BUSINESS PRESENTATION **REVOLUTION**

The Leader's Guide to Inspiring Action, Online or On Stage

PHIL WAKNELL

FOREWORD

Some choose to spend their time spotting trains or collecting stamps, even if many others believe there could be nothing more boring.

Since 2010, I have spent my days on business presentations: writing them, illustrating them, delivering them, and helping thousands of others to do so. Like trainspotting and stamp-collecting, many people might assume this is boring simply because that's how they feel watching most presentations.

Unlike these optional pastimes, business presentations are a necessary part of daily life in most organizations, so because they are mostly boring and ineffective, presentations are an expensive problem, and a revolution is long overdue.

By picking up this book, you have taken the first step towards joining the Business Presentation Revolution, and learning to feel as passionate about presentations as I am.

My aim is to awaken the credible, creative speaker you have the potential to become, to share a simple yet powerful method to make your presentations stand out and succeed, and to give you the confidence to lead and to inspire your audiences to follow you.

With a little learning and work, you can transform presentations from an unwelcome task into a pleasure, for you and your audiences, and thereby improve your results, motivate your teams, and boost your career.

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WELCOME TO THE REVOLUTION

Leadership communication

Are you a leader? How can you tell?

It's very simple: you can recognize leaders by their followers. Someone with no followers isn't a leader. You can't proclaim yourself a leader: it is the followers who choose to follow you, or not, so they define whether you are a leader.

Leadership is the art of being followed.

This means making others want to follow you. Managers can make people follow instructions. Leaders get people to follow them not because they have to, but because they want to.

You don't have to be a manager to be a leader. If you are selling products, services, ideas, or yourself, you need to make your audience want to follow you. If you are speaking to an audience, you need to make them want to follow you and your ideas.

A successful presenter, therefore, needs to be perceived as a leader worth following, yet we all know we are unlikely to follow a speaker who is poorly prepared, who speaks unconvincingly, whose presentation is simply boring, or whose slides hurt your eyes.

This book is for anyone who aspires to lead, who understands that strong communication skills are vital, and who realizes that the conventional wisdom has led most presentations to be boring and ineffective. It is for those who wish to stand out, to inspire, and to make people want to follow them.

If that sounds like you, read on. The business world needs more people like you.

The presentation problem

Imagine you are watching your favorite movie. You are captivated by the combination of a brilliant story, fine acting, and breathtaking images. At the end you feel happy or fulfilled, and you remember so much about the film even though they only told you a story.

Now imagine yourself in a meeting room, or a university, or a virtual meeting, listening to a presentation. How do you feel? Most likely, the only thing you remember afterwards is how bored you were and how much of your precious time you wasted.

Businesses, schools and organizations all around the world waste millions year after year because of bad presentations. If you add the time and money spent creating bad slides, delivering ineffective presentations and attending meetings, conferences and lectures that simply waste your time, you will quickly realize that all around you, presentations are a problem.

Think of it in pure business terms. If meeting participants remember nothing and waste their time, and if conference participants sit there bored and praying for the coffee break or evening cocktail, the return on that investment is minimal.

If your sales pitch fails to make customers want to buy from you, your revenues will suffer.

If your leadership presentation fails to inspire your employees, they won't be motivated to deliver on your strategy.

And if your results presentation fails to convince analysts that your leadership, strategy and results are a good deal for shareholders, your stock price and company value could plummet.

In all of these situations, you personally would not be succeeding as a leader, and that could have an effect on your own career.

The impact of a good or bad presentation has never been higher. The number of presentations given every day has never been greater. Yet most presentations are a waste of everybody's time, and most managers fail to act as leaders. We don't just have a problem. We have a huge problem.

After the revolution

Business presentations have mostly been poor for far too long. I've helped business leaders around the world with their most important presentations for many years, and they have seen what a difference a powerful presentation can make. It is a real competitive advantage.

To give you a very clear idea of how different a post-revolution presentation is, the table below outlines how applying the five key revolutions in this book will deliver results that are diametrically opposed to typical boring business presentations.

Before The Revolution	After The Revolution
Focused on information	Focused on transformation
All about the speaker and what he wants	All about the audience and what they need
Long enough, based on what the speaker wants to say	Short enough, based on what the audience needs to hear
Aims to include everything the speaker wants to cover	Aims to keep the audience's attention throughout
As standardized as possible	As personalized as possible
A monologue	As interactive as possible
Create slides, then (perhaps) think about what to say	Choose what to say, then (perhaps) illustrate it with slides

Tell them a lot, but they remember very little	Tell them a little, and they remember a lot
Full of facts and figures	Only essential data, backed up with examples and anecdotes
Lots of text on the screen	Visual slides with a few words
What you project is what you share (via email or printout)	You project simple slides, and share a clear document
Your audience sits through your presentation, trying hard to listen	Your audience enjoys your presentation so much that they listen without even trying
Your audience can't wait for the presentation to be over	Your audience can't wait for your next presentation

As you can see, this is a complete change. It does require a little effort on your part, but it will be worth it. How can I be so confident about this? Simply because so many different business presenters have already joined the revolution and seen the difference it makes to their success – and refuse to turn back.

