**The Difference Between Ending and Concluding A Presentation**

by Joseph Sommerville

Have you ever heard a speaker end a presentation by “telegraphing” the close with a phrase such as “Thank you” or “That concludes my presentation”? Speakers who rely on such phrases to trigger audience applause are like the driver who stops not because he’s reached his destination, but because he’s run out of gas or reached a roadblock. Effective presentations don’t simply end—they conclude. Unlike a mere ending, an effective conclusion accomplishes three specific goals: intellectual reinforcement, psychological closure and a behavioral roadmap.

**Intellectual Reinforcement.** Reinforcement is more than simply restatement. It’s a summary of your key messages. If you’ve communicated clearly, an audience member should be able to repeat your key messages to someone who wasn’t present. This is the opportunity to drive home the crux of your argument.

**Psychological Completion.** When you watch a movie, you get a sense of psychological closure before you see the credits start rolling. All the story elements have come together in a certain way that point towards closure. Closure provides the audience with a sense of mental satisfaction. Here are some specific techniques:

* Refer back to the introduction. If you’ve opened with a narrative or story, refer to it as you close. If you’ve opened with a statistic, frame it within the context of the time you’ve been speaking.
* Use a Quotation. Many books on public speaking recommend that you use a quotation to end your presentation. It’s good in theory, but is often poorly applied. The problem is that most speakers fail to make the quotation applicable to their presentation. Make certain any quotation you use is not only topical, but applicable as well.
* Use an anecdote. The appropriate anecdote can often be used to great effect. A short story can be just the vehicle to pull all your points together and leave something memorable. Don't drag on. Make certain it’s relevant to the presentation. Your own stories will work best. Don’t simply repeat one you’ve heard in another context or presentation.

**Behavioral Roadmap**

You’re guaranteed to lose 100 percent of the sales you never ask for. A behavioral roadmap tells the audience how they can implement your ideas, become a client, or take the next step in the sales process. Don’t leave them wondering. Help them to visualize the benefits they’ll enjoy when they take action on your recommendations. The more specific you can be, the more likely they are to take action.

Your conclusion is the last thing in the audience’s mind as you finish, so you’ll want to make that last impression a positive one. Here are three commonly used conclusions that detract from your message.

**The stall.** That means you're promising to conclude but you never quite get there. “In conclusion . . . , I'd like to just summarize by saying . . . , and to move towards my final point, . . . so I guess I’m at the end . . . ” Don't keep promising to conclude; just do it!

**The Porky Pig.** How does Porky Pig end every cartoon he appears in? Bdeh, bdeh, bdeh, that’s all folks! How many presenters do you hear say: “I guess I’m out of time so I’ll stop there. That's it, that's all I have to say. I'm done. I guess I should quit. They are telling me to stop. I’ll stop there for now.” These are all awkward endings. The presenter might as well say, “I don't know how to get out of this, so I'll just stop talking.”

**The Apology.** Don’t draw the audience’s attention to your shortcomings by apologizing. “I hoped to talk about x, y, and z, but only talked about A. I had hoped to cover more points, but I ran out of time.” “I was thinking maybe that we should have covered the problem or the solutions but I only talked about the problems, so I guess we'll just have to have another meeting on this.” These are all examples of telling the audience how you’ve failed as a speaker.

Your conclusion is the final opportunity to make your case in your presentation. When you can satisfy the audience, strengthen their understanding of your position and show them what next steps they should take, you’ll be closer to getting the business.

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