

I once sat through a three-hour anti-trust presentation. . . . The executives thumbed their BlackBerrys during the entire presentation. Talk about failing the \$300,000 challenge.



JOEY ASHER is an attorney and president of Speechworks (www.speechworks.net), a selling and communication skills coaching firm that has been helping lawyers grow their practices for 20 years. His book, "Selling and Communication Skills for Lawyers," was published this fall by ALM Publishing and is available at www.lawcatalog.com.

You can win the \$300,000 challenge

IF YOU CONCENTRATE on a few messages and repeat them, your listeners will have a clear understanding

AT A LUNCHEON recently, I was sitting next to the managing partner of a large, prestigious law firm. We started talking about presentations to clients and he told me, "Most lawyers, when they give a presentation, don't have a clear point. They touch on lots of issues. But what is the core message? A presentation should have a point."

I couldn't agree more. And one way to ensure that your next presentation to clients or colleagues has impact and makes a clear point is to make sure it passes the "\$300,000 challenge."

What's the "\$300,000 challenge?" Imagine that you're about to give a 30-minute presentation to a group of clients and someone approaches you with a satchel of cash. "Here is \$300,000," he says. "You can have the money under one condition. At the end of your presentation, I'm going to grab three people and ask them, 'What were the speaker's messages?' If all three people repeat your three core messages, you get the \$300,000."

With that much money at stake, virtually everyone would make three simple points and repeat them clearly to guarantee their retention. And yet I think passing such a test is a bare minimum for a good presentation. If your listeners can't repeat your core messages, your presentation surely is a failure.

By that standard, huge numbers of legal presentations fail. When I was practicing law, I once sat through a three-hour anti-trust presentation given by an excellent anti-trust lawyer to a room of executives. The presentation amounted to a comprehensive review of anti-trust case law, with numerous citations of federal statutes and U.S. Supreme Court cases. It was painful.

The executives thumbed their BlackBerrys during the entire presentation. Talk about failing the \$300,000 challenge. I doubt the listeners could have identified even one key point.

The key to passing the \$300,000 challenge is to limit your presentation to a few core messages and repeat them using the same phrasing throughout your speech.

I worked with a different anti-trust lawyer on

a similar presentation that was meant to ensure that his clients knew the fundamentals of anti-trust law compliance. We came up with three simple messages.

- Be careful what you talk about with competitors.
- Be careful when you take actions that harm your competitors.
- Be careful about what you put in documents.

Of course he went into detail with each of his three points. In urging caution when speaking with competitors, he discussed topics that should be avoided, including pricing, bid information, and production volumes. He explained how a conspiracy can be implied from small things, even if there is no formal agreement. He talked about the Archer Daniels Midland case and how the company's executives went to jail.

All of this drove home the fundamental point of the need to "Be careful when you talk to competitors." He repeated that fundamental point several times as he went through that section.

When you settle on your key points, it's also important to phrase them so that they can be repeated the same way each time.

The anti-trust lawyer that I worked with said, "Be careful when you talk to competitors" using the same phrasing every time. Repetitive phrasing helps your listeners remember your message.

This is a trick that radio advertisers understand. Home Depot's ads always say, "You can do it. We can help." They say it the same way, over and over, so that you will remember it. Similarly, you want to repeat your key points so that your audiences will remember your messages.

When you give a presentation, you want your listeners to take away key points. If they can't repeat those points, then your presentation has been a waste of your time and your listeners' time. Focus on a few messages and repeat them the same way several times and you'll pass the \$300,000 challenge. More importantly, you'll help your clients. ®