

Bag of Tricks – Presentation Design 2

Don Weatherbee
EHS Manager
Sika Corp – Lyndhurst and Lakewood, NJ

Introduction



*This is the follow up to
Presentation Design I.
Yup this is the sequel!*

Well, you knew there might be a sequel. If possible, a third in this series may happen also. In the first seminar, Bag of Tricks: Presentation Design I, a lot of new and different ideas was introduced. The general response to the presentation ran the gambit from “shock and awe” to “a deep desire to fix every training presentation they ever made.”

The intent of Design I was to change a paradigm. Too often, we find ourselves sitting through very boring presentations (you, me and my grandmother have all had that experience). After Design I, many people found they could not look at presentations the same way again.

The main purpose of this paper is show examples and still introduce some new ideas for everyone to ponder.

This was set up as a non-linear presentation, which basically means the audience decides where the presentation goes. In this case, the audience could pick one of four areas to “travel” to. After the area was done, the audience would pick one of the three remaining choices, and so forth.

The trick with this approach is that one has to have an overall sense of the content of the each section of the presentation. If the order picked is 1-2-3-4, certain pieces of information will carry forward. But on the other hand if the order picked was 3-1-4-2, then a different set would be used.

In this case, each section had two to three items that had a common thread to them. This allowed the presentation to flow properly regardless of the order. For example, some of the story slides come from the same presentations as the before and after slides.

The Terrors



Scary bad, that's how bad!

This section of the seminar showed examples of terrible slides and gave some ideas of how to fix them.

Typical slide problems include:

- Wall of text
- Too much text
- Poor contrast
- Low resolution images or clip art
- Too busy
- Templates/logos hogging space

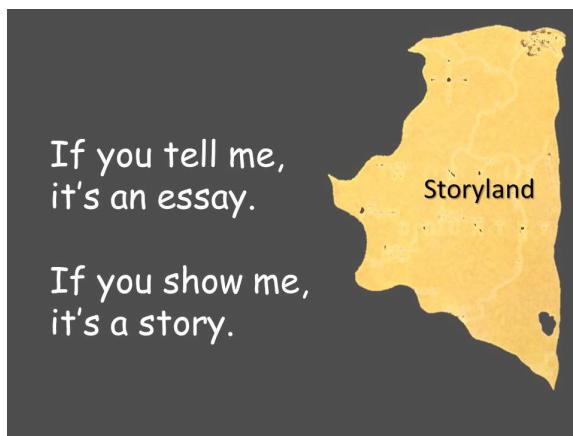
Another point brought out in this section was whether it was better to “click or not to click.” In any presentation, it is possible to have several items appear on the screen as the presenter presses the page down key or the slide advancer button on their remote. In either case, the presenter has to remember how “clicks” are on each slide for the entire presentation. It is almost a certainty, that everyone has seen a speaker “click” once too often and advanced to the next slide, while they are still talking to the previous slide.

At this point, the audience has seen the next slide, and while they were reading it, they are not hearing anything the speaker was saying. By the time the speaker gets to that next slide, the audience was effectively bored, as they already knew what the slide was going to be about.

In my presentations, I tend to avoid clickable events on my slides. My preference is that every time I click to advance the slide, that I get a whole new slide. I find I make fewer mistakes that way.

Behind this thought process, is the recurring manta of this seminar, “Keep it simple, don’t make it complicated, because slides are free. You can make lots, just make them good!”

Storyland



A quote from Barbara Greene, which I think captures the point of this section of the presentation.

It is generally know that every 10 to 15 minutes (and that is being generous), the audience’s mind will begin to wonder.

I call these points in any presentation potholes. You know, you’re driving along, and then wham, your car hits a pothole and the trip you were on goes all bad. If I had known a pothole was there, it would have been easier to avoid or to deal with it.

This is one of the best uses of stories: to fill in the potholes of any presentation. A story can be done with no slides, one slide or many slides. I tend to use many slides in order to create a visual story.

Stories tend to come in four types: beginning, ending, filler and war.

- Beginning: Starts with something to get their attention
- Ending: Closing it out strong
- Filler: Designed to cover potential low points
- War: Specific to topic, highlights a real life scenario

In the presentation I showed several examples that either came from my training at work or seminars that I’ve helped to “improve” for others.

Many of these stories are a collection of slides and images meant to support the overall story being told.

