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LeaderSpeak™ is a commentary on how leaders create, engage and mobilize followers.

PowerPoint Can Leave Leaders PowerLess

PowerPoint is one of the biggest impediments to an individual's communications effectiveness.

Yet every day we see leaders becoming more and more dependent on it to “facilitate” their communications. At one large Canadian technology firm, PowerPoint is absolutely mandatory; according to one of its executives, no presentation can take place without it. At a recent strategic planning session, for example, the primary presentation contained no fewer than 300 PowerPoint slides.

We understand the allure. It can be an appealing method of organizing facts, figures, findings and trends. It's tempting to dump all your knowledge into a flashy looking PowerPoint. The software is full of possibilities – colourful charts, animation, and graphs – all of which are accessible 24/7, lending themselves nicely to those presentations completed hours, or mere moments, before delivery.

But here's the question:

As an effective leader, where should your audience's attention be: on the screen, or on you?

The simple fact is that they can't focus on two things at once. Even when people are actively listening, they only hear 80% of what is said. By asking them to read detailed PowerPoint slides while listening to you, you're setting yourself up to compete for their attention.

Furthermore, if everything you are going to say is contained in the PowerPoint, then why are **you** there? Audiences may well ask themselves the same question.

There is a place for PowerPoint. As a means to illustrate your key points, it can be very effective. Use just a few words per slide – not the six line maximum the software recommends. Use pictures over words, whenever possible. And remember, unless you're using the medium to deliver a report, avoid slides saturated with words or numbers.

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Al Gore's Speakcheck Score

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SPEAKCHECK®
THE TRUE MEASURE OF LEADERSHIP

Al Gore,
“An Inconvenient Truth” (2006)

Speakcheck Score: 9.14 out of 10



We ran our Speakcheck diagnostic on the presentation portion of Al Gore's film.

Gore scored particularly high in the credible commitment (9.87), visionary (9.65), trustworthiness (9.59) and leadership traits (9.41) clusters.

He establishes his credibility in the subject early on. He uses visuals powerfully, and tells compelling stories. His presentation appealed to

By the time Al Gore made the documentary film “An Inconvenient Truth”, he had delivered his slide presentation over 1,000 times. His mission in making the film was “to communicate real clearly” and remove any obstacles to people’s understanding of the global warming issue.

Would Gore have won the Nobel Prize if he had simply delivered the standard dry and detailed PowerPoint presentation?

Well, spend an evening with Amory Lovins. The energy efficiency guru, founder of the Rocky Mountain Institute, spoke in Toronto last winter. He greeted the audience of senior business, political and community leaders by saying he was going to deliver the other half of Al Gore’s speech. The two have been on the same mission for over 30 years. He then proceeded to deliver a PowerPoint presentation that more closely resembled an engineering lecture. Two hours later, the slides were still coming, and he continued unabated, oblivious to the number of audience members who ever so quietly made their escape.

In Lovins’ case, as with so many other leaders, the medium killed his message. He has great expertise and much to say, but his message was largely lost. Lovins was preaching to the converted; yet he still managed to lose their interest and attention, and likely a lot more. The high profile leaders in the room had anticipated a higher return on the time they invested with him that evening. Their disappointment couldn’t help but diminish the former high regard they had for him.

Technology should never drive the communication.

If you want to engage your followers and move them to action, relegate the technology to the back seat.

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all styles of learners, including analyzers (facts, numbers) and kinesthetic learners, although at times it was too detailed for a mass audience.

He delivered clear, strategic messaging, and made a powerful declaration: “I believe this is a moral issue. It is your time to seize this issue. It is our time to rise again to secure our future”. He closed with a strong, explicit call to action.

What does Speakcheck measure?

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- Leadership counsel
- Strategic communications counsel
- Key message development
- Communications coaching

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