

The urban legends of new business pitching

 By [Sid Peimer](#)

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“Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em. Tell 'em, then tell 'em what you told 'em,” is one of the pieces of trite advice that's bandied about as if it's some truth that will produce guaranteed results.

It was developed for military use, where I understand perfectly that it makes sense to tell your comrade three times to aim to the left, as you will be on the right. But lethal weapons are seldom fired in presentations, and a clear story does not necessarily have to be repeated three times.

Here are some more urban legends of pitching:

1. They will choose the best people for the job.

If you're pitching to perform surgery on clients, then yes, maybe they will. For non-life threatening situations, they do not choose the best people for the job - they choose the person or team who shows them a future with the greatest added value from the relationship.

2. We need to get a number of important points across.

No. You need to get one point across. As any successful defence lawyer will tell you, “If you argue 10 points, and even if each is a good point, when they get back to the jury room they won't remember any.”

The trick here is exclusion. What you don't present can sometimes be your best part. You can't have more than one North Star.

3. We will follow the plan.

On the battlefield no plan survives contact with the enemy. The bulb can go on the projector and you could even have forgotten to take your Tourette's medication - as long as you have communicated the 'Commander's Intent' to the team, the plan will have served its purpose. The military recommends that a commander arrives at a Commander's Intent by asking two simple questions:

- If we do nothing else during tomorrow's mission, we must...
- The single, most important thing that we must do tomorrow is...

4. People need to be fully informed.

Nonsense. If people are connecting the dots for themselves, they're involved. And that's what every new relationship needs - involvement. Do we ever say, “Come over to my place, I'd like to show you my homework”?

5. Rehearsal is the most important thing.

No, it's not. Telling a clear story with a structure that everyone understands is. If I had two choices - rehearse or prepare notes for the presenters - I would go for the latter. However, both are ideal.

ABOUT SID PEIMER

Sid Peimer is the strategic director (urban legend has it) of www.behp.co.za and runs his personal site at www.stratplanning.com, where he provides numerous resources on pitching.

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