

The Seven Deadly Sins of Technical Presentations – And How to Resist Them

SHARE - Pittsburgh

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Abstract

What's the difference between a great technical presentation and a poor one? It's easy to know that you didn't get what you wanted out of a session, but it may be harder to understand why. As you prepare your own presentations, knowing the key elements to a great speech can not only help you deliver the message you intended, but also set you apart as a key contributor. Learn how to avoid the mistakes others make and bring your delivery to a new level. Get the message out there, successfully.

Agenda



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Special thanks to Dr. Kersten, founder of Despair.com. Without his efforts, this presentation would be a lot less funny. There are many ways to approach improving a technical presentation; using the 7 deadly sins is just one more way, but keeps the effort manageable while helping you achieve far better results. Make people want to hear you quickly.



"There are always three speeches for every one you actually gave. The one you practiced, the one you gave and the one you wish you gave."
Dale Carnegie

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What would it be like to give the speech you always wanted to and get the response you desire? It is possible – you have all the material you need in your head and heart. It's just about finding the best way to deliver it.

Why me?

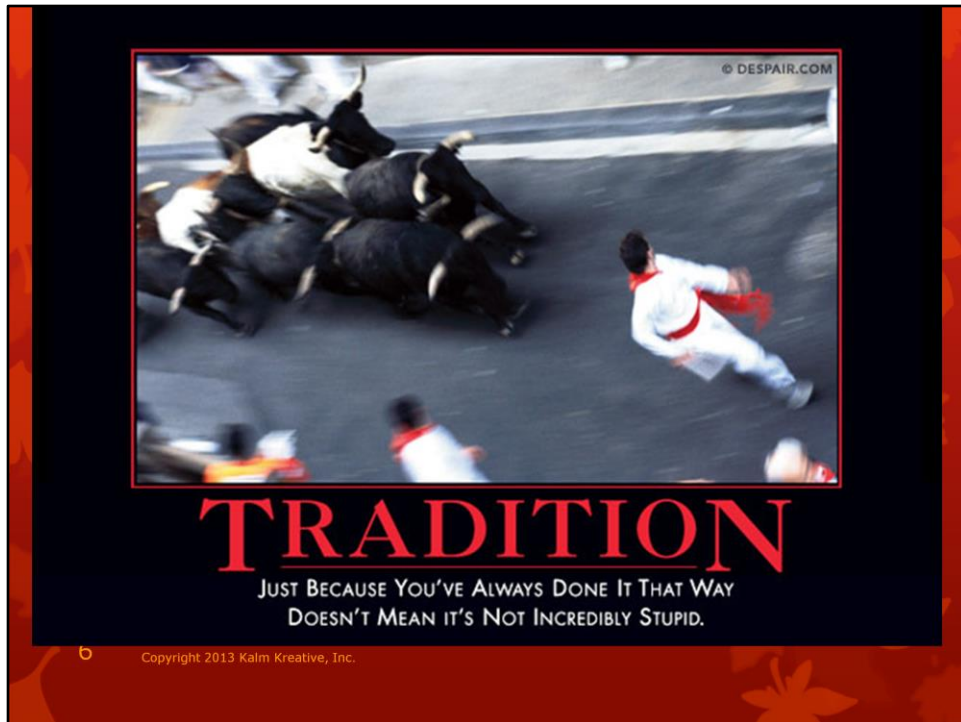
- Toastmasters ACG
- Speaker's training
- Practice
- Feedback
- I'm the audience



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Why listen to me? What do I know? I'm still learning to be a better speaker, but I have learned a few things that might help you, based on becoming an Advanced Communicator Gold with Toastmasters – the highest level, additional speaker's training, lots of practice, listening to feedback and heck, I'm the audience. I'd like us all to be better at this. The first time I spoke at CMG 2000, I was terrified. First, I was worried no one would come and then, I was afraid they would come. The day before, I had worn the wrong shoes and my feet had swollen. I couldn't put on any shoes I had with me, so I did the presentation barefoot, stuck behind the lectern so no one would know. Each time, it gets better. And I'm always learning, from research, from watching others and most of all, from the responses I get from audiences.



