Spokeswoman’s Information Day – Summary notes for effective communication workshop by Kerrie Douglass, Communications Consultant

Presentation
Know your Objectives – Why are you speaking or giving a presentation. What is it that you want your listeners/audience to do as a result of your communication i.e. what is your desired outcome (if you don’t know the answers to these questions at the beginning of the process, you need to think again about what it is you are doing and why you are doing it.) You should be able to write in 15 words or less what you want the listeners/audience to do as a result of your talk.

Analyse your audience – You need to know exactly who you are talking to so that you can tailor your presentation/communication accordingly.
- If you are speaking to your superiors, adopt a ‘suggestive tone’ and make recommendations based on your knowledge and research.
- If you are speaking to your peers, adopt a tone of mutual respect and shared understanding. Ask for opinion, experiences and feedback. Use ‘we’.
- If you are speaking to a special interest group, establish some kind of ‘connection’ with them i.e. a shared interest, experience etc

Presentation Preparation – Having worked out your objectives, you should already have a 15 word description of what you talk/presentation aims to do – the desired outcome. Your preparation then involves deciding on the ‘key messages’ or points you wish to make. Try for a maximum of three...(we tend to remember things in threes) and then work on supporting research, facts and opinions to support each of these three key messages. Your goal should be that your audience grasps these messages by the end of your communication/presentation.

Rule – Tell the audience what you are going to tell them, tell them and then tell them what you have told them.

You need to open ‘big’ to give listeners a reason to keep listening (like a catchy headline in a newspaper, which entices the reader to keep on reading). You could start with a quote i.e. ‘good teaching is one quarter preparation and ¾ theatre’ or an interesting statistic or a story/anecdote – an attention grabber.

You then need to give them an ‘agenda’ i.e. tell them what you are going to tell them or the ‘what’s in it for me’ clause…..i.e. I’m going to take about 15 minutes to explain to you/convince you etc – happy to have discussion or take questions at the end’.
Detail your key points using a ‘sparkler’ or attention grabber at the beginning of each point (you can use the Presentation Ladder we discussed) or more simply - A headline, a thesis/plan, three points to support this thesis/plan and then a conclusion.

Just like an essay, a presentation or talk should have a great introduction and a conclusion which echoes the introduction but incorporates convincingly the points which support the introduction. The conclusion can also take the form of a ‘call to action’.

‘The very best impromptu speeches are the ones written well in advance’.

Don’t use jargon – keep it simple – don’t say ‘inculcate’ when you could say ‘teach’.

First Impressions – “The messenger is just as important as the message”. Most human beings form an initial opinion about someone on sight …some say you have 20 seconds, others say about 7 seconds. The point is, it doesn’t take long so if you are going to speak to a small group or a broader audience, you really only have a moment to create a ‘positive impression’. That’s why it is important to start ‘big’ with enthusiasm….but also remember this breakdown – Visual – 55% Tonal – 38% Verbal – 7%

It might be a little exaggerated but it is worth noting so (having analysed your audience), think about dressing one level up. In tone, be confident but not authoritative – strive to be knowledgeable but not arrogant.

Work out beforehand the kind of impression you want to make and dress accordingly.

Maintaining Control
It’s natural to be nervous when the focus is on you (even if it’s only with a handful of people) so put your nerves to work for you – use the ‘adrenaline buzz’. Use movement to take up your nervous energy, hand gestures, moving forward towards the audience to stress a point and to break down the psychological barrier etc. Use a podium if you like but don’t grip it like a life buoy and move out from behind it from time to time.

Use the pause for effect and also to collect your thoughts if you’ve ‘struck a blank’.

Use eye contact – a general rule of thumb is to make eye contact for three to five seconds at a time and try to do this at regular intervals with everyone in the room. Using eye contact also means you are less likely to read from a script !!
Women have a natural advantage over men in that we have more natural ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ in our voices, so use them. Alternate pace as well and pause for impact (as well as to catch your breath).

Involve the listeners/audience – allow discussion, ask a question at a planned point or ask a question and then answer it yourself i.e. ‘you might be asking about now ….. well let me answer that for you.’

**Visual Aids and Support Material**
If you have support material, don’t hand it out at the beginning of your talk – people will read it rather than concentrate on what you are saying. Hand support material out at the very end as a summary or as added material to complement what you have said.

Powerpoint presentations etc – can occasionally be of use but you often risk becoming just an ‘usher in your own movie’.

Think very hard about why you are using visual aids and how they will enhance your talk/presentation.

Don’t cover more than one point per slide and don’t use any more than 12 words per slide. Make sure what you are saying equates with the slide and watch your listeners/audience carefully. Many will tend to watch the slide show and write down the points which means they are probably not concentrating on what you are saying.

Don’t use technology for the sake of using technology !!!