



## The 5 Fatal Pitch Flaws



*Using Brain Science to Achieve & Impact More*

Asking for investment, a grant, budget, a job, or a raise? Maybe you want someone to buy, try, or refer your product? Offering an idea or rallying support?

***Like it or not – we all need to pitch.***

Pitches are significantly different than presentations. You can pass as a ‘meh’ presenter. People will politely tell you that you were great and that they enjoyed the presentation. This doesn’t mean you were engaging, relevant, or otherwise successful. It just means you were ‘good enough’ that they aren’t angry for taking their time.

***Pitches, on the other hand, are designed to ask your audience to do, decide, pay, or give something.***

Just knowing that you are pitching raises all kinds of fear in your brain that impacts your behavior and ability to present well. You realize that you may fail to get what you want, regret doing something, or be personally rejected. These common fears cause everyone to go into “caveman survival mode” – where the less ‘thinking brain stem takes over to keep us safe. In the extreme case, your brain stem directs your body to sweat, palpitate, or hyperventilate. The more common result is that you can’t control your words, your eyes, your fidgeting, or other visual discomfort. Your body clearly conveys a lack of cognitive control and personal confidence.

***Your Audience Act Like Cavemen, Too***

Your audience also walks into a pitch with a survival mindset. They are likely on guard knowing they are going to be asked to make risky decisions and/or take some action that usually requires payment or personal effort.

Even pitches that are requested create fear and impact behavior both sides of the table.

***Pitching is a Learned Skill***

For many years, I’ve been teaching people how to pitch with confidence. From entrepreneurs and executives to event planners, engineers and educators, they are brilliant in what they do but they don’t have specific pitch knowledge or experience. It is not uncommon that the most brilliant people do the most painful pitches. The goal is to structure a custom message that is clearly compelling and cognitively digestible, while **also** delivering it with authentic confidence so the audience can comfortably consider whatever you are asking them to do.

Like general selling, pitching is only part art. But you can up your winning odds by leveraging brain science and marketing know-how.

Avoid these 5 fatal mistakes so you deliver a compelling pitch to get the result you want for yourself and/or your company.

### Fatal Flaw #1:

*Being technically baffling  
and boring.*



When you try to dazzle people with your brilliance, it doesn't make them feel confident. It intimidates them and they put up even higher survival walls. Plus, if they can't understand you, they can't help you. They don't know who or what to do and may even politely appear to be on board just to avoid embarrassment. In reality, they can't wait to leave the room to recover their confidence. When someone doesn't understand you, they likely won't admit that to you – especially if they are supposed to be an expert. They will become defensive, maybe even aggressive making it hard to enable confident discussions and decisions. Everyone, loses.

### Fatal Flaw #2:

*Polishing your deck but  
not your delivery.*



It is easy to spend way too much time putting the gorgeous graphics and exciting animation into your deck. You can perpetually reorganize and rethink your transitions, timing, and other staged elements.

Practice is critical but confidence is the key. If you don't have the presence to captivate your audience, no slides will matter. Every audience will pass judgement on your confidence. Using their mirror neurons, they feed off and reflect it in their own behavior. If you aren't confident, they won't be either. This means you need to master your content, even without slides. You must know how to deliver smoothly and interactively. The only way this happens is working on your own personal confidence, having confidence in your offering, and having the authentic belief that you are pitching something that will truly benefit your audience.

### Fatal Flaw #3:

*Being defensive and subsequently offensive.*



Inevitably someone will challenge you in a pitch. They walked in with defensive shields up and now when there is an opportunity, they poke you with a tough question or comment. Many great pitches fail in the end from a mishandled response.

Pitching, like most things, is a social game. Other players may unconsciously test you to see if you'll crack under pressure and/or try to prove their worth by being the smartest person in the room. Don't fall for it. Field questions calmly. Breathe first, then speak only after you have your thoughts together. A pregnant pause of a few seconds doesn't make you seem stupid – just the opposite. When you rush to answer, you may sound defensive and disorganized. Avoid knee jerk responses and never, ever be aggressive back. Smile, maybe even thank the person for their question, and then answer calmly. You can even appropriately disagree with well-spoken words, but your face and body language will speak even before your mouth does.

### Fatal Flaw #4:

*Underappreciating competition.*



Everyone has competition and it is always formidable. Prospects always have options to spend the money that you are asking them to invest with you. When you demean or deny competition, it demonstrates a lack of confidence and diminishes your credibility. You can respectfully disagree about potential competitive threats by explaining why you are not worried about them and/or how you plan on excelling. By acknowledging your competition and having a plan to best avoid or own your marketplace, that shows you are realistic, mindful and ready to enter the ring of reality. If you defensively deny there is competition when challenged, it shows that competition make you nervous - and your audience will be, too.

## Fatal Flaw #5:

### *Avoiding the ask.*



If you don't clearly ask people what you want them to do or give you, they won't! Don't expect them to ask you or offer freely. Tell them what you want and why. Remember that they don't really care what happens to **you** if you don't get the money. They only want to know what happens to **them** if they give or don't give you the money. Frame your ask factually saying how much, when, and what impact or opportunity is gained for the investor/customer. Don't sugar coat things or promise indirect, uncontrollable rewards. Don't assume anyone invests or buys because its "the right thing to do". Be specific about what's in it for them. Conclude your pitch with something concrete: "If you give me X, I expect that you will get Y back in Z months."

### **Pitch Confidently to Win**

Avoid these 5 fatal mistakes so you deliver a perfect pitch. Understanding what the audience needs to make a confident decision is the secret to getting anything you ask for.

If you want to polish your pitch, consider joining ACI's next virtual **Pitch Confidence Crash Course**.

Live-led, totally interactive via video conferencing with a small group of likeminded professionals.

Two 3- hour sessions + 1x1 follow up personal coaching session to make your pitch perfect.

It's the same class we teach at Wharton's Innovation Center, the Toulouse Business School, dozens of conferences and high-performance companies.

Enroll yourself or contact us if your team wants a private class.

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