

Dissemination of Research Findings to a Non-Scientific Audience



Aminu Magashi Garba, MBBS, MSc.PH, DLSHTM
Nigeria Representative GFMER
Geneva Workshop
Tuesday 16th September 2014

“One hallmark of intellect is the ability to simplify, to make the complex easy to understand. Anyone can be unclear.”

-Paula LaRocque, former writing coach, *Dallas Morning News*

Reasons to communicate research findings to the public

1. Educate the public (build public support), because the public has a lot to learn about science. They need folks like you to teach them in order to make informed decisions.
2. Influence policies and programmes
3. Help to evaluate

Keys to Effective Communication

- Know your audience
- Remember, there are those in the audience who may not want to be there
- Make it engaging
- Don't be afraid to make bold statements about your research – be sure to say “this is the first-ever...” to make sure the audience recognizes the significance.

Top 10 Communication Strategies:

1. Simple, not simplistic
2. Put into context
3. Focused
4. Use vivid language
5. Use metaphors/analogies to emphasize your point

Top 10 Communication Strategies (Continued):

6. Tell a story
7. Be Unexpected
8. Emotional – Make people care
9. Put numbers into context
10. Answer: “So What?”

Important Notes

- Do not get into the specific details
- Do not try to give a mini-course
- Do not define a list of technical terms at the beginning only to freely use them later on, assuming that the audience will remember the terms.

Other Important Notes

- Ideally both your closest scientific colleagues and the general audience will understand and enjoy what you say but focus on engaging the general audience.
- Do not explain how difficult the work you do is. Nobody cares (sorry).
- Do not run through what a typical day in the lab is like. Nobody cares (sorry).

Other Important Notes (Continued)

- Do not be modest about the significance of your work, while remaining honest.
- Show pictures of instruments only if they move your story along – and only explain how the machine works if it takes no longer than 10 sec.
- It is fine to use humor

Other Important Notes (Continued)

- Plan a general talk far more carefully than you would a technical talk.
- Never use slides from a technical talk assuming that you can easily explain their meaning.
- Never show a slide of which you have to say “I know you can’t read this”.

Other Important Notes (Continued)

- Never show tables of numbers and say, “It would take hours to explain this, but this in fact shows my thesis is correct.” In fact, try not to show tables of numbers.
- Of course you have to simplify, but use analogies only if the audience is not going to find them harder to understand than the situation you’re trying to explain.

Thanks for listening !