

Presenters' 7 deadly sins – Lessons learned from PMI LightUp 2016

In the year of our Lord 2016, on the holy ground of Istrian hospitality industry, 11 honorable presenters from Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia crossed their swords. The dust has settled and it is now time to remember that glorious day and learn something from it. It is always more painless to sit in a shade and 'live in quiet desperation' than take a stand and clash under the spotlights. Ladies and gentlemen of a presenting squad, respect!

Introduction

Great presenters are made, not born. Presenting or giving a public speech is a skill. A skill is learned, improved, and mastered through practice, training, and repetition. No mystery here. No natural talent. Mostly effort, dedication, and commitment. Some people would argue this fact and make an argument comparing presenting with sports, singing or playing a music instrument. Well, let's be honest. Telling some story for ten or twenty minutes and pressing next button while talking about your job or performance can never be in the same league with virtuosity of artists and players and their life long training.

Maybe the 360 seconds format is not perfect. Some said it is still better than 20 slides by 20 seconds form. The truth is that you play with the cards you were dealt. You can't change the format you are given, but you can change the structure, size, and arrangement of your presentation. You can never change your audience, but you can always change yourself.

The presenters made some oversights and slips. Let us call them deadly sins. Just to emphasize some steps that needs to be taken on our journey from good to great.

7 deadly sins

1. You're just too good to be true

The Internet contributes one quote to a former football player Eric Cantona. For that line of business, a rather sharp guy. He said: "If someone is too perfect they won't look good. Imperfection is important." Oh, how true those words are.

People admire perfection, but they can't relate to it. People respect it, but they can't connect with it. People will look up to it but the contrast between the presenter and the audience must never be too wide to be impossible to cross. We the people are cynical and envious little beasts. We approve humility and easily mistake pride for vanity. Show the audience your struggle and your pain. Show them how you overcame the hurdles and show them your relief. They will find themselves in your story and love you for it.

2. I can't take my eyes off you

Who made those slides? Who made those notes? You did? They are just so great, aren't they? If you love them, set them free. Set them free and stop looking at them. The most important thing you can ever do in your presentation or a speech is to establish a good relationship with your audience. If you succeed in that, no matter what errors you make, you will be forgiven. However, how can you establish the relationship if you are not looking into their eyes. How can you establish it if you never smile at them? Don't lecture. Communicate. Look at them, smile at them, and talk to them. It shows that you respect them, and more importantly, that you care. Remember, your presentation can only have one master, one captain. You have to decide whether it will be you or your slides.

3. More is more

Greed. One of the original deadly sins. More is more? No. Less is more. It always is. And it always will be. Less presentation in your message. Less slides in your presentation. And less words in your slides. The same goes for colors, animation, and any form of visual overdoing. The only thing that will ever be more is the font you use. Less is more.

4. Breaking the laws of physics

Let us just remember our elementary school physics. $s=v*t$. If you take your 30 minutes presentation and try to squeeze it in 6 minutes format, you have to go five times faster. The faster you go, more members of the audience you loose on your way. When you cross your finish line you will notice that you are alone. While you are fighting for your breath everyone else will look at you in disbelief trying to figure out what just happened. Slow down and use pauses. Yes, I know, time is relative. Three seconds pause is something normal for the audience but it feels like an eternity to a presenter. You will get used to it. Don't worry.

5. Preserving the planet

Save the energy! Great for the planet, a disaster for your audience. The instruction was to choose a topic that you are passionate about. First, do that. Second, show the audience your passion. The audience wants to experience your joy and your thrill. Since people are already sitting in the audience, why not to take them for a ride. Passion is contagious. It spreads like an airborne disease. You display it and in no time you will see a room full of fascinated people sitting straight and looking at you with anticipation and excitement. So, how should one show some passion? Well, the best advice is to let it go and allow it to happen. It means that you stop thinking about yourself and how audience might judge you and start considering what they need and what they want to hear. Be friendly and allow them to experience your true emotions. Use your body and especially your hands. OK, sometimes there is really no room to move around, but you have to get the most of it. Vary with your voice. Play with its tempo and loudness. If you find it hard to do that with a microphone in your hand, then loose the mic. Go unplugged. In the minds of your audience, human passion and sincere emotion will always beat all the tech wonders of a modern world.

6. **Don't follow me, I 'm lost**

The famous car bumper sticker said it the best. But I was not lost, some would say. I know my topic from the inside out. Good for you. Have you ever wondered how much the audience knows about the topic? Have you really thought it over how easy is to follow your mind flow? Please, don't be like a grasshopper jumping from one topic to another without making clear connections and building upon the information you shared.

Remember the old saying: "Failing to prepare is preparing to fail". A good preparation is the cornerstone of a great presentation. Just ask yourself what is the purpose of your presentation. How will your audience be better off when you are done? What is it that they should learn, feel, or do? What is the one thing they should remember? And you start from there. Everything else is the fat that needs to be surgically removed. When you trim down your message, make a plan how you will start and how you will finish your presentation. A strong opening will steer the perception of your audience and your powerful closing will stick in their minds.

7. **Are you not entertained?**

"Are you not entertained? Is this not why you are here?" It is the line from the famous movie with half-naked Russell Crowe to the delight of our ladies. And very important message to be remembered. Your colleagues and friends who come to LightUp don't have to be there. They want to be there. They don't come to be bored. They come to be amused and inspired. Bore them and they will not forgive you. At the best, they will forget you. LightUp is not a multimillion project you have to present to your stakeholders. LightUp is an opportunity to spend some quality time with your PMI brothers in arms and share some of your experiences. Tell them how you succeeded and make them promise not to do the things you've done poorly. Inform them by all means, but remember to charm them. As Walt Disney once said: "I would rather entertain and hope that people learned something than educate people and hope they were entertained."

Conclusion

Less is more. Less of me lecturing, more of you practicing. Do that and you will never have to read an article like this ever again. But, please do. There are great tips out there that could easily improve your presenting performance. Plan and prepare. Know the purpose of your speech and benefits for the audience. Rehearse and practice. In the end, be firendly and humble. Show them your emotion and passion. To err is human, to forgive divine. Let them feel heavenly and allow them to turn a blind eye or two to your small occasional gaffes.

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