

The Purpose Statement

The purpose statement, or „goal“ of a presentation, needs to be clearly articulated so the audience knows where you want to take them. A common problem in many presentations, however, is that most purpose statements are simply too general or vague. For example, “The purpose of my presentation is to give you an overview of our product line” (or of the current situation, or of what we can do for you...etc.). How many times have we heard openings like these?

When the purpose statement is vague, quite often, the whole presentation lacks focus as well. And this leads to the audience losing focus in your presentation. Why shouldn't they? If you can put yourself in the shoes of the audience, would you feel compelled to concentrate if a presentation speaker was vague about the purpose of why he was speaking? Didn't think so. After a few minutes the typical audience member is daydreaming about taking a holiday on a tropical island.

The listener needs to hear what specifically will be discussed (i.e. what specific aspects of the product line, or current situation) and, very importantly, what they will learn or gain from listening to the speaker. That should be specific as well. If won't be enough to silence their minds with catch phrases such as, “...and the advantages or benefits you will get from hearing this”. What exactly does advantages and benefits mean for me? Rather, we need to unpack words like “benefits” and give the audience something more concrete to hold on to. See example below.

The formula:

A purpose statement can be divided into two parts. Each part should be one sentence long (or one breath long). Why? Because the audience won't be able to keep anything longer than a few lines in their head. Part one articulates specifically what you want. Part two tells them why this is important FOR THEM.

Example:

In one breath – tell the audience what you want - SPECIFICALLY

- **“I would like to explain in my presentation why we should put speed limits on German Autobahns”.**

In the second breath – tell the audience what they get, why it's meaningful for them to listen, what's in it for them.

- **“...and how that can help you to get to your destination more quickly and safely, while saving money”.**

Examples of improved purpose statements

- Product presentation to sales team (Industry: automobile manufacturing)

☹️ ...so the purpose of my talk today is to give you an overview of some new products in our drive train portfolio

😊 ...so the purpose my talk today is to go over 3 new components for the drive train that will help reduce emissions below EU norms and at the same time be easy for your customers to integrate into their current development process.

- IT (software) presentation to clients (industry: energy transport)

☹️ ...I'd like to talk to you about our new energy-related software solutions.

😊 ...I'd like to talk to you about how to significantly simplify your logistics' costs in energy transport while increasing safety.

- Internal presentation to department heads (industry: non specific)

☹️ ...I would like to talk to you about our change management meeting last week

😊 ...what I would like to present this afternoon are the 5 final proposals for change that the board would like to see up and running within the next 3 months. This is important because you will be responsible for implementing these changes in your departments.

- Internal presentation to board members (industry: advertising, marketing and design)

☹️ ...and so this morning I would like to look at some new trends in our industry.

😊 ...and so this morning I'd like to look at the increasing trend toward social-network advertising and marketing and how it will impact our existing strategy and core competencies.

- Medical conference presentation (industry: health, pharmaceutical, medical research)

☹️ ...my talk will cover some new treatment strategies for cancer.

😊 ...my talk will look at Angiogenesis: a revolutionary new way to look at *and* treat many deadly diseases, including cancer, through starving their source of growth.

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