



4 SECRETS TO PRESENTING WELL TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Introduction

When presenting to senior management, it's easy to forget that the details of an internal audience matters just as much as those of an external one. After all, a crowd of strangers is tough, but a room full of higher-ups is tough and responsible for the success of your company.

With an extra-critical eye in mind, this guide will give you some in-depth thoughts and tips for boosting your confidence and building presentations specifically for your company's leadership team.

Secret #1

Understand what makes executives tick.

The first step to creating any great presentation is to take some time to understand the audience. When you're preparing for a big presentation for your boss—or your boss' boss—here are a few things you'll want to ask yourself and keep in mind about your senior audience:

They'll ask hard questions.

So, what are senior executives thinking or looking for when sitting through a presentation from one of their employees? They can have a reputation for being tough and unforgiving, but at the end of the day, there are two key things to remember:



Senior managers are extremely time-poor with a huge daily agenda. As a result, they need to make high-stakes decisions fast, without spending too much time weighing their options. They really do want to help you—your success helps them succeed, too.

Both of these factors mean that your audience is going to be trying to figure out, as quickly as possible, whether what you are presenting fits within the current business strategy and budget, and whether it has the potential for an acceptable return on investment. You can expect probing questions when presenting to senior

management, not because they're trying to make your life hard, but because this is how they will arrive at a decision quickly. Just make sure you've done your homework and have the details on hand to answer any questions that might come up.



Are they right-or left-brained?

In addition to preparing for their questions, do some research on the personalities of the executives to which you're presenting. Try to understand what kind of thinkers they are. Are they right- or left-brained? Some senior executives come from a financial background that makes them more interested in analytical information—with this group, get to the numbers quickly and back your statements up with data.

On the other hand, if you're presenting to a more left-brained audience of creative executives, you'll want to spend more time on the story and the big picture of your idea. Use real-life examples and a cohesive narrative to bring your presentation to life for this group.

The best way to determine how your prospective audience thinks is to go to their close colleagues.

Talk with people who have worked closely with them before to find out if they have any pet peeves or preferences. This way, you can avoid doing something bothersome that will distract from your key message.



Try to understand what kind of thinkers they are.



Secret #2

Proper prior planning is essential.

Once you've done your research, you might be tempted to open up your presentation software and jump right into building a deck. Before you do this, however, there are a few more things you need to consider:

What is your objective?

What do you want your audience to think and do after you have finished your presentation? Your main objective—whether it's to get budget for a project or garner support for a campaign idea—will dictate the content that you include in your presentation, and it will also determine who you bring into the room to help you.



Andrew Abela's presentation matrix is a great tool for determining your objective.



The idea is very simple. Use the template on the left and fill in the blanks. Start by considering what your audience is thinking before your presentation, and what you want them to think after your presentation. Then ask yourself what they're doing before your presentation, and what you want them to do after.

Once you have filled this out, keep it near when planning the content for your presentation. You should try to ensure that all content in the presentation helps change either their perception or action to meet your objective for the presentation.

Who is the Robin to your Batman?

The next thing to work out is who else on the senior team needs to be on board for your idea to work. Who's the partner-in-crime you can speak to before the presentation, to get their insight and—most importantly—get them on your side?



Finding the right supporter is key if your goal is to convince senior management to take some kind of action.

They can help you understand how your idea fits in with other company activities and goals and what it might take to get in approved—and then when the day for the big presentation comes around, they can help you with convincing their peers.

Set up an advance meeting.

Try to get an informal meeting with the people you're presenting to before you actually give your presentation. This can be as brief as a five-minute chat next to the coffee machine where you outline the idea, rewards, and potential risks in a way that piques interest.

This kind of quick “elevator pitch” can be enough to prompt your target to say, “Sounds interesting, let's talk about it,” thereby giving you permission to set up a more formal meeting.

Create an ROI proposal.

If you're asking for budget to do something, or presenting next year's campaign plan, create a separate ROI document that you can either leave behind or send before your pitch. Going through the process of outlining the ROI of your project will help you formulate your argument, so it's a good idea to do this before you actually create your presentation.

Senior management will appreciate that you've taken the time to put the ROI of your idea into writing—if you want them to take it seriously, then you need to show that you take it seriously, too.

Secret #3

Start your presentation with a bang and focus on brevity.

So you've done your research, and you've taken the time to outline your key objective and get some early supporters on board. Now it's time to build your deck. Here are the most important things to keep in mind when crafting a presentation to be presented in front of senior management:

Keep it quick.

Brevity is essential when presenting to senior managers, so rather than building up to an aha! moment, try leading with one. And make sure you leave plenty of time for questions. If you have been given a 20-minute time slot to present, aim to get your presentation down to **a maximum of five minutes**. There is zero room for waffle. Never present an agenda; just get straight to the point.

Here is a good way to structure your presentation, with brevity in mind:



- Lead with the bottom line.
- Cover 2-3 main points (your story).
- Give supporting facts (data).
- Open up for audience Q&A.
- Delve into the relevant details.

Less presentation, more conversation.

A quick presentation is at its best when it's built around a few summary slides/frames. Keep these uncluttered and concise—they will serve as jumping off points for your audience to ask questions.





