



LESSONS FROM TED - AND HOW TO USE THEM IN YOUR PRESENTATIONS

I LOVE TED TALKS...

I love the platform for passion they've given gifted speakers from around the world, that I can watch from the comfort of my laptop, phone or tablet...

I love the insight, ideas and fodder they give for interesting pub conversations...

I love the fact that they're accessible and welcoming to all.

In short, I think they're ruddy marvellous.

Then again, as a self-professed presentation geek, you'd probably expect me to be a little giddy about TED Talks. After all, they've finally given us an alternative to the 'pretend to be Steve Jobs' articles that have been all the rage for the last decade or so. Chances are that you've read more than one article breaking down the key elements of a great TED Talk so you can apply it to your own presentations. Heck, you may have even invested in one of the countless books or advanced PowerPoint [training sessions](#) dedicated to making your presentation 'TED-like' or spent even more time online viewing numerous YouTube videos on how to 'TED-ify' your next pitch.

All completely understandable...but it's this blind faith in all things TED that makes me a

little nervous... Sorry but I'm duty bound to point out that TED Talks are not necessarily the solution to the world's presentation woes, that many would have you believe.

Now don't get me wrong –TED has been a global success because they tick so many of the boxes left unmarked in most business presentations. They are so engaging that, like me, you probably carved out some time from your busy schedule to watch a presentation from someone you've probably never heard of, talking about something you probably didn't realise you cared about.

This weekend I spent 18 minutes enthralled by a presentation dedicated to the crowd funding of interior hydroponics for New Yorkers – I didn't see that one coming...

Who would have thought such a thing was possible through the medium of presentations?

The secret is actually not that secret at all – it all pulls upon some simple 'old as the hills' thinking that, for some bizarre reason, seems to have escaped most presenters today.

HERE ARE 3 LESSONS FROM TED THAT YOU CAN USE TO HELP IMPROVE YOUR OWN PRESENTATIONS:

1. THE VALUE OF INVESTING IN THINKING

TED Talks resonate with audiences because the presenter has dedicated time and effort in making the entire process valuable. They've carefully considered their message, mined their own passion for the topic and planned each step of the process. TED presenters are often not natural orators but the passion for their subject, coupled with an all-important respect of their audience, means that the presentation delivers pretty much every time.

TED Tip 1: Dedicate as much time thinking, planning and editing your presentation as possible.

2. THE IMPACT OF STORY

Passion without structure becomes very confusing very quickly. If TED presentations have taught us one thing, they've demonstrated that complex content can be communicated effectively and engagingly (even the ones on interior hydroponics) using the power of story.

TED Tip 2: Creating content for a presentation is easy (ask anyone on the receiving end of 'Death by PowerPoint') but using that same content to create a message that not only sticks with you but also adds value is a whole lot trickier. This is where story comes into play.

3. REHEARSE, REHEARSE... OH, AND THEN REHEARSE AGAIN.

Eyeful has been lucky enough to support a number of speakers at TED events and even we've been surprised with the amount of time set aside for rehearsals. The wonderful thing is that no one is exempt – everyone, from Bono through to a newbie on stage for the first time at a TEDx event, is expected to put the hours in to bring their 18 minutes to life when it matters most.

TED Tip 3: Rehearse – a lot. This 'wisdom' is nothing new – Gary Player summed it up rather nicely with the phrase "the harder I practice, the luckier I get". The reality is that TED Talks deliver because the presenter has invested time in getting it spot on, from the witty asides (Ken Robinson) through to the beautifully executed silence (Jon Ronson).



So I applaud the wonderful line in the sand that TED has given business presenters – the vast majority demonstrate good practice in action. Yet my concern is that in their excitement, some presenters might blindly apply well-established TED tactics to their next business presentation. It's this free-for-all application of all of TED thinking that worries me – let me explain.

3 EXAMPLES OF HOW TED TACTICS MIGHT NOT WORK SO WELL IN YOUR PRESENTATIONS:

1. SOME TED TACTICS JUST WON'T WASH IN THE 'REAL WORLD'

The sad fact is that some of the things that make TED Talks work so well simply won't play out in your normal business presentation. 'Big bang' moments like Jamie Oliver tipping over a wheelbarrow of sugar or Bill Gates releasing (benign) mosquitos into an audience work brilliantly on a big stage to a specific type of audience. Equally, they are likely to freak out a more conservative audience in a meeting room in Swindon. Tread carefully.

2. YOUR PRESENTATION CAN BE LONGER THAN 18 MINUTES

I've previously ranted about a whole set of 'presentation myths' that have become folklore over time. There are a multitude of 'rules' floating around covering everything from the optimum number of slides in a presentation through to the 'perfect' font size – all of which are ridiculous and redundant in equal measure. The same goes for limiting the length of presentation to a specific 18 minutes – if you can get your message across in 10 minutes, wonderful. Equally, if it takes 30 minutes or an hour, use the time wisely and with your audience foremost in your mind.

By far the best advice I can offer around length of presentation is this (courtesy of Ira Hayes) – 'No one has ever complained about a speech being too short'. Enough said.

3. CLEVER PRESENTATION TECH ISN'T THAT IMPORTANT

TED has played host to an array of very cool presentation technology over the years. We've seen compelling use of 3D holograms and virtual reality in certain presentations through to the more traditional use of PowerPoint presentation design and Prezi. Each of these has wowed, entertained and engaged the TED audience to good effect but don't make the mistake of thinking that the cool tech is the differentiator. A boring presentation created in PowerPoint is likely to be equally boring in Prezi...or as a 3D model...or in virtual reality. Great presentations come from people, not technology, so don't get blinded by the medium and instead focus on the message.

So there you have it – my theory about the danger of TED Talks writ large! As you will have figured out, the reality is that TED Talks have been an extraordinary boon to presenters over the last decade – they've provided a platform for great presentations and shone a light on those that simply don't make the grade.

The key is not to lose perspective – use the good stuff and ditch the bits that don't relate to your audience, your environment or your message. Get this right and audiences will be eating out of your hand. Simple really.