



# The Power Briefing in a Nutshell



## Planning and Preparation

- **Attitude is critical.** Think and behave as an expert about to give information and advice to a client. The officials want your information and value your opinion. Demonstrate respect for authority and maintain the dignity of proceedings. Groom appropriately and wear business attire.
- **Determine exact date, time, minutes allowed, and location.** Telephone the day before and confirm. Make no assumptions about handouts, equipment, or time.
- **Confirm protocols with the chair or administrator in charge.** Determine proper procedure for addressing members and the chair; time limits; if audio-visual equipment is allowed; how questions and interruptions will be handled; and whether handouts should be distributed in advance. Request advance distribution of handouts. Protocol is very important and varies from institution to institution.
- **Visit the site.** Examine seating arrangements, fields of view, lighting, switches and outlets.
- **Study the biographies of officials in attendance.** Verify pronunciation of names.
- **Anticipate each official's policy interests and level of facility with details.** Consult with others to determine preferences and interests of members you do not know.
- **Know current events and late breaking news stories that may bear on issues to be discussed.**
- **Use sufficient technology.** At a minimum, type a one-page list of talking points to use as a handout or as a basis for an *ad hoc* ("in the hall or in the elevator") briefing on the fly or if your committee presentation must be abbreviated. When presenting to a powerful individual or a subcommittee, use a flip chart or poster. For larger groups or more formal presentations, use computer projected slides using software such as Microsoft *PowerPoint*. Display a poster outline on an easel by the screen.
- **When using slides, assure a good color scheme and that screen fonts can be read from the rear of the room.** If using computer-projected slides, use a dark background and contrasting type color (e.g. dark blue background and yellow type). (See *Purpose Movement Color: A Strategy for Effective Presentations* by Mucciolo and Mucciolo. New York: Media Net, Inc. 1994). Limit the number of bullets on slides unless using computer projection software that "builds" or brings in bullets one at time. Make each slide "free-standing" to facilitate rearrangement and skipping around.
- **Practice operating audiovisual equipment.** Know all of the features of machines. Prepare for contingencies. Know how to recover after power failures. Don't depend upon technicians because they may not be available. Back up high tech with low tech (e.g. have transparencies ready if the computer projection system fails).
- **Simulate the briefing with colleagues and follow their suggestions.** The scenario should be realistic and roles should not be overplayed. This is no laughing matter.
- **Prepare handouts.** Make absolutely sure that handouts have been copied and that there are no differences in the handout and any slides. Distribute handouts in advance and have extra copies available. To distinguish your handouts from others, use yellow paper.
- **Demonstrate due diligence with supporting documentation.** Introducing supporting documents may be awkward and could be detrimental. However, bring supporting documentation to the briefing if requested or if there is any indication that documentation is an issue.



## Executing a Power Briefing

- **Begin with a "Frame":** Thank you (*Madame Chair/ Mr. Chairman*) and members of the Committee. My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am (your job title) with the (your agency name). My presentation will take \_\_\_ minutes. I will need additional time to answer questions. We have distributed a handout consisting of all of my slides and some supporting materials. We have numbered all of the slides and pages and have cross-referenced the handout to our (study, bill, report, etc.).
- **Overview** the entire presentation *briskly in three minutes or less*, beginning with an emphatic statement of the message. The message is the essence of the presentation and may be an assertion, an answer, or a description of a completed product (bill, plan, proposal to...). Then quickly summarize the sustaining points. Give just enough detail in each summary point to stimulate thinking. **But don't stall or digress!** For a model, consider the introduction preceding each segment of the TV program, "60 Minutes."
- **Then in more detail, review each sustaining point.** Make each point emphatically, and then explain. Don't leave listeners dangling or begging for detail. Use illustrations and examples. Use graphics to describe processes. Use active voice "Bill hit the ball." Not, "The ball was hit." Avoid acronyms and technical jargon.
- **Accommodate varying listener personality types.** Assuage "intuitive" personalities with metaphors, overviews, margin notes, and clip art to capture a sense of the "overall." Assuage "sensing" personalities with examples, illustrations, data, and details to capture the pieces that support the overall. Assuage "thinking" types with a logical and consistent structure. Assuage "feeling" types with actual cases, stakeholder views, and personal anecdotes. Assuage "judging" types by stressing that the presentation will end on time and will be responsive to the assignment. Assuage "perceptive" types by allowing time for questions and more open-ended discussion.
- **Bridge all parts of the presentation together.** Number each slide and include page number cross-references to any larger documents (bill, study, proposal). Assure consistency among slides, speaker's notes, the poster, and supporting documents.



## Fielding Questions

- **View questions as an opportunity, not a burden.** If seriously concerned about questions, consider using a "question and answer" briefing format.
- **Allow the Chair to handle unruly members.** Always request permission from the Chair before responding to a question. Make eye contact with the Chair when a member's questions or conduct appear inappropriate. Avoid offensive body language (jaw dropping, head shaking, eye rolling, crossing arms, laughter, etc.)
- **Allow the official to finish before responding.** What starts out as a question may become a comment. Generally, there is no obligation to respond to comments unless directed by the official to do so. Never engage in dialogues with public officials without the approval of the chair.
- **Anticipate questions.** Public officials frequently ask for comparisons to other similar states or jurisdictions. They ask for confirmation of intuitive beliefs. They often ask if a case that they know about is representative of the whole. Others will ask for clarification.