

Judge Gates mentioned in our last call that it is important to gauge your audience at the beginning of a presentation, in order to anticipate how much interaction they will give and how the presentation might need to be refocused as a result. (For example, you may need to cut or go more quickly through parts of the PowerPoint if you get a high level of participation from the audience.)

A participatory presentation always is desirable, but everyone has run into one of those audiences that just aren't willing to engage. I suspect Judge Gates makes the judgment about her audience without thinking about it, but I am wondering if we need to provide potential leaders of the discussions with some pointers on how to size up their audiences?

For example:

- In the first few minutes, find out what's most important to your audience. You could start with something like, "I want to make sure we talk about your most important issues today. You've seen the subject of the presentation. Is there anything you want to make sure we cover?" And take notes.
- Whether you get responses will help you judge the audience's participation level. Don't be disappointed if you don't get a lot of questions; sometimes they will come later (you might want to indicate you are comfortable with taking question during the presentation, not just at the end). And sometimes audiences don't involve for other reasons that have nothing to do with you--they just ate a big lunch, they're tired, they're anxious to get back to the office.
- You might help to stimulate the audience if you spend a little time before you are scheduled to present to become familiar with it. That helps you present without reading off the page. And sometimes it helps to stand while you present.
- If you have a relevant personal experiences, tell it. Ask your audience if they have had experiences relevant to something in the presentation.
- Generally, audiences involve more when they are asked questions that get them thinking. We are all so familiar with PowerPoints that we sometimes don't pay full attention unless we are engaged.
- Be brief; finish early.