

How Do You Give a Great Lecture?

Compiled by Daniel Federman, MD

As many of you know, the word “doctor,” derived from the Latin, doctoris, means teacher and is an agentive noun derived from the word docere. Teaching (like I just deftly did) has been and continues to be an important aspect of our profession. In addition to chronic disease management, cancer screening, disease prevention, navigating insurance plans, and educating patients, some of us, whether we like it or not, also find ourselves in the daunting and frightening position (at times) of having to speak publicly, which can be more intimidating than the relatively short one-on-one “health education talks” we share with patients behind closed doors.

Personally, I have been giving lectures for housestaff and at medical meetings for years. However, I have neither been offered nor sought out advice on how to give a great talk other than a one-hour faculty development lecture at my institution and a lecture at the American College of Physicians’ national meeting last year. With that in mind, for my benefit and yours, I finally decided to seek advice from experts on how to give a great lecture. This is part 1 in a two-part series.

—Dan Federman

Scott Litin’s Three Tips to Make Your Next Presentation Go Better Than Your Last

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(Editor’s Note: Scott Litin wrote his own introduction. He recommends that the speaker write his/her own introduction, especially if the person introducing the speaker is not a very close associate.)

Tip #1. Meet the Needs of the Audience. The most important thing a speaker can do is to determine what the audience wants or needs to know about the topic being presented. Many speakers make the mistake of presenting large amounts of data to an audience due to the fact the speaker is very interested about the topic him/herself. However, the key determination

that a speaker should make is to decide what the audience wants or needs to know about the topic being presented.

I know that whenever I walk into a lecture hall to speak, the audience is looking at me asking three questions: So what? Who cares? What’s in it for me? If I can answer those questions for the audience at the beginning of my presentation, I have “hooked” them, and they will want to hear more about the topic.

An example of an effective opening might be the following: “If we stay connected over the next 20 minutes, I will make you a promise. I promise you will learn several tactics, new ideas, and skills to help you make your next presentation better than your last. And why is this important to us as medical professionals? Because, colleagues, our careers depend on the way we present ourselves and our information to one another, our patients, and the public.”

Tip #2. Organize the Presentation. We have already discussed the importance of a strong opening statement that tells the audience you will meet its needs. Now, let’s think about content. The body of your presentation should emphasize a limited number of points. People will only remember a few points out of a 30-minute presentation, yet many speakers overwhelm their audiences with fact after fact. Your audi-

ence will be more likely to remember stories, however. That is why case presentations (stories) are so effective in keeping audiences attention as well as making key teaching points. If a speaker presents several cases with teaching points during his/her half-hour pre-

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sensation, the audience will stay more connected and therefore will remember more take-home points.

Finally, it is very important to have a strong closing. The audience remembers your summary better than any other part of the presentation. Don't blow that opportunity. Stating "Oh, this is my final slide, I guess I'm finished" is not a strong closing. You must tell members of the audience it is coming by stating "In summary" so that you will capture their attention and they will know your next points are important. Another tactic that is often used in closing is to state "If you only remember three messages from today's presentation, please remember the following...".

Tip #3. Make it a Performance. The data that you are presenting are available in journals, books, on the Internet, and in a variety of forms. However, you as the presenter are unique. Make presentation a performance, and allow yourself to connect with your audience. One way to do this is by simply smiling. A smile

makes you appear friendly and approachable. Remember, the audience wants you to succeed, and smiling helps you form a bond with them. It is also important to show enthusiasm when you present your topic. If you don't demonstrate passion for the topic you are presenting, how is your audience going to become excited about your message?

So in summary, by remembering to meet the needs of your audience (answering the three questions: So what? Who cares? What's in it for me?), by organizing your presentation (using an opening hook, limited number of points, and strong closing) and by making it a performance (engaging your audience by smiling and showing enthusiasm), I guarantee your next presentation will be better than your last! *SGIM*

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Michael Barry's "Top Ten" List for Giving Great Lectures (in no particular order)

1. Know your audience and gear your talk accordingly. Avoid terms that may be offensive to some. (I just heard a lecture where the term "physician extender" was used in a roomful of prominent nurse and PA executives. The knives were out!)
2. If you're lecturing to an unfamiliar audience, ask your hosts who will be there and what presses their buttons...for good or bad.
3. Always arrive early to check out the slides. (Flip through all of them; PowerPoint gremlins are ubiquitous.) Also review the room, the lighting, and the controls; get some water; see how far the podium is from the edge of the platform; check what's down below (remove any potted cacti), etc. In the drama that is your presentation, you are your own stage manager!
4. Save a file of your favorite cartoons and quotes and work them into your lecture...but sparingly and only when apropos. Use humor strategically, and again, know your audience. Rita Mae Brown has some great quotes ("If the world were logical, men would ride sidesaddle."), but she's not *comme il faut* for everyone. And work in a little self-deprecation...especially if you've spent any time at Harvard.
5. Occasionally, develop a talk on a brand new topic and/or rebuild your favorite "canned talk." Think hard about what works well and what doesn't. It's too easy to get comfortable and lazy with an old talk, which will inevitably get outdated, stale, and well...smelly.

6. After a lecture, make a few notes on things that you should change for the next time so you don't forget!
7. Be sure of your allotted time, and always aim to talk much less. If using slides, plan on no more than one minute per slide. Allow plenty of time for questions and audience interaction. Did you ever hear anyone criticize a speaker for a talk that was too short?
8. Emphasize themes and organizing principles in your content...point out ironies. (For example, there are no randomized trials of PSA, yet everyone's had one. There are 18 trials of decision aids showing they improve PSA decision-making, yet nobody uses them.) Use metaphor. ("Evidence, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.")
9. Read the work of Edward Tufte and, if at all possible, take one of his courses (see <http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/>). In particular, read his essay, "The Cognitive Style of Powerpoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within."
10. Avoid dissolves, spins, attacking lines of text from outer space, and other Powerpoint gimmicks. They're just distracting. Make sure your slides are sparse and readable from the back of the room. (One rule of thumb is to guess the age of the oldest person who'll be in the audience and divide by two to get the minimum font size.) Having to apologize for an unreadable slide is the death knell for a talk. *SGIM*

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