The Seven Glorious Words

Idea In Short

Judge every presentation by whether the client says: oh, that makes sense, let's do that. Formatting is table stakes, and storytelling is the product. Know the audience, lead with recommendations, structure the logic and aim for the moment when intellect, emotion and action align.

Stories Matter

Type storytelling into a book retailer and more than 20,000 titles appear. The popularity is earned, because humans are wired, down to the lizard brain, to tell and remember stories.1 Business storytelling adds a requirement: it must go somewhere. This is persuasion, not poetry or contemplation. Consultants are hired to solve difficult problems that are volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous [VUCA], and if the problems were easy they would already be solved.2 Like attorneys, consultants earn their fees in the narrative.

PowerPoint Is More Than Looking Pretty

Some clients and students hold the incorrect perception that good PowerPoint means correct formatting. That is like saying a burnt chicken is the wrong color. The problem is not the color; the chicken tastes burnt. The same holds for slides. Yes, the mechanical sins are real and numerous: broken alignment, missing parallel structure, mismatched fonts, excessive color, inconclusive titles, absent page numbers, typos, misleading graphs, unsourced data, misused histograms, shifting verb tense, illegibly small font, words that contradict the chart, misordered slides, uncentered text boxes and clip art. Fix all fifteen and the deck can still fail, because the main problem is storytelling.

Make It Easy to Understand

Think of a large home improvement store. Do you want shoppers to find what they came for,

discover things they did not know they wanted and buy at full price, quickly? Yes, three times over. The same holds for a presentation. The audience should know what you are talking about, follow the logic, ask good questions, engage, enjoy and collaborate on next steps. A handful of concepts carry most of the weight. Visualize your points with meaningful diagrams. Apply the Pyramid Principle and put recommendations up front, as Barbara Minto taught generations of consultants.3 Keep it simple, since the less needed to prove the point, the better. Use titles and kicker boxes aggressively so nobody guesses your meaning. And answer the senior manager's eternal question: so what?

Audience and Message

No presentation exists in a vacuum. You would not say the same thing to your boss, your mother, your ten-year-old niece and your competitor, so think audience first. A chief marketing officer, chief financial officer, chief operating officer and chief human resources officer bring different concerns, incentives and interests to the same room. Know who you are talking to. Then interrogate your own message. Have you done the work and broken the problem down to clarity? Could you explain it simply to a cousin? Could the audience repeat your main points after the meeting, or describe the presentation three days later? Is the message salient, memorable and worth their time? If not, no design polish will rescue it.

Oh, That Makes Sense, Let's Do That

At the end of any presentation, if the client speaks those seven glorious words, the work succeeded. The whole point is to hear them, and each part carries meaning. The oh holds surprise. You took messy data, structured it, added spicy analysis and created something they had never seen, what one senior manager called the wow factor. The critical self-test: are you delighting the client, or stealing their watch and telling them the time? Is the work worth its daily rate?

That makes sense holds even more. The client understands what you are saying, which is huge. The client follows your logic and sees how you reached the conclusions. They might disagree, question or correct, and that is fine, because this is collaboration. They are buying into your point of view, proof the quiet pre-work paid off. Value has been delivered and trust established, and clients at risk need both.

Let's do that completes the arc. Consultants are paid to make change happen, and this

phrase signals you got past the head, through the heart and down to the hands. Head plus heart plus hand equals implementation. Phase two grows likely, add-on work sells itself and the consultant graduates from minding work to finding it.

Diagnosing the Missing Word

The seven words also work in reverse, as a diagnostic when a presentation lands flat. No oh means no insight, so return to the analysis and ask what the client learned that they did not already know. A missing that makes sense signals broken logic or skipped context, curable by walking the argument backward until the audience can reconstruct it unaided. A missing let's do that is the subtlest failure, since the client understood and agreed yet feels no pull to act. That gap usually means the recommendation ignored their constraints, their politics or their fear, the heart layer between head and hand. Diagnose which word failed to arrive, and the rework targets itself.

The Best Presentation Uses No Slides

Remember the highest form of the craft: the best PowerPoint is the one you never take out of your bag. You bring it to the update meeting or the business lunch, and the conversation goes so well, alignment runs so deep and trust sits so high that the deck stays untouched. You spend less time convincing the client you are credible and thoughtful, and more time planning and plotting how to make both of you more successful. Storytelling built that trust, one clear narrative at a time, until the story no longer needed visual aids. That is the end state worth working toward.

- 1Storytelling
- 2Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity And Ambiguity
- 3Barbara Minto

Summary

Presentations exist to earn seven words: oh, that makes sense, let's do that. The oh signals genuine insight, the sense signals understood logic and trust, and the action signals change. The best deck is the one trust renders unnecessary. Head, heart, hand.