



Stand *out* whenever you Speak

How Do I Stay On Message?

Never Ramble or Forget Anything Again!

A few weeks ago, a client came into my office looking for help. His name was Bill, and he was the senior VP of advertising for a national insurance firm. He was a seasoned professional and quite accustomed to speaking in public. I knew that because he appeared frequently on a local TV business program.

Bill's problem, he said, came about during a recent board meeting. He was in the middle of a presentation when several board members began peppering him with questions about a new advertising campaign. Bill is used to answering tough questions, in fact, he said, he most always looks forward to them. However, after dealing with three fairly difficult questions, and trying to get on with the remainder of his remarks, Bill said, "I froze. I had completely lost my place, and it seemed like an eternity. The board didn't approve my proposal. I lost their confidence, and I never want that to happen again."

There is no question on my mind that Bill is an accomplished executive. But the only thing he took into the meeting was a piece of foolscap that listed just the topics he planned to cover for his notes. "Why?" I asked. "Because I knew my stuff," he replied. "I thought that my words would simply come to me when I looked down at the headings."

Do You Know Your Stuff?

Sound familiar? It happens more than you might think. Whether they know the subject well or not. When people don't prepare proper notes for their presentation, there is every chance that they will lose their place, ramble or even forget to deliver major points.

Certainly, it pays to 'know your stuff' but don't leave your presentation at risk. You should always have your messages, every idea you plan to state, committed to notes.

While that statement seems reasonable to most, I have had two major objections from clients to using notes.

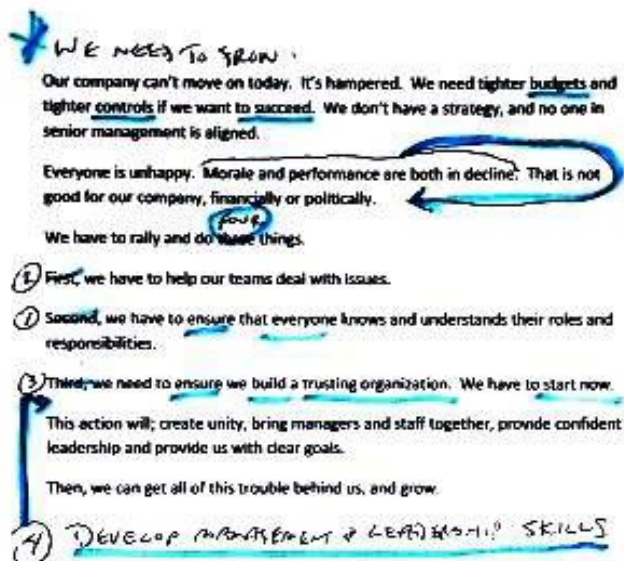
Once, during a one-on-one coaching session, I had a federal politician say to me, "Barry, I'll never use notes. It's a sign of weakness." I said, "Peter, what would you do if, the next time you fly to Ottawa, the pilot announces over the PA that he's been flying for over 20 years, so today, he wasn't going to use his checklist?"



Needless to say, Peter reconsidered.

A second objection came from Karen, a senior financial executive in one of my workshops. She told me that she had tried using notes, but she just couldn't get them to work for her.

I asked Karen to show me what she used. I've recreated her notes below. One look and you can easily see why they didn't work for her. Who could read them? She's written complete sentences, re-ordered, added and subtracted from them. "The only thing missing," I said to Karen, "Is a second colour of highlighter for the really important points." She laughed.



Karen's case is extreme, but how many times have you thrown your notes away because you just couldn't follow them?

Proper notes simply serve as your checklist. They keep you on message whether presenting to one person or to an audience of many. They keep you from forgetting anything, and from 'thinking out loud' when your mind runs blank as you try to bridge from one idea to another.

What Does It Take?

So, what does it take to develop proper notes? I'll assume, for the moment that you've read our white paper entitled, "What Do I Say?", which outlines how you develop an impactful structure for your presentation. If you haven't, let me provide you with a quick summary.

First, write down your conclusion. Leading with your conclusion, will let the audience know at the outset, what you want from them. Then you follow with the important points that support your conclusion. You can identify these points by asking yourself the 'W5H' questions to your conclusion - why, what, who, when, where and how. You don't have to include the answers to all of these questions in your presentation but going through the process will identify the ones that should stay.

