

## Hints for Successful Presentations International Envirothon Contest

There has been an ongoing discussion within the governing body of the International Envirothon for some time over the question of weighing substance over presentation. It is true that a mediocre plan well presented will be better received than a brilliant plan poorly presented. We all agree that substance or facts should carry more weight than a showy theatrical presentation. However until the world changes you will have to be prepared to give a well prepared and professional presentation. The Arizona Envirothon Group wants to give our teams the best possible chance of winning so we developed this paper to help you prepare **Winning Presentations!**

- I. These first 6 steps are critical for developing a winning presentation:

### **1 Analyze your audience and determine your purpose.**

This really is pretty easy since you know that your audience will be a panel of judges who are playing the part of a city council or board of directors for a corporation., or other decision making body. Your purpose is to sell them on a course of action that you and your team have developed over the past two hours. The judges are, in reality, local leaders who have expertise in the subject you are working on, so don't try to "snow" them. don't invent things that don't exist.

### **2 Research and collect your information.**

In reality you have several months to collect information and data bits. You should spend some time learning about the current topic. Go to our web sites; go to links to other states learning sites. California has a great site as do several other states.

### **3. Organize your ideas and information.**

You don't know the exact wording of the question you will be asked, but you do know the subject matter. Develop your own questions and prepare answers as a practice. You know you have 20 minutes to present your plan of action. Try sitting quietly for 20 minutes to get a feel of how long and short that time frame really is. Your target should be between 18:30 and 19:45. **NO LESS.**

### **4. Add "finishing touches" to the content and structure.**

Every winning presentation has a structure, one that flow smoothly from opening to a powerful and compelling conclusion. The structure can be worked out well in advance of the contest and then just plug in the data given in the question.

- c. Do use contractions like don't or can't in place of do not or can not. Use the long form only when making special points like "We can not delay taking action any longer."
  - d. Pronounce your words as correctly as possibly. Failure to do so indicates, at best laziness and at worst, ignorance.
2. **You're Tone** – Before you begin your presentation get excited. Like Dorothy in Wizard of OZ repeat "I'm glad I'm here. I'm glad I'm here"
  3. **You're Appearance** – All competitors will be dressed alike in Envirothon T shirts. But be as clean and neat as possible,
  4. **You're Eyes** – Be aware of where your eyes take you. Don't let them wonder all over the room. They give power to a strong and lasting impression.
  5. **Your Body language** – When you not speaking stand with your feet flat on the floor, arms loosely at your sides or hands clasped in front. Keep your hands out of your pockets or your thumbs hooked in your belt loops. Be attentive and alert. Look at the speaker then to the panel.

During the presentation each team member should try to speak roughly an equal amount of time. When you are not actively speaking don't zone out, stay involved by watching the speaker, help with the visuals, or observing the panel for clues as to how things are going. If the panel looks confused, then you can correct it quickly. Don't just stand in one place, move around a bit when appropriate. Be spontaneous.

#### IV. The Presentation

- A. During the next few months plan who is going to be the "leader" and who is going to present soils, water, wildlife, etc and how it will go together.
- B. At the beginning recap the problem by laying out the issue very briefly.
- C. Divide your presentation into a beginning, middle and end.
- D. Always face the panel.
- E. When referring to a visual be sure everyone is out of the way.
- F. Speak in complete sentences.
- G. Make your voice expressive.
- H. Expand your ideas; give examples where your thoughts are successes. For example "This type of plan has worked well in Des Moines, San Francisco and Jersey City."
- I. Relax. Be natural but nervousness is OK just don't let it control you.
- J. Don't apologize. If you mention your nervousness or problems you think you may have with your presentation you have done nothing more than draw attention to something they may not have noticed. Keep silent.
- K. Concentrate on your message. Focus attention outward, away from your nervousness.

Stay away from the usual " Good Morning or Good Afternoon or It's a pleasure or a privilege ... We 're delighted. etc." They are old fashioned to the point of being meaningless and usually fall flat.

Introduce the team, the panel already what you are going to talk about so don't re-visit your mission to a great degree. "*Ladies and gentlemen it's my pleasure to introduce our planning team. On my left is ...*" Then launch into your well-prepared opening. Open with something unpredictable. Always begin with an attention getter. **LIKE – A Question** – "*Now who wants to hear the best, most workable solution to the problem?*" or

**A Challenge** – "*I dare you to leave this meeting this afternoon without changing your attitude toward the nesting habits of the Robin.*"

**A Quotation** – "*Mark Twain once observed ...*" or quote an authority "*Dr. Donald Duck, of the University of Duckburg drew these conclusions from his ten year study of salt.*" or

**An Observation** – "*There's a sign just outside Rutland, Vermont that says "Choose the right Rut, you'll be in it for the next 17 miles."* or **Just**

**one Word** – "*Money. Yes Ladies and Gentlemen that's what this problem boils down to.*" or

**Ask a rhetorical question** – "*What does it take to make a great city? Clean air, fresh water and good transportation and especially in Phoenix, shade. Where you park your car is determined by shade not walking distance. This is the city where a seat belt makes a great branding iron and windows frequently explode due to overheating of the air in the car. Where your car is at operating temperature parked in the garage overnight.*" or

**Go directly to a visual** – "*Please direct your attention to this representation of the re-vamped downtown area of Phoenix. It has several areas of interest.*" Then introduce the team "*Linda Lightfoot will direct the soils discussion, David Moorehead will discuss the wildlife issue ...*"

Transition from the opening quickly and smoothly to:

## **B. THE BODY**

This is the major portion of your team's effort and you want plenty of time to go over your plan with the panel. The most common Transitional Device is to Enumerate "*The first reason for encouraging you to adopt our plan is... The second reason is... and so on*"

This is a good method, but often used so consider using a Theme Approach. For example "*There is a myth that protecting the environment is bad for the economy. Quite the contrary...*" Followed by "*Another myth is that trees cost and return nothing. Again the contrary is true as illustrated by this graph...*" This method creates a powerful image that the judges will remember.

## VI. THE ENDING

Your purpose is to persuade or challenge a group to make a choice of action, yours. Close by calling for a specific next step.

*“When you give the go-ahead to our proposal we will immediately inform our support vendors and put in motion the steps we’ve outlined in the presentation. We can be on site and working in less than one week.”* or

*“If you have the courage to...”* or

*“If we put our shoulders to the wheel now, then...”* or

*“Let us have the courage to act boldly with conviction and...”* or

*“If we want our children to have a bright future then...”*

## VII. The Question and Answer Period

After your presentation the panel will have the opportunity to ask questions in order to gauge your understanding of (1) your facts, (2) the overall problem and (3) clarification of points you made during the presentation. “Facts” you threw around during the presentation may come back to haunt you if you’re unprepared.

This time is a great opportunity for you to convince the judges that your team is really on top of the problem. Use it like having more time to explain your plan. Treat each question as an opportunity to elaborate on your plan, its extra time to shine. When beginning to answer a question begin with something like:

*“I thought someone would notice this point.”* or

*“Thank you. You’re a good listener. This is a great question and it goes directly to the heart of our proposal...”* or

*“Thank you. The question you raised troubled me as well, and I can best answer it by...”* or

*“Ah, yes. Good question. The answer can best be expressed when we understand or remember the....”*

If you don’t know the answer you can admit you don’t and promise to research the question and get back to each member of the panel with the answer ASAP. Say “I’m sorry, I really don’t know. I don’t know how that information was overlooked. I will research it and contact each of you by phone and email with the answer before noon tomorrow. But I do feel a little like Mark Twain when he observed *“I was happy to be able to answer the question quickly. I said I didn’t know”*”