



## 8 Common Pitfalls Presenters Make<sup>®</sup>

By Patrick J. Donadio, MBA, CSP, MCC

My first "paid speaking engagement" in 1986 was a disaster! Here is what happened. As they read my introduction I began to feel myself getting more and more nervous. By time I got up to speak, I was so nervous I forgot my opening. Next, I had memorized my speech and half way through lost my place. Luckily for me I had a copy of my script with me. So I ended up reading the rest of the speech from my notes. This caused me to have poor eye contact with the audience and in turn made me even more nervous and flustered. It got so bad that I abruptly ended my talk and forgot to close the speech. What a nightmare!

I learned a lot from that first speech... all the things not to do. Over the years I have seen many of my presentation skills coaching clients make similar mistakes. In order to help you become a better presenter I have compiled a list of the most common mistakes presenters make. Avoid these like the plague and you will be on your way toward being a better speaker/presenter:

1. **Trying to imitate someone else.** Be your unique self!
2. **Failing to project a sense of confidence.** By talking too fast or slow, too loud or soft, having poor eye contact, or reading word for word ... Confidence is visual. Portray it through your voice, eye contact, mannerisms, gestures and body language. **Confidence is not how you feel, it is how you look!**
3. **Speaking down to the audience.** Speak with the audience not to them. Be careful of using jargon/technical terms or having a superior attitude.
4. **Neglecting to prepare enough supporting information.** Many presenters fail not because they lack facts but because facts are all they have. Incorporate stories, human experiences, quotes and statistics to keep your audience's interest.
5. **Lacking a dynamic opening and closing.** The first and last things you say are very important to the success of your presentation. Try to avoid the following:

### IN OPENINGS AVOID

- An apology - the audience doesn't know what your problems are so why tell them.
- The trite comments – "Hello my name is.... and I am going to talk about....." (They are almost asleep by now...). Open with something different, unique and attention getting!

### IN CLOSINGS AVOID

° Abrupt endings – Just stopping or saying "Well that is all I have to say..." Be sure to come prepared with a closing and then announce your close so people are ready to hear it.

6. **Failing to rehearse.** Work out the kinks before you present. Rehearse out loud. If not, your presentation becomes the rehearsal. Rehearsing also helps boost your confidence.
7. **Memorizing your speech word for word.** It's okay to memorize your opening, closing and quotes but not your whole presentation. As comedian George Jessel said "*The mind is a wonderful organ, it begins working the day you are born and doesn't stop until you get up to give a speech*".
8. **Forgetting to involve the audience.** Involve your audience mentally, physically and emotionally. If you don't tune them in, they will tune you out.