

AROUND NYU LANGONE HEALTH

Scrap the Slide Deck, and Other Speaking Advice from TED Talk Veteran Dr. Joseph Ravenell

by Office of Communications | 9:45 AM | Friday, January 26, 2018 | [✉ Share](#) | [👍 13 Likes](#)



In early 2016, [Joseph Ravenell, MD](#) (pictured left), associate professor of Population Health and Medicine and associate dean for Diversity Affairs and Inclusion, received an invitation that would make many prominent thinkers' hearts leap. He had been asked to give a [TED Talk](#).

Dr. Ravenell had gleaned plenty of insights during his many years of community health research that would fascinate the wide-ranging audience the prestigious speaking series aims to engage. But having spent his career in academia, lecturing frequently at conferences among his peers, he soon learned that preparing for his TED Talk would be anything but business as usual.

Leading up to the event, he attended a practice session with Chris Anderson, the owner and curator of TED. As Dr. Ravenell gave what he now describes as a fumbling presentation, he realized something about the trusted slide deck on which he was relying—the one he had presented and added to for years. “For this forum, at which we have a very broad audience, giving a medical school–style lecture wasn’t going to fly,” he said.

Dr. Ravenell recounted the story at a Department of Population Health research seminar in late December entitled “How to Give a TED Talk: Advice on Telling a Story about Health Research.” The event drew an overflow room of faculty, staff, and students.

To help him connect with viewers, Anderson told Dr. Ravenell to limit his talk to one major idea he was passionate about. “That’s something that we as academics often don’t do. We develop Powerpoint presentations that we continually update,” Dr. Ravenell said at the seminar. But “ideas are complex” and need explanation. Speakers should slash content that does not contribute to developing the one overarching “big idea.”



Dr. Joe Ravenell gives a TED Talk in early 2016. Being invited to the prestigious speaking series required him to change up his typical presentation style, he told colleagues at NYU Langone.

With this advice from Anderson, Dr. Ravenell settled on his main theme: the power of barbershops to improve population health. For over a decade, he has developed and evaluated strategies with a team who work with barbers to help screen black men for high blood pressure and set up screenings for colorectal cancer.

Instead of centering his talk around complex research methods and findings, Dr. Ravenell “went back to my roots of being a normal human being.” He spoke of how his father brought him every other Saturday to their local barbershop in

New Jersey as a child. He talked about his own longtime barber, Denny Moe. He used only two slides during his TED Talk—a photo of the inside of Denny Moe’s barbershop in Harlem, and a photo of him with Denny.

TED was a whirlwind experience. In addition to giving his own talk and being stopped admiringly throughout the week as the “barbershop doctor,” Dr. Ravenell watched live as Al Gore gave his own TED Talk, and met other TED fellows including singer John Legend, director and choreographer Bill T. Jones, and writer and producer Shonda Rhimes.

TED found out about Dr. Ravenell’s work through an article in the [Huffington Post](#)—an opportunity that came about through his department’s communications staff and NYU Langone’s media relations team, part of the Office of Communications and Marketing. After his TED Talk, he was invited to do an interview on NPR’s TED Radio Hour for a segment called [Rethinking Medicine](#), which also featured prominent physician-authors Atul Gawande and Siddhartha Mukherjee. He also gave a [TEDx](#) at his high school.

Many of the faculty, students, and staff who attended the seminar here said they had changed their presentation style, in an effort to make their work more relevant to a lay audience. Someone also asked Dr. Ravenell how many views his TED talk has received. The number, according to the TED website, is over 1 million.

Advice on public speaking from Dr. Ravenell and TED:

- Limit your talk to one major idea, and let people know why it is so important. Use the idea as a “through line” for your talk.
- Go back to being a normal human being.
- Tell a story, make it personal, and bring the listener into your world.
- Don’t put too much information on your slides.
- Check out TED curator Chris Anderson’s [“Secrets to Great Public Speaking.”](#)

Comments (10)



So amazing!

Ainsley Goulbourne January 23 10:14 AM



So amazing! I am elated in not only being a part of the ODA office here at NYU School of Medicine but to work with Dr. Ravenell. He is truly amazing and his work stands for it!

Massielle Pimentel January 23 2:57 PM



The barbershop concept is a great idea, can identify undiagnosed hypertension.

Shakespear Boka January 24 10:15 AM



Thank you for sharing your experience.

Bernard Eldorado January 25 9:03 AM



Really great to hear about Dr. Ravenell’s experience. He’s a definite role model.

Crystal Mainiero January 25 9:33 AM



Wow! This is a great story, very insightful. I dream of doing a TED talk sometime.

Steven Bock January 25 11:40 AM



This is amazing!

Farah Michel January 26 12:10 PM



Dr. Ravenell is amazing!

Jasmine Liu January 26 1:30 PM



Fanstastic story and very useful for us all!

Crystal Lewis January 26 1:43 PM



This provides very useful information. Thank you for presenting Dr. Ravenell's experience and suggestions.

Richard Gallagher January 27 8:43 AM

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