

Chapter 7.2

Presentation skills

Benefits of this chapter

As leaders of your federation, you will likely need to represent and speak on behalf of the federation in many different situations – both formal and informal. As such, it is very important that you make the best impression possible, and part of doing so requires strong, effective presentation skills.

In this chapter, you will learn some simple but impactful strategies and tips for developing and delivering presentation. By making strong impressions on audiences with which your federation interacts – international aquatics community, national sports community, media, athletes, sponsors, fans, etc. – you can develop more credibility as an organisation and have a large impact on the future of your federation and aquatics sports in general.

Introduction

Even the most successful CEOs and public officials can find giving speeches or presentations intimidating. And often times, these individuals have other people helping them draft what to say or design PowerPoint presentations on their behalf. Considering the limited resources that your federation may have, this extra help may not be possible. So, it may be entirely up to you to create effective presentations and make positive first impressions.

The effectiveness of any presentation is 20% what you say and 80% how you say it. So, the key is to approach the process from a step-by-step strategic approach. With simple techniques, you can take complex or high-volume information and condense it into a presentation that is easy to understand and accomplishes its desired impact.

In this chapter, you will learn about the fundamental aspects of effective presentations. Topics covered include:

- How can you design and deliver formal presentations?
- How can you present yourself in informal settings to have maximum impact?

These strategies may only be a starting point, but with practice, they can become a critical part of your skill set that will serve you and your federation for years to come. Even Michael Phelps and Ian Thorpe had to learn and practice the most basic stroke techniques before becoming world record holders and Olympic champions.

How can you design and deliver formal presentations?

The best presentations follow some very simple guidelines. By approaching your presentation from the following five-step process, you can greatly increase the chances that your presentation will have its desired effect.

These five steps include:

- 1/ Define the situation
- 2/ Create the storyline
- 3/ Design the visuals
- 4/ Customise the visuals
- 5/ Deliver the presentation

To illustrate these five steps, let's develop an example across all five steps. Imagine that as the Executive Director of your national aquatics federation, you are delivering a presentation to your National Olympic Committee (NOC) asking for more funding for the next four years. With the following five steps, you can make this challenging task manageable and results-oriented.

Step 1: Define the situation

Once you know that you will need to give a presentation, the first step is to ask yourself the following question: Why am I giving this presentation and what

precisely do I want to accomplish? By clearly identifying the goal of your presentation, you can craft your remarks in such a way that drives you toward that desired effect. And not all presentations are the same. Presentations can be used for many purposes – to inform, motivate, persuade, etc. Be clear with yourself about what you want to achieve.

Think of your presentation as the vehicle that will get your audience from Point A to Point B. Point A is where they are now – uninformed, unmotivated or unconvinced. Point B is where you want them to be at the end of your presentation – informed, motivated or persuaded.

In the case of presenting to your NOC, your goal is to convince the NOC to grant you more funding for the next four years. As such, you will want to make sure that you design and deliver your presentation in a way that persuades the audience.

To understand where your audience is now – Point A – you need to ask yourself a few questions, including:

1/ Who is the audience? Are you presenting to athletes, sponsor management, or perhaps to FINA? In our example, your audience is the Board of Directors of your NOC.

2/ How familiar are they with the subject of your presentation? As the organisation in charge of funding each Olympic sport in your country, you can assume that the audience knows the funding process quite well, as well as events and issues related to your sport. So, your presentation should not focus too much on informing the NOC about aquatics sports. Instead, you will want to highlight reasons why your sport should receive more funding.

3/ How interested are they in the topic? Knowing that will help you determine how much time you have to spend generating interest in your presentation. In this example, the NOC is likely to be very interested in hearing your request, so you should be able to get the main point of your presentation quickly after a few introductory remarks.

4/ What is their WIIFM (What's in it for me)? Getting your audience interested in your presentation is directly related to the impact that the topic has on the audience. If the audience does not perceive the presentation to be relevant to their interests, they likely will not be that engaged in the presentation or remember what you said during the presentation. In our example, the WIIFM for the NOC is clearly related to the potential to win more medals at international competition, including the Olympic Games, and developing sports that have many medal opportunities.

