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Great Presentations: Tips From Great Presenters

I worked at Franklin Quest for four years right before they merged with Stephen R. Covey's organization and became FranklinCovey. For a while we were not only the biggest Time Management Company, but the largest training company in the world. We would put on 300 or more seminars a month.

Hyrum Smith, the Chairman of the Board, and an incredible presenter himself, pulled in and often partnered with the world's best trainers like Stephen R. Covey, [Denis Waitley](#), Ken Blanchard, Joel Weldon, and many more.

Some, like Joel Weldon (we called him the trainer's trainer), would give special seminars just for us. He would teach us his craft. I took copious notes. I would buy all of their tapes, but especially his.

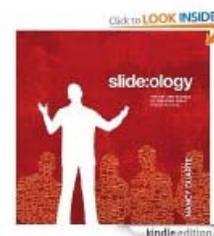
My colleague, Chris Jorgensen, shared a book with me called [Slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations](#), by Nancy Duarte. It finally made me willing to use PowerPoint. Many of these points are Nancy's, and Joel's.

Get Nancy's book and find a way to [listen to Joel Weldon](#). And [watch TED](#) for really great presentations.

Consider this a pre-flight checklist for delivering world-class presentations:

1- Am I passionate about my message? Joel Weldon tells the story of rising up through Toastmasters and the single most important rule of a great presentation is to speak about what you love and know well.

Les Brown is probably the most passionate presenter I have ever heard. He tells the story of how he became a disc jockey. He says you [must be hungry](#): One of the most motivating presentations I've



Slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations, by Nancy Duarte, Kindle Version on Amazon

experienced in my entire life.



Les Brown, "Mamie Brown's Baby Boy" shares his signature statements often and may be one of the most passionate speakers ever. He says you "Gotta be hungry!"

2- Could I speak without notes? One way to measure how prepared and passionate you are is whether you need any notes. A true master taps into the spirit in the room and adapts the message to the specific needs of the audience, they can't do this if they are bound in notes.

3- Do I have something really important to say? Does what you say matter? Enough said.

4- Do I need to use PowerPoint or can I go live? I don't like PowerPoint but I use it when I have to. I love a whiteboard and markers. A PowerPoint is linear, static. You can't anticipate a perfect presentation in advance. But a great slide deck is possible and sometimes necessary.

Salman Khan, a graduate of MIT and Harvard Business School, and the founder of Khan Academy, perhaps the most exciting new development in online education, uses a dynamic tablet and just [draws as he talks](#). At last count, he has done over 3000 online tutorials for kids and adults alike to learn at their own pace, and have fun doing it.

5- Do they focus on my slides or me? Too often we have so much content on the slide the audience doesn't focus on the presenter. This is a bad thing. Do I want them to experience, watch, listen, or just read?

Steve Jobs made absolutely sure that everyone in the room (and often around the world) was focused on him.

6- Can they see what I'm showing? This is the single rule that kills most presentations, especially in large rooms. Nancy calls it the 30-point rule. Are the words on your slides big enough to be seen from the back of the room?

So basic... don't forget the basics.

30-point fonts are where you begin. Find the size of the room and the size of the screen in advance. Don't rely on old, worn out hotel projectors. Test them.

7- Can I say it with fewer words? –

“If all you want to do is create a file of facts and figures, then cancel the meeting and send in a report.”
Seth Godin – [Really Bad PowerPoint](#).



Nancy Duarte - Author of *Slide:ology: The Art and Science of Great Presentations*

Nancy says if there are 75 words on your slide, put it in a document and hand it out. If there are 50 words, it's really just a teleprompter. Few or no words... perfect. Try and distill it down to one word. A Mnemonic.

Think of your slide as a billboard on the freeway... 7 words at 65 miles per hour is about all.

Mark Twain is credited with the quote (though probably penned in French by Blaise Pascal)

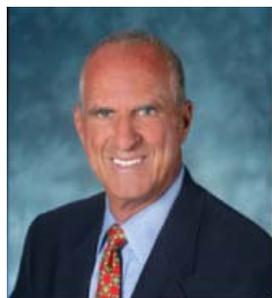
“If I had more time I would write a shorter letter.”

8- Are my slides well designed... or just decorated? Just because there are lots of really cool special effects, clip art, stock photos, and things you can do, doesn't mean you should.

