



Talk Like TED

The 9 Public-Speaking Secrets of the World's Top Minds

By Carmine Gallo

“While you may never speak at an actual TED conference, if you want to succeed in business you’d better be able to deliver a TED-worthy presentation,” says Carmine Gallo, author of *Talk Like TED*. To succeed today, he says, you must be able to sell your ideas, and yourself, confidently and persuasively.

In *Talk like TED*, Gallo identifies and outlines the techniques used by the top TED presenters and shows how you can use them to improve your own presentations. Whether you’re presenting to an audience of two – or two hundred – there are plenty of ways to make your presentations more powerful and dynamic.

“There’s nothing more inspiring than a bold idea delivered by a great speaker,” says Gallo, who analyzed more than 500 TED presentations.

The mission of TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) is to spread ideas. The non-profit organization is best-known for its TED Talks, short, powerful talks of 18 minutes or less, delivered by experts drawn from the worlds of technology, academia, entertainment and beyond. Available on the TED website, archived TED Talks enjoy a huge viewership. By the end of 2012, TED presentations reached one billion views, and they’re currently watched by about one million people per day.

In his preparation for *Talk Like TED*, Gallo, who also wrote the bestselling book *The Presentation Secrets of Steve Jobs*, interviewed some of the most successful TED speakers, as well as leading neuroscientists, psychologists and communications experts. He also reviewed 150 hours of TED videos.

According to Gallo, TED Talk presenters use a “bold, fresh, contemporary and compelling style.” He categorizes the most engaging presentations as being **Emotional, Novel, or Memorable**.

Emotional refers to making a meaningful connection with an audience;

Novel means that audiences are learning something new; and

Memorable means that content is being presented in ways that audiences

remember.

Gallo discovered that the most-viewed TED Talks share nine important elements.

He's organized his book into three parts, Emotional, Novel and Memorable, and he outlines three of the nine key elements within each section.

In this summary, we'll look at each of Gallo's nine elements, along with specific examples from a variety of TED presenters. In the Emotional part of his book, Gallo talks about the importance of passion for your subject, the art of storytelling, and the power of body language and verbal delivery. In the Novel part, he covers how to engage audiences with new information or unique approaches, delivering "wow" moments and incorporating humor. The Memorable section talks about the ideal presentation length, making sure to include vivid, multisensory experiences, and the importance of being genuine and authentic to gain the trust of your audience.

The ability to sell your ideas is the most important skill in business, he says, and fortunately it's a skill that's possible to improve.

Part I: Emotional

1. Unleash the Master Within

Do you have a passionate connection to the topic of your presentation? If you're inspired, you'll be able to inspire others too. "Science shows that passion is contagious," says Gallo. If you share the connection that you have to your subject matter with your audience, you'll be more likely to win them over.

In his work with clients who want to be better communicators, Gallo starts off by asking them a question: "What makes your heart sing?" Sometimes it takes a bit of drilling down to identify your passion. "A passion is something that is intensely meaningful and core to your identity," he says.

For his client Howard Schultz, founder of Starbucks, his passion wasn't coffee but was instead, "building a third place between work and home, a place where employees would be treated with respect and offer exceptional customer service." So while coffee is the product, for Schultz the passion is in exemplary customer service.

The most popular TED speakers are clearly passionate – about their work, their research, their discoveries, or their causes. And their passion contributes to their success well beyond the TED stage. For example, when they were starting out, tech leaders Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, Sergey Brin and Larry Page all showed a powerful passion for their work, which helped them persuade investors and secure critical start-up funding.

Your motivation can also make you a better presenter. If you're trying to make a deal, or elevate your stature, you may fail to connect. But if you are sharing information that will help your audience in some way, you'll feel more confident - and are more likely to connect.

Being positive is important, too. People who listen to charismatic, positive speakers experience a more positive mood themselves. People judge the effectiveness of leaders based on their emotional expressions. "How you think - the confidence you have in your expertise, the passion you have for your topic - directly impacts your communication presence," states Gallo.

