



## It's Alive! Behold, The Human Slide Show!

*How to make your audience part of your presentation. Literally.*

Getting frustrated with PowerPoint is nothing new. Edward Tufte, an information design guru and legendary PowerPoint hater, has written a lengthy treatise condemning it. But when Margot Knight reached her breaking point, she opted not to destroy, but to create - and in so doing, she's given presenters everywhere an inspiring new way to think about their content.



Margot Knight  
Photo Credit: William Coupon

For Knight, Executive Director of the Djerassi Resident Artists Program, the last straw was the Gettysburg Address. Not Lincoln's immortal words - the dehumanized and bullet-filled PowerPoint [version](#) rendered by Peter Norvig. Knight made a New Year's resolution to stop using PowerPoint altogether and to once again tap "the power of human rhetoric and eye contact." Though the change refocused her on oration, there was still one problem.

For all its faults, PowerPoint effectively displayed statistics that were an important part of Knight's presentations. To cover this same territory without breaking her resolution, Knight decided to try something unconventional. First, in preparing for her presentation, Knight identified the key numbers that were absolutely essential and printed each one as large as possible on individual sheets of 8.5" x 11" paper.

At the presentation itself, she handed out these sheets to different attendees as they filed into the room, making sure to write down the name of each recipient and the statistic they were given. Having quietly distributed her "slides" in advance, Knight began her presentation like any other, but instead of flashing numbers on a screen at the front of the room, Knight would say something like, "...and last year, our

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### Raising the Bar on Presentations

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*free-range thinking* is written

revenue took a big jump. Bob, would you tell everyone how much?" And Bob, having received a sheet and a little behind-the-scenes coaching from Margot, would stand, hold up his number, and proudly announce it to the room.

Thus the "human slide show" was born. Knight has given scores of presentations using this technique and has noticed a big difference in her audience's reaction. "There are questions that are directly related to what I've said," Knight told me, "which makes me believe they are *remembering* what I've said." She believes this technique engages the whole audience much more than a traditional PowerPoint and has noticed in particular the rapt interest of the people who are asked to hold up slides. "There's nothing that focuses attention like being told you're going to be a part of the presentation," Knight added.

### Quick Tips

Over the years, Knight has developed some hard and fast rules to best engage an audience during human slide shows:

1. Keep it simple. Make sure that the numbers you're using support a broader idea or are in the context of a story. Numbers alone do not a presentation make.
2. Don't say the number first. Ask the audience members to stand up and show their slides before you tell the story behind the numbers.
3. Make sure the audience members who are holding your slides keep them face down until they are called on.
4. Use no more than 10-15 slides for a 20-minute speech.

Full disclosure: Knight is using PowerPoint again on occasion...but only to project photographs.

[^ back to top](#)

by Andy Goodman and Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit [www.agoodmanonline.com](http://www.agoodmanonline.com) and [www.thegoodmancenter.com](http://www.thegoodmancenter.com).

To reach Andy directly, please call (323) 464-3956 or send an email to [andy@agoodmanonline.com](mailto:andy@agoodmanonline.com).



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**The Goodman Center**  
444 North Larchmont Blvd.,  
Suite 102  
Los Angeles, CA 90004  
323.464.3956

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## Raising the Bar on Presentations

***The Center for Global Development routinely evaluates its presentations to ensure improvement -- and it's working.***

When I lead presentation workshops, I know going in that I can accomplish just so much in the handful of hours I have with the people in the room. I can highlight the key points in my book, *Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes*, and show myriad before-and-after samples of PowerPoint slides, but I know that the real work of improving presentations will happen *after* I leave. And there's no better example of that than the [Center for Global Development](#).

In December 2007, I conducted a 90-minute workshop for about fifty staff members at CGD's headquarters in Washington, DC, and I also spent a few additional hours consulting with individual presenters. When I left, I wished them well and gave everyone a copy of my book for good measure, and that's when Lawrence MacDonald took the ball and ran with it.

