



by David E. Zulawski, CFI, CFE and Shane G. Sturman, CFI, CPP

Zulawski and Sturman are executives in the investigative and training firm of Wicklander-Zulawski & Associates (www.w-z.com). Zulawski is a senior partner and Sturman is president. Sturman is also a member of ASIS International's Retail Loss Prevention Council. They can be reached at 800-222-7789 or via email at dzulawski@w-z.com and ssturman@w-z.com.

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## The Ups and Downs of Doing a Presentation—Part 1

**T**he first order of business is to congratulate Jim Lee, the executive editor of *LossPrevention* magazine, who was inducted into the Ring of Excellence by the National Retail Federation's (NRF) awards and recognition committee (see page 65). He was selected from a prestigious group of individuals who had all extensively contributed to the field of loss prevention. The Ring of Excellence was created to recognize pioneers in the field of loss prevention whose contributions provided the foundation for today's retailers.

We had the opportunity to meet and work with Jim early in his career, but for those of you who may not know him personally, he has extensive experience in the retail industry. He has held a variety of loss prevention positions culminating in a vice presidency of loss prevention. He also chaired the NRF's LP advisory board in the 1980s. Jim's foresight led him to cofound *LossPrevention* magazine, and he also sits on the board of directors of the Loss Prevention Foundation.

We hope you'll join us in congratulating him on receiving this prestigious award.

This year at the NRF loss prevention conference, a specialized career-development track was conducted on the final day of the conference. The purpose of this set of programs was to provide developmental training on issues critical to the success of future executives. W-Z was asked to participate in this educational track focusing on presentations. The NRF board members felt presentations were a critical component to successful career advancement, and we were flattered to be asked to participate. For those who were unable to attend the conference, we wanted to provide some of the key points to prepare for and deliver an effective presentation.

### Packaging a Presentation

The same material can be delivered in multiple ways depending on the number of people participating, learning objectives, experience of the attendees, resources, and time available. The most mundane information can be delivered in an exciting, interactive learning experience or

in the most boring fashion depending on the choices made by the presenter.

To add to the difficulties of preparing to deliver a presentation is the variety of participants likely to attend the program. There may be different levels of experience ranging from the new to highly competent individuals. The problem becomes how to teach to the inexperienced participant while keeping the journeyman engaged in the material.

There are also differences between the attendees based on their ages and educational level. The baby boomers are significantly different in their educational desires from the Gen X or Gen Yers. The older baby boomers are used to being lectured to and having the presentation delivered

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with little or no participation. As we move into the younger generations, there is a desire for more collaborative decision-making and a shorter, more succinct delivery of the teaching.

The type of presentation may also affect how the presenter determines it will be packaged. If the presentation is to be made to senior executives, the presenter must consider the personal and professional needs of each of the executives attending. What do they want to obtain from the material? In addition, their personalities may dictate a different type of presentation since they are likely to want to quickly move forward with solutions.

One could compare these types of presentations to presenting an argument to the United States Supreme Court. Attorneys prepare an extensive argument to deliver to the Supreme Court justices, but the justices often interrupt the presentation with specific questions they want answered. The attorney must answer the question, yet continue to maintain the message of the argument.

Politicians are often asked questions and rather than responding specifically, they return to the fundamental message of their campaign. The presenter must be concerned with responding fully to the question while continuing to deliver the core ideas included in the presentation.

## Understanding Your Audience

The first piece of the puzzle in developing a presentation must be to understand the type of participant who will attend. This will dictate the level of participation and the way in which the material should be presented.

Participants can be classified into three different groups—adventurers, tourists, and hostages. Whoever came up with these terms accurately defined the three types of people who will be present at any program. The *adventurer* will actively participate and engage in the adventure of learning. The *tourists* are visitors who may or may not engage or do so only selectively. The *hostage* is there only because he has to be and is unlikely to participate or be engaged with any of the material. Determining how many of each of the three groups are likely to be in attendance will help the presenter determine whether the material will be delivered interactively or in a more formal fashion.

The total numbers in attendance will also dictate the teaching fashion to some extent. As the audience becomes larger, it is more difficult to engage them in interactive teaching styles since their sheer volume makes this difficult. However, there are opportunities for a presenter to maintain some level of interaction through problem-solving or small group breakouts. Breakout groups do not work well if there are a large number of hostages within the overall audience. The hostages will not participate in the group activities, limiting the overall effectiveness of this educational style.

## Using Role-Play

If the presenter attempts to use role-play as a fundamental teaching component, it generally works best with a group of adventurers. Tourists may join in if it seems fun, but are unlikely to participate if they sense the activity may be dangerous. Danger in this context means potential embarrassment or possibility of adversely affecting their self-image. One of the most feared activities by most people is speaking in front of a group. Imagine having to participate in a role-play or group activity with unfamiliar material and a high likelihood of either failure or embarrassment and one can see the immediate difficulty of using role-play.

Role-play also has the possibility of boring a large portion of the audience since they are not actually participating in it. As the instructor works with the role players to obtain the desired outcome, others in the room may lose interest and let their minds drift from the learning experience.

If the instructor attempts to break the group into smaller parts and have them role-play within their groups, the issue of adventurer, tourists, and hostages comes into play again. In the small group role-play there is also the problem of not having an expert provide feedback, which may result in the role players performing outside the desired parameters. Now they have modeled inappropriate responses without critical feedback and that becomes their take away. If the small group is made up of tourists and hostages, there may be no role-play at all.

There are many types of programs with content that requires an individual to perform some sort of practice to enhance their understanding. In situations requiring this, the presenter must limit the numbers attending in order to control the small groups and provide adequate feedback. An alternative is to increase the number of instructors so that sufficient feedback can be provided to meet the learning objectives of the course.

## What's in It for Me?

The presentation should also be developed in a fashion to take into account the personal needs and desires of the attendees. There will be those who wish to be lectured to, those who want to try the material, and those who don't want to be there. To be successful the presenter must meet the needs of each of these groups in a different way, which may be visual, auditory, or tactile.

While hostages may be present at a presentation, it does not mean that they will remain so for the entire program. If the material can be presented in a different and engaging fashion, it may be possible to draw them into the tourist or even the adventurer categories.

In our next column we will continue to expand on the development and preparation of a presentation. ■