2. Master the Art of Storytelling

Brain scans show that stories engage and stimulate the human brain. Storytelling helps speakers connect with audiences, which in turn helps speakers persuade. Brands that tell stories connect with customers much more strongly than those that don't.

A study at Princeton University showed that we experience "brain-to-brain coupling" when we hear a story. The brains of both speakers and listeners, observed with an MRI, showed the same response patterns and areas of activation while the speaker was telling a story. This synchronization illustrates that a deep connection has been made between the speaker and their listeners.

"If stories trigger brain-to-brain coupling, then part of the solution to winning people over to your argument is to tell more stories," says Gallo. He says there are three types of stories that the top TED speakers tell. They are personal stories, stories about other people, and stories about brand success.

Tell personal stories - Gallo thinks business professionals are often reluctant to tell personal stories as part of a professional presentation, but given the power of stories, this might be a mistake. "Storytelling is the ultimate tool of persuasion," he says.

The most popular TED presentations begin with a personal story and the most compelling stories are those that end with an unexpected result. Take your audience on a journey, with lots of details so they can imagine your situation more fully.

Tell stories about other people - Some neuroscientists believe that we're hard-wired to feel empathy, and that this emotion helps hold our society together. Personal stories can also be about other people. Bryan Stevenson is a civil rights attorney, and executive director of the Equal Justice Initiative. In his TED Talk, called "We need to talk about an injustice," he talked about people who had influenced his life, including his great-grandparents, Rosa Parks and a janitor. In fact, sixty-five percent of his talk on racial discrimination in the criminal justice system was spent on stories. This talk earned Stevenson the longest standing

ovation in TED history, and so far the online version has been viewed 1.9 million times.

Tell stories about brand success – Stories can put a human face on a big corporation. Many food companies now use advertising that features the individual farmers who grow the ingredients used in their products. People also like to hear about marketers who promote brands in a unique way. Seth Godin, in “How to get your ideas to spread,” (3.7 million views), talks about brands that were marketed differently, to great success. Marketers for Silk soymilk opted to put Silk next to regular milk in stores, even though it doesn’t need to be refrigerated. This made it stand out, increasing profile and sales.

You can strengthen your stories by including heroes and villains. The villain is your market challenge, and your hero is your product, brand or idea, which somehow saves the day for your users or customers.

3. Have a Conversation

Gallo tells us to: “Practice relentlessly and internalize your content so that you can deliver the presentation as comfortably as having a conversation with a close friend”.

Performance artist and musician Amanda Palmer gave one of the most high-profile TED Talks in 2013. She spent hours and hours over four months perfecting her talk, and credits over 100 people with helping her to prepare. She practiced her talk relentlessly too, presenting early versions to a wide range of audiences, incorporating feedback from all of them.

Gallo talks about the three Ps in presenting: Passion, Practice and Presence. Once the first two are in place (a passion for your topic, and lots of practice delivering your speech), you can work on your stage presence.

The four elements of verbal delivery are rate (the speed at which you speak), volume, pitch (high or low), and pauses. You can use all of these elements to add emphasis and your best speed is the the speed you use in regular conversations.

Body language is also very important. “The way you carry yourself actually changes the way you feel when you’re delivering a presentation,” says Gallo. We’re constantly being judged on how we walk, talk and look. Leaders look like leaders. They’re confident, they speak articulately, they stay calm. “You might never see a TED stage, but you’re selling yourself all the time,” says Gallo. “Successful TED presenters have strong body language and so should you.”

How should you use gestures?

First, take your hands out of your pockets. Use gestures at key moments – don’t go overboard. And keep your gestures in your “power sphere” – picture a circle that extends from your navel to your eyebrows, to the ends of your outstretched arms, and keep the movement of your hands within that circle.

Part II: Novel

4. Teach Me Something New

“Reveal information that’s completely new to your audience, is packaged differently, or offers a fresh and novel way to solve an old problem,” states Gallo.

Humans are natural explorers, and our brains crave novelty. Presentations that contain something unexpected give us a bit of a shock, shake up our way of thinking and give us a different perspective on our world.

