

Where Are You Going with that Presentation?

A clear, compelling objective forms the foundation of every great presentation

“WHERE ARE WE GOING?”

My teenage son and I sat in the car in our driveway. He was behind the wheel, beginning another training session as he learns to drive. No engine started yet, when he posed that question. I just looked at him quizzically.

“You’re kidding, right?”

“No”, he said. “I don’t know where we’re going.”

I sat in silence for a bit, absorbing that. Okay, I thought, let’s start somewhere else.



“What are we trying to do?” I tried.

“Buy sneakers for me.” That’s good, at least he knew that.

“And where might we get those?”

“I don’t know.” The standard teenage response. Then he thought for a second. “How about the outlet mall? There’s a couple of stores there.”

“Let’s go then”, I said.

He started the car, and rolled a short distance, then stopped. He just sat there staring straight ahead. He looked deep in thought, pondering. I looked at him again, wondering.

He slowly turned to look at me, and with a look of chagrin said, “How do I get there?”

I laughingly smiled.

“You don’t know how to get there?” I asked with some incredulity.

“No”, he stated matter-of-factly. “How would I know that? I’m used to just sitting there and going along for the ride.”

Let’s pause the story there, and shift gears from driving to presentations.

How many presentations have you attended where it’s clear that the presenter doesn’t know where they are going? That the objective wasn’t clear, or even evident? Yes, there was a title that gave some idea of the topic, but the presenter just meandered along presenting various concepts and then just ended without any future direction or point. Been there? I have.

Whenever you give a presentation, you must know where you are going, where you are taking your audience. In other words: your objective. So here’s a quick primer on how to decide on your objective.

First, what is an objective? Your objective is what you want to attain as a result of your presentation. All presentations must have an objective, which essentially informs your audience why they are there, what they can expect, and how much they need to tune in.

An objective must state what you want to attain during your presentation, but it must also demonstrate benefits to your audience. To meet your objective, state explicitly what you want your audience to do.

Three perspectives. You can determine the objective of your presentation in one of three ways: from your perspective; from your audience’s perspective; or from a combination of both.

To develop an objective from your perspective, answer these four questions:

- ◆ Why are you presenting? List the reasons that you are giving this presentation to this audience.
- ◆ What are you presenting? Briefly outline the main points or content of your presentation. Identify benefits that meet your audience’s explicit needs.
- ◆ What do you want your audience to do? Put another way, what is your desired result? Determine what you want your audience to do, what

action would you like them to take. In your closing, state this call to action and motivate them to act.

- ◆ Are you going to inform, instruct, or persuade your audience to act? Generally, you would use a combination of all three of these. Identify, at a high level, what you are informing, how you are instructing, and how you are persuading.

To determine your objective from your audience’s perspective, look at your presentation with your audience’s eyes and mind. Then answer these four questions:

- ◆ What is this about?
- ◆ Why should I listen?
- ◆ What am I asked to do, and why?
- ◆ What’s in it for me?

Communicate your objective to your audience. Communicate your objective using three basic methods: informing, instructing, and persuading. Since most presentations include all three:

- ◆ Outline how you are going to *inform* them about the information you are presenting, your two to four points.
- ◆ *Instruct* them on what you want them to do, to act on your call to action.
- ◆ *Persuade* them to act on your call to action within a certain timeframe.

Now, back to our story. Another driving lesson a few weeks later: my son started the car and just sat there staring straight ahead. I waited patiently a bit, then looked at him.

“What’s the hold-up?” I asked.

Pause.

“Well,” he began. “I know where I’m going.” He turned and looked at me. Then continued, “I’m just trying to figure out the best way to get there.”

At that, I could only smile. 🌟

—RICH MAGGIANI

Solari assists utilities with creating their integrated resource plans (IRPs) through an integrated resource, distribution, and grid planning process for incorporating renewable generation.