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MANAGING FOR SUCCESS

REAL SOLUTIONS

PUBLIC SPEAKING

Make Complicated Ideas Easy to Understand

“Remember: You know more about your subject than anyone else in the room.”

That’s what a coach might say to calm your nerves before you give a speech. But all that knowledge can prove both a blessing and a curse. You may spend too much time lecturing about complex concepts or using acronyms and technical terms that stymie your audience.

“Connect with people by relating your topic to everyday human experience,” said **David Silver, president of Los Angeles-based Silver Public Relations, an investor relations and financial PR firm.** “Speak their language, not yours.”

If you’re presenting a complex theory or explaining technical processes, refer to actions or observations that are unmistakably clear to your audience. Rather than use fancy economic terms, for instance, discuss how the price of milk changes or how two-for-one deals attract customers. Whenever you introduce a complicated concept, ask yourself, “What can I compare this to so that listeners latch onto it?”

Provide a visual tool to help people understand your ideas. Examples include a graph, flow



David Silver

chart or pyramid that conveys different levels or steps.

“If your message is complicated, break it down into simple bullet points,” Silver said. “Instead of dumping a lot of information at once on people, give them bits one at a time that are accompanied by visuals that reinforce each point.”

As you dole out information, show how it builds on what you’ve already covered. For example, if

you’re explaining how to master an advanced skill, organize your bullet points into before-during-after stages.

Prepare your remarks by anticipating the audience’s questions – and coming up with concise, jargon-free answers. Silver often advises CEOs to appeal to investors by rehearsing easy-to-understand answers to questions such as “What does your company do?” and “Who’s your market?”

By composing a chain of questions that you answer in a logical sequence, you can reduce a complex subject into bite-size chunks. Listeners who expect to be bored or confused will gain excitement as they make breakthroughs.

To increase your listeners’ retention, prepare a handout with definitions of key terms and answer to common questions.

Start your talk by summarizing your conclusion – the most important idea you want to get across to your audience. “People need to understand where you’re going with your presentation,” Silver said. “Plant in their mind from the beginning what you want them to take away.” **Morey Stettner**