



Disaster Planning: Before-During-After

Business Presentation Mastery Module 1

When you see your worries down on paper and look at them from an objective, realistic, problem-solving frame of mind, it helps shrink them down to size and make them less fearsome. By thinking through everything you can do before, during, and after a presentation to prevent or mitigate problems, you will develop a game plan to deal with problems, which puts a lot of power back in your hands.

To do this exercise, you can use the template on the next page or create your own disaster planning table on a separate piece of paper or a whiteboard. If making your own table, be sure that there are four columns in the following order: What could go wrong, Before, During, After

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) In the “What could go wrong” column, list all the things that you are worried might go wrong during your presentation (e.g.: brain goes blank, slide deck doesn’t work, I can’t answer a question, I lose my voice, the projector doesn’t work, mis-pronounce a key name, I screw up and lose my job, the audience hates me and walks out, etc.)
- 2) For each concern that you wrote down, ask yourself “is this thing realistic?” Answer this question very honestly. For example, your brain going blank or technical troubles are both realistic concerns. Your brain going blank may be likely to happen, and maybe technical troubles are possible but not likely. Both these worries are worth planning for. On the other hand, losing your job because you messed up a part of the presentation or the audience hating you so much that they walk out, are pretty unrealistic (and if they happen, there are probably bigger issues at play). ***If a fear that you listed is unrealistic, cross it off the list!***
- 3) Now, in the “Before” column, list tactics you can use to prevent a problem from happening in the first place. If you are worried about your brain going blank, you could write “Practice presentation for an hour each day in the 5 days leading up to the presentation.” For the slide deck failing, you could write “Print the slide deck in handout forms, bring enough printouts for everyone there.”
- 4) In the “During” column, list what you will do *during* the presentation if that thing happens. These tactics will probably be very simple and will mostly involve implementing what you did in the “Before” column. So, for “Brain goes blank”, you could write “Refer to my speaker notes”. For “slide deck doesn’t work”, you could write “Pass out the paper handouts of the slide deck”.
- 5) In the “After” column, list what you could do *after* the presentation is over to repair or resolve the problem, or to prevent it from happening again. Let’s say that your brain went blank and you forgot part of your presentation – in the “After” column, you could write “Email attendees the part I skipped as a bit of bonus information.” For the failed slide deck, you could write “figure out why slide deck failed and brainstorm back-up options for next presentation.”

What could go wrong	Before	During	After

Sample Disaster Planning table

What could go wrong	Before	During	After
Brain goes blank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practice presentation twice a day for the 4 days before my talk - Create really good speaker notes and practice using them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Take recovery breaths to let my brain get back on track -Refer to my speaker notes -Repeat my Most Important Message to jog my memory 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Plan for more practice time or a different practice strategy for the next presentation -Next time, bring a bottle of water that I can sip if my brain goes blank to buy me time to think
Run into traffic problems before presentation and I feel rushed when I arrive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -2 days before presentation, check possible driving routes and alternatives. Look for construction, etc. -Verify my parking options -Have the organizers cell phone # so I can call in an emergency -Leave 30 minutes before I think I need to; organize my schedule to arrive 90 minutes before my presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Call event organizer if there's a major issue en route to the venue -Practice deep breathing when I'm feeling overly rushed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -If I feel rushed at this presentation, lengthen my "arrive by" time so I have more room for traffic differences and more time to settle in before my talk
Technical problems – bad laptop or wrong cable connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Pack my own laptop and connection cables -Have slide deck backed up on both a flash drive and cloud storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Swap out the venue's laptop and cables for mine -Download the slide deck from the flash drive / cloud storage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Not much I can do after. Review my tech backups and buy any missing backup cables I might need in the future.
Forget part of my presentation / need to cut my presentation short	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Leave myself enough practice time -Verify my presentation timing, leave extra wiggle room 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Go back to the part I forgot if I can do so without confusing the audience. If not, just move on. -Skip over the least important parts of the presentation. Don't draw unnecessary attention to what I'm skipping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Send "bonus notes" handout to the event organizer containing the information I skipped. Have event organizer email this to attendees with a personal note from me.
Can't answer a question from the audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Brainstorm possible audience questions and think of answers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Admit that I can't answer question. Get the person's contact info so I can follow up. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Follow up within 2 days with the answer or with some helpful resources.