Once you have written down your conclusion, and detailed the main points that support it, you then need to add just the evidence that led you to the main points.

Finally, you write your close; an evocative question, a call to action, or a simple summary of your key messages.

This structure is sure to keep your audience engaged throughout your presentation.

Proper Notes - Design

From this structure, you list every idea, every sub-idea and even every sub-sub-idea that you intend to deliver in your presentation. List them all in two- or three-word bullets. Space the points out well on the page. Indent freely. Use large (16 or 18 point), sans serif (Arial or Calibri) font, because it's the easiest to read.

I've redone Karen's notes on the following page, using these guidelines. Do they look different from the first version? Absolutely.

Sample of Proper Notes

- Company needs to grow
- We're at a standstill
- Clear need: cut back expenditure
 - Tighter budget
 - Better controls
- Right now
 - No strategy
 - Even senior management
 - Not in agreement
- Everyone knows staff unhappy
 - Not good
 - Financially or politically
 - Morale, performance
 - Both in decline
- Need to do 4 things
 1. Clarify roles and responsibilities
 2. Help teams deal with issues
 3. Build up trust
 4. Develop management/leadership
- Then we can move on...grow

Advantages

With proper notes, you'll never wonder what to say next. It's all right there. And, with proper notes you will be able to cope more reasonably with questions and comments that inevitably come from the audience throughout your presentation. And, most importantly, you retain the confidence of your audience.

Proper Notes - Delivery

Developing proper notes takes practice, and while delivering notes for maximum impact is not difficult, it does take practice too.

We outlined a similar process in our second whitepaper entitled, "Speak Like Obama." The steps are summarized below. Give them a try using Karen's notes to the left.

- Look down at his notes and take one or two lines into your mind.
- Next, look up at your imaginary audience, pause, for a second or two, and without looking away from your audience, deliver the ideas you just picked up.
- Pause for another second or two, still looking at your audience.
- Then and only then, look down at your notes and pick up another line or two.
- Look up at your audience, pause, deliver those ideas, and keep looking at your audience for a second or two.
- Repeat these steps, until you reach the end.

Did you notice how easy it seemed to deliver your ideas from notes? I'll bet you didn't lose your way and bridging from one idea (line) to another was effortless.



Still not convinced? If you have the chance, use your mobile device to tape the exercise above. Impactful? Absolutely! Here's why.

You've delivered a presentation that was well structured, summarized in succinct notes and you delivered it with impeccable 'pace' and 'eye contact.' This gave the audience a chance to think about what you just said and, to think about what you were about to say.

If you embrace these principles, practice them regularly, you will become someone who is always counted on to influence the outcome of any meeting.

Conclusion

Even your best presentation fails if you cannot 'stay on message.'

Key Points to Remember

1. Proper notes are nothing more than your 'checklist.' They ensure you don't forget anything, and they prevent you from rambling.
2. Proper notes should include each and every idea that you plan to deliver.
3. Be succinct, list ideas, not sentences.
4. Bridging from one idea will come naturally, while you are presenting.
5. Never forget proper structure (what you say) and proper pace (how you say it).

Next In The Series

Next in our continuing series, learn:

- Four guiding principles that will forever transform your use of visuals.
- What 'Active listening' truly means and how it can turn your personal communications on its head.

Previously

Please contact Black Isle for our first three white papers -

1. **'Is Anybody Listening?'** to learn why success in speaking means that your audience remembers you and your message.
2. **'Speak Like Obama'** to learn about the dynamics of proper pace and eye contact.
3. **'What Do I Say?'** to learn how to structure your presentation for impact from when you start speaking through to the very end.

About Barry Kuntz

As a senior executive with General Motors of Canada, Barry was faced with making hundreds of presentations upwards, downwards and to his peers. In 1992 he took a speaking program with Black Isle, a global consultancy with offices in Toronto, Hong Kong and London.

He liked the program so much that he joined Black Isle as its Managing Director and has embarked on a journey that has been uplifting, inspiring and rewarding.

About Black Isle

For over 20 years, Black Isle has been recognized for teaching leaders how to stand out whenever they speak. It has a distinctive and radical approach to communications training that gives leaders both the skills and confidence to approach the most daunting presentations with the knowledge that their message will be understood, remembered and acted upon.

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