

## Cohort challenge presentations

As part of the ReDI cohort, you'll be presenting the work from your Cohort Challenges to the Provost's Leadership Team. Our goal is to ensure you have tools to help you create and give a great presentation. This document covers information that will help you better understand:

- Compelling openings
- Framing
- Clarity
- Other tips when presenting to executives
- What to avoid
- Additional resources

This document has contributions from the ReDI faculty as well as members of the Provost's Leadership Team.

### Compelling openings

Imagine being a member of the Provost's Leadership Team – a Dean or academic Vice Provost. Your day is filled with back to back meetings. At each meeting someone's trying to convince you about the merits of their initiative and to get you to engage with them. They may come with a thick stack of PowerPoint slides and dense spreadsheets, or a strong argument and point of view. They hope you will make decisions in the span of the 45 minutes they have with you. You have limited resources, many constituents asking for your attention, external pressures, internal politics, and most of all: limited time. Now think of what it will take to deliver a presentation that inspires and captures the hearts and minds of this audience.

Typically, university leaders are excited to be interacting with high potential future leaders. They invest their time in developing the next generation and look forward to talking with people they don't see on a daily basis. It's time to grab their attention by deviating from the same old, same old that they've seen in all their meetings that week.

The purpose of your opening should be:

- To get your audience's attention
- Show them from the start that this is a presentation they will enjoy and benefit from
- Demonstrate the issue you're trying to solve or the future you're trying to achieve

Instead of droning through a set of slides, consider starting with an opening that first grabs their attention AND is relevant to your topic. In other words don't just start with a gratuitous joke, or, go into a long-winded explanation of what you're going to talk about. Some examples of compelling openings:

- Startling facts (e.g., thanks in large part to cellphone cameras, "Ten percent of all of the photographs made in the entire history of photography were made last year," according to *Time*)

- A metaphor
- A visceral experience (e.g. quotes from faculty or students or candid camera shots of people performing a certain activity, audience reaction to someone's talk, etc.)
- A visual experience (e.g. compare the size of a dime with that of your laptop – and liken it to your issue)
- Something humorous (and appropriate) that makes your point with a picture, sound, or image (e.g., a picture of the Star Trek ship "Enterprise" when presenting a talk on "Fueling the Research Enterprise" at the university)

## Framing

Many teams spend immense time and effort in debating the specifics, choosing options, providing recommendations and leave the framing to the end. Instead, start with the framing and spend a disproportionate amount of time on it. I recommend spending 50 to 70% of your preparation time on framing and the rest on the remaining content.

The purpose of framing is to:

- Give your audience a clear, concise sense of why you're here, what they can expect, and what you'd like
- Paint a full picture in a brief way. If you were only with your audience for the duration of an elevator ride that went from floor one to floor ten, what would you say?

What are some elements of framing?

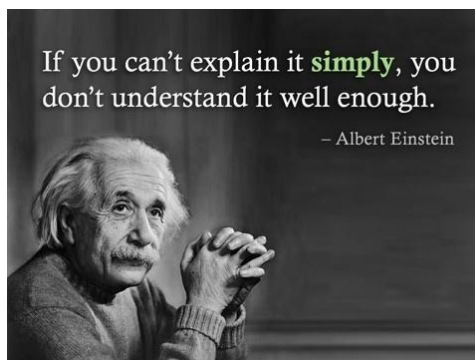
- Why is this issue important?
  - What problem will it solve?
  - What opportunity will it create?
- Your goals for today's presentation
- Your desired outcomes (what does success look like) for today's presentation
- The three messages/points you want your audience to leave with
- What you'll cover
- What you'd like from the audience during and after the presentation (e.g., decisions on X, ask of certain resources, sounding board, brainstorm, etc.). This is often one of the most neglected areas and leaves the audience guessing and/or disengaged.
- What this presentation doesn't cover

## Clarity

Your audience will not be as steeped in the subject matter and the various options for solving the issue as you. Don't assume they'll fully understand everything you say. The key is to provide clarity and be brief at the same time. Framing helps with this significantly. In addition, here are some tips to increase clarity.

