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POWERPOINT: YOUR CO-FACILITATOR

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INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

POWERPOINT: YOUR CO-FACILITATOR



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I had just started a new job when I learned that my co-facilitator for a session I had only delivered once before could no longer participate. As I turned my attention to the work ahead, I was growing increasingly concerned that, without help during the upcoming three-day session, my presentation could go poorly.

I was going to be in front of a large group, and I needed someone to help keep people on task during activities, to help reveal answers to questions that were planted throughout the session, and to offer a different voice from time to time. Finally, I needed someone who could make better sense of the facts and figures I was going to present, since, after all, I was still new.

As I thought about it more, did I need someone? Or could something help?

This issue of *TD at Work* is intended to help both seasoned training professionals and those called on to occasionally present in staff meetings and at industry conferences. Just as the crowd at a sporting event is often referred to as an extra player for the home team, the proverbial 12th man, with some creativity, PowerPoint—or other presentation software—can offer an extra facilitator advantage to any learning experience.

This guide is intended to provide a variety of ideas on how to leverage PowerPoint as a true learning aid during a presentation. It is not intended to offer hard and fast rules about such aspects as bullet points, word count per slide, or the ideal font size.

Note: There are many presentation software tools on the market and in use in training rooms around the world. While I will primarily reference PowerPoint throughout, these tips are intended to improve the effective use of any presentation software.

This issue of *TD at Work* will show you how to:

- start developing your presentation
- use adult learning theory as a basis
- ensure your slides are focused
- create a dynamic deck, develop powerful imagery, and ensure your graphics are meaningful
- tie your presentation together as a true learning tool.

DON'T LAUNCH POWERPOINT JUST YET

You've been asked to give a presentation, and it's time to put it together. What's the first thing you do?

If your answer is open PowerPoint, you should hear a loud, annoying, this-is-a-test-of-the-emergency-broadcast-system-type buzzing sound in your mind.

One of the principle problems with opening presentation software and beginning to lay out your presentation with one slide after another is that it's easy to simply capture your stream of consciousness. In today's business environment when we're asked to do a gazillion other things in addition to prepare presentations, the slides we create when we first launch PowerPoint—except for a few refining tweaks the night before the presentation—are often the slides we end up using.

If you aren't intentional about slide design, it becomes easy to make the slides the focus of your presentation. If you don't think through how you can visually best support information, your slide deck is no longer your co-presenter, ready to support you. Instead, you are left to compete with the slide deck. Keep in mind, people can read information on your slides faster than you can speak. While the average person can speak somewhere between 110-150 words per minute, your average audience can read about 250 words per minute. When your thoughts are written completely on the screen, you'll lose the battle for audience attention every time.

JUST LIKE THE CROWD AT A SPORTING EVENT IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS AN EXTRA PLAYER FOR THE HOME TEAM, WITH SOME CREATIVITY, POWERPOINT CAN OFFER AN EXTRA FACILITATOR ADVANTAGE TO ANY LEARNING EXPERIENCE.

MAKE POWERPOINT A TRUE LEARNING TOOL

Microsoft debuted PowerPoint in 1987, and since then, it has been used to present content in training rooms, board rooms, and classrooms. If you know a little about its features, PowerPoint can be so much more than mere presentation software. It can be the means for taking audiences on a truly engaging learning adventure as well as a powerful tool that supports presenters by serving as their digital co-facilitator.

It can be. Unfortunately, though, in too many instances, people don't use PowerPoint as a true learning tool.

Adult Learning and PowerPoint

Before we jump into some of the tips, tricks, and strategies that can make PowerPoint a powerful force for learning, let's review some basic adult learning principles. After all, presentations and training sessions should always be about the audience and the learners first—never about what's easiest for the presenter or trainer to slap together.

It's been 45 years since Malcolm Knowles published *The Adult Learner* and taught that adult learners are autonomous beings who like to spend time learning how to solve problems through relevant content. As you continue to make your way through this issue, you'll come across a variety of strategies in which PowerPoint can encourage a more autonomous learning environment.

WHAT'S POSSIBLE WITH POWERPOINT?

