



COMMUNISPOND™

CASE STUDY

Presenting for Impact: To Groups, the Boss, and on the Spot

Improving presentation skills to compel others to your ideas is always a winning strategy

Company: Allied Waste Industries, Inc.

Industry: A leading waste services company providing collections, recycling, and disposal services for residential, commercial, and industrial customers in the U.S.

Strategy: Improve communication and presentation skills to better deliver personalized service to its industry and create a more compelling winning image.

Implementation: Use Communispond's Executive Presentation Skills program to develop the executive and management staff's ability to present ideas with greater clarity, focus, engagement, and audience buy-in.

Results: Improved ability to communicate ideas, points, and needs to various audiences. In turn, this increased Allied Waste's perception in the marketplace as a confident, capable, and successful provider of waste disposal services.

AUDIENCES LOVE RIVETING SPEAKERS. They arouse their audience's emotions and hold captive their attention. The words they choose, the way they organize their points, and the techniques they employ work in unison to compel their audience to embrace their ideas.

Whether the audience is a client's decision makers, a company's employees, the boss, or a peer encountered at a convention reception, all will better understand ideas when conveyed with skill, enthusiasm, and conviction.

Business leaders are often considered to naturally possess effective presentation skills, but in reality too many—often brilliant strategic thinkers and managers—simply get tongue-tied in front of an audience. They struggle to communicate their points well and too often leave their audience confused, or worse, bored.

A case in point is Allied Waste Industries, Inc., one of two leading national waste disposal companies, which is embracing communication and presentation skills training as a key component of its company-wide initiative to personalize its services as a competitive differentiator.

“We had to find a way to cultivate our story and then present it concisely, credibly and engagingly so we create a dialogue with our audience rather than give technical recitation,” noted Debora Martinez, Vice President of Human Resources, for Allied's 11-state Midwest Region.

In fact, she described the Midwest Region's presentation style as dry and lackluster. “Our audiences told us we needed to present with more excitement and enthusiasm to keep their attention and get our points across more effectively,” Martinez added.

In this case, the audience was the company's senior executives, and the presenters were the region's market vice presidents and regional staff delivering their quarterly overview. The recent addition of new senior leadership, many from companies outside the waste industry, brought with them styles, skills, and experiences that were different to the Allied culture. This emphasized the need for enhancing the region's communications skills.

“The question we asked ourselves in the region was, ‘How do we put together a better, more dynamic platform for presenting ourselves at structured times?’” Martinez said.

Their solution was to contact Communispond, part of the Informa international family of companies, to help it close this communication skills gap. Communispond delivers consulting and coaching in business communication to more than half of the Fortune 500.

After meeting with Martinez, Communispond recommended its Executive Presentation Skills program. This two-day, instructor-led presentation skills workshop is designed to enable participants to organize, prepare, and deliver a presentation to any group using appropriate verbal skills, non-verbal skills, and presentation media.

Participants honed techniques for and practiced such skills as:

- Using eye control to command audience attention
- Leveraging vocal and non-verbal communications cues
- The power of appropriate stance, speaking volume, word inflection, and hand gestures
- Defining the purpose of the presentation and its outcome
- Analyzing audience expectations, needs, and biases
- Building ideas into a logical flow and sequencing idea blocks for impact
- Creating a powerful presentation opening
- Choosing and using good visuals
- Taking and handling audience questions, and how to neutralize challenging ones

Other modules strengthened speakers' ability to better brief superiors, including how to present to-the-point updates without too much detail, and how to establish credibility in impromptu situations to compellingly present a particular point of view.

The training, which featured videotaped reviews of attendees' practiced presentations, proved eye-opening for the executives participating. Some key feedback, Martinez said, included:

- “I was not aware of how I was being perceived.”
- “I recognize I need to collect my thoughts and focus to deliver the message I want to communicate without getting frazzled.”
- “I'm now better able to handle audience questions without feeling anxious or losing my train of thought.”

The Midwest Region has now presented a number of regional quarterly presentations since improving its management's presentation and communications skills. “We've had a very favorable response,” Martinez said. “We've been able to demonstrate our ability to understand the business from multiple levels and keep the audience engaged. We've learn to reformat this intensive process so it's received as a dialogue and a learning environment.”

The Midwest Region is now in the process of delivering the training deeper into the organization to round out the skills of its high potential employees.

“The surprise to all of us was that regardless of where within the business you sit, everyone has room to improve how they present their ideas to others,” Martinez said. “As a result of this training, we are more confident and that is leading to an enhanced perception of Allied in the marketplace as a winner, in a marketplace where average isn't acceptable.”