

COMMUNICATION - MAKING YOUR CASE

There's an old saying: "I want never gets". It's true, but not because of what you want, more probably the way you ask for it.

It makes no difference whether you are the Prime Minister or a Course Manager, the principles of persuasive and professional presentation of your case are important in winning support for it. The only difference is that successful politicians tend to recognise this and are always working to develop their skills, whereas the greenkeeper may not see this as an essential part of the job!

Successful presentation of your case to the committee or the proprietor involves two key areas: planning and delivery. In short, what you are going to say and why, plus how you say it – the skills of the presenter. Let's look first at what you are going to say to make the case for what you want.

*Continue
to learn*

PREPARATION – Consider the Benefits

First, think BENEFITS. Think about the machine you want the club to buy, or other new investment you want it to make. For example, an irrigation system or new buildings. What will this do that the club wants to be done? Unfortunately, it's more common to think in terms of the features of a machine, which may not be particularly persuasive. For example, a feature of a new greens machine may be that it has a diesel engine. By itself, this may mean little to the person making the buying decision. However, when you add that it will reduce running costs by £x per season through reduced maintenance, lower fuel costs, etc, you are turning a feature into a benefit.

The "SO WHAT" Test

There is a simple test you can run to check whether you are talking about a feature or a benefit. Just ask "SO WHAT?" after the statement. It's important to avoid using benefits in a presentation like a shotgun – blasting away and hoping that some will stick. Instead, they need to be used like a rifle, to pinpoint the specific needs of the club. If the decision makers are concerned about the operating costs of the club, then the benefit of changing to diesel will have real value impact. However, if the club has more pressing needs that are not addressed by your proposal then this benefit lacks impact. Finally,

always attempt to quantify the benefit. In the example above, that means working out the total potential savings per season in hard cash.

In most commercial organisations, which should include members' clubs, benefits usually relate to financial returns – ie, money earned or saved – even if this comes in a less direct way such as the presentation of the course to attract more visitors, which increases green fee income. Other important motives include "fear" – for example, the prospect of the inability to turn the course out in a specific condition for a major tournament because the machinery isn't capable of doing the job; and "status", which could mean buying new machinery to take advantage of the opportunity to stage a prestigious tournament.

TABLE: Features Functions Benefits Proof. (See below.)

A Three-Part Structure

Next, is the structure of the presentation: "Tell them what you're going to tell them", "Tell them" and finally "Tell them what you told them!" This simple structure will serve you well, if you follow it carefully.

Telling them what you are going to tell them means setting out a simple route map for the presentation. It is important to open with impact, to grab

FEATURE or BENEFIT?

FEATURE

What the product is or has – eg, it has a diesel engine, capacity, power output, manufacture, etc

FUNCTION

What the product does or has that the decision maker wants or needs, eg, it is more economical

BENEFIT

What does this mean to the club or business – eg, cost savings, increases in performance or output. This links to a buying motive – eg, financial, fear, status, etc

PROOF

Evidence that substantiates the benefit – eg, manufacturer data, independent reports, the experience of other clubs, etc

Each of these elements should be linked using phrases like "which means that", "as a result", etc, to form a simple, flowing statement.

Keith Jaynes looks at how effective presentation skills can help greenkeepers get the new course equipment they need

TORO Count on it.

the attention of the audience, whether it's one-to-one or the whole committee. Using the example above, you could ask a rhetorical question "Do you know how much it cost us to run x machine last season?" following with the answer, "Ey".

You can then go on to set the agenda with a short statement like: "In the next 15 minutes I'd like to show you some of the options we considered to reduce these costs, and one solution in particular that I think fits the needs of the club pretty well because it could help us save up to 15% on our machinery operating costs."

Having set the scene, follow with the main part of the presentation. First, outline the current situation and make sure you relate this to issues that are the direct concern of the audience. Remember, you must state the need (yours is the machine) in terms with which the audience can identify, for example revisit the rising cost of maintenance or the challenge of staging the major tournament.

Consider Other Options

At this stage you can include an additional step that adds real power to your ideal solution. This is to suggest one or two alternative possible solutions you have considered but, more importantly, why you have discarded them – eg, refurbishment of an existing machine – ruled out because of high cost and temporary reduction of machinery fleet at critical time. This step shows that you have considered your proposal very carefully and also serves to pre-empt some possible objections you might encounter later from the audience.