It also helps to package data in a fresh way. Hans Rosling, a professor of health who tracks global poverty and health developments, co-developed software that gives life to dry statistics. He’s given multiple TED Talks, and the interactive way he presents his information has made him one of the most popular TED presenters. In “Let my dataset change your mindset,” he uses moving bubbles to show evolutions in life expectancy, family size, and health care around the world.

Scientists believe that learning something new triggers the same brain reward centers in the brain that drugs and gambling do. They say that dopamine must be present in order to retain information, and that it’s released when we learn something novel. We can get addicted to this kind of dopamine release, and it’s heightened when we’re presented with new ways of learning, or new ways of looking at things.

While your topic might not be earth-shattering, you can connect with your audience by sharing something new that benefits them in some way. Some technology companies do this very well, promoting complex technologies by highlighting the specific benefits they deliver that help people in their daily lives.

How can you jumpstart your own creativity to come up with new ways to present your information? “Bombard the brain with new experiences,” says Gallo. “That means you need to get out of the office once in a while. Experience new events, people and places. Most important, incorporate these new experiences into your presentations.”

5. Deliver Jaw-Dropping Moments

Neurologists define a “jaw-dropping” moment as an emotionally charged event. This surge of emotion (and the accompanying surge of dopamine) is what makes the moment memorable.

Gallo offers five ways to create a “holy smokes” moment in a presentation.

Props and demos – Add a relevant product demo, or an item that helps illuminate your topic. Bill Gates opened up a jar of live mosquitoes at the beginning of his TED Talk on malaria, to a huge audience reaction.

Unexpected and shocking statistics – Look for an interesting statistic that’s related to your talk. Jon Ronson, in his TED Talk on psychopaths, made a comment that turned heads: “One in a hundred regular people is a psychopath. So there’s 1,500 people in this room. Fifteen of you are psychopaths.”

Pictures, images and videos – The right choice can add punch and emotion to a presentation.

Memorable headlines – Make up your own sound bites. These are short, provocative statements that are often repeated and are ideal for sharing on social media. TED has a website and a Twitter handle to promote the quotes of its speakers – because they are so key to spreading the TED message.

Personal stories – Consider adding a personal story, as they are often the “jaw-dropping” moment in a presentation.

And try to end on a high note. Think of a “showstopper” to close your presentation. “The showstopper seals the deal and permanently brands the message in our minds,” says Gallo.

6. Lighten Up

Our brains like novelty – and they like humor too. “Humor lowers defenses, making your audience more receptive to your message. It also makes you seem more likable, and people are more willing to do business with or support someone they like.”

The TED Talk that Sir Ken Robinson gave in 2006 is the most popular in TED’s history, with over 29 million views to date. The subject, “How schools kill creativity,” doesn’t sound very funny. Robinson combined stories with humor to talk about a serious topic in a novel way.

There’s a big difference between telling a joke and making a humorous observation. Unless you’re a professional comic, keep your jokes to yourself. But a humorous observation can humanize you, and draw your audience closer.

Gallo shares five “humorous alternatives” to add humor to your presentations.

Anecdotes, observations and personal stories – Stories that you tell about yourself can be funny. Gallo suggests starting your presentation with observational humor is a safe bet – you’ll be aiming for a smile rather than a big laugh. If you try for a big laugh at the start and fail, you’ll never recover.

Analogies and metaphors – These help people understand abstract concepts, or large numbers, and can add fun.

Quotes – Quoting someone else can be a safe way to add humor. Adding quotes is also a great way to break up your slides. Gallo likes to incorporate quotes from association members, or CEOs, who are connected to the group he’s speaking to. This can be funny, and helps him connect to his audiences.

Video – A video can provide the humor instead of you, and can also be used to highlight an element of your talk.

Photos – Just like video, photos can add emotional impact and help to lighten the mood.

Laughing releases endorphins in our brains, relaxing us and leaving us receptive to new perspectives. Gallo says that as he himself developed as a speaker, he realized that he didn't have to make the audience laugh, all he had to do was "reveal the humor in a particular situation."