Once you've read this book, you will no longer have any wish to suffer another boring pre-revolution presentation, or to inflict one on your audiences.

The science of presenting

I'm not a motor mechanic. I don't play with my car's engine, hoping to make it run better, because I don't understand how it works in detail: I leave that to the experts who are professionally trained and experienced.

The human brain is far more complex than an engine, and we know far less about how it works. Trying to present without learning a little about how the brain works is like throwing a spanner into a car and hoping it will fix the brakes.

Don't worry: I'm not going to get all neurological here. I'm just going to give you a few key highlights of what presenters need to know, in simple terms. I believe this is required knowledge for anyone who needs to give presentations, because when you present, you're trying to change what's in your audience's brains in some way. If you need to see the science behind these simple statements, I recommend you read the excellent *Brain Rules*, by Dr John Medina, and anything by Richard Wiseman or Richard Mayer.

1. There is no such thing as 'divided attention': there is 'undivided attention', or distraction. If you don't have your audience's undivided attention, they won't properly understand or remember what you're saying.

2. Attention spans are short even for interesting material, and almost zero for anything boring.

3. When it comes to presentations, two synonyms for 'boring' are 'typical' and 'predictable'.

4. Human beings cannot listen and read at the same time.

5. We forget most of what we hear, very quickly.

6. The more we say, the less people remember.

Business presenters need to know what science already knows about how their audiences pay attention and how they learn. Most presenters don't work hard enough to gain or retain attention, they expect people to read and listen simultaneously, they don't use memorable images, they are too long, and they usually say too much for fear of leaving something out.

A presentation is hard work. If the presenter doesn't put in the hard work, it will be hard work for the audience.

All of this is perhaps doubly relevant to online presentations. Where a live audience might be able to pay attention to their boss for 20 minutes, that attention span may only be half in an online meeting, where the speaker doesn't know whether the participants are actually paying attention – and where the participants know that she doesn't know.

The methods in this book take account of how our brains work, focusing on making the audience fully attentive, and giving them the best chance of remembering you and your messages.

Empty your cup

Astute businesspeople will realize that a problem for some is an opportunity for others. If most presentations are mediocre at best, then a little effort can allow any presenter to stand out and shine.

Buying this book is an important first step. You've started to invest in yourself, and your ability to lead others.

You've probably seen and given many presentations before, so although you've seen what doesn't work, you most likely also have some preconceived ideas of what presentations should be.

Before learning how to join the revolution and enjoy the competitive advantage of this new and better way of presenting, you first need to let go of the old approach.

Please now make a conscious effort to throw away everything you thought you knew about presentations. Trash the old ideas of 'one slide for three minutes', 'seven bullets per slide', 'tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you told them' and the others.

If your cup is already full, you won't be able to pour anything new into it.

Five key revolutions

There are many things we need to change about the way we present, but over time I have distilled these into five major revolutions. If you make all these changes, you are set up for success. If you miss one of them, you risk failure.

Each revolution underpins one of the five stages outlined in this book, and together, these five revolutions will serve as your guiding light as you follow the path to successful presentations.

1. **It's not your presentation – it's theirs.**

   Each presentation should be personalized to its audience. Make them the most important ingredient.

2. **Aim not to inform, but to transform.**

   People forget most of what they hear very quickly. Focus on what you need them to believe, feel and do afterwards.

3. **Prepare your storyline before your slides.**

   You're not there to comment on your slides. Your slides exist to illustrate and reinforce what you say.

4. **Don't confuse slides with documents.**

   Slides make poor documents, documents make poor slides, and a mix of both is doubly poor.

5. **Aim not for perfect but for personal.**

People prefer authenticity to perfection. Be yourself. When you share, we care.

Now it's time to discover the method that has already helped so many aspiring leaders, saving many audiences from presentation pain, and which will revolutionize the way you present: the Presentation SCORE Method™.

pSCORE: The Presentation SCORE Method

Over several years, and many thousands of presentations for clients of all types, we've refined the presentation generation process we follow at Ideas on Stage into what we call the Presentation SCORE Method (pSCORE™ for short), a tried and tested way to create and deliver effective and memorable presentations. It's the method we use with our clients, the method we teach them, and a method that has proved its worth time and time again.

