

Excess Returns

Insights for Investment Marketing and Sales Professionals

Preparing to Present | January 2024

Successful asset managers implement a consistent, repeatable investment process. But how many have developed and put into practice a consistent, repeatable presentation process? This issue of *Excess Returns* considers not only how investment professionals can get better at presenting but also how they can get better at *preparing to present*.

With best wishes,



Liz Hecht
Founder

In This Issue

[A Better Way](#)

[Step by Step](#)

[Hidden Potential](#)

Alpha Partners is an investment marketing firm offering custom research, marketing communications and presentation coaching. Our goal is to create alpha (excess returns) by helping investment firms win, keep and diversify assets under management.



Alpha Partners LLC

435.615.6862

www.alphainvestmentmarketing.com

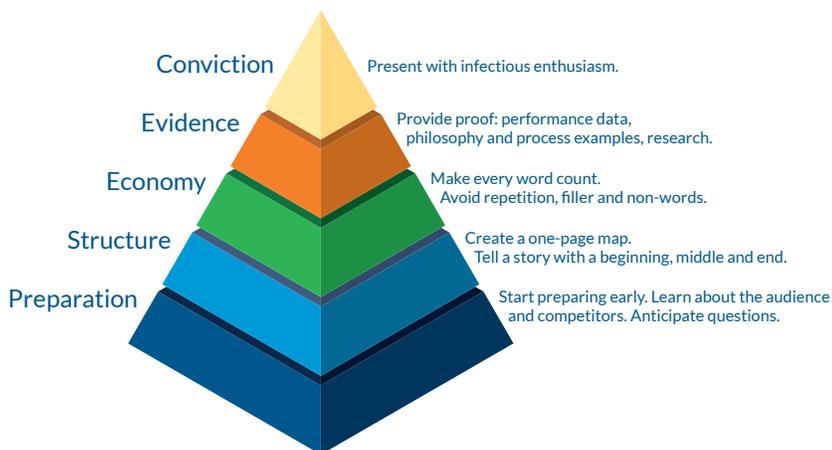
A Better Way

Many years ago at a Schwab Impact conference where I was about to speak, I looked out at the gathering crowd and wondered, "How badly would it affect my career if I just got up and left right now?" Speaking at this conference was an honor and an opportunity. So why did I fantasize about walking out?

Crafting the content of the presentation, creating slide-worthy exhibits, honing my delivery to align with yet not repeat the slides, practicing over and over again to the point of tedium ... The process of preparing to present had left me feeling exhausted and depleted of anything like enthusiasm for the presentation itself. Not for the first time I thought: "There has to be a better way."

In the sport of dressage, there is something called the Dressage Training Pyramid. It's a system, a consistent model for how to practice, honing interrelated skills from the base to the pinnacle of the pyramid. Why can't there be a similar system to help investment professionals prepare for important meetings and presentations? A template that can be used routinely to reduce the time and stress associated with preparing to present. There can be and forthwith I would like to introduce such a template:

The Presentation Training Pyramid A Template for Asset Managers



The pyramid can help you prepare in less time with less pain for all different kinds of presentations: an introductory meeting with a consultant, a high-stakes finals, a client review or a conference presentation before a large audience. The different yet related layers of the pyramid allow a presenter to build from strength to strength based on a solid foundation:

Preparation. If I had to give every presenter I coach one and only one overarching, all-encompassing piece

of advice, it would simply be this: *Start preparing early*. Early preparation or lack thereof is what has made the difference between my own best-ever presentation (a sense of triumph) and worst-ever presentation (intense self-loathing).

Learn everything you can about your audience. What do they already know about your firm? How might they perceive your company relative to competitors? What questions might they have and what questions should you ask them? How can your colleagues perhaps contribute useful background? And, most important, *how can you help this audience*? By thinking hard about how you can help others, you likely will transcend any anxiety about how you yourself might be perceived.

Preparation is the base, the foundation for everything good that should happen during your meetings and formal presentations: structure, economy, evidence and conviction.

Structure. Through careful preparation, you can establish a solid framework: what you plan to cover and why. During prep, create a one-page map of your presentation, navigating clearly from beginning to middle to end. Does the type of presentation lend itself to book-free delivery (e.g., an informal meeting)? Or is covering certain key pages selectively the best approach? With a well-structured presentation, you know where you are and where you're going.

Economy. Structure begets economy of language. With a well-structured presentation, you are less likely to wander off course, more likely to present with precision. Structure tends to mitigate non-words and filler—i.e., all the “ums,” “uhs,” “you knows,” and “kind ofs” that signal lack of preparedness and lack of conviction. Streamlined content also gives you more time to hone delivery.

Evidence. Thanks to a well-defined structure and economy of language, you have made a persuasive case for your investment strategy. Proof will make the case even stronger: long-term performance with performance attribution, specific philosophy and process examples and research validating your approach to generating consistent returns.