Some of you have a lot more experience than I do, but that doesn't mean you can't get better. And in fact, many continue to do the same style of presentation year after year, no matter. And that's not working. Just because you have seen some of the greats do it, or because it is what you're used to doesn't mean it can't be better... a lot better.

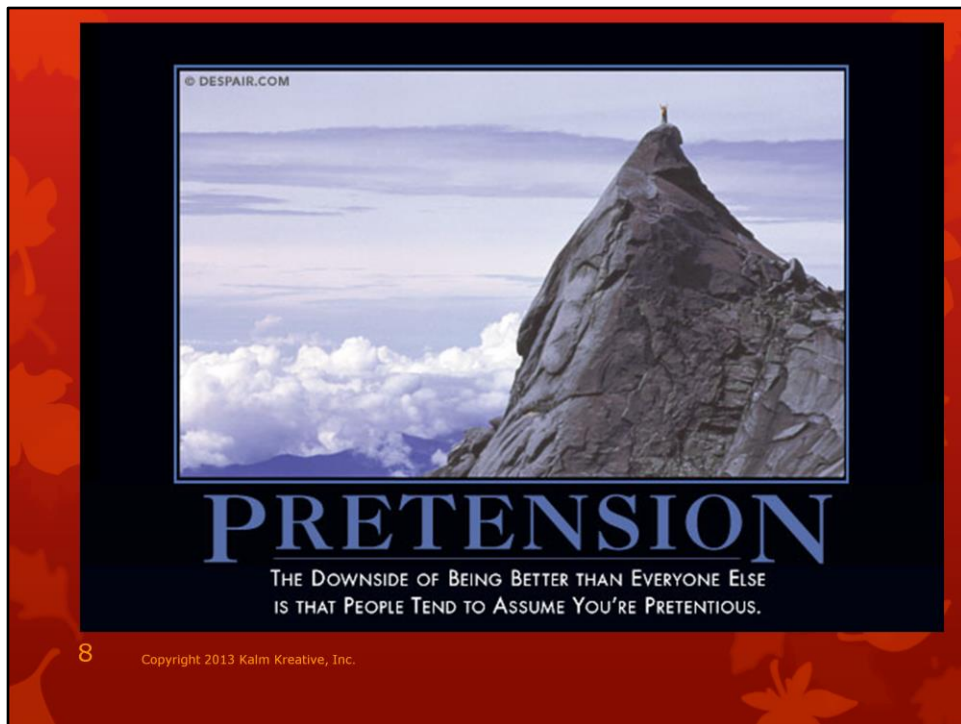
Pride



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Pride is excessive belief in one's own abilities, that interferes with the individual's recognition of the grace of God. It has been called the sin from which all others arise. Pride is also known as Vanity. A proud speaker, in the negative sense of the word, is in love with his presentation and believes that his time on stage is to show how smart and talented he/she is. The audience version of this is the smart-a–questioner who is only asking questions to trip you up. You don't like that person; don't be that person. It's not all about you – that's not why you are up there speaking. Your job is to share your knowledge in a way people can actually take it in.



Pretension and pride go together. We've all seen it. But milder forms also fail to deliver as well as when they give us a presentation where this 'sin' is not invoked. I remember being intimidated by a few speakers early in my career – I wouldn't even ask them questions. You know the ones I mean – they are better than us and we should just receive the words they offer us as manna from heaven. No one's that good and if they really are, they won't make you feel like that.



I know you've been to this session. We all have. The offenders often bring together a variety of 'sins' to this presentation, as we will see. {And perhaps we know some managers who do this as well – one used to do 4PM meetings on Friday and would love to hear himself talk. I wrote my first book in his meetings.} How many of you fall into this trap? We can fall in love with what we have done, but the question is – will anyone else?



Instead, practice 'service'. Start with asking – what's in it for your audience? What can you give to them? What is the question they are asking? Next, you need to understand who your audience is and deliver to them what they want to learn. Use body language and eye contact to relate to your audience and help them hear you. Be clear – speak clearly and understand your message well enough to teach it. Make sure each one goes away with something concrete – an action to take, a new learning, a new awareness. When you act in service to your audience, your gift is to be 'remembered and repeated.' Patricia Fripp, NSA past president defined that phrase. She explains that this is all about sharing, not showing off.


