

HOW TO Communicate WITH Excellence

BY TONY JEARY

Communication has been my life’s work, and I realized a long time ago that *life is a series of presentations*. God created us to live in societies and within communities, interacting daily with other people. In fact, our lives largely consist of our interactions with the people around us.

Some of us may go through life without ever giving a formal speech, but very few of us go through a single day without making a presentation of some kind to someone. And if we *effectively* communicate the message of God’s love to people—whether we are encouraging someone, leading a small group, sharing a thought in a class or group as a participant, or talking with a friend—we can have a profound impact on their lives.

Our churches are full of earnest followers of Christ who are called and willing to deliver God’s message through the various venues of the church. But many of them lack the communication skills and confidence they need to step up to the plate. My passion is to help Christians learn effective communication tools to help them articulate the message and fulfill their calling.

While working with thousands of people over the last 25 years to help

them become better communicators, I developed what I call the *Seven Steps to Effective Presentations*. Following these seven steps will help you make a powerful and lasting impact in whatever ministry role you serve.

STEP 1: CLARIFY OBJECTIVES

Whatever your specific objectives may be for a particular area of ministry, writing them out and clarifying your purpose

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for each objective will set into motion a strategic thought process that will energize your efforts. Understanding the purpose—or the *why* of each objective—gives you greater confidence and increases your effectiveness. It is important that all your objectives are aligned with the vision and goals of the church.

As you prepare your presentation, consider objectives from three different per-

spectives or “levels.” Levels one and two relate to the overall objectives of your ministry area and are strategic in nature. Level three objectives are more tactical and specifically relate to the purpose of the presentation for which you are preparing.

The first level takes the broadest perspective. It is the 50,000-foot view where you evaluate how your presentation communicates or fits with the basic purpose of your area of ministry. This purpose will probably be established cooperatively with the church leadership or the ministry leader. Consider what you want to accomplish with this particular ministry.

For example, if you are working in the first impressions ministry, your level one objective may be to create a warm and caring environment where people and relationships flourish. If you are hosting a segment of the worship service, your objective on this level may be to create a worship experience that allows people the opportunity to connect with God. A Sunday school teacher’s level one objective may be to disciple people to help them grow in their faith.

The second level objectives move from a global ministry focus to a more spe-

cific but ongoing need. An objective at this level for someone ministering on the first impressions team may be to convey to guests the caring and welcoming nature of the church. For someone hosting a segment of the worship service, it may be to lead the congregation from one worship experience to another. A Sunday school teacher's level two objective may be to impart life-giving information based on a study of the Bible.

Third level objectives relate to the purpose for a specific presentation. At this level, for example, a Sunday school teacher may think about her objectives and needs for this week's Bible study. A first impressions leader may focus on a particular message the greeters need to convey to the church members for the week. And someone hosting a segment of the worship service may consider his objectives for the particular announcements he is making.

STEP 2: DEFINE YOUR AUDIENCE

You cannot really reach an audience if you do not understand a little about who they are, what is important to them, and how they think. The more you know your audience, the more comfortable you will be during your presentation.

Form a mental image of your audience by practicing any or all of the following exercises:

- Create a profile of your typical ministry audience member that includes age, background, marital status, education, income, and occupation.
- If you have been an audience member in this type of group before, think through any expectations you may have had as you heard a similar presentation.
- Talk with someone who has led a similar group or taught

a similar class. Ask her what went well or how the experience could have been better.

- If you have a list of audience members, talk to some of them in advance to see what they expect and need.

You may think you already know your ministry audience well. I believe if you follow these steps to gain a clear understanding of who your audience is, it will provide an even better foundation for the entire presentation. Here are six subconscious needs of every member of your audience: To belong. To be respected. To be liked. To be safe. To succeed. And to be inspired.

When you help meet the needs of your audience members, you create an incredible opportunity to reach them and make a real difference in their lives. Knowing your audience is crucial to knowing how to meet their needs. It's imperative to understand the needs of your audience so you can identify the actions you want them to take to meet those needs.

Once you have clarified your objectives and defined your audience, then you are ready to start gathering the content for your presentation.

