

Saying These 2 Words During a Big Presentation Could Damage Your Credibility

Every presentation is an opportunity to demonstrate your confidence, competence and character. You have the chance to prove that you understand your audience's concerns, and show how you can meet their needs. And, when you do it well, you also get to boost your personal and professional credibility. Until you say, "I'm sorry."

What's the impact? It makes you sound insecure and unprepared. It also puts others in the position of having to reassure you that whatever you're apologizing for isn't a big deal. And you don't want your audience to be focused on tending to *your* needs; it's your job to focus on tending to *theirs*.

Here are three things that presenters often apologize for, and what to do instead:

1. "I'm sorry, but I'm nervous."

Being nervous for a big presentation is a given. If you have something at stake, like a business outcome, a relationship, or your reputation, you're going to feel it. Here's what I can tell you from three decades of experience helping people become better presenters: more often than not, your anxiety is barely visible to the audience until you say, "I'm sorry, but I'm nervous."

And if you've gotten feedback that your anxiety is evident to others? Plan to take a break early in your presentation where you can take a breath and regroup.

2. "I'm sorry - it looks like the technology isn't working...again. Give me just a minute here...."

As someone who has presented in two separate blackouts (one where even the toilets didn't flush), I can say that there is no substitute for three things: 1) doing a test run with the technology right before the presentation; 2) identifying *in advance* who your emergency tech guru will be onsite; and 3) having a power-free Plan B.

3. "I'm sorry, but I don't know the answer to that question."

Leave off the apology and get down to business. If it's a question you should know the answer to, say, "I should know that offhand, and I can't recall it at the moment. I'll get back to you with that information by end of business today." If it's a question that someone else might know, offer it up to others: "I don't know that but I'm wondering if someone else here does." And if you just don't know, say so: "I don't know, and I'll find out and get back to you."

So when *should* you apologize? When you've said something that hurt or insulted someone (or a group of people) in the room -- whether or not you meant it, and whether or not you see it their way.