

The Listener's Point of View ☆ member / subscriber content

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We often hear about the importance of presentation skills. In fact, in talent development, we rely on our presentation skills more often than we realize. When we think of these skills, our first thought is usually about delivering a presentation to a large group—maybe to shareholders, customers, employees, or a larger community. We need to present effectively to capture and hold listeners' attention so we can get our point across in ways that they will understand, remember, and cause them to take action.

But the need for these skills goes way beyond speaking to an audience. We give presentations all the time. These talks shape the way people think, guide them in making decisions, and often drive their actions as a result. For your presentations to be truly effective, your skills matter.

Consider some examples:

As managers, talking to employees during a performance review depends on our ability to help them understand how they performed against goals. Did they meet expectations or fall short? It's up to us to deliver this information in ways that will motivate rather than intimidate them and inspire collaboration rather than resistance. Our presentation skills affect their performance. Their performance affects the organization and helps it grow or bogs it down. In other words, there is a cause-and-effect relationship between our presentation skills, employee performance, and company growth.

As parents, talking to a child clearly, firmly, and with warmth shapes and molds their character. Telling stories opens up virtual windows to the way the world works. Our presentation skills, while certainly informal when talking to a child, help prepare that child for navigating life. Their life affects others over time including friends, colleagues, organizations, and the broader society.

So what do different presentations and their respective audiences have in common? At the core of every presentation is what keeps listeners listening. Whether welcoming a new employee, developing talent for an organization, conducting a performance review, motivating a team, or disciplining a young child, presenters must consider how long their listeners will pay attention before their minds start to wander.

Not surprisingly, it's not long. The average attention span is less than you might think. According to recent research from Microsoft, the average adult attention span is only 8 seconds! How can we in talent development capture and sustain attention span beyond 8 seconds?

We need to give our listeners compelling reasons to listen. Whether we realize it or not, there are four questions running through the minds of our listeners, that if we don't answer they will stop listening. These four questions comprise the listener's point of view:

- Why should I listen to you in the first place?
- Why should I keep listening?
- What do you want me to remember?
- What do you want me to do?

By answering these questions, your presentation will be framed from your listeners' point of

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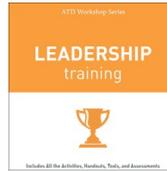


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view. Talk to people from their point of view and they will listen. Talk to them from your point of view and while they might politely look like they're listening, their minds will be focused on what's important to them. The listener's point of view is your key to unlock the mystery of how to keep listeners listening.

This is one way speech pathologists can help trainers become better presenters. Speech pathologists are trained in the science of communication and specialize in many different areas, including neurolinguistics, acoustics, articulation, foreign dialects, voice disorders, stuttering, interpersonal communication skills, and presentation skills.

As we know all too well, miscommunication can lead to organizational dysfunction and reduced productivity. Speech pathologists can often help by providing valuable information through visits to your organization as guest speakers, consultants, or professional practitioners ready with expert guidance on communication. To find a speech pathologist near you, check out the Corporate Speech Pathology Network at corspan.org.

Has your organization worked with speech pathologists before, or do you have best practices to share on presentation skills? Join the conversation in the Comments below.

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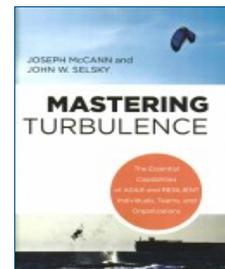
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