Presenting Your Solution

Next, present your ideal solution. It is important to de-personalise this and instead of using phrases like "I think" or "I need", which could infer that this is in your interests only, pick out the specific points of your solution that relate to the needs which the audience has already agreed are important. If the key need is reduction of costs, select the features of the machine and its operation that do this. Explain how they do this, never assume that the audience already knows or understands your world in the same depth that you do! Make sure you turn the features into benefits and that these are tailored to the needs of the audience or the club.

Ask for a Commitment

Finally, it is important to summarise what you have said, restating your ideal solution and the major benefits. However, one final step remains, "Ask for a commitment!" Naturally, what you want is agreement to go ahead and place the order with the supplier. Getting agreement means you must ask for it. This requires a closing statement – eg, "On the basis of what I have shown you, will you go ahead now and approve the purchase of this new machine?"

The best technique is to put up and then shut up! Always wait for the answer. It can only be one of three things, "Yes", "No" or "Maybe", so come to terms with the fact that people do say "No", but also that they are less likely to reject a well thought out proposal. Having said that, "No" should always be challenged to establish "Why?"

The commitment may also include the agreement of committee members to attend a demonstration of a new machine, or a visit to a club with similar machines or installations where you know you will receive backing from a fellow greenkeeper!

However, don't bank on this unless you prepare for success by planning the demonstration or visit down to the last detail. The more substantial your proposal the more important thorough planning becomes to eliminate nasty surprises.

Good Preparation = Confident Delivery

If what you say is one key element of a successful presentation, then how you say it is the other. Many people have a genuine fear of making formal presentations. This is probably because public speaking involves a set of skills

that are not called for under normal conditions in their jobs. Surprisingly, these are not new skills, but ones we already possess. It's just that practice is required to develop them to the point where we can use them confidently and effectively in public.

The Speaker's Assets

Most important is the use of the voice. It has many different components that can add colour and interest to what we say. These include its pitch, its volume, its pace and its tone. We also have the ability to turn it on and turn it off! Silence is a valuable aid to add dramatic effect.

Second is the "presence" of the presenter and the descriptive use that is made of hand gestures and mannerisms. Unfortunately, nerves and lack of confidence can often make the hands head for the safety of the pocket where they are free to jangle car keys or to count loose change! When this happens, you can bet the attention of the audience turns to what's happening to the keys rather than the speaker's message.

Facial expression is important too

Your expression should mirror the message you are sending, for example, no one would dream of delivering bad news with a smile, but nerves can often have this effect on the mouth. The eyes also have an important part to play in receiving feedback from the audience – eg, are people nodding in agreement or do their expressions and actions show they are losing interest or concentration?

Finally, there is the use you make of simple visual aids and other presentation support media – eg, pictures that show what a particular machine looks like (these may be from the manufacturer's brochure) or a broken component from an existing machine. You may have access to an overhead projector or the opportunity to work with a specialist from the manufacturer, which will add interest for a larger audience.

Similarly, a pre-prepared flip chart may also help to keep your presentation on track.

It certainly helps to write the key points that you want to make on a series of numbered post cards (numbered in case you accidentally drop them during the presentation and need to find your place again in a hurry!). In addition, cards don't betray a small shake of the hands if you are nervous! Simply list the key points you want to make but leave the words open, letting you speak normally and with animation. Nothing is worse than presenters who read their presentation word for word!

The Way Forward

The key to successful presentations is good planning and preparation. This takes time and effort. It is important to talk to committee members or proprietors and managers regularly to understand their views about the course and what they are trying to achieve. It also helps to run through your presentation and hone it with someone you trust. This will increase your confidence.

Formal training also helps, where you have the opportunity to master both the development of the material and the speaker skills in a controlled, non-threatening environment.

About the author: Keith Jaynes is a Director of Key Associates, a company that specialises in training, marketing support and financial services for businesses in the agricultural and turf-care industries. He has held senior training and marketing positions in a number of major UK and international companies and has worked extensively delivering tailor-made skill development programmes in the UK and Europe. He is also a member of Committee and a past Captain of his local golf club.