

Kellogg Insight Podcast Transcript

Knock Your Next Business Presentation Out of the Park

Jake SMITH: Tim Calkins is a clinical professor of marketing at Kellogg. And his new book, on how to give a good business presentation, has a slightly offbeat title. It's called, *How to Wash a Chicken*. That was the name of a presentation he gave in the 4-H club, back when he was a kid, about, you guessed it: how to wash a chicken. But as Calkins explains in a promotional video, the title of the book also has a deeper meaning.

Tim CALKINS: If you're gonna take a chicken to a chicken show, you want to clean it up so the chicken looks its very best. It's the same thing, though, when you're putting together a business recommendation. Anytime you're doing a presentation, you've really gotta clean it up. In other words, you've gotta wash your chicken.

SMITH: Welcome to the Kellogg Insight podcast. I'm your host, Jake Smith. If you've ever had to give a presentation at work, then you know: It seems like there are a million things to worry about. How do I write it? How do I prepare? Who do I invite? Where in the room should I stand?

In his career, Tim Calkins has worked with companies including Pfizer, PepsiCo, and Kraft foods. So he knows firsthand just how tricky presentations can be—and he wants to help you make yours better, cleaner, and more powerful. Today on the podcast, we'll hear bits of a presentation that Calkins gave on how to give a great business presentation. He shares five simple steps that will let you conquer the business presentation.

[music interlude]

SMITH: His first recommendation: Make sure there's a good reason to give the presentation in the first place.

CALKINS: Anytime you're doing a presentation you should always ask yourself, "What's the purpose?"

SMITH: Now, this may seem like a no-brainer. But, he points out, we've all been in these pointless meetings and presentations before. And, Calkins warns, they can actually damage your reputation.

CALKINS: So what happens is if you give a presentation and there's no real reason to be doing it, your audience doesn't pay attention. And they start to tune you out, and they look at their phones and they get up and they leave. And that doesn't make you look good, it doesn't make them look good. It makes you nervous.

SMITH: If there's not a really good reason for the presentation, then you might be better off scheduling a quick phone call, or jotting down an email. Step number two: Figure out the

story you want to tell. All too often, Calkins says, people think they're supposed to merely be conveying a bunch of facts and figures.

CALKINS: You sort of put it in a natural order and you go ahead and create your pages and present it. I would suggest this approach does not work very well. And the problem is, what's going to happen is, you're going to have all this data, all this information and your presentation's going to end up being very clunky, very full of numbers, data, information. It's not going to lead you to a good spot. So instead what I recommend is you start by saying, "OK, what is the story?"

SMITH: But how do you figure out what your story is—let alone the best way to tell it? One way is to draw a storyboard. Take a piece of paper, make nine little boxes, then put just one bite-sized point in each box. Those boxes will be the templates for your slides, and for the story you're telling. Or, if you don't want to write out a storyboard, Calkins has a little trick he likes to use.

CALKINS: Generally speaking, as humans, we're better at speaking than we are at writing. Like, if I were to ask you, "How was your Thanksgiving?" You'll probably tell me, "I had a great Thanksgiving. Had the turkey, the stuffing, all that." But if I were to say, "Could you write me just maybe a 750 word essay about your Thanksgiving?" Then you're like, "Aw man, that's going to take a couple of weeks. I don't know. I got that writer's block, I need a coffee." And so what you do though, when you're refining your story then is you tell it to a colleague, like, "Write down the story." Or record it on your phone. That works too.

SMITH: OK, so now you have a clear story to tell. There's a date circled on your calendar, when you're going to give the presentation. Most people simply show up on that day and present. But Calkins thinks that's a mistake. Because, you need to let folks know what you're going to tell them before the actual presentation.

CALKINS: Surprises are wonderful in life. We love surprises—surprise parties, surprise trips, surprise presents. These are all great. But in a business situation, they rarely go over well. If you're like, "Surprise, the website's down." No, that is never—surprise is never a good thing in a business context. Which means, before meeting, before a presentation, you meet with the key people and you just take them through.

