

How to Grab Your Audience's Attention, Immediately

Most of our sales pitches and presentations rely heavily on visual aids and collateral. These can be a crutch for those of us who might not know our content inside and out. But these can also get in the way of us focusing on the most important part of our pitch: the people we're speaking to.

Chances are, you're used to seeing people tapping away on their phones during a pitch. This has become so ubiquitous that we've come to ignore it as a signal that our listeners may be multitasking at best, and totally checked out at worst. And it's not the only sign that we're losing our audience. Some others include:

- Backing away from the table
- Fidgeting/tapping fingers
- No eye contact with you
- Nodding robotically
- Blank or confused facial expression
- Getting up and walking around
- "Move it along" hand gestures
- Crossed arms

While we can't know for sure what these behaviors mean, we can decide that these signs and signals offer us an opportunity to stop talking, pause, check in with our listeners, and redirect the conversation.

Here's what *not* to do: blame the listener. Embarrassed and defensive prospects are not positively inclined to buy from us.

So, what should you do instead? Here are three strategies:

1. Stop talking, and do a process check.

In my experience, taking a significant pause can sometimes be enough to capture your listener's attention. It's a change from the ongoing sound of your voice -- and if you haven't been pausing a lot, it can capture the ear, and get your audience to look up at you. Adding a check in can help redirect the conversation.

2. Take the heat.

You don't want to blame your listener for not paying attention, but you can blow the whistle on yourself. You don't have to beat yourself up, but you can call attention to your contribution to the dynamic, and offer to remedy it.

3. Ask for direct and immediate feedback.

While few of us want to know that we're off track, most of us would rather know that when we still had the opportunity to get back *on* track. If you notice your listeners may be checking out, check in: "I have a lot I'd like to address, but I want to make sure I'm covering what feels most critical to you and your business."

Your presentation isn't the most important part of your pitch -- the people you're presenting to are. As cosmetics founder Mary Kay Ash once remarked, "Pretend that every single person you meet has a sign around their neck that says, 'Make me feel important.' Not only will you succeed in sales, you will succeed in life."