Less is more.

Blow away the chaff.

9- Do I pay attention to the housekeeping issues? These little things make all the difference. Inspect the room. Is it clean? Is there clutter? Are there distractions? Joel Weldon would even tape the door latch open because it made a bothersome noise if people came in late or left early and distracted others. Wow... really? They don't call him "America's Most Prepared Speaker" for nothing. Thanks Joel.



Joel Weldon - "America's Most Prepared Speaker" pays attention to every little detail for flawless presentations... even taping the door latch so it won't distract if people come and go.

10- Do I control the environment? If I have my choice, I set the room up with doors at the back, so people coming in don't distract. I check air conditioning controls, sound systems, open windows. Plan for distractions... they will happen.

11- Am I hiding behind the podium? Don't.

12- Have I tested my audio and video? Do.

13- What if my slide animations fail? Fancy animations are often better handled in multiple slides... if at all. Test it on the mac, on Chrome, on Firefox, on a PC.

14- What do I do if the power fails? This happened to me. Halfway through a half-hour keynote, my laptop battery died.... Completely died. I thought I was toast. That is the real test. No time to bring up something else. You better be ready to continue. I jumped down in the audience and just turned up the energy and winged it. So ask yourself.... Are you plugged in? Do you have a backup thumb drive or even an entire laptop?

15- Death by logo. Every CEO (my business partner included) thinks that you have to have your logo prominently displayed on every single slide, sometimes more than once. (If the boss persists, make it unobtrusive.) But really, people aren't dumb, if you have a logo on the front slide and the last one, they will know it is from your company.

16- Death by bullets... Bullets are well named. They kill presenters. Remember: "Gun's don't kill... bullets kill."

17- Death by acronyms. The main method that doctors, lawyers, dentists, and developers use to ensure their job security is to develop a language that only they understand.

They abbreviate everything. CRM. SaaS. T1. Don't use them with normal, real people.

If you do, translate the first time. Explain that CRM means Customer Relationship Management. Have someone call you out if you shoot an acronym across their bow.

18- Death by Umms and Ahhs. This one is really hard. Don't fill sentences with umm or ahh. It

sounds like you don't know what to say and you are making it up as you go. Listen to yourself. Anything you say over and over is the equivalent to an Umm or an Ahhh. Have a friend hold up a finger every time you say one or the other or your favorite repetitive equivalent.

Painful. But do it.

19- Have I set expectations? Start with an agenda, including when you will be done. Give them a reason to stay. It's old, overused, cliché, but still relevant.

“ “Tell them what you are about to tell them, tell them, and tell them what you told them.”

20- Don't make your host look bad! The worst sign of a rookie presenter is the one who gets up there and starts their talk by saying, “Well... I was just called last night and assigned this topic that I don't know much about...”

Don't do that... ever!

21- Am I selling or teaching? You violate the trust of your audience if you try and sell to them. There is nothing worse than a thinly veiled sales pitch when they truly need to learn something.

Don't do it.

The only exception is the Timeshare Condo pitch, but you go into that knowing it is a sales pitch. The \$150 gift certificate to Nordstrom's or the free night at the Marriot get's you past that.

I often get criticized because people actually say I don't sell enough on stage. I look at our company's growth and success and I ask... Really?

Here's my rule, don't sell on stage, ever! If they are interested, they will find wait for you off stage.

22- Am I trying to say too much? Wow, I just blew this one recently. A friend in the audience reminded me of the scene in one of the *Back from the Future* shows where “Marty McFly” (Michael J. Fox) drives a DeLorean time machine 30 years into the past and is given the opportunity to play a guitar on stage at the high school prom.

He decides to give them a sneak peak of Chuck Berry's ‘*Johnny B. Goode*’ and gets going so fast and furious he's done before he realizes nobody is with him, and their jaws are hanging open. That's what I did. I was going so fast in my own world of research I woke up 30 minutes later on stage thinking I did a great thing. With some of the worst reviews I've ever had: “Great research but hard to remember,” “Needs more time,” “Not enough stories.” Great feedback...

Note to self... don't do that.

When in doubt... cut it out.