Traditional PowerPoint Thinking	Intentional PowerPoint Design Thinking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every presentation needs slides. • Every point I make needs a slide. • PowerPoint is synonymous with your presentation. • PowerPoint is linear, and slides appear sequentially. • Templates make a slide deck look professional. • There is a maximum number of words and an ideal font size for most presentations. • People need a lot of information on technical slides and data-driven presentations. • There are lots of options for animations and transitions, so they should all be used at some point. • I can send someone my PowerPoint deck and that should be the equivalent of attending my presentation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My intended presentation outcomes should dictate the types of visual aids I use (or don't use). • My slides should never compete with me for the audience's attention; they should support my message. • PowerPoint is my co-facilitator. • Using triggers and hyperlinks, it's possible to reveal information dynamically. • Effective use of slide real estate and visual representation of my message looks professional. • My audience should be able to read all the words that appear on a slide. • Slides are a visual aid for a presentation; more detailed information is better offered through handouts. • Animations and transitions can help focus attention, but there is such a thing as too much. • Most narrative can be placed in the Notes section and distributed, along with my slides, to paint a complete picture for those not in attendance.

Your slides need not be static, nor do you need to go in any particular order if your learners' needs don't align with the way in which you've originally structured your presentation.

More recently, Jane Vella, a pioneer in the field of dialogue education, challenged what had seemed to be conventional wisdom dating back to the time of Socrates. She begins her groundbreaking book *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach* by explaining “that dialogue is not, as Socrates described it, only between teacher and student but rather also among students. In the kind of dialogue designed with [dialogue education] principles and practices, the teacher discovers herself to be a learner among learners, learning with her adult colleagues even as she designs the learning and manages the course.” Dialogue education is an approach to teaching in which the learners' previous experiences and their ability to engage with an instructor as well as any other learner is central to a meaningful learning experience.

Give Adults the Rein

How, then, can PowerPoint design open a world in which we, as presenters, hand over some control of our lesson to participants so that they can engage with both our content and with one another? To answer this question, I'll ask you for two things:

1. As you read this issue, put aside your current thinking about the way in which you use PowerPoint and design slides.
2. For each tip, trick, or strategy introduced throughout this issue, ask yourself: If I were to apply this, would my audience have a more powerful learning experience?

Keep in mind that the true value of PowerPoint isn't to serve as information provider—that's your role as a presenter. The true value of PowerPoint is to support you and your presentation.

MAKE SURE YOUR SLIDES ARE FOCUSED

A presentation is most effective when it is focused and has a coherent narrative. Achieving that starts with defining your objectives and then taking some time to figure out how you'll meet those ob-

jectives. Who is your audience? What (if anything) does it already know about your topic? What should the audience be able to do new, differently, or better because of the time spent with you?

Back to Basics

Nancy Duarte, author of *slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations*, suggests that “the best place to start is not with the computer. A pencil and a sheet of paper will do nicely. Why take this seemingly Luddite approach? Because presentation software was never intended to be a brainstorming or drawing tool.” She helped former U.S. Vice President Al Gore, a very dry speaker, put together a memorable, Academy Award-winning slide show presentation titled *An Inconvenient Truth* by moving from a hand-drawn outline to an amazing digital visual experience.

At the end of this issue is a reproducible job aid to help you organize your thoughts in a storyboard before you launch your presentation software. Taking an hour or two to map out your thoughts and truly think through how best to visually represent your key points can help ensure that your presentation will be tight and focused with a coherent flow.

When it comes to initial slide design, take to heart the advice Robin Williams offers in her *Non-Designer's Design Book*: “Keep in mind that no one in your audience is going to remember *everything* you say, and actually, the less you say, the more they will remember.” You'll notice that the job aid storyboard template doesn't allow you a lot of room to write. If you'd like to share detailed information, data, or complex text with your audience, a handout may be a more appropriate distribution channel. In fact, a handout will give your audience a physical takeaway from your presentation and help you reduce the number of slides in your deck and maintain focus.

Case in Point

In a real-life example of reducing the number of slides from an existing training program, Tim Cunningham, Michelin's director of customer training and development, knew he had a problem on his hands. Every training session that his team put together included hundreds of slides that

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