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A professional headshot of Louis Sapirman, a man with short brown hair, wearing a dark pinstripe suit, a white shirt, and a patterned tie. He is smiling slightly. Overlaid on the left side of the image is a large, semi-transparent white question mark. In the background, there is a blurred image of a server rack with multiple hard drives labeled "146GB 15k". To the left of the man is a close-up of a gold-colored credit card with a blue and white barcode sticker. The card has various numbers and codes printed on it, such as "10", "11", "12", "13", "14", "15", "16", "17", "666", "7777", "88888888", "999999999999", "34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44", "00402107 0", "2 43 44 45 46 47 48", and "34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44".

Meet Louis Sapirman

Vice President, Associate General Counsel & Chief Compliance Officer
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Short Hills, NJ
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by Bruce Weinstein, PhD

How to teach ethics (and still have people like you)

- » You can and should make the ethics session you teach interactive and fun.
- » Emphasize the carrot (the benefits of acting honorably at the company) over the stick (the punishment that awaits employees who don't do the right thing).
- » Tell stories with high stakes and a strong emotional component, which will make the session memorable.
- » Practice your presentation several times. Recording it on video and studying it beforehand is especially helpful.
- » Being nervous before your talk means you care.

Ugh. You've just been assigned to give an ethics presentation to employees of your organization, and you say to yourself, "I'd rather have dental surgery—without anesthesia!"

I feel your pain, because I make my living giving ethics presentations to companies around the world. I know firsthand how difficult it can be to teach ethics in a corporate setting, so I'd like to share my years of experience with you and help you maximize your effectiveness and even have fun with the session.

Consider the following eight guidelines. Some of them have to do with teaching ethics in particular, and some are about how to give an effective presentation on any subject.

1. Engage your group.

Unless you're as dynamic as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ronald Reagan, or Kelly Sargent (an ethics and compliance specialist with McDermott, Inc. and the second runner-up in the 2014 Toastmasters

International World Champion of Public Speaking competition), you probably won't be able to hold an audience's attention for an hour with a speech. After all, you're competing with something that almost everyone in the audience is completely obsessed with: their smartphone.

If no one volunteers, you can say something like, "This is the *interactive* portion of the presentation," which lightens the mood and gives people permission to get involved.

Instead of a speech, give an interactive presentation by using the following techniques.

Ask open-ended questions

Every few minutes, ask questions and invite people to respond. If no one volunteers,



Weinstein

you can say something like, "This is the *interactive* portion of the presentation," which lightens the mood and gives people permission to get involved. It doesn't hurt to let a few people know in advance about the first question you plan to ask and invite them to be the ice-breakers.

Phrase your questions carefully. They're more likely to make an impact when they're directed to each person rather than the group. Thus, instead of saying, "*How many of you* have ever been offered an expensive gift from a client?," it's better to ask, "Have *you* ever been offered an expensive gift from a client?"

Refer to people by name

"A person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language," Dale Carnegie said, and keeping this in mind will help your ethics session be a big hit. When someone makes a good point, refer to that point later in the session and attribute it to the person who made it: "As Regina said earlier, nothing is more important to protecting our brand than doing the right thing." Regina will be thrilled, the rest of the audience will be impressed you remembered what she said, and everyone will rightly feel that you're there to support, not judge, them.

Take a poll

It's now possible to take real-time, anonymous polls from your audience. You've probably participated in polls during webinars, and it's especially good to do this in meetings to get the audience involved

(and to use the smartphones they already have open).

For my clients who aren't able to use polling software or apps, I create a custom-designed SurveyMonkey quiz for the group, distribute it to the audience several weeks in advance, and present the results at the session. It's time-consuming, but it's a great way to encourage participation.

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Break into small groups—maybe
Small-group discussions can be unwelcome. Some people prefer to listen rather than participate, so requiring them to speak with someone they may not know (or like) can backfire.

