

Frederick Gilbert. 2013. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers. *Speaking Up: Surviving Executive Presentations*. 216 pages. Paperback. \$24.95. ISBN: 978-1-60994-896-2.

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Book's Purpose, Theme, and Intended Audience (30 words):

Although the book is subtitled, "Surviving Executive Presentations," Gilbert's intent is to target middle managers who are not only charged with presenting to executives but experience "terror" at the prospect.

Summary of Content (367 words):

Gilbert's premise is that three simple rules should guide presentations: "1) know the people; 2) get to the point; and 3) improvise." The antithesis of an effective presentation to executives, the author notes, is one in which the presenter fails to say what he or she wants at the outset of the speech, shows too many PowerPoint slides, and are overly wedded to a rigid script. Gilbert contends that executive audiences are different from others; for example, they are impatient with the stories (which, research shows, are more powerful than data) and expect presenters to get to the point quickly.

Having researched the book by interviewing 22 C-level executives, Gilbert presents Part I of the book, which dovetails with his Rule No. 1 about knowing the people to whom middle managers will present. The section features descriptions of executives and their expectations. Part II deals largely with what Gilbert calls "the Seven Deadly Challenges," the potentially derailing events presenters face such as dealing with side talk, having one's allotted time cut down (virtually inevitable!), and maintaining engagement with executives who are easily distracted by cell phones. Part III provides the meat of how to create a winning executive presentation and offers a framework. A chapter on delivery style exudes detail (who knew that most audiences hate laser pointers?). Acronym-based formulas, such as PREP (Position, Reason, Evidence, Position) and READ (Read, Evaluate, Acknowledge, Determine) provide handy devices for quickly learning concepts.

An unexpected component of the book, given that its focus is presentations, is Part IV, "Personal and Career Advice from the Top." The rationale, the author says, is to help middle managers become better acquainted with those at the top, the audience to which they will be called on to present.

All chapters conclude with a summary, and several end with a QR code that a smartphone or tablet can read with a QR tag-scanning app. When scanned, the code reveals video content from the author's self-paced course on speaking to executives. A liberal peppering of pullout quotes; graphics; presentation templates; and anecdotes from interviewed executives, presentation coaches, and middle managers contributes to a lively, reader-friendly feel. A glossary and reference list add to the book's authority.

Most Useful Information for CPAD audience (245 words):

Although the “Personal and Career Advice from the Top” section of Gilbert’s makes the reader feel he or she has wandered into a completely different tome, this component will likely be of great interest to readers of this journal. Executives interviewed for the book talked about mentors and role models, career challenges (workload, stress, sacrificing family and personal lives, being surrounded by poor communicators), tips for success, and interestingly, what kind of legacy they wanted to leave.

Since many readers of this journal both deliver presentations and coach middle managers who are called upon to do so, they will likely also find useful the three-quarters of the book that discusses presentations in fine detail. They will benefit from the research-backed specificity of the presentation guidelines offered. Readers may not always (or even often) be addressing executives in their own presentations, so they may need to adapt to their own audiences some advice that is targeted to those speaking to executive audiences (for example, the notion that executives have no patience for storytelling).

The author’s guidelines for constructing a presentation (especially the presentation template) will be especially valuable to readers and may prevent them from turning a PowerPoint slideshow into the nightmare it often becomes. (The author tells of one hapless speaker whose equipment broke down in the midst of his PowerPoint, leaving him completely flummoxed and unable to proceed.) Tips for interacting with slides, equipment, and audience members abound and provide novel information for readers.

Critique and Feedback (154 Words):

As noted, the final section of *Speaking Up* feels like an entirely different book from the rest of the volume, which some readers may find off-putting. The indirectly related career-advice content suggests that the author did not want to waste interesting material he gained from his interviews with executives. Original source material of this nature tends to be most effective, however, when it supplements the author’s own content, as the interview responses do in the presentation chapters.

Because the author operates a presentation-coaching business, the reader often has the impression that the book is one long advertisement for Gilbert’s coaching services. Oddly, the same is not true in reverse; the Web site for Gilbert’s services (<http://www.powerspeaking.com>), which might be expected to offer excerpts and tidbits from the book, contains no mention of the book.

These are minor quibbles, however. Readers who want to up their game in presentations will glean significant guidance from *Speaking Up*.