Take this single slide that I used in my Hazwoper refresher training at the site:



The story I relate when I bring this slide up is as follows: “In my younger days, around the age of 24, I had joined the local Haz Mat team in my area. I still remember the grizzly old veteran, teaching me the ropes. Perhaps, I should point that grizzly old veteran was as old as I am now. ☺”

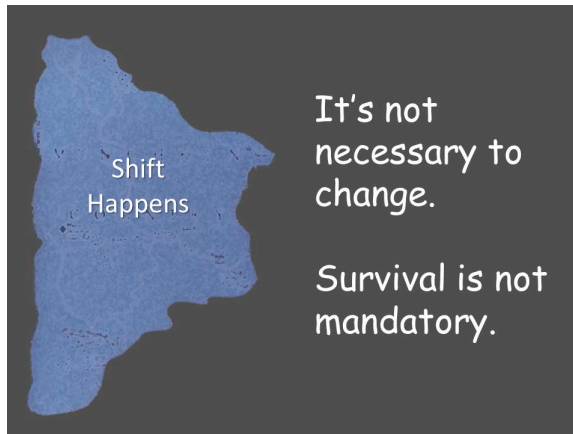
“But one the things, I remember from him, was one day, he asked me hold up my right arm and stick my thumb out, and close my left eye. He then asked, ‘Can you see the gasoline truck over there behind your thumb?’ I answered that of course I could. He told me that I was too close and I should move back. So I kept moving back. I think I was about a ¼ mile away, until I couldn’t see the truck behind my thumb. The grizzly old veteran told me: There is where you set up your command center, assuming of course, you’ve accounted for wind. Oops, had to go to the other side!”

Now, that is a simple story with one slide, but helped to illustrate the point I was trying to make on leaving the plant for the gathering area during an emergency. How far do you want to go? I say *this* far and I hold up my thumb at arm’s length. (This has taken a life on of its own at the plant, I seem to be getting a fair number of thumbs up. Of course, I’ve chosen to take that in a very positive light!)

Be careful to use stories that tie into or support the topic being covered by the presentation. For example, the rule of the thumb story can work well for emergency response and hazwoper presentations, but would seem out of place for a presentation on confined space or fall protection.

Stories should not distract from the overall theme or purpose of the presentation. Don’t, for example, recount a sports story that, while it might be interesting, has no real bearing on the overall topic of the presentation. However, stories, if used correctly, can help keep any presentation from hitting those darn potholes.

Shift Happens



*It is not necessary to change.
Survival is not mandatory.
~W. Edwards Deming*

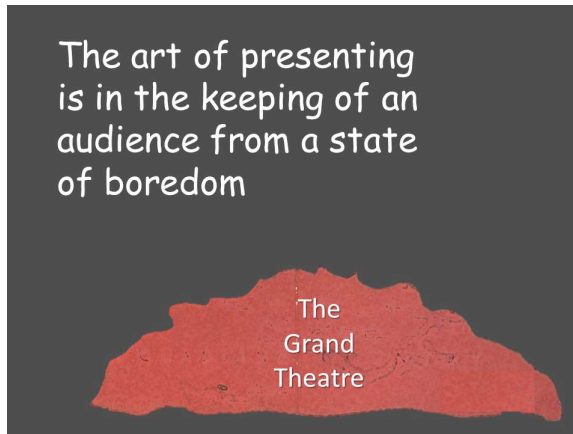
*There is no presentation that
cannot be made better, including
my own.
~Don Weatherbee ☺*

There are many ways to improve any given slide; in this seminar I used several methods and examples, these included:

- *Title Page—Eye Candy:* Catch their attention, this will be the slide that is up the longest at the start of the presentation, so make it interesting.
- *Go Big!* Single image with a few words - make it easy for audience to adsorb so that they can focus on what you are saying – or to say it another way, use the slides to make it easier for your information to get into their heads.
- *Iconic Image:* Pick images that most in the audience will recognize. If showing a mountain – show Mt. Everest or a mountain in your area that is well known to your audience.
- *Text over pictures:* Given a choice between text next to a small picture and text over a picture that fills the screen, I'll generally use the latter. The trick here is to make sure you have a spot on the picture to insert some text. If you don't have that clear space, then placing a text box over the picture and changing the fill of the box to a transparency level as need for contrast is the way to go. I tend to use white letter on a black background or vice versa.
- *Misdirection:* Occasionally, it is helpful to use an image that at the start doesn't quite make sense to the audience, but becomes obvious as you speak. Careful placement of slides of this nature within a presentation can be useful in recapturing the attention of the audience if you suspect it will be begin to wade at that point.
- *Emotion:* Emotion and the demonstration of emotion can be a powerful aid in getting a concept across, don't be afraid to play that card if it works for you.
- *Montage:* Instead of a bullet list, sometimes, you can use a collection of pictures to represent a vary list of item or concepts. If chosen properly, as a whole all the images together project the idea you want to talk about.