SMITH: That's step number three: Before you give your presentation, you should set aside time to meet with those key stakeholders, and walk them through what you're planning to present. Not only can these folks point out problems you may have missed—bringing them in early will also help get them onboard with your idea. And, it will give you more confidence when presentation day arrives.

CALKINS: Now when it comes time to go to the presentation, you're going to walk in there with a totally different perspective, because you walk in there not wondering how it's going to go. You walk in saying, "Oh, this is going to go well because I've already shown it to all of you. You've already seen it. This is going to be fine."

SMITH: Finally, the big day is here. It's time to actually *do* this thing you've spent so long perfecting. But if at all possible, Calkins says, before you present, make sure you set up the room just right. That's step number four. You want to make sure you have space to move around, and that the projector's not going to be projecting right onto your forehead. And you don't want to feel like you're in a different ZIP code than your audience.

CALKINS: I was in Denver doing a talk recently and I got to that room and it was six rows. It was a big group, like 120 people, 150. It was six, seven rows all in just straight rows. And I looked at the room and like, "Wow, this is a really tough room. Because I'm going to be so far away from the people in the back and I can't really go anywhere and I can't ..." So this is a problem. But then I'm like, "Can we just move these things apart?" So what I did was I pushed the tables apart and I created a little runway down the middle of it through the first four rows and I turned it, all of a sudden, into a much better room.

SMITH: So, you've picked the right moment. You've put together a clear story. You've previewed it to the right people, and set up the room just right. Now it's time to present. And if you're like most people, you're going to be a little nervous. But Calkins says, that's actually a good thing. His final recommendation: Be nervous—but also project confidence.

CALKINS: Which seems like a little bit of an oxymoron, but I think it's true though. I do a lot of the Chicago triathlons. I sort of stumble through those. Every year's the same thing. You get there and there's this weird mix of feelings. On the one hand I'm like, "You know what? I'm gonna drown." But on the other hand I'm like, "I've done it for 10 years. I can do it. I know I can do this. I've done it." And it's that feeling you sort of like to have.

SMITH: Now, the nervousness part comes easy to most of us. But the other part is to project confidence. To do that, Calkins recommends a few tricks. Practice as much as you can. If there's anything you're worried about forgetting, just put it on your slides so you can have a reminder while you're presenting. But, more than anything...

CALKINS: You walk in there and you say, "You know what? I know this topic and I'm the expert on this topic." And you know what? You probably are. I spent a couple of years working on Parkay margarine, sticks of Parkay. And I did a lot of presentations about sticks of Parkay margarine. But every time I'd do those presentations—I actually liked them a lot, because I would walk in there and I'm like, "You know what? At the moment, I am the world's expert on sticks of Parkay margarine. I am. There's nobody in the world—I am the only person who all day long spends their time worrying about Parkay margarine sticks. The only person! So I'm delighted to talk to you about this business because you know lots of other things, but that one, that's me." And that's just a great frame of mind.

[music interlude]

CALKINS: So five things: Be clear on the purpose. Start by finding the story. Pre-sell it. Set the room. Be nervous and project confidence. And if you do these things, I think what'll happen is you'll find the presentations go better, more smoothly, and your ideas will have more of an impact.

SMITH: This program was produced by Kevin Bailey, Jessica Love, Fred Schmalz, Jake Smith, Michael Spikes, and Emily Stone. It was written by Jake Smith, and edited by Michael Spikes.

Special thanks to Tim Calkins. His book, *How to Wash a Chicken: Mastering the Business Presentation*, is available now.

As a reminder, you can find us on iTunes, Google Play, or our website. If you like this show, please leave us a review or rating. That helps new listeners find us. And visit us at insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu, where you can find lots more tips on building presentations, telling a powerful story, and taking charge of your career.

We'll be back in a couple weeks with another episode of the *Kellogg Insight* podcast.