

Small Business Professor: How to own the room when you speak

By Bruce Freeman, Scripps Howard News Service

Dear Professor Bruce: I own a small accounting firm, and when I go to networking groups, I don't feel like I'm getting a good response. I don't think I'm introducing myself well. How can I do it better?

Answer: Deborah Shames and David Booth, authors of "Own the Room: Business Presentations that Persuade, Engage, and Get Results" offer the following advice:

■ **Determine your intention.** Consider what you specifically want to achieve from the meeting. This is your intention, which should be clear, brief and action-oriented. For example, a great intention is "they will see me as critical to the success of their business." Most professionals want to educate their audience rather than persuade them. If you educate your audience, you get them to think. When you persuade them, you get them to act.

■ **Then wrap your intention into your self-introduction.** Read your audience. Focus your content to address the specific problems facing your audience and the benefits your services will deliver. Include WHAT you can do, for WHOM and WHEN. People listen for solutions.

■ **Persuade me.** Everyone in business engages in daily acts of persuasion. Valuable tools to ensure success include a solid level of commitment that attracts others and gives communication force and power. Through precise and descriptive language, people can visualize your ideas. With a compelling opening line, you employ novelty and surprise, which grabs attention.

■ **Tell me more.** Another great technique for crafting a self-introduction is to deliver an anecdote, or example of how you solved a problem for a client. Stories are memorable and turn listeners into your own marketing team. Once someone hears a great story, they will repeat it to others when describing your services.

■ **Authenticity is best.** No matter what technique you employ, speak in your own voice as if you were having a conversation across the dining room table. Being genuine is the key to credibility. We do business with people we know, like and trust. It's not about the name of your company, how long it's been in business or what other clients the company has served. We only care how you will serve us.

■ **Speak out.** Your mode of delivery is as important as your content. Be upbeat and confident when explaining what you do. We know from psychology that people generalize. That means if you're positive and are enjoying your elevator speech, we generalize that you will do business the same way. The reverse is also true. So connect with your material, speak from your experience, and put your attention on your audience.

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