

10 Performance Tools to Make Your Presentations Memorable



Are you ready to become a superstar presenter?

No matter where you are as a presenter (beginner, somewhat experienced or advanced), these tips will help you take your presentations from good to great! These are strategies I gained from more than 20+ years in the professional performance industry. Whether you own a business, manage a company, speak with audiences professionally or just have a message to share, these methods will help you create a better connection with your audience.

Become the superstar you've been keeping inside!

Audiences often tune-out dull presenters, even if their content is important. Don't let this happen to you! The performance tools in this guide will significantly improve your chances of keeping your audiences engaged and informed throughout your presentations. They are more likely to remember you as the performer who connected with them, helped them, entertained them or gave them a reason to be their best. You will become the person that helps them realize they already have the resources they need to reach their success. That's powerful stuff. Enjoy!

Ladies and gentlemen...Presenting the 10 Performance Tools to Make Your Presentations Memorable!

1. Pay attention to possible distractions... All of them!

I was the talent for a commercial featuring a local car-dealership. We shot the video outside, in the car lot. It was a beautiful sunny day with very little wind (that's always good when shooting ads outside for video and audio purposes). We were done in less than two hours. I left the shoot thinking, "Wow, that went very smooth. That rarely happens." Two days later, I get a call from the video production company asking if we could shoot the commercial, again. The video company let me know there were two birds flying through the camera shot on one scene. Another scene had a very distracting glare off of one of the car windows. A few more distractions were noticed, which would have been very distracting to the viewers watching the commercial. We reshot the footage and made sure all of the takes were distraction-free. The spots turned out great! The video production company taught me a great lesson: People are easily distracted. I remember watching a presentation with a friend. After the talk, I asked my friend what he is going to take away from the program. His response was, "I won't forget that his (the speaker's) zipper was down the whole time." Your goal is to have audiences pay attention to and remember your message. Minimize distractions as much as you can. You may not get them all, but you'll increase your chances of speaking success!

Lesson: Your audience should focus on your message, not the dangling string from the ceiling, the loud, creaky part of the stage, the Hawaiian shirt you thought would be funny to wear, etc. Scope the entire area for noise-makers, light-producers, etc. If there is any little thing the audience can pick up on, they will. It wouldn't hurt to make sure phones are on silent or vibrate - same goes for small children - I'm kidding, of course. Think of your physical and verbal distractions, as well - hand movements, "Ums," "Ahs," and "Uhhs", etc.

2. Know your order

I had the pleasure of emceeing a gala event for the Boys & Girls Club. It was a big deal. They had a steak dinner, entertainers and a speaker who was a well-respected athletic coach. Everyone was there to see him. As the emcee, I had a list of events and did my best to make sure we were on time. We were at the entertainment portion of the program. The last of the entertainers were a group of middle-school kids. Some of them sang while the others in the group were dancing. Their voices were like a conglomerate of Celine Dion, Whitney Houston and Michael Bublé. The dancing was spot-on and was some of the best choreography I've seen. Amazing! It brought the house down. In my astonishment, I remembered I had to get back on stage to fulfill my emcee duties. I thanked the sponsors, the volunteers and everyone who made it to the event. One problem - I forgot we still had a keynote speaker. Once I was alerted to my mistake, I apologized and introduced the coach. I felt awful. He couldn't have been more kind and gracious about my oversight. He stepped up to the microphone and said, "You know, it actually felt kind of good to be forgot about, for once." That was a big lesson for me - Always keep key elements in mind!

Lesson: After you've prepared your presentation, make sure you know your order of events. Always think, "What happens next?" Be sure to include each part of your story, joke, and lessons you are presenting. It's OK if you leave something out of your talk or if you forget a section of your presentation. The audience doesn't know what you planned to say. It's more important to keep going and deliver the story that hits home, the joke that wins them over or the lesson that has personal meaning. As long as the main focus of your message is present and you are polished on the segments you are presenting, you'll be in great shape!



3. Engage from the start

Writing for some topics, which are primarily loaded with data points and routine information, can be challenging. That's why you see so many headlines and subheadlines with phrases like, "The 5 Secrets to..." or "She thought she was safe until..." It's all in an effort to keep you reading. Your brain wants to see what happens. Be creative in your opening. Make sure it's a fitting grabber, though. It should be relevant to your topic and your message.

Lesson: You've heard many presenters start with formalities like, "It's great to be here," "Thank you for inviting me here," etc. Did you know your listeners are already tuning you out, if that is how you start your presentation? These usual phrases are things we are used to hearing, so our brains tune out a lot of what is being said, and some of what follows. Start with a story. Or, better yet, in the middle of a story - "I was lying on the ground, looking up at the people crowded around me, wondering if I would live." You could start with surprising statistics, a big action, or one of my favorites I've seen from a few speakers... pure silence. The idea is to have your audience thinking, "What is going to happen next?" It will keep them engaged, for sure!

