



Roundtable Member  
**Zev Smith**, People Business Partner at Aviva, shared his perspective with our team on how to set yourself up for success when presenting to a senior audience.



## Mentoring **MATTERS**

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*I've been asked to deliver an overview of our new department plan to the Executive Team. What tips do you have for getting off on the right foot when presenting to a senior audience?*

As secretary for an Executive Committee at an earlier stage in my career, I had the opportunity to see countless Executive Team presentations. I watched presenters knock it out of the park, go down in flames and everything in between. More importantly, once presenters left, I heard the senior leaders' candid feedback on what worked for them and who they never wanted to see presenting again. With this experience, here are a few tips to ensure your presentation is a success:

### *Have the right mindset*

Often people are terrified when asked to present to senior audiences. Rather than viewing your presentation as a daunting task to get through, consider it an opportunity to make a positive impression on a group of highly influential people that you don't regularly have access to. Make your preparation for this presentation a priority, regardless of how busy you are. It could have a disproportionate impact on important aspects of your career like annual bonus and future promotions.

### *Be clear on your purpose*

You would be shocked at the number of people who walk into a room and present to senior leaders without being clear on whether they are explaining a topic, persuading on a direction or making an ask. Be clear on what your mandate is and have 1-2 key things you want your audience to take away. Most senior leaders will sit through a dozen meetings a day and you want to be the presenter who stands out for being focused on key points, clear on a resolution and explicit on any applicable next steps.

### *Prepare appropriate executive level materials*

'Executive level materials' sound daunting and complicated, but they are actually the opposite. Keeping in mind how busy this audience is, you will want to keep your materials brief and to the point. As well, since senior audiences typically include leaders from different parts of the business it's important that your materials are understood by all - stay away from jargon or acronyms and only go as detailed as you need to.

Also, find out if the materials will be sent as a pre-read prior to the meeting. If sent as a pre-read, materials will need to stand on their own when read (hopefully) by your audience the night before. As well, when you start your presentation, it's a good idea to ask if they want to be taken through the material, or if they prefer to discuss and ask questions. If materials are not sent as a pre-read, consider using bullet points or illustrations that support what you say.

### *Anticipate your audience's interest*

As you prepare, think about each member of your audience and see the topic through their eyes. For example:

- CFO** – will be focused on the cost and return on investment, know your numbers cold
- COO** – will focus on implementation and execution
- CPO** – will be thinking about the people aspect

Also, think about the questions they may ask and have your answers ready, or even better pre-empt questions by addressing them while you present. If you are unsure about an audience member speak to your 'sponsor', the Executive in the room you report up through, and gather some information from them.

### *Bonus - Schedule strategically*

Executive Team meetings can at times last all day and the energy in the room ebbs and flows. To ensure there is good energy and attention in the room for your presentation, try to present as early in the meeting as possible. This will ensure your audience is engaged and reduce the chance that you follow a presenter who didn't follow the preceding advice and annoyed everyone in the room.

Also, be sure to know the length of your time slot and ensure that your presentation fits within it while allowing for questions. You don't want to find yourself needing to speed through the material or get cut off just as you are about to make your ask.



**Zev Smith** works in the People Function at Aviva Canada providing strategic HR support to C-level executives and overseeing various operational areas of HR. He previously held a variety of progressive roles in the Strategy and HR departments of a bank where he also spent countless hours presenting and as a fly on the wall in Executive Committee meetings.



**Glain Roberts-McCabe** is passionate about the art of leadership and supporting ambitious mid-career leaders. She created **The Roundtable** to provide emerging leaders with the navigational skills, tools and savvy needed to manage increases in scope, pressure and leadership complexity.