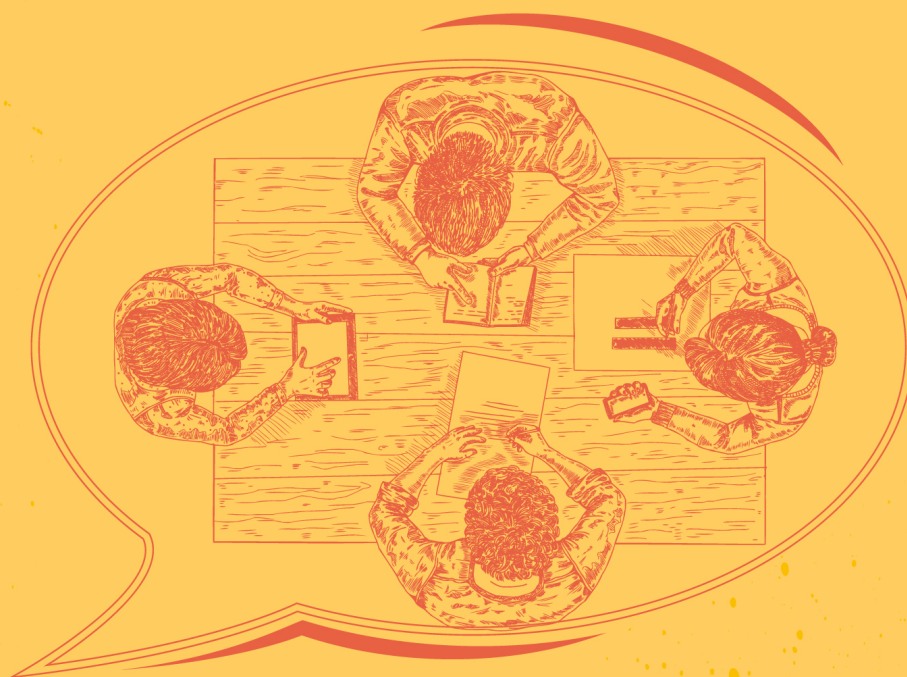


SUMMARY

THE ORDERLY CONVERSATION

DALE LUDWIG
GREG OWEN-BOGER



Summary of “The Orderly Conversation” by Dale Ludwig and Greg Owen-Boger

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Business Presentations Redefined

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Introduction

When we talk about doing business, we are engaging in a conversation between organizations, between those who buy and sell, between manufacturers and distributors, between service providers and clients, and more. Additionally, the business presentations you deliver are part of these larger conversations, and they exist for one reason: to keep business moving forward. As a result, the stakes are incredibly high for any business presenter. *The Orderly Conversation* addresses everything you need to make that conversation go well, including how to distinguish between a speech and presentation. Ultimately, authors Dale Ludwig and Greg Owen-Boger aim to help you overcome nervousness and offer various tips and tricks to help you become a better business presenter. They state, “our goal is to help you, as the unique individual you are, get business done.”

A Presentation is Not a Performance but a Conversation

One of the biggest assumptions about presentations is that presenters assume that the more they practice, the better it will be. While this may be true to an extent, oftentimes presenters set themselves up for disappointment when they practice a presentation for hours, only for the presentation to become a total failure. So how can we ensure a presentation is a success? Well, the first step is to forget everything you think you know about presentations.

You see, most people assume that a presentation is much like a performance; that is, the presentation is scripted, carefully put together, rehearsed, and in the total control of the presenter. Performances and presentations, however, are not the same. For example, stage actors put on performances; they plan, rehearse, and control everything you see and hear onstage. During the performance, the actor is kept separate from the audience, and they never forget that the actor is performing. So while audience members may be moved to tears by the final scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, there is enough separation to understand that Juliet didn't actually stab herself.

This separation between the performers and the audience is what theater people call "the fourth wall," and a similar wall is in place when you watch a speech. While speechmakers address the audience directly, audience members understand that the speech has been scripted and rehearsed. A presentation, on the other hand, is an exchange between a presenter and an audience in which there is no fourth wall. The presenter and the audience are fully engaged with one another, turning the presentation into a conversation. Of course, conversations often veer off-topic and stray in various directions, and in a presentation, this type of conversation is unproductive; therefore, a presentation must be an *orderly* conversation.

An orderly conversation is one in which the presenter lets the conversation happen without losing sight of their goal. Therefore, “Success requires creating a plan that looks ahead to the uncertainties of the delivery. Delivery, in turn, relies on adapting what was planned to what’s happening in the moment.” In other words, presenters must create structure while maintaining some sort of spontaneity which, as you’ll learn in the next chapters, can prove to be quite difficult.

School Teaches Us How to Deliver a Speech But Not How to Connect With the Audience

As you went through school, you probably gave a presentation or two, right? That presentation was probably then evaluated by your teacher based on certain criteria, like your tone of voice, speed, diction, and eye contact. While this may have been helpful for teachers to grade their students fairly, it has led to some bad habits among business presenters.

One of the biggest problems with this approach is that it only prepares you for delivering a speech, and doesn't prepare you for connecting with the audience. People who hold onto what they learned from school presentations often focus on the wrong things, like having the 'right' number of bullets, never looking at their slides, holding their hands a particular way, and rehearsing every detail. As a result, business presenters who follow this performance approach fall into three categories: The Nervous Perfectionist, The Dutiful Student, and The Entertainer.

The Nervous Perfectionist puts an extraordinary amount of time into planning her presentation and rehearses it several times before the big day to perfect her delivery. She believes that she will be nervous and that rehearsing will give her control of what she says, which will then give her confidence, reduce her nervousness, and lead to a successful presentation. The reality is that during the presentation, her perfectionist ways will only lead to self-consciousness when things don't go as planned. Even worse, her excessive rehearsing will prevent the audience from joining the conversation, which is the whole point of a presentation!

