

Reinforcing Attendee Take-Away

"The most important part of the meeting is immediately after. What are they going to do with it once it is over?" — Walter Hailey

SURE, SPEAKERS LOVE STANDING OVATIONS AND GREAT evaluations, but we want to do more than entertain and motivate: We want to make a difference. Even when people rate the program exceptional, the true score card could read: "Happy Face Evaluations: 10; On-the-Job Change: 1." * The challenge is getting audiences to learn, unlearn, and relearn what they need to know to make a difference in their personal and professional lives. Meeting organizers can work with their speakers to help attendees move from passive listening to making positive changes in their behavior. Here are some ways how:

1. Before a presentation, send attendees preliminary articles or surveys. Build an expectation that the program will help their performance. If possible, get participants involved by assigning a simple homework task. If you are offering a training session, have managers require participants, including themselves, share at least three key ideas, "keepers" that they have picked up from the program and plan on using. When attendees know they have to return with something worthwhile to share, they are more likely to be engaged during the program and make changes afterward. Privately held goals are easy to cheat on; no one knows you are working on them. By sharing what they have learned and their goals, participants make their colleagues "listen anew" to who they are and what they need in the way of support.

2. Have a key executive introduce the speaker in a way that reinforces the strategic focus of the message and encourage him or her to stay for the program.

3. Skilled speakers don't launch their message until they have established a need in the audience. People aren't motivated to change until they "feel the pain," or come to realize something they lack. Part of my job as a speaker is to move audience members from anxiety to fear and then beyond fear to hope.

4. Speakers can increase the lasting impact of their presentations by using stories, anecdotes, and humor to build visual images, touch the experience bank of the audience, and provide retention hooks.

Humor generates genuine enthusiasm and energy in an audience — and is likely to be remembered.

5. By involving the audience in structured exercises, speakers help participants retain the material. Even in very large audiences, short dyad exercises can get people out of their comfort zone and into the message. What they do, they remember.

6. Encourage participants to take notes, writing key phrases that will remind them of what they want to work on. The more focused their notes, the more likely they are to review them. During breaks, the speaker can review participants' "keepers" to reinforce the process. Help participants tie down their goals to no more than three principal goals for every program; some speakers have the audience use post-it notes to jot down their goals and stick the post-its in their calendars. When they get back to work, the notes remind them to pursue approaches that move them closer to those goals.

7. Attendees have had years of experience to cement old habits; they need more than one conference or presentation to further develop the ideas that will bring about change. Invite speakers to send support articles to place in your organization's publications or on your Web site to help reinforce the message attendees heard at the meeting and provide new resources for making positive changes. ■

♦♦ **Terry Paulson** (www.terrypaulson.com) is a Ph.D. psychologist, a recognized expert on change leadership and author of *They Shoot Managers Don't They*, *Paulson on Change, Making Humor Work*, *50 Tips for Speaking Like a Pro*, and *Can I Have the Keys to the Car?* For more than 30 years, Dr. Paulson has been helping audiences transform their self-limiting beliefs into self-fulfilling breakthroughs to achieve their personal and professional goals.

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