

Are you talking at or talking with your audience?

I recently attended a panel discussion where the five speakers on the panel were going to share their insights about industry trends. The first speaker got up (literally, up out of his seat) and started providing stats and information *about his business*, and then proceeded to ask the audience for questions. The moderator had to jump in to remind him that questions would be taken after all the speakers had their say.

This speaker didn't seem to know what the panel's topic was (trends) and he was completely focused on sharing what his business does, even though the audience wasn't there to hear that. Worse, he acted as if he was the only one presenting by pacing in front of the other panelists.

The speaker was *talking at* the audience. He was giving a speech that was all about him and did not respond to what the audience wanted or needed.

Does the expression “given a talking to” convey positive feelings for you? I bet it doesn't. Nobody likes to be *talked to* and being *talked at* is almost as bad. Both imply that the speaker has power over the audience or that the speaker is superior in some way.

On the other hand, if someone is *talking with* you, there's a conversation going on. There's some give and take, even if it's not verbal. Speakers who are *talking with* an audience are paying attention to what the audience needs, they are responding to cues and they are engaging the audience's attention.

You want to be talking *with* your audience. You want to be *responsive* to their needs.

There are three basic steps to make sure you are talking with your audience:

1. Understand **who** your audience is
2. Understand **why** the audience is there
3. Understand **what** the audience needs from you

You get bonus points for adjusting your speech depending on **where** you are and **when** you are giving it.

Have you sat through a speech that was all about the speaker? Did you feel talked at? Did it bother you? Please share your stories in the comments.