

## 10 P's to Effective Panel Presentations

*By: Shawn Kent Hayashi*

You already know your stuff – you are a recognized expert with relevant, transferable experience, or you wouldn't have been asked to speak on the panel. Unless your expertise includes speaking on a panel, you run the risk of distracting others from your experience with amateur presentation technique.

As I was sitting in the audience at an association meeting, listening to a panel of experts share their views of the trends and issues in their industry, the man sitting next to me leaned over to me and said, "I wish they had worked with you before they began to speak on this panel." This doesn't have to be your legacy if you follow these ten tips.

### **1. Prepare using notes to guide your comments or presentation.**

Think ahead about the key points you want to make. Put them into bulleted points; do not write out word for word what you want to say. Make it conversational by talking with a few people in advance as if you were speaking to your audience. Ask yourself what your audience really wants to know about your topic. Stick to that content. If possible, talk with a few audience members prior to the event to learn more about their issues, concerns, and questions. Without notes, your nerves may take over and cause you to ramble. No relevant connection will be made with the audience.

### **2. Package your message with metaphors, examples, & statistics.**

Use everyday language. Start your first sentence with an interesting statistic. Then, give an example of how that statistic is affecting your industry, association, or topic. Give an example of any key point that you are making. **Your experience is valuable – it's how you got**

**on the panel!** But this is not show-and-tell. Tell your stories with minimal detail and make a practical application quickly.

### **3. Practice using the microphones.**

In the meeting I attended, there were two table mikes for four speakers. Unfortunately, none of the speakers had practiced with the microphones prior to their first comments, and they didn't realize that the microphones were not turned on. There were well over 100 people in the audience, but only the first few rows could hear the speakers. An audience member had to stand up and say; "We can't hear you." This situation is uncomfortable and easily avoidable. Whenever you are speaking with a microphone: Practice prior to the audience's arrival. Establish credibility. You should practice speaking into the microphone so that your facial expressions don't show surprise when you first hear your own voice over the PA system.

### **4. Participate with other panelists.**

Look at the panelist who is speaking. It's important to nod as you are listening; whether you agree or not. Listen and weave their points into your comments as appropriate. When you reference their comments, use their name. Even if you have very different perspectives, points of view or experience, be respectful. Do not talk over other panelists. You will appear rude and arrogant.

### **5. Paraphrase or rephrase questions.**

When a question is posed to you, make sure that you repeat that question, unless there is a host or announcer repeating for everyone to hear. Don't just look at the questioner as you

answer. Look at all areas of the audience so that you keep everyone involved. Choose a person and look at them for 5 seconds. Then move your eyes to someone else on the other side of the room, or further behind the person you started with. Hold eye contact with them for 5 or more seconds, and then look at someone else. Do this throughout all your comments.

**6. Present using facial expressions.**

**Smile!** Vary your expressions to what you are saying. Remember – you are a panelist the whole time you are on stage – not just when you are speaking. Demonstrate that you are listening to the other speakers by varying your facial expressions as they speak too.

**7. Purposefully link your message to your body language.**

Lean forward slightly while you are speaking. Keep your arms and palms open while you speak, and as you listen to the other speakers. One of the panelists I observed crossed his arms, sat back in his chair, and remained expressionless. The audience thought he was aloof and distant. His body language said he did not want to be there.

**8. Provide handouts.**

Compile a reading list, helpful websites, quick tips related to your specialty, or an article. Be sure to include contact information including your name, address, website, phone/fax numbers and email address. Do not provide an exact reproduction of your talking points.

### **9. Prompt the planner.**

Make the most of this experience by helping the meeting planner shine. Discuss the following:

- Provide seed questions for the audience to get things started in the Q & A session.
- Ask about advance notice and PR for the meeting.
- Provide a bio of no more than 5 sentences, written in story form, with related experience.

Do not include everything you have ever done.

- Make sure there is enough room at the table for all the panelists.
- Discuss the format – does every panelist answer every question? Will each person specialize in the types of questions or topics they answer?

### **10. Pat yourself on the back.**

They say it takes 10 years to be an overnight success. Enjoy the fruit of your labor. You can make a great impression on prospects and clients by connecting with your audience from the platform. Awareness and practice will make the difference between being an expert in your head vs being an expert in the mind of your audience.

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