We call it the Presentation SCORE Method because there are five key success criteria for a great presentation, and they make up the acronym SCORE:

Simple. Clear. Original. Related. Enjoyable. SCORE.

If what you say, what you show and how you speak all meet these success criteria, then most likely your presentation will SCORE with your audience. pSCORE is a method that will give you the best possible chance of achieving those success criteria.

This simple method already works successfully in all sectors, from engineering to healthcare, from luxury to finance, and from retail to education. It works in any function, from legal to finance, from audit to marketing, and from sales to PR. If it works for them, it can work for you.

Let's take a quick look at what success looks like for a business presentation, using these five pSCORE success criteria.

Simple

In recent years, TED has demonstrated that short presentations work better than long lectures. But this isn't new.

Take for example Dr Martin Luther King Jr's famous speech at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 (known often as the "I have a dream" speech). This is one of the most famous and well-respected speeches in history. It lasted 17 minutes.

Go further back, and you'll find the Gettysburg Address by Abraham Lincoln. Perhaps the most respected speech by any politician. How long? Just over two minutes.

Nobody ever complained that a business presentation was too short. The opposite is usually true. What is more, the effectiveness of a presentation is usually inversely proportional to its length.

Talk isn't cheap. In business, time is money, and talk is expensive. Too many people spend too much of their time creating and sitting through long, ineffective presentations. That's not a wise investment.

So keep your presentation as short as it can be to achieve your objectives. That's the first aspect of simplicity.

The second is to ensure that you don't intend to say too much during that time. The more you say, the less they will remember – and don't forget how good people are at forgetting what people say during a presentation. If you're too ambitious, and aim to get them to remember complex stuff or too many items, they may instead remember nothing, because nothing was emphasized.

So say little, but say it well and make it stick. Keep it simple in terms of time, objectives and messages, and you're well on the way to presentation success.

Clear

If you have kept your objectives and messages simple and your presentation as short as it can be, so far so good. In fact, just by having an objective, you're already ahead of most presenters.

However, there are still plenty of ways for these simple objectives and messages to be lost somewhere between the speaker and the audience.

If the audience can't hear you, they won't understand.

If you are speaking too quickly, they won't have time to think about what you're saying and what it means to them, and they'll forget each sentence as soon as the next begins.

If you are using complicated words or concepts, or pronouncing so poorly that they cannot make out what you are saying, they won't understand your message – or, worse, they might misunderstand.

You should also have a clear structure, so the audience is never lost in your presentation, wondering where you are and where you might be going. And as part of that structure, you need to make your key messages stand out clearly to your audience. Don't expect them to guess what's most important – they may guess wrong, or they may not bother to guess at all.

If the audience can hear and understand every syllable, easily work out which are your key messages, know where they are at all times in your structure, and understand what you're telling them, then you've achieved the goal of clarity. It sounds obvious, yet most presentations fail on at least one of these aspects.

Original

In the business world, many managers sit through multiple presentations every day. Most of those presentations are just like most of the others, meaning that none of them stands out and sticks in their memory.

Imagine you are making a proposal to a potential client. That client may well have six different vendors lined up to deliver their presentation, one after the other. If five of the presentations look and sound similar, but one of them stands out in some way, which are they most likely to remember the next day?

It is impossible to overstate the importance of being original. For the audience, an original, different presentation makes a refreshing change from all the usual boring ones. For you, the presenter, that same originality gives you a far better chance of being remembered, and gives your key messages a far better chance of being considered and actioned.

Your presentation should stand out – otherwise, it will fade away.

Related

When you spend time choosing, buying and wrapping a gift for someone, it's not your gift: it's theirs. When you spend time writing a letter to someone, it's not your letter: it's theirs. Likewise, when you spend time preparing a presentation for an audience, it's not your presentation: it's theirs.

Your audience is the first magical ingredient in a successful presentation. This means that it should be clearly tailored to them and their needs, it should meet their expectations wherever possible, and it should be delivered in a way that suits them and creates a connection between them and you. It should also be related to other items on the agenda, if appropriate, as well as the context in which you are presenting.

Know your audience well, and prepare a presentation specifically for them. When you care about their experience and offer them a personalized gift, they will care about you and what you are saying, and receive it gratefully.

Enjoyable

This might sound more relevant to a TED conference than to a serious business presentation, but 'serious' does not have to be the opposite of 'enjoyable'.

In fact, this is a key area where business can learn from theatre, cinema and modern conferences like TED and WikiStage: people pay far more attention when they are enjoying themselves.

