



Presenting to the Big Cheese

1. Start with the answer. Executives are busy and don't have time to wait for you to get to the point. When you begin your presentation, tell them why you are there and why what you have to say is important. Then, get to the bottom line. Executives are not interested in long explanations or details. Give them the straight goods up front. By keeping your presentation concise and relevant to their areas of concern, you are most likely to keep them engaged. If you feel that it's important that they have the details, give them a take-away document for their review after the presentation.

2. KISS them! Keep It Short and Simple. The less time it takes you to cover the most important materials, the better. Plan to finish in less time than you are allocated. The fewer words you can use to get your message across, the better. Include one or two main points with one or two strong supporting facts or statistics, and perhaps a story or anecdote to illustrate your point. This keeps the presentation focused and interesting. While you talk about the key points, remember to keep the message simple and clear. Avoid technical language and jargon. Use silence effectively. Silence allows the audience to process what they hear, and it adds emphasis to what you're saying. It also allows you to gather your thoughts. If you would like to use graphics, they can stimulate the audience's interest, but be careful of having too many – you don't want to distract your audience from the key message. In addition, make sure that the graphics are clear and appropriate.

3. Be flexible, but organized. When putting your presentation together, keep its organization simple so that you aren't sidetracked when the questions come in the first few minutes of your delivery. Interruptions should be anticipated, not dreaded. They give you great insight into what exactly the executives are concerned about, which allows you to target your message accordingly. A rigid flow that depends on your PowerPoint slides being shown in order will sink you if you start getting bombarded by questions that seem off topic. A few well-illustrated points throughout your slides are easier to support than having to flip through many slides to get the details. Your ability to handle interruptions is a key variable to your effectiveness. If you find that you are frequently interrupted, get back on track by returning to the key points of your story-line. If this means going back a slide to get back on course, do so. This will give you a moment to recollect your thoughts, to restore the sense of momentum for your audience and to move forward with the information that follows.



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4. Have a conversation. In addition to presenting your information, make sure you engage the executives by asking for their input, suggestions and answers, and do so in a way that reflects confidence and your own interest in the topic. This will also make your presentation more interesting. Look people in the eyes (you can't do this if you're reading) and respond to their body language. If they look like they've had enough information on one topic, move on to the next one, even if you have much more to say about it. You may even want to give them control by providing options as to what they would like to hear about next. It is not about being perfect, it's about being personable.

5. Be solution focused. Talk about solutions, not just the problems. Describe the benefits of adopting your recommendations, and make the benefits vivid and obtainable, while explaining the cost of not adopting the recommendations. Remember to use technology to reinforce what you're saying, not dictate it. If you decide to use PowerPoint, use the rule of 5: no more than 5 bullets per slide and 5 words per bullet. This will prevent text heavy slides that take away from key points.

6. Wrap up and review. When you have completed your presentation, acknowledge the executives' dismissal in a professional manner and allow them to move on to other work. Take a minute to recover and process the experience. Review whether you learned of confidential information, and how you will preserve that confidentiality. Enjoy your coworkers' interest and curiosity about how the presentation went, and take time to appreciate the fact that you were invited to speak to the leadership group. It is a rare opportunity and you received it.

These tips are meant to help you improve your executive presentation. Remember that when you're in the hot seat, it's alright to be nervous; but nobody sees how you feel, just how you look and act. So keep your presentation short, clear and concise, and you'll make a strong impression and increase your chances of being heard.