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Teach and inspire!

By Mónica Ramírez Chimal, MBA

Imagine you've been chosen to be a speaker at an international conference. You prepared your presentation for months and have practiced it. You are satisfied with the outcome and you are sure the audience will learn. The day of the presentation arrives, so you get there early and set everything up. You watch people get in the room; there are a decent number of people to start. Someone introduces you, and you begin speaking. Ten minutes later, you see people leaving, and 30 minutes later, you see that half of the audience are asleep or looking at their phones. What happened?

If this has been the case for you, don't feel bad. This happens more frequently than you think.

As an international speaker, I've seen and lived things that have made me improve the way I present and deliver content. This article applies if you are delivering a course, workshop, or speaking at a conference.

Teach to inspire, not to impress

I know being chosen to speak at conferences generates excitement. First, you've been selected out of many other people, which says a lot. Second, your name and session will be included in the brochure and on the website of the organization hosting the conference. Wow! Of course, that deserves to be shared out loud. But when you prepare the material and begin speaking, it is not about you. It's about the topic you chose.

Many speakers think the audience is there for them and have chosen them. That's wrong. The audience is there to learn from the speaker about the topic.

Let's be honest: when you read any brochure, what you are looking for is the topic—a topic that can help you with a problem you are facing or need to know more about it. It's not about the presenter. Some names, job positions, or companies can impress, but in my experience, it's really about how effective that speaker is at teaching. I've been in conferences where “important people” are the speakers, and I've looked around to see people aren't paying attention or are leaving.

When the speaker is there to impress, it's shown in their words. “I did that.” “I have achieved . . .” “I worked at . . .” and so on. The “I” becomes the most popular word of the presentation. Who wants to hear an hour of “I . . . I . . . I . . .”?

In addition, to show how big their ego is, the speaker is also not engaging the audience. They're showing that they think the audience is not at their level. You must remember that you may have lots of experience, but many talented people are in the audience. Do you want to be remembered as someone who taught something different, or do you want to be remembered as an arrogant, inaccessible speaker?

You are there to teach and inspire. You'll inspire other people when they see you as an authentic human being that shows it's OK not to know things and that it's OK to make mistakes. Show the audience how to solve problems. If you've done it, the audience can too! That's inspiring because nobody is perfect.

Know your material so well you don't need the slides

I bet you've seen these three scenarios:

1. The speaker who keeps standing at the podium without moving.
2. The speaker who remain still and just looks at the screen.
3. The speaker who reads the slides instead of explaining.

How does that make you feel?

One word comes to mind: bored. That's right. You can be in the same position for a while, but after five minutes, the audience will notice your insecurity. You need the podium, you need to stay in the same position, and you need to read the slides because you are looking for security. The message is something like: "Don't move me, or I'll lose the knowledge."

Great speakers believe in themselves and—let me emphasize the *and*—prepare the material so well they know it by heart. They know what they are talking about, so they don't need to read the slides. They can present without the presentation; people are there to hear their knowledge, not to see the slides. The slides help reinforce what the audience is hearing, but they are not the main source of information—it's the speaker. Next time you're presenting, do this: practice your presentation without slides. If you can speak about the topic without them, it's very likely that with the slides, your presentation will be amazing.

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