23- Have I said too little? Then there are some companies who let a committee get ahold of the presentation and send it out to a design firm with a dozen revisions and it comes back with no substance at all. That's worse. I think a



Michael J Fox playing 'Jonny B. Goode' by Chuck Berry in Back to the Future - He was so intense and crammed so much in that he lost his audience. But still an awesome scene!

committee has only ever done one great thing... That was the movie Toy Story. But, for the most part, they get lost in the thick of thin things. People ask, "Where's the beef?"

24- Have I prepared enough? A long time ago I decided I would spend more time preparing myself rather than preparing a presentation. Refer back to rules 1 and 2. If you live and breathe your content day in and day out, you'll do great.

25- Do I know my audience? My favorite question is:

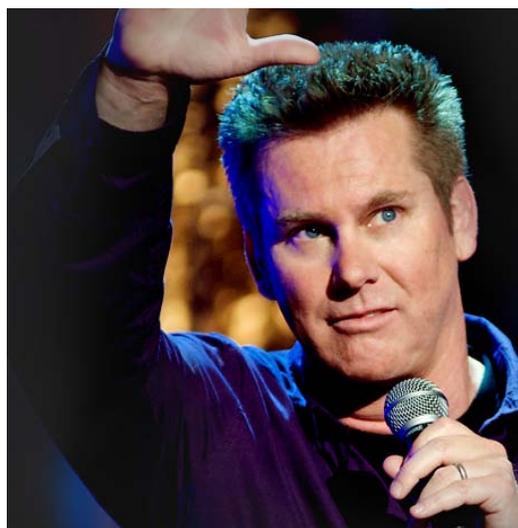
“What would I do if I were you?”

How would I apply what I know with what my audience needs. Is my audience mostly employees, managers, Vice Presidents, CEOs, owners? What do they care about? What is their stress? What are their dreams? What are their headaches and hassles?

26- Will my stories be remembered? Facts, logic and research speaks to the mind, stories speak to the heart.

Seth Godin (again) recommends you find remarkable stories. He breaks the word into sections 'remark'+ 'able'. Will people make remarks about your presentation? Are they 'able' to remember your stories so they can 'remark' them to others?

Stories become legends when they are remarkable.



Brian Regan - one of America's premier comedians, brings a presentation to life with stories. - From BrianRegan.com

If you want to hear remarkable (and funny) stories, listen to [Brian Regan](#). One of my favorite is his story of going to the [emergency room](#). He can take an everyday story and make it so you will never forget it. He may be the best comic on the planet, and he's suitable for the kids (He and Bill Cosby, not many of those left.)

27- Have I backed up my arguments with research? If you can't prove it... don't say it. Your research or better yet, somebody else's... who is credible.

Did I say to use research that is credible?

28- Am I rounding my numbers? You are far more credible if you quote the exact number in the research... to the decimal point. If you round the number, you don't seem to know the number... or you're making it up.

29- Have I checked all my facts? I once told a story that later turned out to be a rumor... Note to self... don't do it. A friend called me out on it. I was grateful and learned a very hard lesson.



Have I said too little? Your audience, like Wendy's, may ask, "Where's the Beef?"

30- Have I given proper credit? My favorite thing to do is to promote other people. Call out the people who came up with the ideas you are using. Oh, and the Golden Rule still works.

31- Do I speak to the whole person? We are told in the scriptures we have four aspects: heart, might, mind, and strength. My mentor, [Chauncey Riddle](#), taught me that heart is what we desire, might is our power or influence or our result, mind is our understanding, and strength is our body and its capacity to act. He shared that the proper order to engage all four aspects of a human being is mind, heart, strength, and might. Or understanding, desire, action, and result. So ask these four questions:

32- What do I want them to *think*? Start your presentation by engaging their mind. Define the terms. Socrates said,

“The beginning of wisdom is a definition of terms.”

Facts build knowledge, application of facts builds wisdom. Questions get them thinking. Thinking comes before feeling. Feeling comes before action. Action comes before results.

33- What do I want them to *feel*? The source of energy that causes action is desire, or motivation. This comes from the heart. Stories and experience play to the heart. How do you teach something the mind does not understand? How do you teach virtue, or courage, or honor, or integrity in a classroom? You don't. They don't come from mathematical equations. You model them yourself, by your example, and by proxy with stories of greatness.

Take them face to face with greatness with a story.

