

Leading a Seminar and Getting Your Audience Involved.

By John Maust

When you're leading a seminar, there's nothing more discomfoting than a roomful of nodding heads, glazed stares or bored frowns.

How can you get your audience involved and energized?

Some years ago, I was feeling a bit queasy over an invitation to lead an hour long seminar as one of the big InterVarsity Urbana missions conferences. Fortunately, the organizers held a brief pre-conference training session for seminar leaders. Claude Bowen walked us through some simple steps to encourage audience involvement.

Be prepared

Long before the seminar, do adequate preparation and pray for God's leading in your choice of teaching content. It's a good reality check to remember: The combined knowledge of the audience is always greater than that of the speaker.

Just as important, do homework on your audience. What do you know about their backgrounds, education level, areas of interest and need? If you are speaking at a church or institution, try visiting the website to learn more about the organization.

Also, arrive early for your class or seminar. Don't rush in looking flustered at the last minute, when everyone is seated and checking their watches. Be the first to arrive. Set out your papers, and get your audio-visuals in order.

Greet people personally as they come in. Mingle. Shake hands. Establish points of contact with your audience.

Identify your objective

Just as writers formulate a central theme for a book or manuscript, seminar leaders benefit by developing a clear controlling objective for their class or seminar. What do you need to cover in the time allotted?

Communicate this objective to your audience at the very beginning of the seminar, and be ready to adjust the objective slightly depending on what you learn about your audience.

Also, tell your audience that you are expecting them to participate in the session. If time permits, you may want to ask them to write down what they expect to get out of the seminar. They can share their expectations in small groups, or you may ask a few to read their statements

Media Associates International (MAI) • 351 S. Main Place, Ste. 230 • Carol Stream, IL 60188 USA
mailittworld@sbcglobal.net • www.littworld.org • tel: 630-260-9063 • fax: 630-260-9265

aloud.

Before your presentation really gets rolling, be sure everyone is able to see and hear adequately. It may be necessary to slightly rearrange the seating so people can better see you—and one another.

Keep things alive

Fill your talk with illustrations and examples. Be enthusiastic about your subject. (If you don't care about your subject, the audience won't either.) Watch your voice inflection and maintain eye contact.

As the session moves along, ask questions. Affirm the participation of your listeners, and repeat their answers. Don't cast judgment on your listeners' responses.

Also, consider asking your listeners to write something down. Watch who is writing, as these are good people to call upon in discussion time.

As you progress in your material, occasionally stop and summarize. In creative and simple ways, keep reminding your audience of the central objective of the seminar.

So, by the end of the session, your audience will sense they have come “full circle” with you in the development of your stated objective. Also, by participating, they will have discovered many of the truths of your teaching by themselves and without you having to state them. As the saying goes, people will not remember what we say, but what they do.

By the end of the seminar, there may still be a couple of nodding heads in the meeting room. But that will owe to a full stomach or a short night's sleep—not your presentation.