If you do decide to use small-group discussions to break up the presentation, have people form groups of three rather than two. That decreases the chances of anyone having to talk with someone they'd rather avoid.

2. Tell stories.

Susan Walberg, an attorney and healthcare compliance consultant, told me about a time when she had to manage a privacy breach at a healthcare institution. "This was back in the beginning of the various data breach notification laws, so there was not yet an industry standard about how to respond to a major breach. C-suite executives, attorneys, and I debated the need to notify patients," Susan explained.

"While everyone was parsing the regulatory language, a risk manager spoke

up in a soft voice and said, ‘Shouldn’t we be thinking of what is right for our patients and what duty we owe to them? What would we want if it was us?’”

Susan said the room fell quiet, because everyone had lost all sight of the institution’s primary mission: to serve patients. “In the end, we notified all patients, whether the law required it or not, because that was the right thing to do.”

Take a look at your audience when you begin to tell a story. Most people stop whatever they’re doing, lean in, and pay attention. We’ve listened to stories since we were children, and we learn best through them, especially if the stakes are high and there is a strong emotional component.

I’ve collected a lot of stories to tell at ethics presentations, so you don’t have to. My latest book, *The Good Ones: Ten Crucial Qualities of High-Character Employees*, is chock-full of true tales about employees who benefited their companies and themselves through the honorable choices they made. There are also examples of how employees who made poor decisions made things worse for everyone. Feel free to use these stories, with attribution, if you have to give an ethics presentation at your organization.

3. Use humor (where appropriate)

A company’s reputation can be damaged or destroyed by one employee’s unethical act. A lot of money may be at risk. And when a client’s confidential information

is compromised, he/she may never trust your business again and will probably badmouth it.

No doubt about it, ethics is serious business. But that doesn’t mean that an ethics presentation has to have the stone-faced seriousness of a security briefing by the FBI. You can and should lighten the

material every few minutes with an ethically appropriate joke.

For example, at the beginning of my talks, I present a scenario in which an employee overhears two colleagues revealing confidential information in a public place. “What

would you do?” I ask. “Would you (a) Report your colleagues to their supervisor, (b) Mind your own business, (c) Talk with your colleagues and leave it at that, or (d) Record your colleagues with your smartphone’s video camera and post the clip online?” That last option is, of course, ridiculous, and it usually gets a big laugh.

Humor has to be handled with good taste and sensitivity. Some topics are off-limits for jokes: politics, religion, and anything about the CEO. A fail-safe topic is yourself. Used sparingly, self-deprecating humor works well, and it tells the audience, “I too, struggle with doing the right thing, and sometimes I fall short of the mark.”

4. Emphasize the carrot, not the stick.

When you see the word “ethics” in the news, with what other word is it usually associated? “Violation”! Most news reports

that deal with ethical issues are about people who either did something they shouldn't have done or didn't do something they should have done. Either way, the newsmakers wind up punished, humiliated, or embarrassed.

Yes, it's important for ethics presentations to address the organization's code of conduct and how the company and its interests may be harmed when an employee violates any aspect of it.

"A Stanford University study found that scandals involving CEOs resulted, on average, in 258 negative news items or mentions over 4.9 years," notes Kristy Grant-Hart, founder of Spark Compliance Consulting and author of *How to Be a Wildly Effective Compliance Officer*.

"Something as seemingly low-news-value as a sexual harassment claim can generate nearly five years of bad press. It's just not worth it, and warning people about such things frequently results in them thinking twice before misbehaving."

But in an ethics presentation, it's also crucial to emphasize that when employees make choices that are consistent with the company's values and code of conduct, this benefits everyone, including the employees themselves.

Too many ethics programs focus on the stick. But if you leave out the carrot, you won't win the audience over to your side, and you'll miss an opportunity to inspire and motivate.

5. Know your audience.

How many times have you been to a talk and quickly discovered that the speaker knows nothing about you or your organization? Great speakers know that the key to their success is learning a lot about the people they're speaking to.