STEP 3: GATHER CONTENT

Your objectives for your presentation will serve as the foundation for the materials you gather. In many ministry presentations, people are often tempted to develop their points and then try to find how the Bible may back those points up. Scripture is a much

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KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE PRECEDES MEETING THEIR NEEDS.



KEEP YOUR PRESENTATION PRACTICAL AND REALISTIC, RATHER THAN ABSTRACT AND UNATTAINABLE.

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more effective guide if we gather what it says about the subject first and then allow God's Word to help shape our thoughts and points.

Whatever sources you use, make sure they align with your church's doctrine, goals, and vision. Above all, maintain what I call "Bible richness." In other words, keep the content of your presentation as accurate to the Bible as possible. Be careful not to put your syllabus or opinion ahead of Scripture. If you do include an opinion, be careful to label it as just that.

Start keeping a file of testimonies, stories, anecdotes, jokes, quotes, or ideas that may be pertinent to the subject matter of your ministry area. Using the information you gathered will help validate your points and will make your presentation more convincing and powerful. You can collect these items through books, magazines, and other printed resources on your topic, or you can search for them on various Web sites.

Remember to gather any visual aids you might want to use. A complete PowerPoint presentation may be a little overwhelming for small groups, but you can spice things up with handouts.

Keep your presentation practical and realistic. Most people want practical knowledge and application rather than something abstract and unattainable. Information presented in an easy-to-remember format, like a simple acronym or a three-point message, is easier to digest and retain.

STEP 4: MAXIMIZE PREPARATION

My experience in launching into a new career is a perfect example of what happens if you *do not* live by the Boy Scout motto, "Be prepared." I had great success and failure in my 20s as an entrepreneur. In my late 20s, I changed careers and decided to move toward advising and encouraging others.

As I look back on my first speaking engagement some 20-plus years ago, I remember an unprepared young man

strutting to the stage with overhead transparencies. Once on the stage, I realized to my horror that I was facing almost 2,000 pairs of eyes. I started to sweat. I threw my first slide up and started telling myself, *I can do this. My story is real. I have something of value to*

give to these people.

As I started telling my story, people in the audience began to laugh and point. I was even more shaken when I found out why—my transparencies were upside down! I had lost my opportunity to make a good first impression, and my confidence was shattered.

I remember standing alone at the front of the room, detached from my audience, and fumbling through my presentation. Then the unthinkable began to happen—people started getting up and leaving the room in the middle of my presentation!

Miraculously, my promoter did not fire me that day. We certainly went back to my hotel room for the first of many postmortem meetings, but we continued the tour he had booked for the remainder of the year. It was a learning year, and I was determined to find a way to improve my presentation effectiveness. I began reading hundreds of books and watching dozens of videos of every successful presenter I could find, hoping I could learn from the masters how to make excellent presentations.

Through hard work, new insight, and God's grace, I became a master presenter myself. In his mercy and plan, God has given me the privilege of coaching many others along the same lines for a number of years now.

I have learned so much since that eventful first day. I can see now that I was insufficiently prepared for my first seminar presentation. And I had not even gotten to know my audience well. I hadn't determined their needs or become comfortable with my venue.

But this is what I learned from that experience: *preparation pays huge dividends*. Whether you are presenting for a small group or a huge audience, preparation can mean the difference between connecting and calamity.

Who's a Presenter? YOU Are!

Tony Jeary's new book, *Purpose-Filled Presentations*, will show you how to lead a small group, make a presentation to a committee or class, or share your faith with someone next door.

Tony, acclaimed by corporate leaders and motivational experts as "Mr. Presentation," explains how any Christian can

communicate more effectively to anybody, anytime, anywhere!

You'll enjoy his practical, step-by-step approach. You'll learn how to use his simple "Seven Steps to Effective Presentations" (the first four are highlighted in this article):

1. Clarify Objectives
2. Define Your Audience
3. Gather Content
4. Maximize Preparation
5. Open Well
6. Engage Your Audience
7. Close With Action

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This article is adapted from chapter 1 of *Purpose-Filled Presentations* by Tony Jeary.