As Vice President of Communications and Policy Outreach, MacDonald was determined to change the internal culture around presentations. Back in 2007, presentations given by CGD's researchers attracted few non-research staff, and key



Lawrence MacDonald

findings were typically discussed only at the conclusion of the presentation. MacDonald wanted to change that. He wanted presenters to be able to explain what they were working on and why it mattered in two or three minutes to the *entire* staff; he wanted their presentations to thoroughly implement the techniques in *Bad Presentations*, and he also "wanted a way to incorporate those values into the DNA of the organization."

Following the maxim that "you can't manage what you don't measure," MacDonald created a short evaluation form that all presentation attendees were invited to complete. The Research in Progress (or R.I.P.) Feedback Form included statements such as "Within the first five minutes I understood the main point of the presentation" with which evaluators could agree or disagree, as well as open-ended questions that captured more qualitative feedback.

MacDonald asked John Osterman, now CGD's Deputy Director for Communications and Publications, to take on the role of presentations coach and designated *Bad Presentations* as CGD's internal standard, offering copies of the book for new staff to borrow and making it available to all staff on the CGD intranet.

Evaluation results are routinely shared with presenters, who can also see how their scores stack up against colleagues'. "The innovation of our system," says MacDonald, "is that we've been able to improve the quality of presentations across the institution and sustain that improvement over many years. Few staff were here when Andy taught his course but the Goodman approach to presentations has become our standard." MacDonald adds that the feedback forms and the emphasis on offering a concise summary in the first few minutes also changed expectations about staff attendance at the R.I.P.s. Lunch is provided, and all staff attend, but people have the option to leave after the first five minutes.

"We've created a culture where it's not rude to quietly slip away after the overview of the main findings," MacDonald explains, "Now everybody in the Center is familiar with what the researchers are working on and why it matters. This has also created an incentive to do a really good job in the first five minutes. And a lot of people do end up staying longer because they're interested."

[^ back to top](#)

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## See You (Online) in September!

***Registration is now open for Goodman Center classes in strategic communications, storytelling and presentations skills.***

**Strategic Communications: Cutting through the Clutter** shows how three classic public interest campaigns engaged and motivated their target audiences and achieved remarkable results. In reviewing these success stories, we'll cover:

- The basics of framing
- Message creation and delivery
- An easy-to-use template for campaign design



Classes will be held on September 4th and 11th from 11a-12n Pacific (2-3p ET) each day. Tuition is \$250 per student. Discounts are available for organizations registering 3 or more. Learn more and register at [The Goodman Center](#).

**Storytelling: Tapping the Power of Narrative** is a four-hour webinar designed to help you tell more compelling stories about your organization's work. Each class runs one hour, and over four weeks we will cover:

- The fundamental structure of good stories
- The 7 qualities that make stories memorable
- The 9 most common mistakes in storytelling and how to avoid them
- The 6 kinds of stories you must tell, and how to tell them for advocacy, development, recruitment and more



Our next set of classes is scheduled for September 5, 12, 19 and 26 from 9-10a Pacific (12n-1p Eastern) each day. Tuition is \$500 per student and discounts are available to organizations registering 3 or more. To find out more and

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reserve your space, visit [The Goodman Center](#).

**Why Bad Presentations Happens to Good Causes** is a two-hour online class designed to help presenters at all levels, from newbies to seasoned veterans. Curriculum in this webinar includes:

- The three most common characteristics of excellent presentations
- The five most frequent mistakes (and how to avoid them)
- How to structure presentations to ensure your audience learns more
- Why PowerPoint should never be used as a presentation and a handout
- Techniques to help you deliver talks with greater confidence



Classes will be held on September 23rd and 24th from 11a-12n PT (2-3p Eastern) each day. Tuition is \$250 per student and discounts are available for organizations that register 3 or more students. Learn more and register online at [The Goodman Center](#).

[^ back to top](#)

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The Goodman Center | 444 North Larchmont Blvd., Suite 102 | Los Angeles | CA | 90004

