

Presentation Skills

No matter how united an organization is there are always differences amongst the members. Differences may be based in politics, culture, gender, class, or sexual orientation, learning styles, attention spans, expectations, temperament...the list goes on and on.

Given these differences how do you present an idea or proposal so that it is heard and gains the most support possible? The following are a few tips to keep in mind when seeking support for your ideas:

1. Prepare. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Does your idea support the purpose of this particular organization?
- How does your idea meet the interests of the current members?
- What questions might the members have?
- Have you researched your idea?
- Be clear about what you are asking for. Volunteers? formal support? funding?
- How long do you have to present? Respect time limits. (Note: 150 words=1 minute.)

2. Practice!

- Practice your presentation at least once, out loud.
- If you can, practice with a friend who can give you honest, constructive feedback.
- Be aware of your body language. (Note: this is 55% of what people "hear.")

3. Be Motivating

- Explain why the idea is relevant and important to the organization.
- Be enthusiastic. Your audience will catch your enthusiasm...or your boredom.
- Avoid speaking in a monotone and putting people to sleep.

4. Be Honest

- Present the pros and cons.
- Don't assert anything you aren't sure of.

5. Be Respectful

- Be open. Don't assume opposition or support. This will come through in your tone.
- Avoid being condescending toward anyone. Have confidence in others.
- Stay within your time limits.

6. Maintain Eye Contact

- If you're reading your presentation, remember to look up at people.
- Respect everyone. Look around the room; don't look at just one or two people.

7. Leave Enough Time for Questions

- Make sure you understand a question before answering. Ask for clarification when needed.
- Be honest. If you can't answer a question, say so and offer to get back to the person.
- Be open to questions even if they are challenging or sound attacking.
- Avoid being defensive or attacking in return. This can turn off possible supporters.
- Questions help you understand the members' concerns or hesitations. These won't magically go away—so listen to them and consider how to address them.

8. Try to Be Inclusive

- Your idea is a starting point. To gain the support of an organization, be open to modifying your idea to include the concerns and ideas of other people.

9. Tip: Pass out informational handouts after your presentation.

- Unless your handouts must be read immediately, distribute them after the presentation otherwise people will read and not listen.

10. Be okay with "No."

- Even after you've made your best case, people may simply disagree or have other priorities. Take a deep breath and accept their decision. Don't take it personally!