- Start with the bottom line before explaining any details:

- State what you're proposing and why you are proposing it up front in the presentation; don't leave your audience guessing for half the presentation
- Each slide title should capture the essence of the slide itself – if you had nothing but all your slide titles – would you be able to tell a compelling and coherent story?
- Less is more! See if you can communicate the sum of all you have to say in no more than three slides. This doesn't mean you populate the slides in 2-point font!
  - If a slide doesn't support one of the three key messages you want your audience to leave with, kill the slide
  - Sometimes a single graphic will be more effective than lots of words or numbers (TED talks are great at this)
  - No more than 3 bullet points on a slide with big enough font to be seen in the back of the room and not at the bottom of the slide
  - No abbreviations without definitions
  - Have detailed data as a handout; don't clutter your main presentation materials. If feasible, provide the backup data as pre-reading or hand it to your audience as they take their seats. In some cases, have data in your "back pocket" and use only if necessary.
- Ensure the context you set clearly connects to the content
- Be clear, concise, and up front about the benefits
- Be clear, concise, and up front about the risks
- Clearly state what data you have and what you don't have
- Track the slide to what you're saying so the listener isn't confused
- Do not read the slide and do not make slides that take a long time for the audience to read; you want them to listen to you and use the slides as reference points. People can't read and listen at the same time effectively.
- Check the flow of your presentation
  - Does each bullet point build upon the previous one?
  - Does each slide clearly flow from the previous one?



## Other tips

- Introduce all members of the team – allow each of their voices to be heard.
- Don't "swallow" or mumble your names. Be loud and clear with each syllable. An amazing number of people don't say their full names clearly enough.

- The best presentations tell a story. What was the problem, who did it impact, how can it be resolved, what will the world look like once you've implemented your solution? Personalizing the story with a scenario, an archetypical character with a day in their life for example can help.
- Anticipate a wide range of questions and responses. Create back pocket material for them and decide which team member will respond for which area of inquiry.
- Don't be afraid to say 'no'. Sometimes after deep reflection you might choose not to pursue a certain solution. It's just as valuable to share what you learned and why you're proposing no action.
- Live your passion. Smile. Breathe. What excites you about this? Let that shine through. It's infectious!
- Present with conviction – about what you know, what you don't know, and how you feel about it all.
- Act like you're enjoying yourself and pretty soon you will.

### What to avoid

- Really dense slides. Distinguish between what's a slide and what's a handout. A slide is also not a substitute for your talking points/notes.
- Lots of whiz bang in the slides: lots of animation, colors, fonts
- Making up an answer on the fly. Tell them you don't know or that you'll get back to them.
- Going over time. Budget for only 50% of the time for your presentation and allow the rest for questions and interaction. Be sure to practice your presentation and time it.
- One person doing all the talking. Presentation should be done by one or two people. Q&A divided up among other team members.
- Too many people presenting. Usually doesn't work well to time slice in each team member for a minute each.
- Fidgeting with your outfit or your hair. Practice your presentation and walking and sitting in your outfit before the actual presentation. Ensure any distracting elements of your outfit – to you or to your audience – are eliminated.
- Talking to the screen. Have brief notes in front of you so you know what comes after each bullet and each slide.

### Other resources

- 18 minute TED talk by Simon Sinek on the importance of communicating 'why': How great leaders inspire action. Also tips on story telling.  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action](http://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action)
- Great body language to practice right before your presentation:  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/amy\\_cuddy\\_your\\_body\\_language\\_shapes\\_who\\_you\\_are](http://www.ted.com/talks/amy_cuddy_your_body_language_shapes_who_you_are)
- Questions? Please feel free to email [sabina@sabinanawaz.com](mailto:sabina@sabinanawaz.com)

*Your final slide deck must be submitted to [e.taylordebarroso@northeastern.edu](mailto:e.taylordebarroso@northeastern.edu) the day before your presentation.*