

Stick To Your Script

When making a presentation, especially one to a large audience, there is a tendency for most of us to improvise. You know, stray from the script a little in the hope of adding what we believe would be a little zest to our message. This urge to improvise often manifests itself in two rather contrasting conditions - the first when we're doing a great job up there; the audience is loving us and our adrenaline kicks into high gear and the other when we're not doing a great job and, in fact, are going down in flames! Well, if you find yourself in the latter situation, there's worse news - you also look pathetic as you go down!

Your audience can tell if you're going off script

I have delivered and attended many presentations in my 30+ year career in the banking industry and these are my observations:

1. I can always tell when a presenter strays from the script (yes, it IS obvious).
2. Even the most seasoned presenter does this.
3. Even the most seasoned presenter doesn't always get it right.

Of course, there will always be occasions when we feel a need to resuscitate a disinterested audience. Depending on how witty you are as a person - let's face it, we're talking about drawing something appropriate from your treasure trove of ideas - your chances of success are 50-50 at best. The price of getting it wrong is costlier than you can imagine. The operative word is "appropriate". When you have little to no time to consider the appropriateness of what you're about to say, there's every chance that you're going to regret your decision. I reckon this is where the line "I was misquoted" was made famous by public figures.

You don't prepare your own presentation script

The higher up in management one gets in one's career, the more likely is one's presentation script written by someone other than the presenter. Although I always wrote my own script, I have developed scripts for senior management in my career and it was a thankless job. Not only did most of these presenters not adhere to my script, in the process losing the plot I have plotted, they usually just picked out the facts and figures and told their own stories, which often turned out forgettable at best and careless at worst.

Some mistakes can be career-ending

You'd be lucky if you merely escaped with a joke that did not take off. It could be a lot worse if it were inappropriate word choices or, heaven forbid, insensitive cultural or religious faux pas. Do you still have use for your right hand? And you know what else is scary? This has already happened to so many seasoned presenters all over the world! Just go Google or Trump it.

Be creative to keep your audience interested

So, do all your planning - including having a Plan B if you must, before you step up on stage. One element I use often whenever I prepare a presentation is creativity. I know that so long as my audience remains interested in my story from start to finish, I would have met my goal. Oh, I do occasionally improvise but I keep a tight rein on this and often it's a one-liner quip to spice up someone's statement. Essentially, unless you're confident of your stand-up comic talent, do all your planning before you step up in front of your audience. Practise and practise to sound believable. And as soon as you're up there, stick to your script.