Conviction. If you prepare according to a repeatable process, you will be better able to present with infectious enthusiasm. You yourself will be confident up there at the peak of the pyramid and your confidence will generate conviction in the audience.

While the presentation training pyramid provides a linear depiction of a process that is highly fluid, it nonetheless can serve as a much-needed template for preparing efficiently and effectively.

So what happened at the Schwab Impact conference? Of course I didn't walk out. The presentation went well, Alpha's slides looked great and the audience engaged with lots of good questions at the end. *But preparing shouldn't have been so hard or taken so long*. Given the benefit of a systematic way to prepare and practice, I would have significantly reduced all the time and anxiety behind the scenes.

Step by Step

The pyramid provides a solid conceptual framework. But what are the practical steps in preparing a strong presentation? Here are three guidelines:

Plan ahead. The advice to start preparing early makes good sense. But following that advice can be difficult given the many conflicting demands on your time. So make a plan with scheduled dates for each step in the process of preparing: (1) background review to be completed by X date, (2) preparing any new slides (if needed) by X date and (3) rehearsing delivery alone and with your co-presenter(s) by X date.

Practice with deliberation. Set aside time to practice turning weaknesses into strengths: replacing reflexive “ums” or “you knows” with deliberate pauses, honing responses to tough questions and practicing with a timer to complete your formal remarks within (or ideally slightly ahead) of the allotted time.

Learn how to use a script. Paradoxically, scripting allows for greater spontaneity by building confidence. In [Hidden Potential](#), social scientist Adam Grant describes how Steve Martin stopped crashing and burning doing standup after he started writing for TV (“Onstage, speaking off-the-cuff made it easy to ramble. On paper, writing forced him to trim the fat.”) The key is not to sound scripted. After preparing a script, practice from open to close without reference to the script until delivery becomes near-fluent. Push onward despite any stumbles as stumbles happen and you need to navigate beyond them gracefully. By preparing precisely what you want to say, you will be ready for anything, including when it makes sense to depart from the script.

For more on the merits of scripting, see Myth #2 in the April 2023 issue of *Excess Returns*: [Presentation Myths and Misperceptions](#).

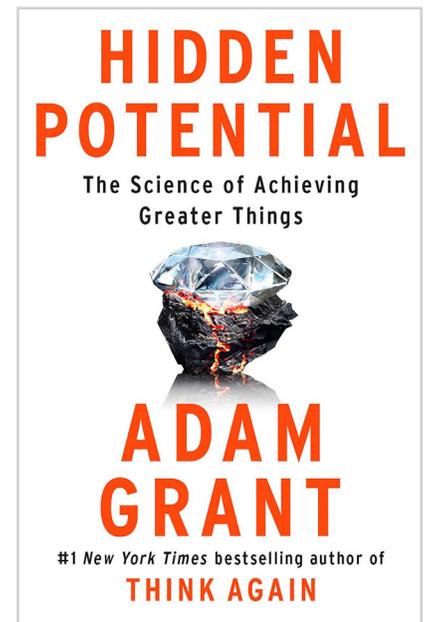
Hidden Potential

A chess team from the Bronx (the Raging Rooks) who bested Manhattan’s elite Dalton School team. The world’s first full-time percussion soloist and a winner of three Grammy awards (Evelyn Glennie) who started losing her hearing at the age of eight. The migrant farmworker (José Hernandez) who became an astronaut. The comedian (Steve Martin) who bombed onstage until he learned to write ... These are just a few of the diamond-in-the-rough stories that bring to life the “science” in the subtitle of this book by Adam Grant.

Reading *Hidden Potential* is a great way to start the new year. Early in the book, Mr. Grant writes, “I want to explain how we can improve at improving,” and he describes his own path toward becoming a better presenter. Adam Grant was rejected after interviewing for his first job at a top university because, as a colleague later explained, “you lack the confidence to command the respect of our students.” Now he is an organizational psychologist at The Wharton School, where he has been the top-rated professor for seven straight years.

The book is divided into three parts: Skills of Character exploring the character traits that “catapult us to greater heights,” Structures for Motivation focusing on sustaining progress in the face of burnout, doubt or stagnation, and Systems of Opportunity about “how to design schools, teams and institutions that nurture potential instead of squandering it.”

Hidden Potential is an excellent read, whether you want to improve your golf swing, your new business presentation or your progress as a human being in this world.



[Questions? Comments? Requests? Click here.](#)

[Click here for more issues of Excess Returns.](#)



ALPHA PARTNERS LLC

1062 Oakridge Road South
Park City, UT 84098

www.alphainvestmentmarketing.com

LIZ HECHT

435.615.6862
435.901.1546 (cell)

liz@alphainvestmentmarketing.com