

Great Presentations

From *Free Prize Inside* by Seth Godin (2004)

Introduction

Most presentations fail because the presenter confuses slides with communication. Slides are not notes, documents, or transcripts. According to Seth Godin, a strong presentation separates three components: what you say, what the audience sees, and what they take away afterward.

Four Elements Of A Great Presentation

1. Make cue cards for yourself.

Don't put your notes on the screen—put them in your hand. Cue cards help ensure you say what you came to say without forcing the audience to read along with you.

2. Create slides that reinforce your words, not repeat them.

Slides should demonstrate—with emotional proof—that what you're saying is true, not just accurate.

3. Prepare a written document (a leave-behind).

At the start of the presentation, tell the audience they will receive the full details afterward so they don't feel the need to write everything down. Don't hand out the document at the beginning. If you do, people will read it while you're talking and stop paying attention.

4. Create a feedback cycle.

The reason for giving a presentation is to move the conversation forward—often toward a sale or commitment. Don't leave the meeting without a clear next step, whether that's a decision, a date, or specific deliverables.

Five Rules For Creating Powerful Powerpoint Presentations

1. No more than six words on a slide.

Godin argues that no presentation is so complex that this rule needs to be broken.

2. Avoid cheesy images.

Use high-quality, professional visuals rather than generic clip art.

mtoellner: Use simple visuals that clarify the idea, and avoid visuals that feel generic or distracting.

What matters is relevance and restraint, not the category of the image.

3. Avoid flashy transitions.

No dissolves, spins, or distracting animation effects.

4. Use sound intentionally, if at all.

Most presentations are stronger without sound effects. If audio is used, it should be deliberate—such as a brief music clip, video segment, or meaningful sound that reinforces the message. Sound can

trigger powerful emotional recall (sometimes called the Proust effect), but it should support the story rather than distract from it.

5. Don't hand out printouts of your slides.

Slides are designed to work with the presenter. Without the spoken explanation, they rarely make sense on their own.

The Three Biggest Powerpoint Mistakes

Using Powerpoint As A Teleprompter

Too many presenters simply read their slides aloud. If the audience is just going to read the slides, there's little reason for them to attend the presentation at all.

Using Slides As A Written Record Of The Meeting

Some presenters distribute slides to create a paper trail rather than writing a proper report. This avoids the discipline of clearly documenting what was actually decided.

Trying To Make The Audience Remember Everything

Slides packed with text attempt to capture every detail. If the goal is to deliver a complete written explanation, a memo or report would be faster and clearer.

Conclusion

When these three components are separated, presentations become simpler and far more effective. The speaker tells the story, the slides reinforce the idea visually, and the written document carries the details. Confuse those components, and the presentation quickly becomes cluttered, forgettable, or both.