4. BE your character



Working in professional theater is a personally rewarding job. Like many industries, there are a lot of challenges behind the scenes. I was given the opportunity to work as a theater manager at a dinner-theater I loved performing in. The people were great, the experience was unique and the shows were top-notch. One evening, before a performance, I was doing my job as manager visiting tables, helping to fill coffee before the performance and at intermission, and taking care of any guest issues. I enjoyed it, but I wasn't fulfilled. I had a forced smile with my guests, I was aloof, and it was easy for my mind to wonder. I stopped by a table where I saw a familiar face. It was my school bus driver from when I was in high school, Kenny. Kenny was a farmer and one of the nicest guys you could ever meet. The first thing he said to me was, "Rick! What are you doing here?" I explained that I accepted the new job several months ago. He said point-blank, "This isn't you. As much as I love seeing and talking with you, I can see in your face that this isn't what you should be doing. You belong on that stage - not down here." He was right. I felt like I was playing the part of a manager, in which I didn't have much experience. I knew I wasn't serving our guests as well as I could. My heart and mind were focused on being a better performer. I started finding ways to be more of myself, instead of being a manager. Things turned around quickly and the comments we received on our guest experience went from good to excellent. Be yourself. It always makes things better.

Lesson: This is in reference as to who YOU are. Play the part of YOU as authentically as possible. That's the person your audience should see and hear throughout your presentation. They will buy in to more of who you are and will listen to more of your message if they see the best version of YOU. If you are someone who is a low energy person, you may need to work at putting some dynamism into your presentations. Energy isn't about being loud and boisterous. It's about being good-spirited, willing to serve your audience and having a bit of pep in your step.

5. Talk to people you know

A tip I learned early in my voice-over career (from one of the best VO coaches in the industry) is to speak as if a person you care about is resting on your shoulder or is close by and you're having an engaging conversation. Of course, this is for straight reads and more serious scripts in the voice-over world. But, the idea is a great one I've applied to presentations with great success. There are serious moments in some of my talks that require me to make all of my audience people I care about. My tone, inflection and even my physicality is more comforting in those instances. Audiences tell me they feel closer to me in those moments in my presentations. It takes practice, but you'll know when you "get it." Your audience will tell you.

Lesson: Instead of imagining your audience in their underwear (which does not work for nervous speakers), imagine them as people you know and care about. Speak to them with the same tone and inflections you would speak to a best friend or someone else really close to you. Be loose, fun, caring, joyful and expressive. It makes a world of difference in how you present.

6. Dialogue between two or more characters shall be distinct

When I performed one of my one-person shows, I would use characters that had dialogue with each other. Not only did I position my body in different ways, but my face would drastically change, too. This helped the audience remember which character was which. Voice inflections may include tone, pitch, pace, and accents. Vary it up!

Lesson: You're in the middle of a great story about being with some friends on an adventure. Trent, Nate, and Lisa are in your story and one of them says something really funny. One of the few ways your audience may differentiate the characters is by you saying something like, "Trent said...", "...then, Lisa said...", and so on, using the your natural speaking voice and barely changing inflections. Or, even better, you may take on the physicality of each character, use various vocal changes for each character, and standing in different locations for each character involved in your story. This helps the audience grasp what each character is saying and doing within the context of the story. I realize this is challenging for many of you reading this. To capture and engage your audience, you must do something to stretch your comfort zone. It doesn't have to be over-the-top. But, it does have to be something which helps your audience understand and enjoy more of your story. Have fun with it, too!



7. Know when to move on



Early in my stand-up comedy career, I performed a bit about dogs. “How come you never hear dogs bark with different accents?” That was my opening line into a segment in which I would proceed to offer my take on what it would be like if dogs from different parts of the world had accents. After about four or five the audience “got it” and the joke had run its course. But, I was still a pup on the stand-up circuit and wanted the audience to hear ALL of the ones I came up with because I thought they were funny. It felt flatter than a can of soda left open for a year. I’m not kidding when I say half of the thirty people there got up from their seats and went to the bar. It was a HUGE lesson learned. Keep it short and keep it moving!

Lesson: When you’re presenting your message, remember that you want the audience thinking, “What happens next?” If they’re stuck thinking, “OK? I know. You already said that. I get the point,” you’ve been on one section of your topic for too long. Great performers know attention spans are minimal and they keep things short and sweet. Stand-up comedians know this, very well. If they’re on one topic for too long, their audiences become owly, quickly, and will begin to fidget, get up and use the restroom, or even start heckling. You should keep your audience thinking, “Oh, I don’t want to miss what happens next,” even if they do have to use the restroom. :)

8. Learn the “Tilt”

I had rehearsal with our improv troupe (which always seems weird to people...“How can you rehearse improv?” It’s more about rehearsing techniques. We’re not scripting anything. I promise.) Anyway, we were performing an exercise in which each of the characters had a unique quirk. The quirk I was given was that I couldn’t stop moving. My scene partners began the scene at a house. I eventually entered the scene and asked, “Where do you want this lamp, ma’am?” She told me and I left. I came back moments later and said, “We’re having problems getting the piano through the doorway. We’re just going to leave it there, OK?” After the scene ended, I had a standing ovation from all of our troupe members for taking “moving” in a different direction than what was expected - they were expecting fidgety, frantic, non-stop movement, etc. Find ways to switch things up in your presentations.