5/ Why might they be resistant or opposed to what you are going to say? You must understand the “climate” of the audience in order to develop effective remarks. If your audience has a reason to be suspicious of you or predisposed to disagree with you, you will have to make an effort to get them on-board before you try to persuade them. Other audiences may be more open and unbiased

to your remarks, in which case you may not have to strategise quite as much in this step. In the NOC example, imagine that your federation received more funding four years ago but did not win more medals at the Olympic Games. The NOC may not be sure whether granting additional funds to aquatics sports is worth the potential return on investment.

Now that you know where Point A is, you can start to think about where you want them to be at the end of your remarks – Point B. To do that, ask yourself the following questions:

1/ What do you want to achieve in ten words or less? Being able to articulate the goal of your presentation is key to making the presentation clear and impactful, especially when trying to persuade an audience. In our example, the goal could of the presentation is “receiving more funding for the next four years.”

2/ How will you know that you have moved your audience from Point A to Point B? Being able to determine the effect of your presentation is key to developing the presentation in the first place. To do that, you need to develop some form of measurement. When trying to persuade or motivate, this usually means that the audience has taken the action you wanted them to take. In this case, you will know you have moved your audience if they decide to grant your request for more funding.

3/ What will happen if you do not move your audience to Point B? Anticipating what you will do if you sense that you have not moved your audience is an important part of an effective presentation. Doing so can help you adapt your presentation, if necessary, to accomplish your goal, than at the very least, help you refine your presentation strategy in the future.

In addition to the content of your presentation, you will also want to define the situation externally, meaning the physical set up and organisation of the presentation venue.

Adapting your physical environment can have a big impact on influencing your audience, including the following elements:

1/ Seating

Make sure every member of the audience can see you. In smaller groups, seating the audience in a V-shape with you at the front can keep attention focused on you and your comments.

2/ Audio-visual equipment

Make sure you fully understand what type of equipment is available and how to use it. Practice ahead of time, especially if you need develop your understanding of how certain devices work. There is nothing more distracting during a presentation than a presenter that cannot operate equipment effectively. In addition, it can make you look unprepared, which can jeopardise your credibility.

3/ Position of the podium

If you are speaking at a podium, be as close to the projection monitor as possible. And in societies where individuals read from left to right, stand on the left side of any visual aides – this draws the audience to you before the focus on your visuals. In societies where they read from right to left, consider switching to the other side.

4/ Microphones

In larger settings where you may need a microphone, secure a wireless microphone if at all possible, even when speaking at a podium. This allows you to interact more freely with the audience and presents fewer distractions.

Step 2: Create the storyline

Your presentation must follow a clear, logical sequence for your audience to follow it easily and take interest in what you say.

Effective storylines for presentation typically follow a seven-part sequence, including:

1/ Opening

The opening is one of the most important parts of getting your audience to really listen. You have about 90 seconds to capture their interest. They will want to know why they should listen, and if you can answer that question convincingly, they will want to know how that can use what you will share with them.

Some good techniques for capturing interest in your opening remarks include:

- Asking a direct question to the audience
- Citing a striking statistic
- A look backward or forward
- An emotional anecdote or thought-provoking quotation

In our NOC example, an effective opening would take into account that the audience may not be exceedingly favourable to you because aquatics sports did not win more medals at the previous Olympics despite increased funding. So, you may want to cite specific statistics that demonstrate how aquatics sports athletes in your country have improved over the last four years (e.g. placement at World Championships, or overall improved placements at the Olympics even though more medals were not won). These statistics capture interest and may spark interest from your audience that gets them to listen further.

2/ Main arguments with the WIIFM

Following your opening remarks, you want to briefly explain why you are presenting and why it is important. You will want to express your strongest arguments and share with the audience the WIIFM. In the case of the NOC presentation, you would want to express how many medal opportunities are available in aquatics sports and

how much progress aquatics athletes have made in the previous four years with the funding they received – having more could drive performance results even further.

3/ Overview

Briefly provided an overview or outline of what you are going to share. This section is similar to a table of contents in a book. It is useful for the audience to have a sense of where the presentation is going so they can stay focused on what you are saying without being distracted about where all that information is leading. Showing them the logical order of your presentation will assure them that the presentation has a clear purpose.