In addition to the summary information, you'll want to provide details that can address the questions you think are most likely to be asked. If you're using Prezi, you can arrange these details around your main ideas, so that you can zoom into them when the questions come up.

With this format—a big-picture overview, followed by a conversation that dictates which details you choose to reveal in which order—you'll be much

more likely to address your audience's biggest concerns in a timely manner. Instead of going through 50 slides and hoping that they answer your audience's questions, go through three frames and then pick and choose the frames that make the most sense to display depending on what your audience wants to hear.

Simplify complexity, but leave no stone unturned.

When it comes to presenting complex data, do your best to boil it down to its most simple form—focus only on the key numbers and metrics that tell your story.

At the same time, you want to make it clear that you have done exhaustive research and preparation before presenting this idea to your audience. The executives in the room should feel like you have left no stone unturned—but hide those extra details until they ask for them explicitly (data visualization is great for this).

Make it clear that you understand the context.

Your audience will find you much more credible if you show them that you know how your idea fits into other things going on in the business. Is there a huge project or spend going on simultaneously to your idea's timeline? If so, it might be better to ask for support for your idea after that project is finished.



Alternately, if you feel this isn't the right time to get "all-in" buy-in for your idea, but you still want to move forward, you can ask for a smaller budget to test if it's truly scalable and has positive ROI.



Secret #4

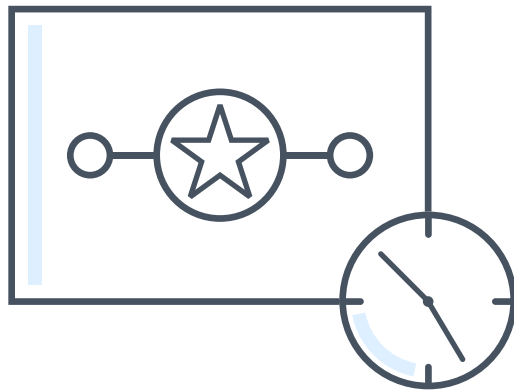
Work the room.

You've done your research, set up a meeting with key stakeholders, and crafted the perfect deck—the only thing left to do is deliver your presentation. Don't let all the hard work that you've put into planning your content go to waste by botching the delivery!

Of course, there's the standard advice that we've all heard before when it comes to giving a great presentation: don't use filler words like "um" and "uh," speak slowly enough so that your audience can follow along, stand upright and still so as to avoid distracting your audience. For more tips on presentation delivery, check out our resource. There are a few additional things to keep in mind, however, when you get up in front of a room full of executives:

Keep a close eye on body language.

Instant feedback is a powerful thing, especially because it can give presenters a chance to try a different approach if their message isn't resonating. One of the clearest forms of feedback that you can receive from your audience comes from their body language. If you see an executive squirming in her seat, staring off into the distance or at the wall, or checking her phone in her lap, stop your spiel immediately. These are all signs of distraction or—even worse—frustration, and they are clear indicators that whatever you are saying is not working.



Instead of plowing through your planned presentation, stop at the first sign of disconnect and ask questions. You could try saying, “I have a few minutes before questions, is there anything else you’d like for me to cover?” By turning to your audience for guidance, you give them a chance to redirect the conversation into a direction that is more interesting to them, thereby earning back their attention.

Don’t leave without buy-in.

The last thing you want is for your presentation to end in a stalemate. That said, in order to get a decision made, you may have to push your audience a bit. Be prepared to ask for a certain action. Don’t be afraid to say, “Can I proceed?” or “Is the budget approved?” Make sure that you outline the next steps that you would like to take, or that you would like for your audience to take, and get a clear verbal answer on whether or not these steps can move forward.

Whatever you do, don’t leave the room until you’ve gotten an answer to your call-to-action.

Set yourself up for success with the three P's.

Do you know what the three p's of presentation success are?

They're very simple: practice, practice, and—you guessed it—practice. If you're giving a 15-minute presentation, you should spend at least one full day practicing. While this might sound like overkill, practicing is the best way to discover holes in your content, shortcomings in your visuals, and gaps in your delivery.

Even better than practicing to an empty room is practicing in front of a real audience. Ask your friends and colleagues to listen as you go through your talk and to provide feedback once you're done—you might be surprised what a fresh perspective on your content brings to light. If you can't find anyone to practice with you, try recording yourself on your phone or with your computer and watching the playback. This tactic is particularly good for improving your body language while speaking.

If you spend enough time practicing, you will know your content by heart—which will make you feel and sound much more confident. You will also be able to focus on your audience instead of your own delivery, which is essential when delivering a presentation to finicky executives.



Even better than practicing to an empty room is practicing in front of a real audience. Ask your friends and colleagues to listen as you go through your talk and to provide feedback once you're done.

Conclusion

Presenting to senior management can be daunting, but just remember: they are on your side and trying to get to a decision as quickly as they can. Try and do some groundwork and get people warmed up to the idea before you go and present. Lead with the key benefit to what you are proposing and keep it short while still leaving them with the feeling that you've left no stone unturned. Leave lots of time for questions and discussion as this will help move to a decision. Finally, don't forget to practice as much as you can make time for as this will make you much more confident.

If you want to get your hands on some great pitch presentation templates then you can find some here: <https://prezi.com/user/pitch-templates/>