Envy



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Envy is the desire for others' traits, status, abilities, or situation. In the speaking situation, the problems come because of envy of other, better speakers. This can cause one to emulate the better speaker without understanding what is actually required to be a better speaker. Sadly, we rarely get the chance to be reviewed as a speaker – it's mostly about content. But when you can deliver skillfully, everything you say can become golden to your audience.



ENVY

When you can't have one, pissing people off who do is the next best thing.

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Envious speakers are often not nice to better speakers. But you can't learn anything from that. Every great speech you hear is a learning opportunity. Spend some time thinking about why you liked it. Was it simply the content or was there more to it? What makes it great is that the speaker delivers the content in the best way possible.

Envy









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To avoid this, learn a few of the basics that really separate out the good speakers from the rest.

1. Know your message – what are you trying to say? You can't aim it, if you don't know what it is.
2. Give eye contact (speak) only to those who are listening. Not everyone will, but by not trying to get their attention, you focus on those who are listening will tend to bring the rest back. And it rewards those who give you attention.
3. Make sure you have a strong opening and a strong close (not questions). Grab them upfront with a strong story, a powerful question. Memorize your opening so you can deliver it powerfully. Close with a call to action. What should they do tomorrow based on what you have taught them.
4. Flex to audience styles. Provide interesting images to engage with those who are visual. Use vocal variation and good word choice to get to those who are auditory. And perhaps use props and body language to engage with kinesthetics. Asking questions of the audience or otherwise engaging the body helps this group. There are more techniques than these, but start small. Pick one and work on it until it is comfortable and easy for you.

Gluttony



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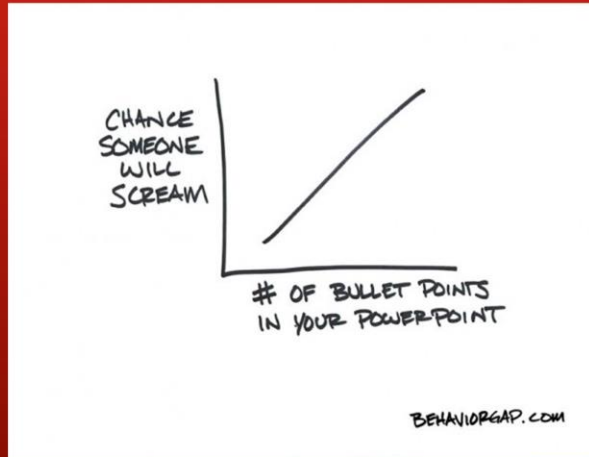
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Gluttony is an inordinate desire to consume more than that which one requires. Or to create a PowerPoint that could never fit in an hour, but try anyway by speaking faster and shuffling through the slides. We've seen this. Figure no more than 1 slide per minute and often less than that, as you need to address questions. {One famous pre-sales rep did at least 120 slides. But that never let his customers have the floor or a chance to say what they really wanted to buy.}



This is what brings on gluttony often – a way of dealing with envy. But it also is often based on a desire to give more – to give value. And yet, when you indulge in this sin, you give less value with all that content. People can only take in a certain amount of content. After that, they're on overload and you're wasting your time.

Gluttony



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Unless this is a handout that people will take with them and read, rather than listening to you, keep your slides clean. Too many bullet points and they won't be listening to you – they'll be reading. And straining. I know you have loads to say – just say it, don't put it on the screen. PowerPoint to read is NOT the same as PowerPoint to present.

PARTITION DATA REPORT

PAGE 2

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*PHYSICAL *														0.64	0.64														
TOTAL										01.02.43.127	01.05.15.033			1.06	26.14	27.19													
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CF1	A	DED					1	ICF	00.59.38.927	00.59.39.066	99.43	99.43	0.00	49.71	49.72														
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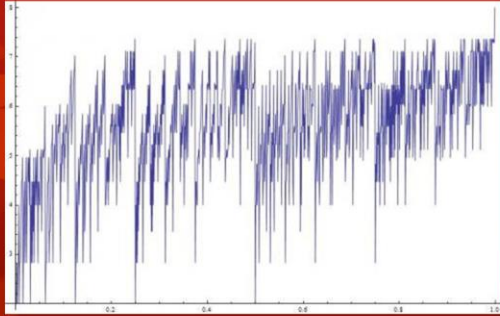
Calculate "Average Processor Utilization Percentage"
Use MXG dataset TYPE70PR

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“I know you can’t see this chart...” We’ve all heard this and it is true. Why put it up there? You can tell us the relevant report and then use the cutting tool to just pull up the small part we need to see. Now, was that so hard? Even this highlighted piece is still unreadable in the back. Yes, we’d love people to sit up front but they won’t. So it’s on you to make your slides readable.

