

**I DON'T CARE IF YOU CAN PLAY "LAYLA" ON YOUR ELECTRIC GUITAR**

1

I'm regularly asked to list a few "tips" that are critical to effective presentations, and while I think that the subject warrants a more substantive discussion, I realize pop culture is replete with "Top Tens," "Top Plays," and "Top Celebrity Moments" etc. So I give in. Here we go:

2

**HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY**  
 Seems basic, right? A lot of presentations have no clear point of view. They reach no conclusion. They're a waste of everyone's time. Figure out what it is you want to say and say it.

3

**START WITH THE END**  
 Once you've figured out what it is you're trying to say, work backwards and put in only those ideas that get you to what you want. Take out everything else. I don't care if you can play "Layla" on your electric guitar. Neither does your audience. As amusing as it may be, if it doesn't get you to your point, it's out.

4

**GIVE YOUR AUDIENCE A BREAK**  
 It's hard to listen to anyone talk for much more than three minutes. You've got to give your audience relief, and you do that with PUNCTUATION. There are many ways to do this. Change your tone of voice. Slow down your delivery. Talk louder. Use eye contact for punctuation. Finish a thought on one person's eyes and then move onto the next person and the next thought. Facial expressions. Gestures. Movement. And last but not least, silence. Do not be afraid of silence. Use it for effect. People tend to remember the last thing you say before you become silent. Make one of your key points and then stop talking. Let the idea sit there like a headline. Wait a beat or two and then start talking again.

5

**YOU'RE THE STAR, NOT THE SCREEN**  
 The screen and what's on it are there to serve you. To reinforce your ideas. It is not the presentation. You are. Make what's on the screen as visual as possible. Cut back on the words. And never read the words on the screen. I could go on and on about the proper way to use PowerPoint (it is possible) but that would take more space than we have here.

6

**PREPARE. KNOW YOUR STUFF.**  
 Preparation cures many ills. You won't be as nervous. You'll seem like you actually know what you're talking about. You can focus on the audience and not on you. You'll be confident. You can focus on your delivery. So prepare. Rehearse. Over and over. Know your part and everyone else's part, too.  
 Adcenter Board member Russell Davies talks about the virtues of "workshopping" a presentation. Sit down with your team and go over the entire presentation out loud. Listen to how the words sound. Look at the visuals. Sharpen-up the segues between slides and sections. In my mind it's similar to a table reading of a script. Get all the "actors" together and work on it.

7

**DON'T MEMORIZE**  
 Make the material yours. Make it flow naturally out of you. It should seem as if your wonderful ideas just occurred to you spontaneously. If you memorize it, it will sound as if you did. And people don't talk that way.

8

**MAKE IT CONVERSATIONAL**  
 It shouldn't be an address given in stentorian tones. You're probably not presenting on the steps of a national monument, so make it fit the venue. Great presentations seem just like conversations, only you're doing most of the talking.

9

**MAKE IT PERSONAL**  
 Let your audience see how much you care. If you don't, why should they? Let them see your passion. Much of what we present in advertising is subjective. It's all a matter of opinion. Your passion can convince the audience that your opinion should be theirs.

10

**MAKE IT MATTER**  
 Make it clear to your audience how important your message is to them. What it can do for them. For their careers. For their lives. Be sure they get it and make sure they know that you get it.

11

**LISTEN**  
 Sure you're talking, but you've got to be listening with your eyes. Notice everything. If they're not nodding, make your point another way. Don't go on to your next point until they've gotten the first one.

12

**KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE**  
 Who are they? What are they expecting? What preconceived notions do they bring to the discussion? Know everything you can about them and use what you know in your presentation.

13

**MAKE AN EMOTIONAL CONNECTION**  
 You're not going to bludgeon people into your point of view. Advertising is the art of seduction, not debate. They're people. People are, at their core, emotional creatures. Remember that and use it.

14

**TELL A STORY**  
 Find the drama. Focus on that. Make your presentation a story with a beginning, a middle and an end. The way you do when you're out with your friends at the bar.

15

For millennia humans have gathered around the fire to share their stories. To find entertainment, understanding, meaning and sometimes, inspiration. Nothing's changed.

16

**HAVE AN ENDING**  
 I've made this point a couple of times in this article, but I feel compelled to do it again here at the, uh, end.  
 People remember endings. That's why I've said "start with the end" as you prepare your presentation. Write it first and work backwards. And when you deliver the end, nail it. Like the Eastern European gymnast dismounting the uneven bars.

17

**PETER COUGHTER**  
 PROFESSOR

18