

# THE IMPORTANCE OF DEFINING YOUR AUDIENCE

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When you have a presentation to make, it's tempting to ask yourself right away, "What am I going to say? How much information can I fit into the allotted time? Which visuals should I use?" So, you may immediately dive into the process of selecting material, developing an outline, creating slides and rehearsing content. Although these steps are important, you risk heading off in the wrong direction unless you first consider the most important element of your presentation – the audience. As an effective presenter, your first step toward making a powerful, persuasive presentation is to define your audience. Who are your listeners and what are their needs? To begin your preparation without this information could mean your time and effort – and the audience's – are spent in vain. By defining your audience, you lay the foundation for a successful presentation, increase the likelihood of influencing your audience and get the results you want.

## Benefits of Defining Your Audience

As a result of defining your audience, you are able to:

- ✓ identify what motivates your listeners to act
- ✓ tailor your content to give them specifically what they want, need and expect
- ✓ project an appropriate presentation style and personality
- ✓ increase your comfort level as a speaker
- ✓ obtain your objective for making the presentation

Defining your audience means finding out who they are. This information is crucial in order to address audience members' needs, interests, expectations and levels of understanding. Without this knowledge, you are unable to match your message with their needs. Your ability to present from *their* perspective enables you to influence their thinking, persuade them to accept what you are suggesting and achieve your goal for making the presentation.

The following questions serve as a helpful guide for defining the people of your audience.

*What are their professional roles, titles and responsibilities?*

*What are their goals and priorities?*

*What motivates these people to act? To buy?*

*What's your relationship to them? And their relationship to you?*

*What are they expecting from you?*

*How many people will be present?*

*What's their motive for listening?*

*What do they need to be more successful?*

*What are pertinent facts, figures and trends of their industry?*

*How much do they already know about your subject? Your company?*

*What are the demographics of the audience? (age range, education, socioeconomic level)*

By asking these questions and customizing your presentation based upon the answers, you show the participants that you know them and want the presentation to benefit them. Audience knowledge is perhaps the most powerful tool of persuasion. When your listeners know you have taken the time to understand them, you meet a basic desire present in all human beings: to feel important and cared about.

### **Ways to Get Audience Information**

So how do you gather audience information and find answers to these questions?  
Consider the following techniques:

- ✓ speak to the participants days or weeks before the presentation
- ✓ send out a questionnaire or survey to audience members
- ✓ speak to their co-workers or managers
- ✓ research audience-related issues and gather current data on their industry
- ✓ converse and mingle with participants at an event prior to your presentation or directly before the presentation itself
- ✓ ask questions during the presentation to gather on-the-spot feedback
- ✓ talk to the participants after the presentation to verify that your intended message was received and their needs met
- ✓ ask audience members to complete an evaluation form after your presentation

The same advice Aristotle gave in 380 B.C. still holds today: "The fool persuades me with his reasons; the wise man persuades me with my own." By defining your audience members and tailoring your message to specifically address their reasons, wants and needs, you are able to deliver a presentation that engages, informs and persuades. Show them that you know them and they will gladly give you their time and attention – and most likely their business.