34- What do I want them to *do*? The greatest presentations end with a call to action. We have lately been using a cool webinar tool called ON24 that let's people act several times along the way by downloading content any time during the presentation, while they are thinking about it, or feeling it. Strength is the body, the body has capacity to act... to do something.

35- What should their *result* be if they act on my words? Tell stories of the results other people have gained by thinking, feeling, and doing the very things you are asking your audience to think, feel, and do. Answer the question of relevance, "So what?" What does this mean to me? What is my result?

36- What can they take away? Software developers ask a great question, "What is the deliverable?" What do they get to take back to their business and apply that very day?

Takeaways are both content and great ideas. [My friend Oliver DeMille](#) (who has inspired much of everything I do) taught me to read and mark down my epiphanies.... Those "aha" moments that change something inside.

Those are the best takeaways.

37- Do I start with high energy? I like to start with a question or a really great story. Jokes are ok, but too easy. Move, but never pace.



Oliver Demille - Author of 'LeaderShift' and bestseller 'A Thomas Jefferson Education', teaches to read and present for epiphanies as the ultimate take-away!

38- Do I maintain high energy? Get someone in the audience to tell you if you are dropping the energy.

Appoint a yawn monitor to scan the audience and have everyone stand up and stretch if you start to see yawns. Then it's their fault, not yours.

If you start to lag, change your position, raise your voice level... stand up... ask a question... share a story.

One of the greatest things I ever learned while presenting is that I control my own energy level... and hence the energy of the entire audience.

The best energy in a group setting is called by Dr. Covey *synergy*: that synchronization that sometimes occurs where every person is attuned and resonating to the same thought, emotion, or spirit.

It's real.

You know it when you feel it.

Like a tuning fork, it gives off its own sound and energy from each member of the audience. It's cumulative. It's additive. Some even know where it comes from.

39- Do I know how to take back my energy? Once I was knocking doors selling David Early tire coupons. They were \$39 and you got three free oil changes, and lots of discounts. Great deal. I knocked on the door of a big huge guy with a Harley in the front yard who proceeded to yell at me and scare me to death. Immediately a woman came up behind him, put her hand on his shoulder, and said, "Don't mind him, he's just had a bad day."

I asked with a grin, "How did I do?"

He smiled sheepishly and said, "You know, you did great. Good luck!"

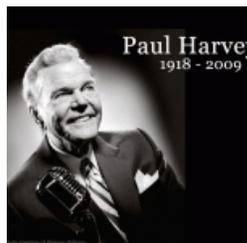
I felt great.

I took back my energy with my question.

From then on I realized I could never let anyone steal my energy away. I could give it, but I won't let them take it. And if they try, I take it back. After that, I try and end every speech, keynote, or

presentation with, "How did I do?"

40- Do I have a signature? Besides ending with "How did I do?" I answer a phone and ask, "How the *heck* are you?" And the person at the other end knows it's me. They also know I'm from Utah. :)



The Late Paul Harvey had a several signature statements in his presentation like, "This is Paul Harvey... Good day!" - Photo courtesy of Chicago Tribune

Paul Harvey would always end a story with, "And now for the rest of the story." He would end his radio show, "Gooood day!"

Les Brown would end everything he did in front of an audience with I'm "Mrs. Mamie Brown's baby boy!"

42- Do I end on schedule? Build up to your finish. End on a crescendo. Start well, maintain, and end well. Save your impact for last.

43- Am I ready for questions? Brush up on the topic and the space. Review the numbers in the research... to the decimal point. Know the stories. If you don't know something, or can't quote it exactly, just admit it. It's ok to paraphrase if you tell the audience you are doing so, and point

them to a source.

44- Can I record my presentation? It's a lot better than trying to recreate it later. And in today's world of YouTube, Slideshare, iTunes, eBooks, Twitter, Google+, and Blogs, it's an amazing way to repurpose your valuable content in many other valuable media and channels. Often I'll have someone pull out their iPhone, after all, it's HD!

45- Follow up with the people in your audience who reach out. I listened to a cassette tape set by [Denis Waitley](#) once while I was at the Naval Academy. He told stories of Wilma Rudolph and the interrogation tactics during the Korean war. He was a graduate of Annapolis. I hung on every word he said. I was young and idealistic, and decided to write him a letter. I found out his address and wrote. I unburdened my soul, I shared my dreams. I told him I was a kid from Utah, just having left the Academy on a 2 year sabbatical. I remember believing he would respond, he seemed like that kind of person.

