Tips for Presenting at Events and Conferences
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Presenting before a group at an event or conference is one of the most impactful ways to build your practice and strengthen your personal brand as an expert in your community. However, speaking in public is a phobia that many suffer from. It's been said that public speaking rates above snakes and burning up in a fire on the scale of scary things! With some preparation and practice, not only can you overcome your hesitation to speak in public, you can excel as a presenter. Developing your presentation in advance will help you ensure that you resonate with your audience and communicate your message effectively. Let's review some tips that will help you deliver a great presentation.

Know Your Audience
Think about the presentations you have attended in the past that were memorable for you. You probably learned something new or gained a new perspective or insight. A common mistake made by conference presenters is to assume that the audience doesn't know anything and needs educating on their topic. Before crafting your presentation, do your research. Find out exactly who is attending the conference and what their level of understanding is about your topic. Is the audience composed of professionals, laypeople, or both? The best speakers meet their audience where they are and lead them on a journey to a new and exciting discovery.

Don't Rush to Your Slide Deck
A common mistake by novice presenters is to begin by creating a PowerPoint slide deck. This typically results in wordy slides that act more like cue cards for the speaker than information enhancers for the audience. It's easy to end up with way more slides than you need to deliver your message. The best presentation skills won't overcome a message that isn't organized and clear. Start your presentation preparation by making a clear outline of the key points that you would like to communicate to your audience. Keep the number of concepts that you would like to present limited. It is best to narrow your focus to three to four key points and to provide multiple stories to illustrate and give context to them. Be sure that you have a clear beginning and a clear ending. Think of your slide deck as providing visual support to the points you are making. Use colorful graphics and images and keep bulleted text and copy to a minimum. You want your audience listening to you and not reading from your slides.

Be Aware of Time Constraints
The right timing is essential when giving your presentation. Running longer or shorter than the allotted time is uncomfortable for the speaker, event organizer, and audience. If you are given thirty minutes to present, prepare thirty minutes of material – no more and no less. The best speakers know exactly how much time they have been given to work with and tailor their presentation to fit that time. Rehearse the timing of your presentation multiple times. When presenting, keep your eye on the time. If you are short on time and long on content, cut something out. Only you will miss it.

Use Your Body Language

There have been a number of studies on the topic of nonverbal communication. Most experts agree that over 70% of all communication is nonverbal. Body language plays an important role in presentations. Your tone of voice, pacing, gestures, and energy level can determine how engaged your audience is. When possible, don't remain rigidly anchored behind a podium. Feel free to move around and use the entire stage to build rapport with your entire audience. Vary your gaze at the different sections of the audience—left, center, and right. Planting a familiar, friendly face front and center can go a long way to making you feel comfortable. Great presenters also know how to use gestures to capture and hold their audience's attention and emphasize their points. Maintain an open and relaxed posture. Avoid movements that distract from your presentation, such as putting your hands in your pockets, or fiddling with clothing or laser pointers.

Practice, Practice, Practice

This is an unskippable step that many rookie presenters neglect. Rehearsing provides you with certainty and confidence by giving you a mastery of what you are going to say. The more times you say the words out loud, the more you will be familiar and fluent with them. Rehearse your presentation in private, but don't stop there. Audio or video record your presentation and play back the recording to analyze your tone, pace and performance. Better yet, rehearse your presentation in front of a trusted friend or colleague and be open to constructive criticism. It is normal to feel self-conscious the first few times you give your presentation. If presenting in front of a friend makes you feel uncomfortable, it will help you overcome the actual feelings you may have when presenting in front of a full audience.

Get Comfortable with the Space

When given the opportunity, make an advance visit to the room you will be speaking in to check it out. Knowing its location will help you avoid a last-minute panicked search for the room you are supposed to be speaking in. Most conference organizers have a pre-presentation checklist of the items you need to present. This typically includes a screen, projector, remote control pointer, and sound system including a microphone. Make sure that all of the equipment you need is present, including technology connection adapters, is there and in working order. This will eliminate unwanted surprises and stress. Walk around the presentation space to become comfortable with the room. It's best to know ahead of time if you will be speaking in a larger or smaller room than you have anticipated.

Check Your Backup

Murphy's Law states that anything that can go wrong will go wrong. This is especially true with technology. It is completely possible that, even with the best of planning, your technology may fail. Flash drives fail, laptops reboot, and projector lightbulbs burn out at the most inconvenient times. Have a back-up plan so that you aren't left stranded if things go sideways. Upload a copy of your presentation slides to Dropbox and email yourself a copy of the link so that you'll have it at hand if needed. Unless you are a seasoned presenter, avoid video clips and other multimedia

elements. There is nothing worse than a tech failure in front of an audience you hope to impress.

Presentation Skills are Lifetime Skills
Practice the tips we've reviewed, and you'll be on your way to giving great presentations. With presenting, the more often you do it, the easier it gets. Eventually you'll reach the point where you won't be able to remember how nervous you used to get!