4/ Housekeeping

Before starting the main body of your presentation, tell your audience how long the presentation should last, when breaks will occur (if necessary) and how questions will be answered (during the presentation or at the end). Doing these things gives your audience a sense of the structure, which allows them to focus their attention on the content.

5/ Main body

The main body of your presentation is where you take the focus of your presentation (in our example, requesting more funding for aquatics sports) and give it a flow that makes sense and moves your audience (showing how and why increased funding is a good investment for the NOC).

The main body should follow a logical, consistent flow, and there are some useful strategies to provide that structure and consistency.

The flow should be structured like a pyramid according to the following principles:

- Conclusions before arguments
- Concepts before examples
- Most important first

In addition to these pyramid concepts, your presentation should follow a flow structure that organises your ideas in a logical way. Examples include:

- Chronological
organise clusters of ideas along a timeline
- Numerical
present a series of loosely connected ideas, facts or arguments
- Physical
organise clusters of ideas according to geographic location
- Spatial
organise ideas conceptually according to a spatial arrangement (e.g. house, pyramid, building blocks, etc.)
- Problem/solution
describe a problem and provide solutions

- Issues/actions
organise the presentation around key issues and propose actions to address them
- Features/benefits
organise the presentation around a series of programmes or services and describe the benefit of each one

In the NOC presentation, you may want to consider the chronological flow structure. By presenting your case in terms of what happened during the previous four years (showing the progress made in aquatic sports during that time) and what will happen with increased funding over the next four years, you can provide structure and show your audience a step-by-step strategy for producing a solid return on the NOC's investment in aquatic sports.

6/ Summary

When you have finished the main content of your presentation, summarise the key points. But do not add any new information. Instead, clarify the WIIFM, reinforce the goal of the presentation, describe any further actions necessary and seek agreement or consensus from your audience.

7/ Conclusion

The conclusion is simply the end of your summary. Close your remarks with "next steps" to give your audience a sense that your presentation is actionable.

Step 3: Design the visuals

Visual aides are a critical part of an effective presentation. Many people are visually-oriented, meaning they process information more thoroughly through pictures, graphs and charts than they do through spoken words. As such, having visual aides can make your presentation more impactful, as well as provide visual interest for an otherwise monotonous series of speeches and spoken remarks.

The best option is to use presentation software such as PowerPoint. Programmes like these allow you to create simple slides that convey information clearly and cleanly. In the NOC example, PowerPoint slides could be especially useful to show the improvement in results over the previous four years with graphs or charts. You could also use a pie chart to show how money received from the NOC was distributed, and how you may alter the percentage of funds to target areas that could improve performance results even further.

In whichever way you choose to incorporate visual aides, there are some important things to keep in mind to make sure your visual aides have the strongest impact possible. These include:

1/ Keep the focus on you, not the visuals

While the visual aides should be pleasing to the eye, they should not become the focus of the presentation. By keeping slides simple and not overly-designed you can generate visual interest without distracting your audience.

2/ Refer to slides, don't read from them

The slides should assist you in delivering your main points – they should not be a word-for-word representation of your presentation. Presenters who simply read from their slides are not impactful and they quickly lose the attention and respect of their audience.

3/ Make slides simple

To keep interest on you and your main points, follow a minimalist approach to visuals. Use simple graphics, short words and phrases and limit your colour choices to one or two that are professional and easy to see. Bright colours may attract attention, but they can be distracting and appear juvenile. Instead, opt for dark background with white text, or white background with dark text.

4/ Use 4x4 principle

Don't overload your slides with lots of text. Instead, try to use a maximum of four lines with four words each. Those four lines should use fonts consistently and use capital letters sparingly. Keep fonts to 24 point or allow for lots of blank space of the slide – this helps the audience see more clearly and focus on specific points.

5/ Avoid abbreviations and jargon

You do not want to alienate or confuse your audience by assuming they know more than they do. Especially in audiences unfamiliar with your topic, spell proper names completely and define any jargon before using it in your presentation.

6/ Highlight quantitative data convincingly

Using graphs and charts can be very persuasive and effective, but you must present these visuals clearly and simply. The chart should convey an obvious message, which should be easy to understand without much explanation. Consider making the main point of the chart the actual title of the slide. Keeping things simple is key to making visuals effective.