Think back to the example right at the beginning of this section, where I asked you to compare watching a movie to sitting through a presentation. The more enjoyable the movie seems to you, the more attention you pay to it, the less distracted you get, and the more you remember.

It works the same way for a presentation, or a speech, or a lecture, or a training course. The more the participants enjoy it, the more they will pay attention, and the more they will remember.

Put simply, if you want your audience to take action, you first need their attention. And if you want their attention, make your presentation enjoyable to attend. Enjoyment leads to attention; attention leads to action.

That does not mean that you need to crack jokes or show them video clips from Saturday Night Live. Humor may have its place in some presentations, but not all. An enjoyable presentation is one where the audience pays attention effortlessly.

When it comes to presenting, the opposite of 'enjoyable' is 'boring' and therefore 'unsuccessful'. In section 3, we'll see how to make a presentation enjoyable without making it any less serious or business-focused.

You might think that making your presentation Simple, Clear, Original and Related is enough, and making it Enjoyable is just the icing on the cake. I don't agree: enjoyment is the key to the cake tin. If your presentation isn't enjoyable, it doesn't matter what you say because your audience won't be paying deep attention, and you'll be wasting your breath.

So those are the five pSCORE success criteria:

Simple. Clear. Original. Related. Enjoyable. SCORE.

We will come back to these throughout the book, and you will see why we need to focus on them so strongly.

Now let's take a first look at pSCORE and start thinking about how we build a presentation that will SCORE with our audiences.

Five stages to presentation success

Business Presentation Revolution is organized around pSCORE, and takes you through the five-stage process you will follow to create and deliver a successful presentation. I've made the structure as simple as possible, so we have one section for each of the five stages, each of which corresponds to one of the five key revolutions:

Section 1: Foundation covers the first steps of preparing a presentation, remembering that it's not your presentation: it's theirs. We'll therefore start by focusing on the audience, their needs, and the context in which you'll be giving this presentation, and then setting one or more transformational objectives. This is the foundation on which you should build your presentation, and it is the key stage that most presenters skip in their haste to start typing their slides.

Section 2: Ideation builds on this foundation by generating ideas for what to say, show and do during your presentation to achieve your objectives, aiming not to inform but to transform your audience.

Section 3: Creation takes these ideas and shapes them into a compelling and effective storyline for your presentation, with storytelling techniques to gain and keep your audience's attention and to make your key messages memorable. By the end of this stage, you'll know what to say and in what order – and then you'll be able to start thinking about whether your audience might benefit from some slides. Always create your story before your slides.

Section 4: Illustration takes your storyline and illustrates it powerfully, avoiding a confusing blend of slides and documents, and instead using effective slides and other visual aids (where appropriate) to make your messages more interesting and memorable. By the end of this stage, you'll have a finished presentation (what to say and what to show).

Section 5: Connection helps you to prepare and rehearse ahead of your presentation, and to deliver it professionally and convincingly yet naturally. Your performance in front of your audience is just as important as what you say and what you show, and your connection with your audience is more important still.

Each section includes several chapters, and at the end of most chapters you'll find some activities. Since humans learn far more by doing than by reading, I recommend you take the time to go through these activities.

I suggest reading through the book from start to finish, and then going through it again as you prepare your next presentation, making sure you complete each part before moving on to the next chapter. It's up to you how you read and use the book, though (it's not my book – it's yours). I just have two humble requests:

1. Please don't skip the Foundation stage (Section 1). If you forget to prepare, prepare to be forgotten.

2. I encourage you to discover the many supporting materials on http://extra.businesspresentationrevolution.com. This collection of training courses, webinars, templates, articles, videos and podcasts will help you to visualize what you are reading in this book, and give you many examples to help you further.

In particular, before starting the first stage, I recommend you fill in the free Impactful Presenter Scorecard, available on the above web site. It only takes a couple of minutes, and it will give you an idea of your current presentation skills.

If you need help convincing your colleagues to join the revolution, you can also contact me via this web site to invite me or one of my colleagues to come and train your people (or your boss).

Now it's time to get started. Think of a presentation you need to prepare soon, empty your mind of everything you might already have thought to say, and let's start going through pSCORE, beginning with stage 1: Foundation.

This is the introduction to Business Presentation Revolution by Phil Waknell, set to be published on 7/14/21. The supporting materials on http://extra.businesspresentationrevolution.com *will be added progressively up to, and after, that date.*

If you would like to stay updated with regular presentation advice, and details of publications, author signing events and webinars, please join the movement at http://join.businesspresentationrevolution.com*.*