- *Metaphors*: In the presentation I used Black Tuesday (acute) and the Depression (chronic) to help highlight the two terms and their relationship. Metaphorically images that represent the idea in a similar way but not exactly; it can be useful for concepts that are hard for people to wrap their minds around.
- *Eliminate Charts and Tables*: The idea here is always think about the Why for the chart or table you are thinking to put in the presentation. Once you know the Why of it, then show that and not the table or chart. For example, you have a 10% reduction in injuries, show 10% and talk to it as oppose to a table.
- *Minimize Ads and Logos*: Put it on the first and last slides if you must, but remove from inside the presentation. The audience knows who you are. ☺. But to be honest, why give up the real estate of the screen?
- *Paraphrase*: Don't list results in several slides, summarize it for us. We trust that you know what you are talking about. If the data is important, hand out a word document of it.
- *Let your talk connect the dots*: This slide is not obvious to the audience as to what is it about, but as the speaker talks, that slide begins to make sense and actually provide a solid connection and memory for the audience.
- *Humor (and Timely)*: Humor (funny images) can be useful in breaking up the presentation with a lighter moment. Just make sure it is timely!
- *Popular Culture*: As we are a TV generation, the periodic use of images from TV and movies can help to build a connection with most audiences.
- *Avoid Smart Art*: Just like bullet points, just because the company behind the presentation software gives it to you, doesn't mean you should use it all the time (if ever).
- *Play on Words*: Like the Metaphor, use an image what reflects the concept, but is not the concept exactly. For example – the idea of Clarity – one could use anything that was clear – bubbles, marbles, windows, Visine.
- *Show the employee, location or object*: Use images from your site. Your employees will relate to the content much faster. I try to use images of my employees doing the right thing in my training at the plant.
- *Black and White*: Not all images have to be in color. A Black and White image can be used to stand out or perhaps to reflect an “old” condition before changes.

The Grand Theatre



The original quote that I adapted for this slide – “The art of acting consists in keeping people from coughing.” ~ Benjamin Franklin

This section of the presentation is geared more to delivery. One of the ideas that I want to get across is the fundamental difference between speakers and presenters. When I think of a speaker—I tend to think a Toastmaster—a person up in front of other people talking to them, little to no visible aids other than themselves. While a presenter is working with a visual media (generally a presentation), the Presenter’s voice and the Presentation’s visuals work together.

Winston Churchill was a master speaker, he was able to motivate people just with the power of voice. On the other hand, Steve Jobs was recognized as one of the best presenters *ever*. One of his most famous tag lines was “... and one more thing.” He didn’t use all the time, but when he did it was amazing, because at the same time, he’d have the screen match the moment, and he’d generally have a prop.

So are you also nervous when you get up in front of a bunch of people – me too, every time. But I do some things to help control that. Of course, I think the only people who don’t seem to get nervous when speaking are politicians – I think genetics are involved. The biggest single thing you can do is to start early. I am generally working on training presentations a few months in advance, and external seminars anywhere from 6 months to a year. Nothing ever good came out of starting a presentation on Tuesday that you have to give on Thursday. At that point, your nerves are the least of your concerns.

I generally find that I am most creative when I first wake up, before the wife and son get up; there are no distractions, my mind is clear. If I get two hours in morning, before everyone else wakes up, I can get a lot done. And during football season (college and pro) I find myself measuring how long it takes to create a presentation in terms of how many games it took. My wife is kind enough to not bother me when the games are on. On the flip side, I find 10-15 minutes in bed before I go to sleep to be a very good time to review a presentation. It seems to me that I continue to think about it even once I am asleep.

The other really big thing you can do, is to practice, practice, and practice some more. The more you practice the less nervous you will be when you give the presentation. My goal is to have the entire presentation into my head as a series of images; I want to be able to see the overall

flow of it. A strong, easily remembered introduction helps you and your audience get into the flow of the presentation. An interesting ending helps the audience to better remember the presentation. I tend to work out the plot, the beginning and ending and then fill the middle, but your mileage may vary.

Another tool you can use is transitions; no, I don't mean the ones in Powerpoint, I mean visual aids to let you know when you are moving from one section of the presentation to another. For example in this presentation, I used the Wicked Witch of the West as my transition.

And I hate to be the one to tell you but you are never actually done. Once you've created it, do not be afraid to tweak it, particularly after you have given it live. Listen to the questions asked; quite often they are clues to additional content or revisions to the presentation that you may want to do.

Typical Presentation Problems

Solution < > Problem



- 90% based on the defining the problem
- No direction, no point(s), no flow
- No preparation, no practice
- No consideration for the audience
- Trying too hard to sell, only there to market

I hope every presenter (and every speaker for that matter) understands that none of this about them, and it all about the audience. Put yourself in their seats: Would you want to sit through the presentation you are about give? Think about all the ones you've seen and heard; what was annoying about them? Maybe you can avoid those issues.

