



And That Concludes. . .

©2009 Joseph Sommerville, Ph.D.

Have you ever witnessed a speaker end a presentation by “telegraphing” the conclusion with a phrase such as “Thank you” or “That concludes my presentation”? Speakers who rely on such phrases to trigger audience applause are like the driver who stops not because he’s reached his destination, but because he’s run out of gas. Effective presentations don’t simply end. Instead, they conclude by creating intellectual reinforcement, psychological closure and a behavioral roadmap.

Intellectual Reinforcement

Intellectual reinforcement helps strengthen understanding and summarizes the point of the presentation. You create it by reviewing the key messages—The reasons you’ve given the audience why they should accept your ideas. Remember that reinforcement is more than simply restatement.

Psychological Closure

Psychological closure provides a sense of satisfaction. It’s the same feeling you get after watching a good movie. All the elements have come together in a certain way that pointed towards completion. Conflicts are resolved or the hero has saved the heroine or, evil has been defeated. To provide psychological closure for your presentation, consider using one of the following techniques.

Refer back to the introduction. If you've opened with a narrative or story of some kind, refer to it as you close. If you’ve opened with a statistic, frame it within the context of the time you’ve been speaking.

Use a quotation. Some books on public speaking and several coaches recommend that you use a quotation to end your presentation. It’s good in theory, but is often poorly applied. Many speakers fail to make certain the quotation has a direct application to their presentation.

Use an anecdote. You can often use an appropriate anecdote to great effect. A short story can be just the vehicle to pull all your points together and leave something memorable. Don't make the story drag on. Make certain it's relevant to the presentation. Your own stories will work best. Don't simply repeat one you've heard in another context.

Behavioral Roadmap

A behavioral roadmap tells the audience how they can implement your ideas, buy your product or service, or what next step they should take. Don't leave them wondering. You'll lose 100% of the sales you never ask for. Help them to visualize the benefits they'll enjoy when they take action on your recommendations.

Your conclusion is the last thing in the audience's mind as you finish, so you'll make that last impression a positive one. Here are three commonly-used conclusions that detract from your message.

The stall. That means you're promising to conclude but you never quite get there. "In conclusion..., I'd like to just summarize by saying..., and to move towards my final point, ... so I guess I'm at the end..." Don't keep promising to conclude; conclude.

The Porky Pig. How does Porky Pig end every cartoon he appears in? Bdeh, bdeh, bdeh, that's all folks! How many presenters do you hear say: "I guess I'm out of time so I'll stop there. That's it, that's all I have to say. I'm done. I guess I should quit. They are telling me to stop. I'll stop there for now." It's an awkward close. The presenter might as well say, "I don't know how to get out of this, so I'll just stop talking."

The Apology. Don't draw the audience's attention to your shortcomings by apologizing for them. "I hoped to talk about x, y, and z, but only talked about A. I had hoped to cover more points, but I ran out of time." "I was thinking maybe that we should have covered the problem or the solutions but I only talked about the problems, so I guess we'll just have to have another meeting on this." These are all examples of telling the audience how you've failed as a speaker.

Thank of your conclusion as the place to tie everything together in your presentation. When you can satisfy the audience, strengthen their understanding of your position and show them what next steps they should take, you'll be another step closer to becoming a rainmaker.



Joe Sommerville shows professional services firms how to increase visibility, enhance credibility and close more business. Download the first chapter of RainMaking Presentations: How to Grow Your Business by Leveraging Your Expertise at www.RainMakingPresentations.com.