

Mark

A presentation is a very one-sided form of communication. Usually the audience can't easily interrupt or contribute. So it's asking a lot to expect them to stay focused, unless you can somehow make your presentation feel more like a two-way conversation.

Perhaps the best way to do this is simply to ask lots of questions. Question tags in particular create the illusion that you're having a conversation with your audience. Don't just say 'Interesting'. Say 'Interesting, isn't it?'

Another inclusive question type is the negative question form. Don't just say 'There's a need for more transparency'. Say 'Isn't there a need for more transparency?' This also sounds much more persuasive.

One very simple way of building rapport with your audience is to avoid addressing them as 'you' and talk about 'us' instead.

And, finally, use plenty of involvement expressions – expressions like: 'I know what you're thinking', 'If you're anything like me', and 'What if I was to say to you'. Adopting a semi-conversational tone like this is especially effective if you're presenting to small groups ...

Presenter

OK, I think we all know why we're here. We're here to discuss how we respond to the illegal file-sharing online of this company's copyrighted musical content. Now, we've been here before, haven't we? And many, many times, in fact. And you don't need me to tell you that illegal downloading is costing us million[s] of dollars ...

Here at CMI we've always taken a tough line. And that makes sense, doesn't it, when it's effectively killing our business? None of us can deny that [the] music industry is in decline ...

As we can see, along with video rentals, the market for CDs has halved over the last ten years. But what if I was [to] say to you that illegal downloads are *not* primarily responsible for this? That file-sharing is *not* what's killing our business? Because, if, like me, you thought that every download is a lost sale, you'd be very, very wrong. Isn't it time we faced the fact that what's *really* killing music sales is that buyers are spending their limited disposable income on computer games instead? Here we can clearly see that sales of computer games have quadrupled over the same ten-year period ...

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Now in most presentations there are only two things an audience can do to show their appreciation – applaud and laugh. Applause usually only comes at the end of your talk. But laughter can come at any point, even right at the beginning. And when you make people laugh, you make them more open to your ideas. Laughter is non-verbal agreement.

So how do you get it? Jokes seem the obvious choice. But jokes are high-risk. If nobody laughs, you look bad. So, if you do tell a joke, keep it short and make it relevant.

A safer strategy is to refer to an amusing quote or saying ...

Presenter

I forget who it was that once said: 'Sometimes the best solution to morale problems is to just fire all the unhappy people.' Fortunately, morale isn't a problem for us. In fact, let me show you the results for the job-satisfaction study we carried out at our packaging plants last month ...

Mark

Another fairly safe option is the funny story. Funny stories are often better than jokes. Jokes create the expectation of a laugh. Stories don't. The laughs, if they come, are a bonus.

Presenter

To make sure your message reaches its target, sometimes you have to break some rules. Airlines have a particular problem in getting people to listen to their safety announcements. So one regional airline changed its message to this: 'Welcome aboard flight 577 to Houston, Texas. To fasten your seatbelt, insert the metal tab into the buckle, and pull it tight. It works just like every other seatbelt, and if you don't know how to operate one, you probably shouldn't be in public unsupervised. In the event of a sudden loss in cabin pressure, oxygen masks will descend from the ceiling. Stop screaming, grab the mask, and put it over your face. If you have a small child travelling with you, secure your mask before assisting with theirs. If you have *two* small children travelling with you, decide now which one you prefer.'

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Connecting with your audience is always your first priority in a talk. Never try to be so serious and professional that you lose that vital connection. And remember that when things go wrong or you make a mistake, if you can see the funny side, it may just be an opportunity to build rapport.