



Practical Tips for Presenting to the Board

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1. Don't be daunted.

Presenting to the board is an important and onerous task. If someone has recommended you to make a presentation they believe that you have what it takes to make a good presentation. Nobody is going to recommend a poor presenter, or presentation by somebody who has insufficient knowledge of the topic. To do so would reflect more badly on them than on you.

2. Be prepared.

Understand *why* the board wants your presentation. Do they need background information, or a report on progress, or is there a decision which the board must make? If you understand what your presentation is expected to achieve you will be able to develop the best presentation to achieve that.

3. Understand what boards do.

The board is the ultimate decision making forum. Individual board members have very little power but the board as a whole, acting in consensus, is empowered to perform or delegate all of the business of the organisation. The aim of the board is to enhance shareholder wealth or, in a not-for-profit organisation, to ensure that the organisation does what the founders wished it to do. Make sure your presentation helps the board to fulfil its aims.

4. Understand how boards work.

Because boards work as a team, rather than as individuals, it is important that they discuss issues thoroughly and form a group decision. When presenting to a board, even if you are giving them background information, your aim should always be to enable the

board to have a good discussion of the topic, reach their own understanding, and form a basis for future decision-making.

5. Understand board protocol.

It is normal in most boardrooms for information to flow to the board under the direction of the chairman. You can expect experienced board members to address their questions to you through the chairman. The chairman will also manage the amount of time dedicated to any agenda item, and may ask you to spend more or less time on your presentation than previously envisaged. It is wise to enter the boardroom with the ability to present at least 20% more than planned, but without 20% more slides. You should also be able to achieve your objective even if your time is cut by 20%.

6. Allow the board to prepare.

Boards need to discuss the information presented, and to do that they need to understand it. Provide a background paper or briefing report which can go to the board with the agenda so that the directors are "up to speed" before you present.

7. Discuss rather than present.

Boards sit through a lot of presentations. Rather than subject them to yet another, try to summarise very briefly the information you have provided beforehand, and then facilitate a discussion with the board members. They will be much happier with things they say than with anything you can say.

8. Provide good quality information.

Boards need information that is relevant, in perspective, timely, frequent, reliable, consistent, coherent and easily comparable with other data, and above all, clear and easily understood. Be sure to name your sources, quote references, and alert the board to any inconsistencies between different data sets that you might have incorporated into your information.

9. Set an appropriate level.

What goes into a presentation depends upon what the board already know, how important this presentation is to the board, whether it is written or verbal, any supporting information, etc. Do not gloss over the risks involved.

Boards need to understand the worst possible outcome, the most likely outcome, and the best possible outcome in order to make an appropriate decision having full awareness of the risks involved.

10. Be punctual and polite.

Board members are important, they should not be kept waiting. Be available a few minutes before your appointed time and allocate sufficient time that if the board is running late you do not have to rush your presentation or leave before the board has finished the discussion. Remember that manners are important and that people will respect you if you respect them. "Please" and "thank you" are important words. If a board member interrupts, rather than react to their rudeness show your good manners, and pause politely to listen to their comment and deal with it before moving on.

Above all remain calm. The board may disagree with your ideas or with each other, but they won't make it personal unless you do. Board presentations are an important part of every senior executive's personal and professional development. The 10 tips above will help you present like an experienced professional and help your board make appropriate decisions following your presentations.

Julie Garland McLellan is a professional company director and corporate governance consultant. She is the author of the "Director's Dilemma" and "All above Board: Great Governance for the Government Sector".