

Gene Zelazny, *Say It with Presentations*. Revised and Expanded, McGraw-Hill Publishing House, 2006, 166 p.

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Gene Zelazny's book - *Say it with Presentations* - is a masterpiece in the field of designing and delivering successful presentations in the professional environment. In his revised and extended edition, Gene Zelazny explains how to combine his methodology and PowerPoint techniques to create world-class presentations.

Business presentations; presentation design; presentation delivery; commandments of successful presentations; presentations checklist.

Gene Zelazny's book, titled *Say It with Presentations*. How to Design and Deliver Successful Business Presentations. Revised and Expanded, published at McGraw-Hill, New York in 2006 is one of the most valuable tools when it comes to delivering effective presentations for the professional environment. The book is written in a funny yet persuasive way inviting the readers to a journey in every aspect of a professional presentation, from initial concept, writing, storyboard, and rehearsal to facilities, equipment, visual aids, and final delivery.

In the first chapter, *Introduction*, the author starts the journey with an anecdote which is based on the statement *So you've been asked to give a presentation* followed by five catchy answers. The 1st answer is based on the assumption that there is no way we would ever volunteer for presentations while the 2nd one emphasizes the idea that lack of clear objectives might lead to disastrous presentations. Furthermore, the 3rd answer refers to the anxiety that any presenter must overcome whereas the 4th one reflects the need for timeframes when designing and delivering presentations. As the author points out in the *Introduction*

"the book offers insights and practical ideas derived from all the presentations I've designed and given, as well as the experiences of my friends and colleagues at

McKinsey&Company for whom I've shaped presentations for more than 40 years.

I do not intend this to be a textbook from which you learn to design and deliver presentations. After all, you do not learn to ride a bicycle by reading a manual.

The only way to learn is to get on the bike and fall off and get on the bike and fall off and get on the bike and ride. So it is with presentations. All this book can do is point the way; you have to do the pedaling" (Zelazny, 2006, p.2).

The 2nd chapter, *Define the Situation*, gives valuable information about the main reasons for giving presentations, the audience's needs and expectations, the need for setting up a timeframe and ways of choosing the best medium to deliver the presentation effectively and efficiently. The author points out the fact that "the way to a good definition is to write, in one sentence, what, realistically, you want the members of your audience to do or to think as the result of this presentation" (Zelazny, 2006, p.10), therefore the objectives of any presentation need to be clearly presented and explained, by limiting each objective to one sentence, making sure that the objective is realistic and it leads to action. The audience is another aspect that is detailed in the 2nd chapter. According to the author, analyzing the audience means more than identifying them; it means estimating how they will receive, understand and accept the message and how they will give feedback. The need for setting up a timeframe to start on time and end on time is more than a matter of organization in the author's opinion. It's a matter of integrity. As far as it concerns the best medium to deliver presentations, the author presents the pros and cons of traditional standup presentations vs. discussion meetings vs. video conferences vs. virtual presentations.

The 3rd chapter, *Design the Presentation*, provides valuable suggestions for designing the story line, a catchy introduction and a strong ending and practical guidance on using imaginative visual aids other than traditional charts and text pages. As the author points out, there is no "magic formula that would make presentations simpler to prepare" (Zelazny, 2006, p.39) and the presenter needs to light a fire under the audience, to arouse enthusiasm for being there, to build anticipation for what is going to follow. The author recommends the presenters to use the PIP formula in the introduction, which, in simple terms, means *Purpose* (Why are you giving this presentation?, Why are we here?), *Importance* (What makes it so important that we accomplish that purpose today?, What's the relevance of this presentation to the problems we face?) and *Preview* (giving a bird's eye view of the way the presentation is structured and of what to anticipate), three essentials steps that any presenter must follow. When planning the ending of a presentation is, like the introduction, the part where the audience's attention is at its highest, therefore, the author

recommends summarizing the main points, speeding out recommendations and presenting the action plan along with asking for agreement and for commitment and closing off with the next steps. Visuals are always of critical importance in any presentation because with visuals "you can convey your messages more powerfully, demonstrate relationships more clearly, and influence your audience more quickly" (Zelazny, 2006, p.58) and the author recommends that they must be said with imagination, with metaphor, sometimes with art and music, sometimes with humour and animation.

The 4th chapter, *Deliver the Presentation*, deals with the concepts of *confidence*, *conviction* and *enthusiasm* which are the qualities that audiences look for when someone delivers a presentation. Moreover, rehearsal is one of the aspects of any successful presentation; dealing with nervousness, admitting we made a mistake, trying to be natural, comfortable, ourselves are all aspects that have to be practiced when dealing with presentations on a regular basis. As the author points out, "the more perfect we try to be in front of an audience, the less human we seem, because to be human is to be imperfect" (Zelazny, 2006, p.120). Being sensitive, constructive, objective and realistic are the key aspects that the author recommends by the end of the 4th chapter.

The last chapter, *Closing Thoughts*, emphasizes the main idea with which the book began, the fact that "learning to give a presentation is like learning to ride a bicycle" (Zelazny, 2006, p.152) and presenters always need to learn how to design and deliver a successful presentation before they can walk to the front of a conference room with confidence and a smile on their faces. To make things easier, the author includes in the last chapter *The 10 Commandments of Successful Presentations* whose main aim is to give a good start down this path.

The end of the book is an invitation for the potential presenters to become better acquainted with every aspect of the presentation – from initial concept, writing storyboard and rehearsal... to equipment, facilities, visual aids created with imagination and final delivery. All in all, this book is not only a comprehensive manual that gives instructions and information about how to design and deliver successful presentation, but also an exercise that stimulates imagination, creativity and humour and helps you know yourself better to establish relationships between you and the members of the audience in an efficient, effective and professional manner.

References

Zelazny, Gene (2006) *Say it with Presentations*. Revised and Expanded, McGraw-Hill Publishing House, 2006, 166 p.

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