Spicing Up Your Flip Charts with Graphic Images -- Even if You Can't Draw
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I have always been envious of trainers and presenters who can spontaneously create images to match their message and seem to have an endless repertoire of graphic images. That is because I'm a left brain thinker (more analytical than artistic) and for me to come up with images or envision a theme on the spot is a stretch. To help compensate I have built a collection of images over the years that I have practiced drawing and can pull from. It is also one reason for my writing *The Big Book of Flip Charts* --to help me and the people in my *Presentation Pizzazz* workshops who often ask for information on creative flip charting.

Every presentation can benefit from appealing graphics. According to the 3M Company of St. Paul, Minnesota, there are five situations in particular when a visual aid is particularly helpful:

1. To grab attention at the start of a session, such as a catchy cartoon, drawing or quote;
2. To emphasize key points, such as session objectives or major issues;
3. To present statistical data using an easily understood format, such as a pie chart or bar graph;
4. To compare data being presented, such as sales or profit forecasts;
5. To illustrate an item that is either too big or too small to display adequately during a presentation or meeting, such as a piece of equipment.

Once you know you need one or more graphics for your presentation, you have two choices – you can either draw them yourself or find a sample and copy it. Just make sure you do not violate any copyright laws!

Adding Graphics

Simple graphic images are an easy way to break the monotony of rows of words on a page. By drawing a small figure or symbol on your page as you write participant comments or prepare pages in advance, you can highlight, draw attention, entertain, or emphasize some aspect of your presentation. By adding artwork, you can add color and variety while helping visually introduce a new topic.

There are literally thousands of images from which you can choose. Go to any art store, library, the phone company yellow pages, look in "junk mail" advertisements you receive, software graphics packages, children's coloring books, or any other source you can think of. They're everywhere! For years, I've cut out small images that I liked and tossed them into a "clip art" file in my drawer. Whenever I need an idea for an image I look there first. Today with the progression of computer technology there are literally hundreds of thousands of possibilities available to you.

When choosing your graphic images, there are five things I suggest you consider:

1. Be creative and humorous, and utilize your imagination to develop a program with a dash of flair.

2. Use bold, broad-line pictures that can be seen from a distance of at least 30 feet (appx 9 meters). Also, avoid complex, detail oriented images that may blur at a distance ---

simpler is better. Line art is usually the safest. You can always give participants a handout of your charts if necessary to provide details.

Learning to draw simple characters and items is not that difficult. You can use stick figure or "people" shapes.

3. Choose your images objectively and wisely. Remember, not every picture evokes the same thoughts or feelings for all viewers. Choose more generic graphics that tend to have the same meaning to virtually all viewers, and avoid controversial social, religious, or political images that may cause contentious feelings. Also, keep in mind that when your audience members are from a variety of countries, cultural interpretations may vary.

4. Select images that complement your written text or add value to the page. Do not make the mistake of using an image just to fill the page.

5. Finally, don't worry if you don't have the talent of Rembrandt or Piccaso; as long as you images are recognizable, they serve the purpose.

Pre-Draw Your Graphics

Here's another little secret I've learned over the years. Create your title lines on pages before your session begins. Then, to help you give the appearance of being a talented artist when you are in front of a group and want to add graphics, use a pencil to very lightly trace an outline of a geometric shape (circle, triangle, square, diamond, parallelogram, star, rectangle, or oval), simple diagram, flowchart, model, image or picture on the page. When you are ready to add words or collect participant input, flip to the page and trace the image quickly with the broad edge of your marker. Voila…instant artist!! They'll be impressed, you add a splash of excitement and you will likely feel better about the end result.

Use Icons as Bullets

"Icon Bullets" add visual intensity or color, and draw attention to your message. These icons can also be duplicated in handout materials as a way to connect the narrative and printed data. For example, for a telemarketing presentation, you might use small telephone receivers as bullets on flip charts and throughout any handouts used. For my supervisory workshop entitled, *Working Effectively With Others,* I use the "justice" scales often associated with courts and lawyers on my flip charts, in marketing materials, and on handouts. Since the program deals with setting a positive work environment and various employment laws, this graphic image subconsciously sends a message that legal issues are associated with the program.

Additionally, to enhance a title line or key concept, you can also surround it with icons in the shape of clouds, boxes, explosions, banners, geometric figures, stars, arrows, or other devices.

The key to using add-ons to your masterpieces is to remember to control your urge to use too many colors, since this could distract a viewer, and to plan what you will use. The rest is just practice.

Source: Lucas, Robert W., *The Big Book of Flip Charts*, McGraw-Hill, New York NY (1999)

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