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How To Recover When You Get Flustered During A Presentation



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How to recover during a presentation ICLIPART

By Dianna Booher—

Some glitches turn out to be funny—later, at least to the audience. Before a group of gregarious sales reps, I was trying to make the point that business communications are much less formal now than in past decades—due to the informality of social media and texting.

“For example,” I elaborated, “we no longer start emails with ‘Pursuant to our discussion...’ or ‘Reference is made to the aforementioned attachment.’ “

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On a roll with my examples, I continued, “When introduced, we no longer say ‘How do you do?’ Instead, it’s just ‘Hi!’ or ‘Nice to meet you.’ ”

Continuing this line of reasoning, I added a throw-away line: “When was the last time your family dressed formally to sit down at the dinner table together? Our family doesn’t dress for dinner.”

One sales rep raised his hand and shouted back, “May we come?”

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The audience roared with laughter, leaving me dumbfounded about his meaning. Finally, someone in the front row pointed out to me what I’d *said* versus what I’d *meant*. Needless to say, after turning ten shades of red, I forgot where I was going with the next point.

Just wait until your turn comes. If you haven’t yet experienced your point of embarrassment or memory lapse, you will. When it happens, consider these fail-safe ways to regain your memory and retain your poise.

Fail-Safe Ways to Recover From a Presentation “Fail”

Build A Mnemonic Device To Help You Recall Chunks Of Content

Memory experts tell us that our brains can hold only about seven chunks of information at once. For this reason, trying to remember nine key points,

five anecdotes, and four charts of data can be setting yourself up for disaster. That is, unless you devise a solid system of recall.

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Teachers have understood the value of mnemonic devices for ages. For example, pianists teach the scales EGBDF as *every good boy does fine* (recalled from my 4th grade piano lessons).

Think of almost any discipline from sports to the military to consulting, and you'll find technical concepts conveyed in models, mnemonics, and metaphors meant for easy recall.

Create the same for yourself as a presentation fail-prevention tool.

Launch Into A Key Anecdote As A Springboard

Stories stick better than an elaboration—even with the storyteller. In telling the story, you often will recall the point you typically make with the story by the time you get to the punchline. And with that key point, the whole section of content will likely return to the forefront of your mind.

Fiddle With Fodder

Your fodder can be anything that fills a five- or 10-second gap to provide you with thinking time. You may decide to take off or put on your eyeglasses so that you can “verify something” in front of you. You may pause to sip your water or jot yourself a note with a clear statement of what you're doing: “Let me make a note of something to follow up.”

You may pause to “check the chat box” to see if there are questions. Or, just pause to ask for feedback. Your listeners will patiently wait 10 seconds for you to pick up where you went blank.

Add Code Cues to Visuals

To keep you oriented during interruptions, use a repeating key word or subtitles to group sections of your visuals. These cues will remind you of the

context for an individual slide. For example:

Proposed Budget: Income

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Proposed Budget: Expenses

Report-Backs: Monthly

Report-Backs: Quarterly

Report-Backs: Annually

Or, you can add the same cues by a change of colors or a different icon in the corner, side, top, or bottom of the slide. That change of color or icon will alert you about which section of the presentation that slide belongs to. That cue should trigger a complete chunk of information to flow to the forefront of your mind.

If you go off on a tangent with a detail and cannot find your way back, all you need do is glance at the gray hexagon to remind you that you're tracking marketing goals for Q3.

Remember: Your best defense against disaster during a brain freeze in the middle of your presentation is preparation and tricks—in that exact order.

Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 48 books, including Communicate Like a Leader. She helps organizations communicate clearly. Follow her at BooherResearch.com and @DiannaBooher.

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