

PANELIST DO'S

Serve the Audience. The audience paid good money (at the very least invested their time) to be there, so speak to them and not just with each other. Figure out what they might want to know from you and then serve it up. Anticipate their questions and have answers and resources ready.

Check In with the Moderator. Speak to the moderator well beforehand to align your expectations. Find out who the other panelists are, why you were chosen, and what role you play. Ask for the format of the program along with a working agenda, speaking order, and ground rules. Finally, ask how best to support each other. At the very least, the moderator will ask for a short bio that is interesting and relevant as well as some pithy, provocative questions about the topic.

Be Prepared. Always keep the audience in mind as you research the other panelist's positions and determine what makes you/your position unique from the others. Be ready to introduce yourself succinctly (2-3 sentences is great) and share 3-5 key messages that matter. Be ready to support your points with concrete examples and crisp, concise stories to humanize your message and drive it home. Think of a quick sound bite that everyone will write down because it is so cool—and so right!

Be Timely. Show up on time, even a little bit early. Then, stick to your time limits. For example, if you are given five minutes to present, take four minutes to share with a sentence to recap. It's all about respecting the audience and following the prescribed process.

Follow the Moderator's Lead. Hopefully, you'll have a good moderator who provides clear instructions. Speak when invited to and give subtle signals to the moderator when you would like to contribute to the discussion.

Be Honest. Your audience wants insider information. They may be struggling with topical issues that you successfully conquered. As you share your ideas, be honest about your struggles, what worked as well as what didn't. Be open, honest, and a little humble too.

Use the Microphone. When working with only one microphone for all the panelists, make sure you have ready access to it. Lift it close to your mouth and speak confidently into it while looking at the audience.

Tag On. Have a conversation rather than a ping pong match between the moderator and individual panelists by making explicit links or references to what other panelists have said. Add to or disagree with their contributions by saying "Let me add something to that idea..." or "We take a different approach at our company..." Be additive and not repetitive to the discussion, and do not feel compelled to answer every question, especially when another panelist gave a perfectly fine answer.

Disagree Diplomatically. At some point, you *will* disagree with the other panelists, otherwise, why have a panel discussion? One of the panelists will say something that is not consistent with your own view or perspective. You've got to weigh in! Respectfully disagree without being disagreeable. Rather than saying "Jacob, that's stupid," respond by saying something like "Jacob, I understand how your research could lead you to infer this; however, my field work indicates otherwise."

Enjoy Yourself. If you're having fun, the audience will too. Smile. Laugh. Tease each other in a kindhearted way. Your audience wants you to succeed, so show your passion and enthusiasm for the topic. Just relax; it will all be over in an hour or so!

Make Friends. You have the opportunity to create great relationships with your fellow panelists, moderator and audience members, particularly if you are articulate and make relevant points. Being a panelist is a great way to connect with other high profile experts so do not hesitate to follow up with an email and continue the conversation!

POWERFUL PANELS **PANELIST DON'TS**

Don't Wing It. You have to do more than just show up. Audiences expect a scintillating conversation similar to their experiences on CNN or Fox News. Great panelists take the time to think through their key messages, headlines, and inspiring (and concise) stories—otherwise, you may end up looking like someone from the Jerry Springer Show.

Don't Be Boring. Yes, you are there to educate, but you must also be entertaining. Show your energy and enthusiasm for the subject. Have a few interesting facts, real stories and illustrative examples. If you're able, try to make things a bit humorous—but leave out the joke about how many panelists it takes to screw in a light bulb!

Don't Bluster. When you are speaking, keep it short. No more than 90 seconds is a good goal. People prefer snappy, well thought out answers to interesting questions.

Don't Get Huffy. In a good panel, you will be interrupted, challenged, and contradicted. The moderator will cut you off if you go over time. You do not have to answer every question. You will not always get in the last word. Let it go. Be gracious to others and they will be gracious to you.

Don't Be A Jerk. Do not cut off other panelists or the moderator. Do not interrupt another panelist. Do not hog the spotlight. Balance your airtime with others on the panel and give everyone a chance to weigh in and answer questions.

Don't Use Slides. Can you show a prop or a book? Put the information in a handout? Give the audience a link to further information? If you must, use one or two slides that requires a visual representation of a key idea—a graph, chart or image—and the audience should not have to squint to read it.

Don't Self-Promote. Some panelists just can't help themselves pitching their product, service, or company. Do not be that person. NO ONE wants to hear your sales pitch. Instead, make your comments in service to the audience and at the end, let them know where you are available afterward to discuss the panel topic further.

Don't Be a Contrarian. Yes, disagreements are to be expected but don't disagree simply because you can. Disagree because the discussion will benefit the audience *and* your reputation.

Don't Think No One is Looking. Even though you are not speaking, the audience will still be watching you. Stay poised and professional. Look at the other panelists when they are talking. Don't sigh, eye-roll, zone out, scratch, cross and uncross your legs, fiddle with your smart phone or laptop.

Don't Fake It. If you don't know the answer to the question, simply say so. Don't ramble or make something up. Somebody is out there recording your response to post on YouTube immediately after the panel is over! If someone else on the panel might be able to answer the question, punt it over by saying, "I have never experienced this myself, but perhaps Jacob has some ideas on this?"

Don't Pontificate. Don't talk down to or lecture the audience. This is a discussion, not a dissertation. You are having a conversation with the other panelists and audience as colleagues, not to serve your ego.

Don't Distract. Be aware of your physical presence, especially if you are on a raised platform, sitting on comfortable chairs without a table in front of you. Short skirts, plunging necklines, dangly jewelry, shoes with worn soles, and shoes worn with no socks can distract the audience from the message. It doesn't add to your credibility, either.