The Dutiful Student is one who follows the rules and is too focused on the classic rules of presentation. In one workshop, for example, a Subject Matter Expert pulled out her three-ring binder filled with her training slides, complete with a script in the speaker notes and laminated to prevent damage. She admitted that when learners asked questions, she often became frustrated because it veered off-script. As a result, she became

disconnected from the audience and didn't engage in a productive, orderly conversation.

Finally, The Entertainer is one who sees his presentation as a stage. He typically has a larger-than-life personality, has a lot of confidence in front of an audience, and acts as if a spotlight has been turned on as soon as they begin. As a result, these “actors” are often perceived as being over the top and disingenuous, traits that many people don't want to work with, or even buy from! Ultimately, falling into any of the three categories means that you are focusing on the wrong thing. Instead of focusing on the presentation itself, you should focus on your audience and determine how you can include them in the conversation.

The Key to Presentations is Eye Contact and Intentional Pauses

A problem that many presenters encounter is that they focus on themselves. Think about it. How often have you seen someone give a speech who is clearly nervous? How do they act? They often speed up their speech, they might start sweating, their hands might shake, and they might even stumble through the presentation until they can finally run out of the spotlight. Afterwards, you are left unimpressed and probably a bit confused. Unfortunately, this happens all too often because the presenter becomes too caught up with themselves and forgets entirely about the audience.

When a speaker forgets about the audience, he will continue to focus on himself and become even more nervous. The author compares this experience to that of a funhouse. When you first enter a funhouse, you find yourself in a place with uneven floors and strange mirrors that are made to disorient you. And as you explore the funhouse further, you become even more disoriented, and eventually, you find you can barely stand on your own two feet. It is disorientation and loss of control that many people experience when they focus on themselves during a presentation. So how can you avoid the funhouse? Well, the two primary skills that must be used during a presentation are eye contact and intentional pauses.

When having an ordinary conversation, how important is eye contact? When someone fails to make eye contact, you typically feel unimportant or that the person you are talking to is distracted, disengaged, and indifferent. The same can be said for a presentation! The intentional use of eye contact allows you to make a connection with people and allows you to read their reactions and determine how to respond. As a result, you'll stay focused on the conversation and keep the audience's attention.

In addition to eye contact, you'll also want to engage your audience with intentional pausing. Intentional pauses can give you time to gather your

thoughts and think of how you want to respond or what you want to communicate. It allows you to take control of what you're saying instead of rambling through a nervous presentation. In fact, intentional pauses shouldn't be used to add a dramatic effect; instead, you might be surprised to find the powerful calming effect intentional pauses have on you as a speaker. When you are connected with your audience and stay in control of what you are saying, you become an effective communicator that is fully engaged in the conversation. You aren't caught up in the wrong things, like performing, or whether or not your audience is following along.

Identify Your Goals and Use Framing and Content Slides to Reach Those Goals

If you've spent any time in the business world, you've likely sat through a presentation or two that were difficult to listen to. Rather than engaging in conversation, some presenters take on a lecture approach and bring their audience to boredom and put them through a slow, painful "death by PowerPoint." By the end of the presentation, you probably don't remember at all what message the presenter was trying to convey. So how can you ensure you get your message across?

The first step is to consider your audience and identify goals that directly relate to them. Think about how you want your message to be received and before making any slides, simply write out the fundamental goals of your presentation. When doing this, it's important to consider what you want your audience to feel at the end of your presentation. Do you want them to understand something new? If so, write out what you want your audience to know by the end of the presentation. The next step is to think about who your audience is and how you can relate to them. What knowledge might your audience already have on the topic? Asking this question will help you to relate to them. For instance, if you're giving a presentation on technology to a group of people who know nothing about the topic, then you will probably leave out the technical language.

Next, you'll want to prepare a frame, not a script. In an ordinary conversation, people listen as another speaks, and this pattern goes back and forth. The same should happen in a business presentation. The difference, however, is that the presenter should be leading the conversation and have a goal that can only be achieved through the conversation. So how can you prepare for that? Build a frame. The first few slides should begin by explaining to your audience why you are there, what needs to be accomplished, and how your goals will be reached. When you build a solid frame, you are assuring your audience of four things: you have

a plan, you know what you want, you understand their perspective, and there is a reason they should care about what you are talking about.

For example, let's assume that your team's sales are slowing down. In this case, you should show them a slide that explains the current situation, a slide that states a goal, and a slide that describes your agenda. A fourth slide should then show them how your plan benefits them. These framing slides should set the stage for your presentation and make it clear to your audience that you plan to leave them with at least one clear, actionable step that they can implement immediately. So while these framing slides are essential for beginning your presentation, your content slides should be used as the vehicle for delivering the key information of your topic.

Content slides can be more than just PowerPoint slides; in fact, they can be anything from visuals to drawings, spreadsheets, and posters. Content can be presented in any way as long as it aids you in informing your audience about your topic. Lastly, you probably don't have time to create beautiful, well-designed slides, right? Well, there's no point in stressing over having aesthetically-pleasing slides; instead, simply focus on communicating the point you need to make when you encounter complex slides. Don't just talk about the details, but the overall point you wish to make.

Final Summary

When it comes to preparing a presentation, there is no need to stress about rehearsing to perfection or even stress over what to do with your hands. Instead, a presentation should follow the same structure as a conversation, the only difference is that you, the presenter, should have control over where the conversation goes. Presenting to a group should be unpredictable, and your job should be to create an environment conducive to discussions that lead to your end goal. So stick to your agenda, make eye contact, make intentional pauses, and you'll easily meet your goals!



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