One of the most important questions to consider when planning a presentation is, "If I was in this audience what would I want to know about this subject and why?" Then you should prepare and present the session accordingly. I learned the importance of this question at two of my presentations.

As president of the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) in 1994–1995, I was invited to Mexico to give a presentation. I had someone translate my words into Spanish for the audience. When the talk was over, I commented to my translator, "You did a great job of translating. They even laughed at my jokes." The translator responded, "I'm sorry, sir, but they did not laugh at your jokes. When you told a joke, I said, 'The speaker has just told a joke. Please laugh!'" I wondered if he was joking. In any event, my Mexican talk was about constructivism and theoretical aspects of education. When I finished the talk, a person in the audience said, "That was interesting, but what programs do you have in the U.S. that we can copy and adopt here?" I was embarrassed. The audience didn't want to hear about constructivism and educational theory. They wanted to know about more practical matters. I had goofed!

A second misjudgment occurred at an NSTA convention in Philadelphia. I presented a talk on "Tips for Motivating Students." More than 100 people attended, and I proceeded to talk about motivational features of my introductory college biology course. I mentioned some of my major objectives: subject matter competency; societal, personal, and intellectual relevance; recognizing science as a human activity; competence in communication skills; problem-solving; developing a positive attitude about science; and becoming a motivated self-learner. I stressed the importance of motivational, extracurricular features added to the core of the course, such as bio-lunches, a bio-feast, midnight lectures, a bio-phone, open office hours, a Frontiers of Science Lecture Series, a Pathways to Knowledge Lecture Series, a bio-creativity project, and so forth (Druger, 1998, 2010). When I was almost through with my lecture, a young teacher raised her hand and said, "You have a different situation in a college class. Most of us are high school teachers. What can we do to motivate our students in a high school classroom?" I was embarrassed, and I could feel my face turn red as I started to sweat. "These are tips for any level," I said, as I tried to extricate myself from the situation. At the same time that I was fumbling with excuses, I realized that I had not anticipated the audience correctly. I did not give them a clear exposition of what they really wanted to know. When the lecture was over, I thought about the real issues. In a high school class, there may be a student who is resistant to learning, and is perhaps a discipline problem. This student may be disruptive in class, and has no interest whatsoever in learning about the cell, or mitochondria, or anything.

I recall one such student when I first started teaching as a substitute teacher at Westinghouse Vocational High School in Brooklyn, NY. During class, this student put his head down on the desk and was obviously not paying attention to the lesson. I walked up to him and tapped him on the shoulder. "What's the matter? Are you tired?" I asked. That student didn't move at all. His friend in the seat next to him exclaimed in a menacing voice, "Leave him alone. He's tired!" I left him alone.

In one instance, I told a disruptive student to leave the room. The room had a door at the front and one at the back. Both had windows. During that period, the student gestured and cursed at the front window. When the bell rang, we tried to leave the room, but we couldn't do so. The student had found a rope, and he had tied the doorknob on the front door to the doorknob on the rear door.

I thought about how to handle that tough class and that student, in particular. First, I tried to make the lessons meaningful. I discussed drugs and sex. Students paid attention, and they probably knew more about these subjects than I did. I asked my problem student to help with the lesson by standing in front of the room with two wires attached to a bell and an electrolyte solution. Whenever the class became disruptive, I would say to the student, "If you were the teacher, would you stand for this inappropriate behavior?" The response was a booming, "Shut up," as he rang the bell. He was involved, and had a role to play in the lesson.

These examples, and many others in a high school setting, made me re-think my presentation at NSTA.