5 Rules for Presenting to Executives

Your pre-presentation checklist — use this before every high-stakes meeting.

I've spent years working inside some of the world's biggest organisations — Google, Nestlé, Nespresso — training leaders, advising on messaging, and moderating executive conferences. I've seen from the inside what works. But for this, I went directly to the source: I sat down with C-suite leaders, VPs, CTOs and CMOs, and asked them one question: how do you actually want people to present to you? This is what they told me.

BEFORE YOU OPEN POWERPOINT

- [ ] I can finish this sentence clearly: "The one thing I need them to understand or decide is..."
- [ ] I know why I'm in this room (I have a distinct message, not just presence)

RULE 01 Cut the blah blah — know your one point

- [ ] My core message fits in one clear sentence
- [ ] I've removed every slide that doesn't serve that message
- [ ] I've replaced jargon and buzzwords with plain language

RULE 02 Say the uncomfortable thing — name it first

- [ ] If there's tension or disagreement, I've planned to name it at the start
- [ ] I frame it constructively: "Here's the gap — and here's how I want to solve it"
- [ ] I'm not building up to the difficult part — I'm leading with it

RULE 03 Respect their time — don't repeat the pre-read

- [ ] I know which 2–3 points need discussion, nuance, or a decision
- [ ] I'm prepared to adapt in real time based on what they already know

RULE 04 Orient, don't overwhelm — context in plain language

- [ ] I've kept context to only what they need to make the decision
- [ ] I've simplified complex detail — no 'curse of knowledge' dumps

RULE 05 Serve the decision — not your ego

- [ ] I've asked myself: what does this person actually need from me today?
- [ ] My goal is the best outcome for the business, not to look good
- [ ] If I stripped the slides, could I say this clearly to someone I trust? (That version. Use it.)