Part III: Memorable

7. Stick to the 18-Minute Rule

The 18-minute rule applies to *all* TED speakers, no matter how exalted. TED curator Chris Anderson says, "It's long enough to be serious, and short enough to hold people's attention." It's also an ideal length for online viewing. It "forces people to be disciplined in what they write," says Anderson, especially for people who are used to taking as long as they like when delivering presentations.

When people listen to a speaker, they're building up a "cognitive backlog." The more information they have to organize, understand and recall, the more they get stressed and frustrated.

"... a 60 minute presentation produces so much backlog that you risk seriously upsetting your audience unless you create a very engaging presentation with 'soft' breaks - stories, videos, demonstrations or other speakers," says Gallo.

Learning takes a lot of energy. While a three-hour seminar can mentally shut us down, an 18-minute presentation leaves our brains with enough energy left over to think further about what we've heard, and maybe act upon it.

The Rule of Three & the Three Story Structure

How can you keep your presentations on the shorter side? Create a "message map" to help organize your speech. First, come up with a Twitter-style headline, which states the most important idea that you want to convey. Then, draft three key messages which support your headline. Then, flesh out your three key messages with examples, stories and hard facts.

8. Paint a Mental Picture with Multisensory Experiences

When audiences are exposed to multisensory experiences – those that touch more than one of the five senses – they're more engaged and involved. The brain wants to be stimulated. Use images, videos, props, or other people to add another level of interest to your presentations.

In research with university students, levels of recall were much higher when presentations included video, images, animations, and text.

Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor's TED Talk about her own stroke reached more than 16 million views, in part because she used an actual brain with spinal cord attached as an attention-grabbing prop.

Al Gore's presentation on the climate crisis is another great example. His slides – which are remembered by just about everyone who has seen them – convey very complex information in a way that's easy to understand. If he had just spoken to the audience, his presentation would have been much less impactful.

The presentations that most business people create are lackluster. For the business user, the average PowerPoint slide contains 40 words. At TED, slides might show a few words, or just images.

Slides filled with words are a distraction because people can't listen to a speaker while they read a densely-worded slide. Our brains just can't multi-task in this way.

"The old style of PowerPoint is an anachronism on the modern corporate battlefield," states Gallo. Replace old-style, word-heavy PowerPoint decks with new ones that "take ... audiences on a visual journey."

Gallo's tips for improving PowerPoint slides:

- Add images, background pictures to graphs, tables and pie charts
- Use no more than 40 words – total – on your first 10 slides
- Minimize the number of bullet points (the best TED presenters never use them)

Pictures are important, and help us to retain information. "Pictures are superior," says Gallo. "... a picture will help you remember six times more information than listening to the words alone."

When Bono delivered a TED Talk on reducing poverty, each of his slides contained just a single idea or data point. He also included stories about specific individuals, with images. He used a close-up photo of two children saved by medical care, for example, to illustrate a specific data point.

You can use words, and props to paint a picture too. And there are lots of ways to help your audience "feel" your presentation. Build in some audience participation, walk in the crowd with a prop and pass it around, or do a product demonstration.

These types of approaches are harder. It takes courage to do things differently, and go beyond the typical presentation style. But your presentation will be much more successful – and your ideas will be received with greater interest and enthusiasm.

9. Stay in your Lane

“Be authentic, open and transparent,” declares Gallo. If you try to be something you’re not, audiences will sense it, and not trust you.

It can be hard to be yourself in front of an audience when you’re struck by nerves and focusing on the mechanics of your speech. Lots of practice is the answer. When you know your material inside and out you’re free to “tell your story in a way that is interesting, dynamic, and more important – authentic.”

Conclusion

TED Talks are increasingly a part of our culture. As the talks themselves become more widely known, and watched, the presentation style of TED speakers is also becoming more widely adopted.

“Ideas are the currency of the twenty-first century,” says Gallo. “You don’t need luck to be an inspiring speaker. You need examples, techniques, passion and practice.”

Anyone can Talk Like TED. All it takes are the right tools and approach. If you use the nine elements, your presentations will be more dynamic, you’ll speak with greater confidence and you’ll persuade like never before.