



How to Win Your Audience Over Right From the Start

by Patti Hathaway, Certified Speaking Professional & Author

What do you do to "grab" your audience from the start of your presentations? Is there a sure-fire way to relax your nerves and connect with your audience at the same time? I want to share with you what I learned from Lee Glickstein, the speaking coach I hired several years ago. He is the author of *Be Heard Now! How to Compel Rapt Attention Every Time You Speak*. His concepts have transformed how I speak and can impact your presentations as well.

Openings are the toughest thing for most presenters. You only have about 15 seconds to make a good first impression. Think about typical openings you have heard presenters give: jokes, thanks for inviting me, I'm glad to be here, housekeeping items, name dropping, etc. Most of us don't tune in at all until they start their "real" content, do we? And, many presenters start talking immediately after the applause ends to cover up their anxiety or to project confidence.

Consider this...Open by nonverbally noticing and receiving your audience for *at least* five seconds after applause ends (this was the most difficult thing for me to do in the beginning). Why? Because speaking is an act in which you give *and* receive. Most presenters tend to give, give, give or push, push, push more information at you. Take a deep breath and center yourself. Allow room for give and take.

Open with a personal story that reflects your humanness. Your opening line is the most critical line which should connect you to the audience. Here are some actual examples of mine: "It was one of those phone calls you dread." "Have you ever felt like you just didn't fit in?" The fact that you opened with silence and then start with a sentence that grabs the audience's attention compels people to listen immediately.

Tell your story only to individuals, keeping soft eye contact with each for 5 - 10 seconds, before moving on. Avoid sweeping eye contact with the entire audience, but looking at no one in particular. This individual eye contact lessens the fear factor with larger audiences. You are merely having a conversation with individuals, who happen to be in a group. Speak in short sentences, pausing frequently to really connect with individuals.

Use humor based on your own experiences and limitations as a human being. Years after hearing me, people still come up to me to talk about the grape story or my safety city story. In this era of political correctness, jokes can get you in trouble. Personal stories endear you.

Practical Application: Think about your presentations. What is your message? Tell you or your organization's OWN stories and anecdotes to coincide with your main points or content.

I designed the following questions specifically for the health care fundraisers I was speaking with to spark their memory about events that occurred in their life or organization. Consider adapting these questions to your subject matter and incorporating your answers into your presentations in order to build more meaning, rapport, and connection with your audience.

- * Who was the most influential health care person in your life?
- * What's the most poignant real life story you've heard in your health care organization?
- * What was a significant benefit you personally received from one of the hospital's community programs?
- * Name two health care professionals from your organization who have impacted health care for the better?
- * What is your organization's basic health care philosophy and mission?
- * What are the top three concerns people share with the changes in health care?

Patti Hathaway, CSP, The CHANGE AGENT, is one of fewer than 7% women worldwide to have earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation from the National Speakers Association for her proven presentation skills. She is a Business Advisor and the author of 6 books that have been translated into 5 languages and have sold over 100,000 copies. Patti solves your people challenges by providing highly customized solutions to meet your needs. Contact Patti at 1-800-339-0973 or at her web site: www.thechangeagent.com for information on her speaking and consulting services or to receive her free e-mail newsletter/blog.