

You Can't See Their Eyes Roll **The Challenges of Presenting in a Virtual Environment**

When you are presenting in person, you can constantly monitor your audience for engagement. Are they with me? Do they disagree with the plan I am presenting? Do they understand what I am talking about? If you see someone open their laptop and start checking email, you can call on them to participate or move closer to them to pull them back in, but what happens when your audience is on the phone? You don't see them sleeping. You can't see them working on another project and you definitely can't see their eyes roll.

Another challenge in a virtual meeting is making sure everyone is participating. You typically have a few dominant people who take over while the quiet ones on the team sit back and endure another "waste-of-time-meeting." There are a few things you can do to ensure your meetings and presentations are more effective when you can't see the faces of your audience.

1. If your attendee list is less than 25, draw an imaginary conference table on a white board or piece of paper at your desk. Now write everyone's name as if they were sitting around the table. (Yes, I know, you can just print out a list of everyone that is in attendance, but if you are a visual person the table works better.)
2. Now as you begin your meeting, you put a tick mark next to the name of the person speaking—even if it is your own name. Within a few moments, you will SEE who has "checked out" and who is talking too much.
3. Now simply say to the chatty-Cathy's on the call, "That's a great point, AND since we haven't heard from Bob, I would really like to get his input. Bob, how do you feel we should proceed in this next step?"
4. During a virtual presentation you need lots of interaction. Lots of Q&A time. The challenge is when you ask a question and then call on someone, (i.e. So what happened on this last week...Bob?) you catch them off guard. You and I both know that Bob was reading the latest Dave Barry book so he did not hear your question. This is why Bob would quickly dive for his mute button and then ask you to repeat the question. WASTE OF TIME! Instead, call on Bob first and then ask the question. "Bob, what was it that happened on this last week?" BETTER!
5. On conference calls, use lots of colorful picture words to keep people engaged. "The five of us are in a run-down single-engine bucket of bolts at 28,000 feet and now we've got to work together to build a parachute or none of us will survive."

This is much more intriguing than “We’ve got a deadline and we’ve got to work together.” When you engage the brain, the rest of the body will stay with you. Try this, “I want you to imagine standing in front of our biggest customer, Katherine. You are starting to sweat...” This technique gets people to go where ever you tell them to and they are listening. “I want you to picture the top of a mountain...”

Remember that when you can’t see the faces of those in your audience, you will have to put a little more effort and creativity into your presentations to keep your audience engaged, but it is worth it. If they ARE rolling their eyes it will be because they are in awe of your SIZZLING presentation style!

© 2007 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 or call 1-877-978-0887. But please, please, QUIT PUTTING PEOPLE TO SLEEP!