He did.

He wrote me a 4 page letter.

He talked about Spencer W. Kimball, a man very important to him, and to me. I still have the letter. That was 27 years ago. Years later I met him at Franklin and he remembered my letter. That is the single reason why I respond to every comment on Forbes.com, every letter someone sends me. He was my Michael Jordan. My Jimmer. The best.

Thanks Denis.

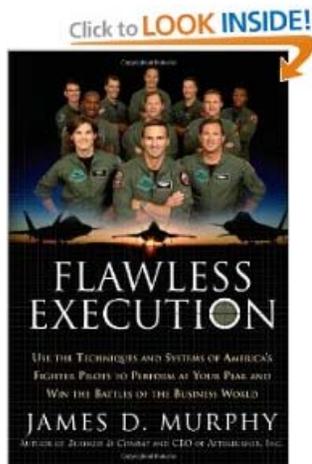


Denis Waitley, one of the greatest presenters in America, made a point to respond to those in his audience who would reach out to him... often changing their life and helping their careers.

46- Have I scheduled a debrief? Again, Chris Jorgenson turned me on to "[Flawless Execution](#)" by James D. Murphy or "Murph" as he is known at [Afterburner, Inc.](#) He teaches the time-tested techniques of America's fighter pilots to help entrepreneurs and businesses perform at their peak.

The trick?

- Brief the team before the mission.



James D. Murphy, author of Flawless Execution and Founder of Afterburner seminars teaches presenters to brief first, present, and then debrief afterward to learn and improve - Amazon.com

- Perform the mission.
- Then debrief afterwards.

(On no! Did I really use bullets?)

American pilots have their names and ranks on Velcro patches. When they go in to the debrief room with higher and lower ranking officers, they leave names and ranks on a table at the door so they can say anything that needs to be said... to improve.

They are the best in the world for this reason and many others.

When I was a Scoutmaster, we used a methodology called “shadow leadership.” We would teach the boys what they needed to do to prepare for an activity, hold the activity, then sit around afterwards with the leadership and discuss what we did well and how we could improve.

I learned that I had to let them do it if they were ever to learn and improve what they did.

The best learning experience I ever remember came on one campout to 1st Hemagogue, above Alpine City. We had trained the Quartermaster, walked him through what we needed to take for dinner and breakfast. The boys wanted oatmeal.

But the Quartermaster forgot the bowls.

10 boys ate oatmeal with their hands.

The 2 hour debrief was one of the most interesting learning experiences they (or I) ever had.

47- Do I review this ‘Tips from Great Presenters’ before presenting? This is the most important, or this list is useless.

Have I forgot anything?

Please add to these tips and ideas.

I’ll respond and add them to the list. -Ken

As promised:

48- Check consistency and spelling - As a frequent creator of powerpoint presentations, you always want to check for consistency! Make sure if you have a fact or figure on one slide, that it matches up with the content on later slides as well. Always check for errors and typos as well. Nothing makes you look more unprofessional than a spelling error, and they really distract the audience from your message. **(From Megan Strong)**

49- Don't over prepare – (from Trish Bertuzzi) I over prepared. I rehearsed. I did not lead with my passion and personality. Now, I am not saying not to rehearse or prepare but at some point, if you love to speak, you can do too much. And that is what I did.

Note to self: you can still know your material and be authentic. It is your voice they came to hear not the “perfect presentation”.

50- Some notes are good, have a high level concept summary – (from Cheryl Conner) - even if you are prepared enough to speak without notes (as you should be), having just the very highest bullet points written down can be good. Otherwise, your passion and preparation on the topic could fill the time (and your focus) to the point that you end up forgetting to cover one or more of your most critical points. (the voice of experience here...)

51- Don't put light color text on a dark background on your slides - At least if you want your content to be read. You lose 30% of readability when you do this. Even worse is white text on a light blue background. Beware of creative designers who love to make things look good at the cost of function. (I'm sitting in a presentation right now in Washington DC and can't read the slides! Ken)

52- Don't use ALL CAPS IN YOUR SLIDE COPY – Only use all caps in headlines and occasionally for emphasis. USING ALL CAPS IS LIKE YELLING AT SOMEONE FOR EMPHASIS! People aren't used to reading all capital fonts and you lose readability.

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