

A Millennial fly on the wall

 By [Warwick Skeritt](#)

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Data. A powerful tool when packaged well, but also potentially a means to put your audience to sleep. Being born with a fairly right-sided brain of creativity and wonder, I thought I would do myself a favour by getting out of my comfort zone and learn how to present data better. On the 21 and 22 June 2017, I was fortunate enough to attend an Executive Education workshop on 'The Art of Presenting Data' as a student representative of Red & Yellow - an opportunity I knew I had to grab with both data-apprehensive hands.

Walking into the room, I was immediately greeted by the presenter, Don Packett, head of perspective at Missing Link, with a smile and a confident grin. I had no idea how someone with the charisma of a stand-up comedian could possibly be passionate about presenting data. Over the course of the two-day workshop he showed me how one's body language, voice tone, volume change and physical presentations of data, all influence your audience and their reception of the information you are looking to communicate.



"Any 45-minute presentation takes weeks of preparation, research and making sure the correct message resonates throughout the course of the presentation. There is no quick fix with this process – presentations and articulating data in the most effective means, takes time," he said.

Such insightful, humble and often humorous honesty really resonated with everyone who attended the workshop. Being the 'baby' of the group I was surrounded by representatives from BrandsEye, Africa Academy, Mirum, Media 24, Pick n Pay, Woolworths and multiple others – all showcasing insight that can only be gained through years of working in their respective fields. After a quick introduction we were taken through, in one and half hour slots, different aspects of presenting data which are crucial in maintaining and grabbing the attention of your respective audience. Context of presenting data was emphasized throughout the workshop as the meaning and relevance of one's presentation depends on it.

Don showed us as a group why we should care about data. Data dictates individuals' and organisations' decision making ability. Data's interpretation can change according to the objectives of the task – using one's 'victory condition framework'. Such a framework allows you as the presenter to understand your audience, communicate your objectives whilst giving them a reason to care, believe, know and most importantly do. Gaining an understanding of this framework can help one understand how to optimize your audience, galvanising the opportunity to educate, inform and inspire them along the way.

“Showing is not explaining.” – Pat Hanrahan, co-founder and chief scientist of Tableau.

We were taught how one needs to find how to make the data resonate with the audience and spark interpretations and discussions.

“Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today.” – Robert McKee, the most sought-after screenwriting lecturer worldwide.

Don Packett truly showed us how one should look to tell stories when presenting to clients, humanise and personalise an approach which inevitably gives the audience a reason to care.

“Combining the language of the eye with language of the mind.” – David McCandless, London-based author, writer and designer.

Don told us the importance of avoiding researcher bias utilising scientific rigour, reliable sources and that storytelling is the oldest form of education. We were shown the various ways in which one can avoid the dreaded 'death by PowerPoint' and how to utilise various components such as text, messages, presenting styles and audience approaches.

Practice makes permanent

The power of learning through practice was showcased within this workshop. Four individuals had 45 minutes to prepare a 5-minute presentation based on data they were currently working on, which they then presented to the class. Feedback and advice was then shared amongst the delegates in the room. We all quickly learned there is no exact science behind the art of presenting data and that you need to find a presentation style that makes you comfortable. All the individuals involved at this event – hosted so hospitably by Red & Yellow – learned more about data, the other delegates and most importantly themselves on this two-day journey.

PowerPoint isn't to blame, but how it's used or misused. Most importantly, in Don's words, “be awesome and be yourself”. The knowledge gained and the individuals I got to engage with inspired me as I look to enter the working world next year. For this I must thank Don and the Red & Yellow Executive Education team for such an amazing experience and being left with a solid framework on how to present data and get the audience to understand it too.

Recognising that the world is rapidly being changed by intelligent technology, Red & Yellow's two-day intensive Executive Education workshops help senior executives and progressive leaders stay ahead of the curve, featuring industry practitioners across a variety of topics that focus on human skills and creative business thinking. For upcoming workshops, go to redandyellow.co.za.

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