Step 4: Customise your visuals

For presentations that you may deliver multiple times, it is imperative to customise visuals for each audience. This keeps the presentation precise and relevant for each audience, and also provides you as the presenter with some variety to keep you engaged.

Helpful ways to customise your presentation include:

- Customise the opening slide with the date, location and name of the audience
- Include a logo of the audience organisation on each slide (in corner or centered on the bottom)
- Show photos and visuals relevant to that specific audience

Step 5: Deliver the presentation

Once you have developed the content of your presentation, put that content into a logical structure and created visual aides that help you make your main points, you are ready to actually address your audience and deliver the presentation.

The following are some useful techniques to help you “make a splash” on the day of the presentation:

1/ Your appearance matters

Your audience will see you before they hear you, so first impressions will be partly based on how you look. Dress professionally for your audience and don't wear anything that is too bright, revealing or distracting.

2/ Review last minute details

Sometimes the smallest issues can have the biggest impact on how you present and how your audience perceives you.

These include:

- Be on time getting to the location at least 30 minutes in advance gives you time to prepare, set up equipment and relax before presenting
- Remember a copy of your speech (hard copy and digital), business cards, useful handouts and any other materials that may be requested from you

3/ Remember the four Cs

- Clarity

Speak loudly and clearly and act in a way that shows command of the material

- Consistency

Find your style and stick to it
(don't joke and then be really serious right after)

- Control

Stay in control of the audience, yourself and the time at all times

- Confidence

Know your material thoroughly, show that you know it and admit it when you don't know something

4/ Answer questions effectively

It may sound simple, but the way you answer questions can greatly impact the way your presentation is received, especially when trying to persuade your audience.

Consider the following hints when answering questions from the audience:

- Never interrupt a questioner, even if you already know the answer to their question
- Take a breath before answering a question – this keeps you from interrupting and shows the audience that you respect their question by taking time to formulate a thoughtful answer
- Maintain eye contact with the questioner while he or she is asking the question, then address the entire audience when answering the question
- Repeat the question to make sure the entire audience heard it – this is especially important when microphones are not available or groups are especially large

How can you present yourself in informal settings to have maximum impact?

Presentation skills can also be useful for more than only formal presentations. As leaders of your national aquatics federation, you will likely be in many environments – conferences, sporting events, press conferences, etc. – where opportunities to meet other people and share information about your sport present themselves. As such, there are some helpful and easy to use tips that can make the difference between a standard conversation and a dynamic interaction that leads to deeper relationships within the sports world.

These tips include:

1/ Be prepared

You never know when you may have an opportunity to discuss your sport or make a contact that could help you grow aquatics sports in important ways. Attending a sports conference or even sitting in the airport, you may find yourself with a unique chance to make an important first impression. Knowing what is happening in your sport, as well as knowing who's who in other sports (including trends in sports performance and sports business) can open doors you may not have known even existed.

2/ Know what you want to say

Even though you may be prepared to meet new people in diverse settings, you may not be fully prepared to make the critical first impression. A helpful way to make an impact in a short period of time is using a 30-second “elevator speech.” This technique gets its name from a scenario in which you are on an elevator with an influential person and you have 30 seconds to make your case. In the context of your National Federation, your elevator speech should summarise who you are and the mission, values and general direction of your sport and your organisation. Your “speech” should make people curious to learn more about you and your federation, so create some interest by including specific examples of what your federation has accomplished or is working to accomplish.

3/ Use the basics

Never underestimate the importance of a firm handshake, eye contact and active listening skills. By showing that you are a professional and know how to engage with other people, you can often set yourself apart from others who lack those basic skills.

4/ Have your business card handy

Always travel with plenty of business cards to hand out when you meet new people. Carrying them in your wallet or purse – even when you are not travelling on business – is a good idea because you typically always have these with you and you never know when you might meet someone who could be useful to your federation in the future.

Useful tips

Use this hint a starting point for your skills:

The key is practicing presentation skills is to make them a regular part of the way your federation operates. Just like a synchronised swim team has to demonstrate certain required elements in their routines, your federation can think of presentation skills as required elements of your federation's skills set that will move aquatics sports forward.