Gluttony



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Graphs should be carefully selected for meaning. If they can't see it and understand it from the back of the room, don't use it. Often, you will have to make a custom graph for your presentation – that's okay. People want to grasp the material easily, not struggle to see what you are telling them. And over all, don't be boring. The more "stuff" you stuff into your presentation, the more boring it can be. Plan to make a few points really well and save the rest for the next presentation.

Lust

Nothing GREAT
was ever achieved
without enthusiasm.

-EMERSON

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Lust is an inordinate craving for the pleasures of the body. Or in terms of speaking, it is the misuse of lust/passion in a presentation. In this light, the problem is when you fall in love with an idea or a joke and it really doesn't work. Or when you have such passion for a subject that you go crazy and try to cover too much. This is a tricky sin, because used properly, it is what infuses a presentation, making it really sing to the audience. Keep the passion – lose the desire to cover everything.



When you do this right, you will remember to pick topics you truly love, but then apply the other guidelines. Fall in love with your idea, not the details.

Lust



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First, identify what you really care deeply about – what do you want to say. Make sure you thoroughly know your concept. Then, define a scope. You can't tell everything (story about CMG presentation on internet capacity planning). As you tell, make sure there are stories that highlight what you are telling. And mostly, do not forget why you are doing this – what made you excited. Share that passion. Remember who you love to hear – aren't they passionate about their subjects (Ivan Gelb, Glenn Anderson, Annie Shum?)



Words to the wise. Be prepared. {Story of the person who had to apologize for bad numbers on slides and other problems. Other stories abound of people who weren't sure what was on their slides and struggled to answer questions. Practice}

Wrath



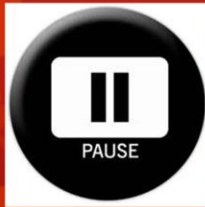
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[Anger](#) is manifested in the individual who spurns love and opts instead for fury. It is also known as Wrath. Wrath can be spurred on by several factors in speaking. One is the fear of speaking which makes you present less well, because in some ways, you are angry to have to do it. Wrath can also be brought on by not feeling that your audience appreciates what you did. But to be sure that they love you and your talk, you need to develop some speaking habits that will ensure you are loved as you speak.

But it is also about the wrath your audience feels when you don't do things the way they should be done. Running over time, talking too fast, planning poorly so your slide order doesn't make sense... all these can incur wrath in your audience.

Pacing



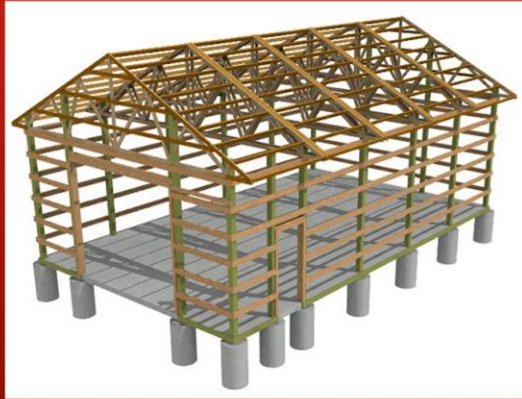
"Silence is the ultimate weapon of power."
Charles deGaulle

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First solution is pacing. Use pauses and moments of silence to allow time for key learnings to sink in. Too often, we 'pull our punchlines,' and the audience misses the most important points. Pausing and use moments of silence will help them get this. Also, always be sure there is time for questions. Longer answers may be deferred till after the presentation, but do let them ask. This is part of the give and take.

Wrath



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Build a structure. Lay the foundation – what's in it for them – then build proof points and action items on that foundation. And while you are doing that, don't read your slides to them. If you do it right, the bulk of your presentation is what you say, not what you show. Keep them engaged with you by making them listen. Don't make them read.

