

# Harvard Business Review

## WEBINAR SUMMARY

# Presentations that Connect

*Featuring Michael Brenner*

JUNE 13, 2017

# Presentations that Connect

**PRESENTER:**

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**MODERATOR:**

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## Overview

A great presentation starts with one focus: The need to create a discussion, online or in person, that can really connect with and serve the audience. Presenters who connect with their listeners by using empathy, telling stories, and building a clear structure can help their audience challenge conventional thinking and embrace a big idea.

When done right, presentations that connect elevate the audience by making the audience the hero, benefit the presenter's personal brand, and create quantifiable business value.

## Context

Michael Brenner described how he overcame the fear of public speaking to become a professional speaker and offered advice on delivering great, effective presentations.

## Key Takeaways

**Making great presentations matters, yet people fear presenting.**

To be successful in almost every profession requires delivering effective presentations and speaking well in public. Whether a person is in sales or business development, is an executive or an entrepreneur, their livelihood depends on delivering presentations that connect.

However, for many people, there is nothing scarier than public speaking. Fear of public speaking ranks higher than the fear of death. Michael Brenner understands this fear. He had an intense and debilitating fear of public speaking and was diagnosed with a severe anxiety disorder related to public speaking.

But because speaking and presenting is so important in the business world, it is essential to overcome this fear, as Brenner did. The key to overcoming fear is telling ourselves new stories, presenting in ways that connect with others, and believing that our presentations provide audience members with

a valuable service. This is increasingly important as online, virtual meetings and discussions take on a major role of our business interactions.

“The way that I got over my stage fright was I started thinking that I was serving somebody.”

—Michael Brenner

**Empathy and storytelling are essential to deliver presentations that connect.**

Too often, speakers begin presentations by talking about themselves. But this doesn't invite the audience into the discussion. Great speakers and presenters—like Oprah Winfrey—connect with the audience by putting the audience first and conveying caring for others.

The natural instinct is to talk about ourselves and what we know. The opposite extreme is to talk about what the audience wants, which may involve entertainment and stress relief. But as a presenter, just talking about what the audience wants fails to achieve the business objective. The intersection between talking about you and talking about what the audience wants is empathy.

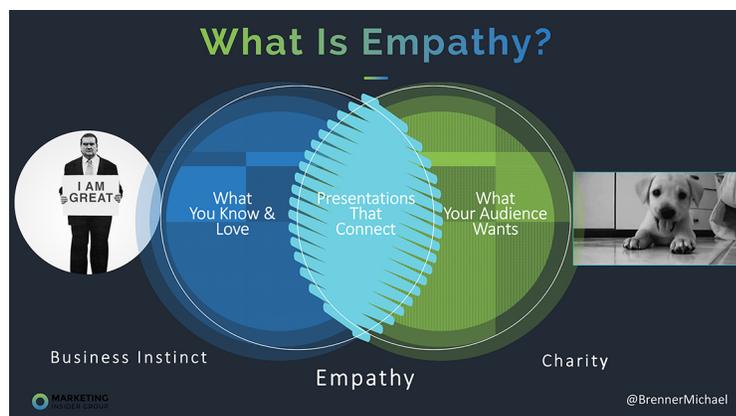


FIGURE 1: EMPATHY IN PRESENTATIONS

Empathy creates connections with an audience by conveying emotion and showing that you understand how the audience feels. In particular, presenters show empathy and build connections through great storytelling. Even for executives who may be skeptical about empathy, storytelling can create quantifiable value.

“The secret to connecting with your audience through presentations is empathy . . . stories have real value that you can quantify for executives, even if they don't see the power of empathy.”

—Michael Brenner

Steve Jobs epitomized great storytelling and used it to make Apple the world's most iconic brand. Jobs' presentation unveiling the iPhone, about 10 years ago, is one of the greatest business talks of all time.

Telling great stories can follow a formula, as do Pixar's successful movies, with common elements that include villains and heroes.

### **10 keys to presentations that connect.**

Based on his personal experience and studying great presenters, Brenner has identified 10 keys to successful presentations.

#### **10 KEYS TO PRESENTATIONS THAT CONNECT**

1. **It's not about you.** Make the presentation and the story about your audience. Have empathy, feel their pain, and make them the hero of the story.
2. **Research.** Understand the audience by conducting research in advance. Understand their challenges and the questions they are wrestling with.
3. **Pacing.** Have quick pacing and use many slides during a presentation. For example, change the slide every 15 to 20 seconds.
4. **Knowledge.** Talk about what you know about—and show deep expertise.
5. **Passion.** Speak with authenticity and passion. Lack of passion is obvious to an audience.
6. **Simple slides.** The biggest mistake that presenters make is having overly complex slides. Slides should use few words, have simple images, and show only one idea per slide.
7. **Enthusiasm.** Present with unbridled enthusiasm, which is noticeable and contagious.
8. **Smile.** Before beginning a presentation, look in the mirror and smile. This helps the audience feel your love and happiness.
9. **Conflict.** Great presentations introduce conflict and take the audience on a journey, which creates interest and suspense. Conflict provides the ability to present your big idea.
10. **Rehearse.** Great presenters always rehearse.

In narrowing this list down to what matters most, the keys are knowledge, passion, and simple slides.

### **Great presenters spend time thinking about the structure and the content of their presentation, particularly for online sessions.**

Great presentations have common elements in their structure. They:

- **Challenge conventional thinking.** Presenters provoke thought by challenging conventional wisdom and laying out a problem that needs to be addressed.
- **Define the implications of the problem.** Just laying out a problem isn't enough; a presenter delves into the problem to outline the depth of the pain and the implications.
- **Propose a big idea as a solution.** Having outlined a problem and its implications, great presenters then propose a big idea to solve the problem.

- **Provide evidence the solution will work.** Deliver the evidence through stories of people who overcome obstacles to become heroes.
- **Share practical tips.** Give the audience practical steps so they too can be heroes.
- **Keep it simple.** Slides are important, particularly in online discussions, but keep the slide content simple and straightforward. Don't go word heavy.

## Additional Information

In responding to audience questions, Brenner provided the following advice:

- **Insights from great speakers.** A series of [one-minute videos](#) shares presentation tips from great speakers. Also, watch [TED Talks](#) to see examples of great presentations.
- **Image resources.** Great free sources for images to use in presentations are [Pixabay](#) and [Flickr Creative Commons](#).
- **Webinar tips.** When presenting via webinar, three tips are: 1) smile; 2) stand up; and 3) visualize by audience by presenting to a picture of someone you love.
- **Presentation tools.** In addition to PowerPoint and Keynote, [Prezi](#) is a great tool that forces presenters to think through structure.



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**Michael Brenner** is a globally-recognized keynote speaker, author of *The Content Formula*, and the CEO of Marketing Insider Group. He has worked in leadership positions in sales and marketing for global brands like SAP and Nielsen, as well as for thriving startups. Today, Michael shares his passion on leadership and marketing strategies that deliver customer value and business impact. He is recognized by the Huffington Post as a Top Business Keynote Speaker and a top CMO influencer by Forbes. Follow Michael on Twitter [@BrennerMichael](#).



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**Julie Devoll** is Marketing Communications Director for *Harvard Business Review* where she leads integrated marketing campaigns for HBR Press books including media relations, social media, and digital marketing. She is also co-leader of HBR's Social Media team overseeing promotional campaigns for the HBR brand, products, and subscriptions. Prior to *Harvard Business Review*, Julie was a Product Manager at MediaMap, now Cision.

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