If the audience will be made up of senior leadership, for example, imagine how impressed they'll be with you if you quote from a recent news article about a problem they're facing or even a YouTube video featuring a speech that one of the leaders has given. Last year, I spoke to a Fortune 100 oil company and, in preparation for the talk, I watched a short video online in which the CEO addressed students at a business school.

He said, "We're doing three million barrels at \$100 per barrel per day, but if you lose one ounce of integrity, you've lost your company."

In my presentation, I referred to that video and quoted this line. I also made sure that I pronounced the CEO's name correctly, since there were several different possible pronunciations. Afterwards, the director of Compliance told me, "We appreciate that you went to such lengths to know something about us." It really didn't take a lot of effort on my part; all I did was go to YouTube, put the CEO's name in the search engine, and study some of the videos that popped up.

It's good to refer to audience members by name and even better to know something important about them and refer to *that*, too.

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6. Practice and study.

Eddie Van Halen, Beyoncé, and Michael Phelps are masters at what they do. How do you think they got that way? Do you think Queen Bey walks on stage and says, “I’ll just wing it tonight”? Does Michael Phelps say to himself, “I’ve gotten lots of gold medals before, so it shouldn’t be a problem to get more”? Just the opposite—each of these superstars spends hours every day practicing their craft. *That’s why* they’re so good.

“But I don’t want to be a world-class speaker,” you say. “I just want to give this talk and get it over with.” Fine—but you still have to practice if you want to make a positive impact.

I’ve been giving paid speeches around the world for many years, but every night before my speech, I record my talk in my hotel room and review the footage several times. It helps me find the best ways to tell a story, avoid bad habits that have crept in, and speak without using a lot of notes.

There are many books about the art of presenting, but two that I especially like are Dale Carnegie’s *The Quick and Easy Way to Effective Speaking* and T.J. Walker’s *Secret to Foolproof Presentations*. (That second book is out of print, but T.J. has a newer one, *How to Give a Pretty Good Presentation*, which appears to cover a lot of the same ground.) If you’re going to be doing a lot of presenting, I recommend working with a coach or taking a training session. I’ve taken Jess Todtfeld’s

workshop and highly recommend it (www.successinmedia.com/services/presentation-training).

7. Find out what worked and what you can improve upon.

There’s an easy way to get feedback from your audience immediately. Services like FixYourFunnel.com allow audience members to send a text to you and receive a series of questions they answer on their phones. You write the questions in advance (e.g., “What is one thing you’ll do differently as a result of this presentation?” or “What would make the presentation better?”).

Give the

audience an incentive that is consistent with your company’s policies on accepting gifts and provide a short deadline. For example, audience members who take my brief survey that day automatically get my audiobook on ethical intelligence, but the offer is good only until midnight.

Take the responses you receive to heart and use them to make the presentation more effective next time.

8. If you’re nervous, that means you care.

In Robert Abel and Pierre Adidge’s documentary *Elvis on Tour*, the King is interviewed just before he takes the stage in the early 1970s. He is asked, “How do you feel, Elvis?”

“Nervous!” he replies.

If the greatest performer in the history of rock and roll can be anxious before a show when he was at the peak of his career, it's OK for you to be skittish, too.

All it means is that you care about doing a good job. And that's exactly as it should be.

Of course, if you have crippling anxiety and an extreme aversion to public speaking, that's *not* good, and everyone would be better served if someone else did the ethics training. But short of that, you should view pre-presentation jitters as what they are: a sign that you're personally invested in serving your audience to the best of your ability. If you

follow the guidelines I've suggested, your nerves will subside once you see your audience being engaged, laughing at your jokes, and recognizing that your ethics session is one of the most valuable talks they've attended in a long time.

If you have any questions about how to give an effective ethics presentation, feel free to call me at 646-649-4501 (U.S.) or write me at bruce@theethicsguy.com. I'll help you any way I can. *

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