Greed



"Make sure you have finished speaking
before your audience has finished listening."

Dorothy Sarnoff

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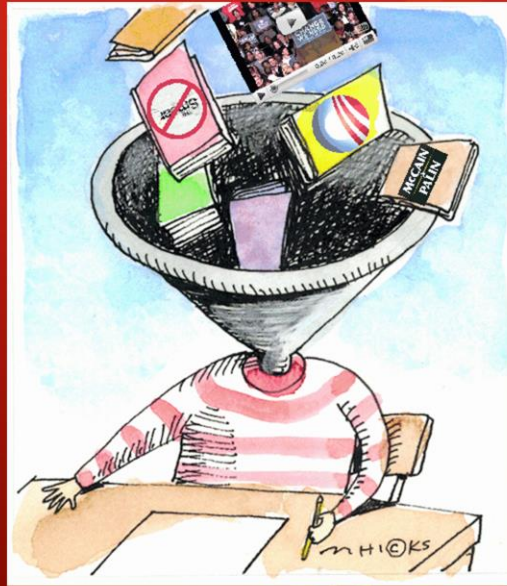
[Greed](#) is the desire for material wealth or gain, ignoring the realm of the spiritual. It is also called Avarice or Covetousness. This is probably not the right word for it but we've all seen this. Someone who has too much to say, too many slides and leaves you with info overload. (Chris R story -)

Greed

"No audience ever complained about a presentation or speech being too short."
Stephen Teague

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No matter what – you cannot get someone to learn that much in such a short time as an hour. No more than 3 major points and they must be related to each other. You have to tell them what you will tell them, tell them, then remind them what you told them. That doesn't leave time to cover a huge amount of turf.

