

## QUIT PUTTING PEOPLE TO SLEEP! 10 Presentation Killers that are Sedating America

John Stewart's "The Daily Show" is considered one of the top cable news programs today. Our local news not only tells us what the weather is, but they show us the poor sap standing out in the blizzard with their umbrella being blown inside out, all while more news scrolls along the bottom of the screen. Audiences want more than information—they want to be entertained as they are informed.

The average corporate employee sits through approximately 700-1,000 hours a year enduring long meetings and boring presentations. Our media delivery has changed over time, but our corporate presentation styles have somehow been frozen in the dark ages—which could explain why most presentations begin with someone darkening the room and warning their audiences that they have 87 slides to get through in the next 15 minutes!

1. **Read directly from the slides**—If you are going to do a “read-along” be sure to have music and a bouncing ball for the audience to follow! Save everyone some time and just email them the book without having to gather together and do a group reading. Put fewer bullets on your slides to force you to turn and speak to your audience.
2. **Speak in a monotone voice**—If you don't sound excited about your own presentation, why should anyone else be excited? This is usually caused by reading your information directly off of a slide. Ask yourself what your point is, and then speak from your heart...or at least your brain!
3. **Put too much (tiny) information on slides.** Be sure your audience can read the info from the furthest point in your room. Remember, your slides are FREE—break a busy slide into two and edit, edit, edit! I want to scream when I hear a presenter say “I know you can't read this from back there, so let me tell you...” If you *know* they can't see it, **DON'T PUT IT ON A SLIDE!**
4. **Bore the audience with too much detail.** A common mistake that presenters make is assuming one presentation can be dumped on any audience from the executive management team to the software architects to the customer support personnel. It is safer to provide less detail and allow questions than to cram every bit of data that has ever been written on the subject into your presentation and force your audience into a data-induced coma! If you truly need that safety net of having everything documented on slides to cover yourself put them at the end of your slide deck or hide slides and only reveal them if needed.
5. **Go over allotted time.** If you are asked to speak for 20 minutes, prepare for 20 and then ask yourself, “What would I cut out if I get there and I only have 15 minutes? How about 10 minutes?” Unless you have had professional training as an auctioneer it is not wise to just increase your speed to cram your 20 minutes of material into 10! Remember, **LESS IS MORE!** They will mentally leave whether you are done or not, so don't go over your time limit!

6. **Keep their back to the audience.** Well this is an easy one to fix...QUIT READING FROM YOUR SLIDES and just talk to your audience. Put away the crazy laser pointers too. I don't know who thought it would be a good idea to give a nervous and shaky person a tiny light that they have to turn around to point with, but they obviously didn't teach presentation skills! If you must point something out, move to the side of the screen and use your hand or a pointer. I found a great extender fork that I often use for a pointer and it keeps people's attention. (I think they're afraid that I might poke them with it.)
7. **Fidget with pens, jewelry or other items in hand.** At times I believe people are having an out of body experience while they stand and present. I have watched a man jingle change in his pocket for 45 minutes as he spoke and I have seen people practically molest a podium while standing behind it, all because their brain was so focused on what they were saying, they didn't realize what their body was doing. Minimize the risk of fidgeting by removing objects from your pockets, bungee badges from your waist, and clicking pens within a 5 mile radius. I love using a presentation remote to change my slides, which frees me to walk around as well as gives me something to hold in my hand—and if you fidget with the remote...well, your slides will turn faster and your audience will be grateful for your brevity.
8. **Speak too softly**—especially when presenting to virtual audience. I don't know why people squint their eyes when they are trying to hear someone who is speaking softly, but that is great visual feedback for the person speaking like a librarian. Over the phone, you have a whole different challenge. You can't see their eyes squinting. The audience has already pushed their volume button up as far as it goes and they are laying their ears directly on the speaker. The challenge is most people use their “inside voice” all day at work and they were taught in school to save their “outside voice” for recess. Well it's time to reawaken those vocal muscles and learn to project your voice to be heard loud and strong during presentations! Practice in your car (with your windows rolled up if you are shy), by projecting with volume and through your diaphragm (belly)—go ahead try it. Yell, “I AM A LOUD TALKER. EVERYONE CAN HEAR MY VOICE!”
9. **Stand in one spot.** Keep in mind, if people don't have to move their heads from side to side, they will move them up and down (as in a big head bob as they fall asleep). Movement is the animation for your voice. The room is your stage. Look around and find spots to move into your audience and make a connection. If you are using a presentation remote, you won't have to worry about being anchored to your laptop either.
10. **Look at the floor, ceiling or one person instead of the entire audience.** Eye contact is a very critical component to audience engagement. Nervous people either lock their eyes on one person or the floor. Poor presenters keep their eyes on the screen as they read their slides. Great presenters make a connection with each of the people in their audience—or at least each person thinks the presenter has connected with them. Try and stay 2-3 seconds with each person, or use the rule of thumb of finishing a sentence or thought on each person before moving to the next. Don't leave out the poor people on the sides. Before you begin, look

around the room and see where people will be sitting. Tell yourself to be sure and connect with each person to keep them engaged.

## **SUMMARY**

John Stewart's "The Daily Show" is considered one of the top cable news programs today. Audiences want more than information—they want to be entertained as they are informed. Our media delivery has changed over time, but our corporate presentation styles have somehow been frozen in the dark ages—which could explain why most presentations begin with someone darkening the room and warning their audiences that they have 87 slides to get through in the next 15 minutes!

Gina Schreck is the president of Pinnacle Achievement and she is on a mission to rid the world of BORING presentations. If you would like more information or coaching for yourself or your teams on making Presentations That Sizzle, contact Gina Schreck at [Gina@AchieveWithPinnacle.com](mailto:Gina@AchieveWithPinnacle.com) or call 1-877-978-0887. But please, please, QUIT PUTTING PEOPLE TO SLEEP!