

You probably already knew that people get tired and hungry. But when you are the presenter, you are at the front of the room. You are moving and talking. You are excited about your presentation. It's easy to forget that your participants might be having a very different experience. It is likely that they are tired of sitting, and if a significant amount of time has gone by, they will likely be getting hungry.

### TRY TO HAVE SOME INFLUENCE OVER WHEN YOU PRESENT

You may not be able to choose what time your presentation is, but if you are able to, avoid speaking right before a mid-day or end-of-day meal—both times when people are hungry. Speaking right before dinner adds to the problem—people are likely to be both hungry *and* tired right before dinner.

You have probably heard that you should avoid speaking right after a meal, since people can often get tired or sleepy after they eat. It would be better to have your presentation time slot be right in the middle—not too close to a mealtime, but not right after one either. You have to speak sometime, though, and I'd rather take a slot after a meal than right before one. If your presentation is focused, interesting, and lively, then speaking after a meal should be fine, because you will energize the audience.

### IF YOU ARE CLOSE TO A MEALTIME, DON'T TALK ABOUT FOOD

You'd be surprised how many times we use references to food, metaphors about food, or pictures of food in presentations. Food grabs people attention, so it's a good idea to use food references and photos in your presentation, but not if your presentation comes right before a mealtime. If you make reference to food when people are hungry, it will make it harder for them to pay attention to the rest of your talk. Be careful of saying things like "Before we break for lunch I want to talk about one more topic..." If people are hungry and you mention food or mealtime, assume that you won't have their full attention anymore.

### Takeaways

- \* People get tired and hungry. If they are either one, then they will not pay a lot of attention to your presentation.
- \* If you have any control over what time your presentation is, pick times that are relatively soon after a meal was served. Avoid speaking to people who are hungry.
- \* If you are speaking right before a mealtime, avoid mentioning the meal or food in general.
- \* If you are speaking at the end of the day, be aware that people will be getting tired. Keep the presentation short and entertaining.

## PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED BY TEMPERATURE

Have you ever attended a presentation where the room was too cold or too hot? You probably found that it was hard for you to concentrate and pay attention to the presentation.

If you have control of the temperature of the room, make sure it is comfortable for the people attending.

### DON'T MAKE THE TEMPERATURE SUIT YOU

Because you are the presenter, you are moving around. Your participants are likely sitting down and not moving around very much. This means that the room will feel warmer to you than it does to them.

It's also possible that the temperature in the front of the room is different than in the rest of the room, so don't assume that what you are feeling is an accurate indication of how others are feeling.

### BE PERSISTENT IN FIXING THE TEMPERATURE

You may not have direct control over the temperature of the room, but as the presenter it is your responsibility to try to fix the temperature if you feel it is too warm or too cold. Start by seeing if the host of the event knows how to adjust the temperature. If that doesn't work, you might have to find a facilities person.

### RECOMMEND THAT PEOPLE BRING LAYERS

If you are presenting in a room that you know is usually too hot or too cold and you have access to participants ahead of time, contact them (for example, via email) and let them know (or remind them) of the temperature issues in the room. Suggest that they bring some extra layers (things they can take off if it gets too warm or put on if it gets too cold).

### Takeaways

- \* If people are too hot or too cold, it will be hard for them to concentrate.
- \* Since you are moving around as the presenter, it is likely that you will feel warmer than your audience.
- \* The temperature for you at the front of the room might not be the same as for participants who are sitting in the back.
- \* Encourage people to take control of their own temperature by bringing layers to dress in.
- \* If the temperature in the room is too hot or too cold, talk to the host or to the people in charge of the facilities to get it fixed.

## WHEN PEOPLE ARE UNCOMFORTABLE, THEY CAN'T PAY ATTENTION

Sometimes we focus so much on ourselves, our presentation, how we feel, and where we will be standing or sitting during the presentation that we forget to think about the audience. If the audience is uncomfortable in any way, then it will be hard for them to pay attention to what you are presenting.

Whenever I give a presentation, I try to get as much information as possible about the venue or room beforehand. If people are sitting a lot, the chairs are uncomfortable, and I'm the last presenter in a full day of presentations, then I know it will be hard for people to pay attention to my presentation no matter how good it is.

### PUT YOURSELF IN THE AUDIENCE'S SEATS

If possible, check out the room and the seating before your presentation. Are the chairs comfortable enough? Is there enough room between seats or is everyone going to be squished together? Are there enough chairs for the expected attendance? Is there cold or hot air blowing on a certain part of the room? When possible, I go into the room ahead of time to check out the room and the seating, and I sit down in one of the chairs and face the front. Even if you cannot change the room, at least you will know what the challenges might be for your audience.

### MAKE CHANGES WHEN POSSIBLE

A few years ago I was giving a presentation at a conference. My presentation was to be right after lunch, so during the lunch hour I went to the room to check it out. It was a room that would hold about 100 people. I was talking on a panel, and several of the panel members were very well known. I calculated that more than half of the conference attendees would want to get in on this panel session—about 250 people—but the room was set up for only 100. That meant that people would be standing in the back, sitting on the floor in front, or not able to attend. I found someone who was with the conference and discussed it with them. They did some last-minute switching and changed the room to one that could accommodate more people. The presentation started on time, and the room was full at over 250.

### Takeaways

- \* If people are uncomfortable, it will be hard for them to concentrate.
- \* Check out the facilities ahead of time to see if there are any comfort challenges.
- \* If there are any comfort problems, try to get them resolved before your presentation.

In one of my presentations, I arrived early to set up. There were going to be 25 people at the session. I did not need an Internet connection for my computer, but I knew that the 25 professionals who would be there would expect to be able to get online. The hotel was going to charge \$25 for each person to connect to the Internet. The host of the session agreed to pay \$25 for herself, and then she went out and got a router so everyone else could connect without having to pay \$25.

These days, people expect to be able to get a wireless Internet connection when they are at a conference or presentation. They also expect to be able to plug in a computer, a cell phone, or both.

Although you may not be responsible for these types of services, it is a good thing for you as a presenter to remind the host what people will be expecting during your session. And if you need Internet connectivity, you had certainly better check that it is available to you. Although many, and maybe even most, facilities offer Wi-Fi in their meeting rooms, not all do, or they may charge. Don't end up surprised. Check it out beforehand.

### Takeaways

- \* People expect wireless Internet connection and plenty of power outlets.
- \* Although it may not be your role to provide connectivity, the lack of it could negatively impact your presentation if people are frustrated or spending time trying to figure how to connect or plug in rather than listening to your presentation.

**“They may forget what you said, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”**

**—Carl W. Buechner**

# HOW PEOPLE REACT EMOTIONALLY

People don't just think. They also feel. Even if the information you are communicating is primarily facts, dates, and numbers, you can't ignore how people will react emotionally, because without engaging people emotionally, you can't even get them to listen to what you are saying. In this chapter, you'll learn how to engage people emotionally so that they will listen to what you have to say.