Sloth

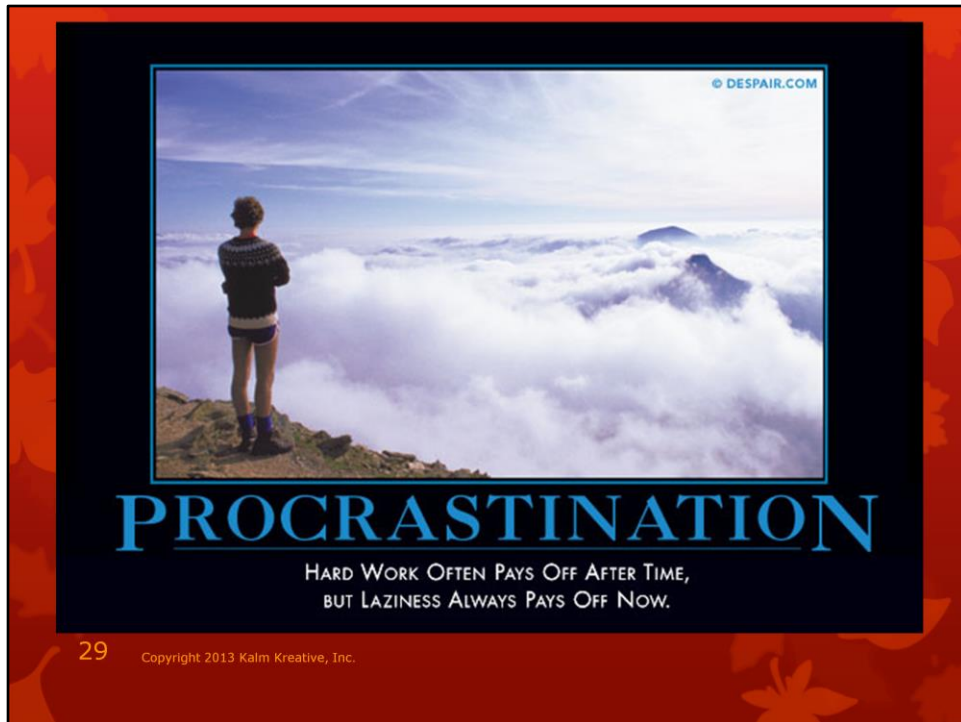


LAZINESS

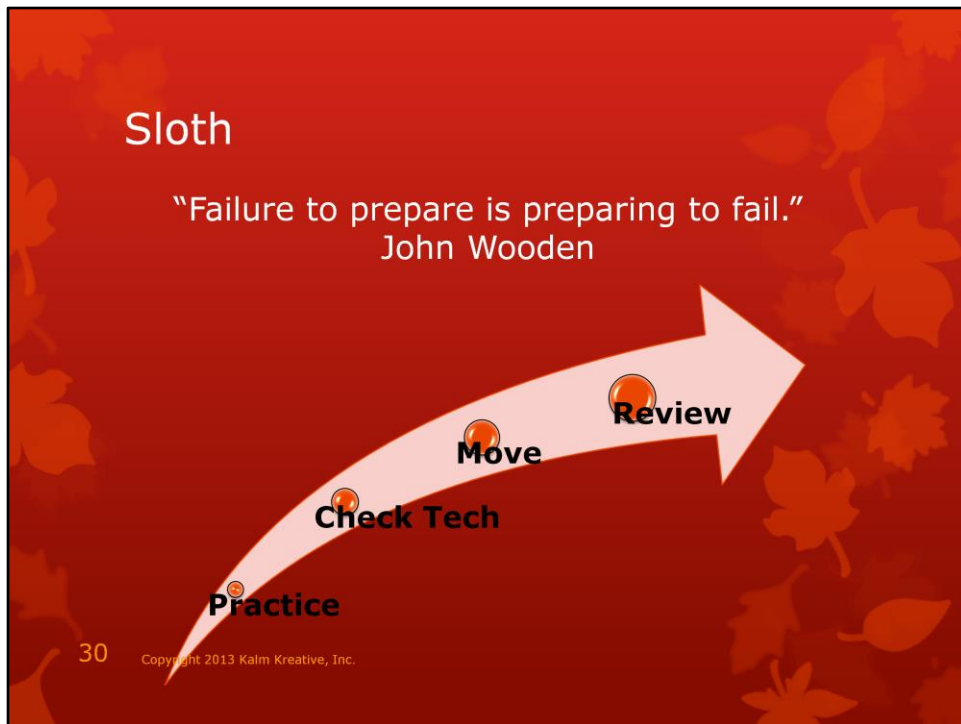
Hard work never killed anybody, but why take a chance?

o/ MotivatedPhotos.com

[Sloth](#) is the avoidance of physical or spiritual work. This is most people's favorite sin. We all find ourselves doing something at the 11th hour and not leaving enough time to do it right. But it will cost you.



And that's how we too often feel. There's always something we'd rather do. But what this means is that we don't practice, we don't check the slideshow or the tech first. We stand at the lectern and don't move around – boring and we don't review after so we can improve. Don't apologize - prepare. Failed tech – slide show didn't show up right or the projector didn't work. If you practiced, you'd be able to handle it. If you checked it over first, you'd have time to get a replacement. Have someone review your slides – we can't edit our own work that well.



It doesn't take long to check things out. After a few bad calls, I now go to the room I'm presenting in so I can see the layout, plan what I will do and make sure the equipment is there. Arrive early, so you have time to get things fixed if they need to be fixed. And keep notes with you – even without PPT, you can still present.



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Take a single step tomorrow to implement one or two of these ideas into your next presentation, whether it is simply to a team at work or at a conference like this. Build your competence one step at a time - become a leader.

"It's not how strongly you feel about
your topic. It's how strongly they feel
about your topic after you speak."

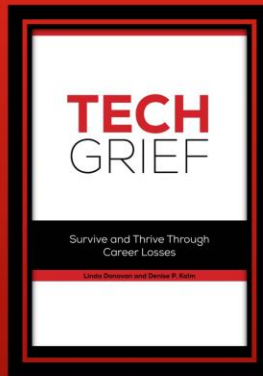
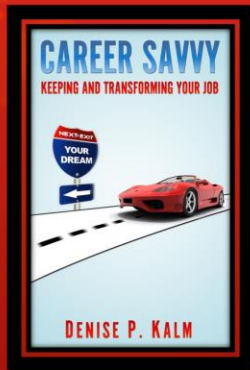
Tim Sallady



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Go out there and be amazing!



Contact me:
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