real life story you've heard about your organization?
- What was a significant benefit you personally received from _____?
- Name two _____ from your organization who have impacted ____ for the better?
- What is your organization's basic philosophy and mission?
- What are the top three concerns people share with the changes in ____?

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