But don't allow yourself to sound like a used car salesman when you present. With the way we are bombarded with commercials, no one is interested in you trying to sell them. On the other hand, most people are happy with being educated on a topic.

I see a lot of speakers focusing on the problem for 90% of the seminar. The "problem" is what brought me to the seminar, the solution is what I want to hear about. Don't take 90% of your presentation telling me about the problem and last 10% to tell me you can fix it if I hire you. I came to hear about the oranges not the apple. I know about the apple (problem), it's all those oranges (solutions) I want to hear about!

Pacing doesn't mean going slower. If the seminar is expected to go an hour, then go 50 minutes and allow for questions and comments. But how often have you seen people realize they are running out of time when they present and rush through the last set of slides?

If you have practiced the presentation, then you should have a good sense of how long it takes. One of the advantages of the more visual style that I am using, is I can vary what I say at almost any point. So I can interject a story or remove one depending on how the clock is running. This also helps me when I only have 45 min for a 1-hour presentation or if I have 1.5 hours for the same one.

Why Presentation Design 2?



Keep it simple, don't make it complicated, because slides are free. You can make lots, just make them good!

In Sept 2003, Mr. Tufte wrote an article called "PowerPoint is Evil." He was a Professor of Communications at Yale, and he said, "Presentations too often resemble a school play - very loud, very slow, and very simple." And the inventor of cognitive load theory said this in 2007, "The use of the PowerPoint presentation has been a disaster. It should be ditched."

Does this mean you should burn all your presentations? In many cases, I find it easier to start from scratch rather than try to fix them. But if you are going to build a presentation with some of the ideas from this seminar, start now. Pick a topic, any topic and create a presentation. Whether you actually give it or not, doesn't matter. Just take your time with it. After the first one, creating the next one goes much faster.

I find with my presentations now, that I can update them simply by changing images out, and it will seem new to those that see it. This is very helpful for the training sessions at work.

There are a few more books to consider, such as *Presentation Secrets* by Alexi Kapterev; this guy created the "Death by Powerpoint" presentation on Slideshare.net that has been viewed a 1 million views or so. He has interesting ideas in this book, particularly on presentation delivery. As I mentioned before, Steve Jobs was simply one of the best presenters ever and *Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs* by Carmine Gallo tells how he got there. And while Gary Reynolds' first book was just so-so for me, his second book, *Presentation Zen Design*, has 9 stickees in it. He gets deeper into the design than he did before.

In general, use images, stories and have a plot. And one last story for you (and yes, it has a point which relates to the purpose of this presentation).

A few years ago I attended a conference where “Value of the Safety Professional” was the keynote and “8 Tips for Engaging the Adult Learner” was the second day keynote. (I was the closing session that year with Presentation Design 1).

After seeing both presentations, I offered to “revamp” their presentations, and they took me up on it. Both were decent speakers, but I felt their presentations didn’t help them to get their message across.

A few months later, both were presenting at another conference using the updated presentations, with “Value” as the keynote, and “8 Tips” as pre-lunch general session.

During lunch the two presenters had a chance to talk.

“8 Tips” – Nice presentation “Value,” you wouldn’t happen to know Don would you?

“Value” – Yes I do, did he rework your presentation also?

“8 Tips” – Yup, but to be honest, the first few times I did it, it didn’t go as well as I had expected. I kept trying to do the seminar the old way. But today, it finally clicked.

“Value” – I know what you mean, you have to practice and you have no cribs notes on the screen now.

“8 Tips” – Exactly, he handled us a Corvette, we just need to learn how to drive it!”

The point of the story is to learn to dance with your presentation. No, I don’t mean doing a waltz or some such thing. I mean you need to know (i.e., have practiced) your presentation enough that you are flowing with it, and your presentation has to be designed well enough so that it can flow with you. It is very much a two way street.

So keep in mind, we can save the world, one presentation at a time!

Bibliography

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Duarte, N. *Slide:ology*. 1st ed. North Sebastopol, CA: O’Reilly Media, 2008.

Kapterev, A. *Presentation Secrets*. 1st ed. IN: Wiley, 2011

Reynolds, G. *Presentation Zen – Design*. 1st ed. Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2010.

Links and Other Useful References

Link to the presentation on-line for viewing - <http://tinyurl.com/yfcudd8> (It will be uploaded shortly after the conference)

Medina, J. *Brain Rules*. 1st ed. Seattle, WA: Pear Press, 2008.

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