

SAMHSA

Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration



COMMUNICATING YOUR MAIN POINT



S O C I A L M A R K E T I N G T A T E A M

Communicating Your Main Point!

“The two words ‘information’ and ‘communication’ are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through.”

– Sydney J. Harris

Your “main point” is the primary thing you want your audience to think, feel, or do as a result of hearing your story and reading your communications. We’ve all experienced the speaker who presents way too much information in a condensed amount of time—most of it over our heads. Or we’ve seen a TV talk show guest who has two minutes to get a point across, but loses the opportunity because the interviewer led them away from the core message. We’ve all opened the webpage or email so dense with copy that we don’t bother to read it.

An audience retains one to two key messages from a speech, presentation or promotional materials. You must maximize the time you have your audience’s attention if you want to make sure they think, feel, or do something as a result of hearing your message.

To ensure that your audience understands and will remember your key points, develop a main point for your presentation or communication.

Your main point:

- Will help you organize your thoughts. After that, if necessary, you can develop a more focused set of messages that tie your main point to an individual speech or presentation or communication.
- Is the reason you do a presentation or interview or write communications material. If you stay true to your main point, there will be no doubt in the audience’s mind about what you stand for, how you want them to think, and what you want them to do.
- Can help you apply the KISS principle—Keep It Short and Simple. Only a small percentage of what is heard or read is retained. Make sure what you say is brief and to the point.
- Remember—if you could only tell your audience ONE THING that you want them to think, feel, or do as a result of hearing your message, that’s your main point. Try and relate everything back to it.

Prepare Your Main Point

1. Introduce yourself! What is your name? What brought you to communicate with this group? Are you representing yourself, or another organization?

2. What personal story can you share that will help your audience understand your point of view?

3. What other facts, or important information will help you “prove” your point, and help your audience understand your story?

4. What do you want the audience to think, feel, or do as a result of hearing from you and reading your materials? What could they do that would help your cause? What is the one thing you want them to remember?

Pointers for Public Speakers

Set the stage by sharing information about yourself up front. This personalizes you to the audience and helps them feel that they know you. No matter how long you are speaking, the introduction should be 15 percent of your speech, the discussion about 75 percent, and the closing 10 percent.

Understand what is culturally appropriate for your audience. This will allow you to make the most effective presentation.

- **Practice, practice, practice.** If possible, spend time alone just prior to your speech; take some deep breaths and think about your central theme. Avoid practicing in a mirror; it leads to overcorrecting of natural gestures and facial expressions.
- **Body language.** A picture is worth a thousand words. Defensive, negative body language is communicated through crossed arms, a “fig leaf” stance, or a military stance. Positive body language is seen through openness, gestures, moving away from the podium, and taking off your jacket, if appropriate.
- **Eye contact.** The reason you maintain eye contact with your audience is for feedback and to make your story more personal. One way you’ll know if your audience is getting the message is through eye contact. Look for eyes following you and heads nodding with you.
- **Facial expression.** Does your face say you are approachable? It does if you smile at appropriate times.
- **Emotional expression.** It is impossible to hide your feelings when you talk about something you really care about. The kind of passion people feel and exhibit when they talk about their loved ones, their mate, or their children is the same passion that should be harnessed when talking about your issues. That kind of passion gives off energy, and energy makes you convincing.
- **Gestures.** Gestures help tell the story. Remember, 50 percent of what people retain is through your body language. Gestures reinforce and highlight your story and add energy to your delivery.
- **Humor.** Jokes and anecdotes make for an entertaining speech, but make sure you practice them. Choose material carefully, and never tell “off-color” or possibly offensive jokes.
- **Voice.** You have six different octaves—use them. Never try to camouflage a regional dialect. Tell people where you’re from and they’ll expect you to sound the way you do.
- **Pauses/silence.** There are four good times to pause: 1) when you move from one subject to another; 2) when you want the message to sink in; 3) when you need to collect your thoughts; and 4) when you receive laughter or applause.
- **Avoid distractions.** Don’t fiddle with your hair, shuffle your feet, sway back and forth, jingle change in your pockets, play with your eyeglasses, or make other possibly distracting movements.
- **Don’t use the podium as a crutch.** In fact, don’t use the podium at all if you can help it. Let your gestures and body language tell your story, and give your audience a refreshing break from the other speakers who may have spoken exclusively from behind the podium.
- **Take time to focus before you start to speak.** Most of us feel we have to immediately say something to our listeners. The audience needs and wants a little time to visually process a new speaker. If you start too soon, they will feel anxious and rushed and may initially tune you out.
- **Talk with—not at—your listeners.** Think of your audience as individuals, not a large, impersonal group.

Don’t forget that being nervous is normal. Try to reframe your fear into excitement and enthusiasm. Remember, you are the expert on your own story. People have come to hear you talk about what you know.

