

# 10 TIPS

TO TOTALLY **ROCK**  
YOUR NEXT PRESENTATION

FROM EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATIONS COACH NORA VITZ HARRISON

“ I don't know how Nora does it, but ever since she started coaching our event speakers, they have been rocking the house.”

— Debbie Hibbard  
Guide Dogs for the Blind

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## 1. BE SUCCINCT.

**Can your audience summarize your message in one sentence?**



If not, simplify it. Boil down your message to its elegant essence. Like a savory soup, you simmer out the excess water (words) so what remains is tasty and memorable. I often give my clients an assignment to communicate their vision — what drives them — in a five-minute presentation. One client lamented: “Five minutes? How can I say all I want to say?” I encouraged him to edit his script. He whittled away the unnecessary words, and his presentation became powerful and memorable. People followed him out of the room to ask questions. He proved the point: Always leave your audience wanting more.

## 2. BE VISUAL.

**Is PowerPoint the best choice?**



Most presenters automatically turn to PowerPoint. Stop. Is PowerPoint the best means to support your presentation? Think creatively. Can you use props? Costumes? Lighting? It doesn't have to be elaborate. Simple is good. One client who encouraged her audience to “be the spark, be a mentor,” started her presentation by lighting a match. If you use PowerPoint, use it in a way that capitalizes on its strengths. Project strong images with minimal words. You want your audience looking at you, not reading your slides.

### 3. BE A STAR.

#### How would Denzel Washington deliver your presentation?



Okay, you don't have to give an Oscar-winning performance, but use the tools of the dramatic arts. Watch Denzel give an empowering speech to his football team in the movie *Remember the Titans*. He pauses. He speeds up. He gets loud. He whispers. He looks at each player. He gestures appropriately. He has his audience mesmerized (without PowerPoint, I might add). He does it all with his voice and his body. And you can bet he rehearses – a lot.

### 4. BE UNEXPECTED.

#### How will you get your audience's attention?



Think hard about the first words of your presentation. “My name is ... and my vision is ....” How boring. Here’s how another presenter introduced a presentation defining his vision: “When I was 10 years old I was caught in the cross-fire of the Nicaragua revolution. I was shot during a skirmish between rebels and border guards. My name is .... War is not the way to solve problems.” Of course his audience was enthralled. Few of us have such a dramatic story to capture an audience, but we can be unexpected. Another presenter wanted her audience to know that, even though she was an accountant, numbers were not just digits to her. She saw the colors behind the numbers. As she said “colors,” she took off her black trench coat to reveal a wildly colored dress.

### 5. BE SPECIFIC.

#### How can you help your audience visualize your ideas?



One presenter wanted to make the point that it takes time to see the results from marketing. During his practice with me he compared his work to planting seeds. “How can you make that more specific and personal?” I asked. He thought a moment. Then he told me about his young daughter. She planted a lima bean and rushed out the next morning expecting to see a full bush. It was a small change, but the more specific example made a big difference. Another presenter was using a football analogy to define teamwork. Instead of being generic and saying “a quarterback relies on his offensive line,” she changed it to: “Without his offensive line, Drew Brees [quarterback for the Saints] would be running for his life.” If she had been giving her presentation in Denver, she could have changed the quarterback to Peyton Manning.

### 6. BE PERSONAL.



#### How can you make your audience care?

Tap into their emotions. You don't have to bare your soul (unless you want to). Just take it down to the individual level. If you can relate your message to how it affects one person, you have a better chance of moving your audience into action. People have to care before they act. Make them care. World Vision doesn't try to convince you to save the millions of children worldwide who need food, shelter and education. They ask you to make a difference for just one child by sending \$35 each month. It's much easier for us to get our heads (and hearts) around one child who needs us.

## 7. BE PRESIDENTIAL.

### How will your audience perceive you?



Command the front of the room with your presence. Stand tall. Move with purpose. According to an oft-quoted communications study (Albert Mehrabian, 1967), a lot of communication is non-verbal – including what you wear. Folks, this is the easy stuff. Make sure your shirt is ironed and tucked in. Pull your hair back so we can see your face. Wear appropriate clothes (“appropriate” is different for every corporate culture, so I never say “Wear a suit”). For your best cues, look at senior management in your organization. What do they wear? If *you* are senior management, are you setting the right example? I love to use video recordings to help my clients really see what they look like. The changes can be dramatic. After viewing his video, one client lost 20 pounds. Another ditched her college-girl look for a more professional hairstyle and dress.

## 8. BE STUDIOUS.

### What other resources will help you learn?



I gratefully acknowledge the books and videos that have helped me develop my skills. I recommend *Made to Stick* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Presentation Zen* by Garr Reynolds, *Visionology* by Karen Warner, and *Body Language*, a DVD from the History Channel. People are resources, too. Watch good presenters and ask yourself, “What are they doing that would work for me?” Steve Jobs was always a favorite for me. Fortunately, his presentations are captured forever in videos that you can view online.

## 9. BE A STORYTELLER.

### What stories bring your message to life?



Read back over this list. I included a simple example or story for each tip. We remember presenters who tell stories – even more than the presenters who are skilled in the mechanics of presenting (body language, vocal quality, eye contact). As a volunteer for Guide Dogs for the Blind, I often talk to potential donors about why they should support Guide Dogs. I could rattle off the statistics about how many dogs are trained each year, how many blind people are served, and how much a blind person pays for a guide dog (nothing). But instead, I tell a simple story about Saffron, the first guide dog puppy I raised for the organization. I tell them about the day that “my” puppy (now fully grown and fully trained) pulled her blind partner out of the way of a speeding car. The car missed them by inches. Saffron saved her life. Tell stories.

## 10. BE PASSIONATE.

### If you don't care about your presentation, why should we?



Communicate with energy and passion. Make us laugh or make us cry. But for goodness sakes, don't put us to sleep. Make us care as much as you do. And have fun.

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About **Nora**: Words. Pictures. Experiences. Nora has been putting them together for more than 20 years to help her Fortune 500 clients communicate. Clients have included AT&T, ARAMARK, and Microsoft. Nora has coached more than 200 executives — from high-potential managers to CEOs. She's written books, taught workshops, and reported from the Olympic Games in Barcelona. She is a Phi Beta Kappa graduate of the University of Redlands, Calif., with a B.A. in communications. She earned a master's degree in English at the University of Sydney, Australia. When she's not coaching or writing, she's probably hiking somewhere in Oregon. You can reach her at: [nora@three60com.com](mailto:nora@three60com.com).