Lesson: Have you ever looked at something so much you’ve taken it for granted? Who hasn’t, right? Well, have you ever looked at that same something and noticed something you never paid attention to before, or saw it in a completely different way? That is, basically, what the

tilt is all about. It's changing perspectives, unexpected turn of events, or uncovering a new development. You can apply this in your presentations in many ways, but the one that is easiest is in your story-telling. For example, you may begin a story about how you saved a four-year old from getting hit by a car. Maybe you jumped into action, sweeping up the four-year old and running to safety across the street. Suddenly, the four-year old starts licking your face over and over and sniffing in your pockets for food. You just tilted the story by revealing that the four-year old was a dog. They, most likely, thought it was a child. So, this disrupts their brain process in a good way! Our brains like to be surprised.

9. Stories should have status shifts



I perform in a sketch comedy troupe with three other very funny fellows. We've developed a ton of sketches that could fill several hours worth of shows. A common theme, in a majority of our sketches, is a high status person conversing with a low status person. Eventually, the low status person ends up becoming the hero or having the last laugh. This works with our audiences because we are incorporating humor and it has a happy ending. Audiences love that!

Lesson: Imagine if you were telling your audience a story about a time you were being bullied when you were younger. Then, as you wrap up the story, the audience finds out there is no happy ending where you actually come out on top. The bully still wins. There's nothing wrong with the story, per se, but the audience is left feeling empty. Many speakers don't realize that the audience is always pulling for them to win. They want to hear about your successes, your triumphs, and your experience overcoming adversities. If you were to tell the same bully story, except you come out on top, that is an example of a status shift. The bully had the power, but in the end you wound up victorious and the bully was left sucking his thumb. Anytime you have a story with someone having higher power and another person having lower power, and the tables turn so the lower power person winds up winning in some fashion, you will fulfill the satisfaction of your audience.

10. Find a way for everyone to win

It's amazing what people think qualifies as an awesome prize. I hosted a fun pop culture trivia game show that audiences adored. Contestants won prizes throughout the show, which were some pretty cool things (big remote control cars, \$20 gift certificates, etc.) and some pretty lame things (pens, coasters, etc.) Our grand prize consisted of dinner and a hotel stay worth around \$200. A few years after the game show stopped running, I was stopped by a middle-aged gentlemen in a restaurant. "You ran that game show, didn't you?" he asked. I

responded affirmatively. He said, “Wait right there.” He went to his car and came back. “This is one of my favorite things, ever!” he said as he held up a can koozie. He went on to tell me that he was in the audience for one of our game shows and I tossed him the koozie as a giveaway. He wasn’t even a contestant. He was just watching the show, but he still received something. He said the koozie fit in his cup holder perfectly. He hasn’t found any like it since getting that one. The guy went out of his way to tell me how much he appreciate what I had given him a few years prior. THAT is the point of everyone winning.

Lesson: A great presenter will find ways throughout their talk to reward the audience. People like to receive things, especially things they weren’t expecting. If you have volunteers for role-playing exercises, give them something for helping you. If someone correctly answers a trivia question you asked, give them something for taking a risk and answering accurately. You can offer snacks, books, coupons, shirts, etc. If you can give something to your entire audience, that is when you are connecting to a lot more people. If you truly want to serve your audience, inform them they can keep learning from you after your presentation. Maybe you offer coaching sessions, an audio program, video training, etc. Or, if you’re not selling products/services, you can hand out sheets with additional tips and your contact information on it so they can contact you if they have questions/comments about your presentation. The more you can offer a “prize,” the more your audiences will appreciate and respond better to you. After all, presentations are about the lasting impression your audience has of you.



So, there you have it. Ten performance tools to make your presentations memorable. After reading through the strategies, you may be thinking, “I don’t know if I can do this.” Look, many presenters I’ve coached have told me they don’t think they can do one or two of these things when they begin. Now, they’re using all ten of these techniques and knocking their presentations out of the park.

If you’d like to learn more about the ins-and-outs of presentation success, go to **DavisPresentationGroup.com** and register for *Ovational Speaking Workshop*. You’ll discover more in-depth training on how to become a superstar on stage and in the eyes of your audiences.

You can give a good presentation that is pleasant for your audiences. Or, you can deliver a performance that resonates with the people you wish to serve for a very long time. When you perform, you are compelled to give your best! Now, get out there and show ‘em what you got!

