

Presentation Skills

Communicating with Style and Power An Introduction

“Meetings are where the minutes are kept and the hours are lost”.

Most meetings are boring because the “presenters” in the meeting do little or nothing to make their material interesting to the audience. That is a pretty sad commentary on the state of verbal communications in business today. In this great age of electronic communication our expectations for the spoken word are at an all time low. Most people who present information at meetings don’t understand that they are “performing” when they are presenting. Audiences do not expect a great performance. We are conditioned to accept the mediocre. Knowing this, a good presenter can work magic on the audience by surprising them with an interesting and memorable “performance”.

The great speakers understand that business presentations, whether to an audience of one or one hundred, are performances requiring all the acting skills that we possess. So why don’t more people become great speakers? Hopefully this workshop will answer that question and show you that you have the potential to become one of those “great “ speakers.

View the workshop as a “consciousness raising” exercise. I hope to make you appreciate how **the spoken word, delivered with style and power, can make you sound like, look like, and be a professional presenter.** Good presenters understand human nature. They know how to make use of the fact that the audience is self-absorbed and want to be the focus of the presenter’s attention. Hopefully, by the end of the workshop you will clearly understand what power this knowledge can give you.

This is a notebook, not a workbook. I hope you find it useful and use it to remind yourself that, whether you like it or not, you are a performer when you are presenting.

There is no business Without Show Business

The Top Performers Perform.

Have you ever wondered why they call your annual review a “performance review”? What you do every day of your business life is to perform the task given to you. When you make a presentation or a sales call you are really **performing** for a client or prospect. The type of business that you are in does not matter; **you are in show business whether you like it or not**. My theory is quite simple: If you are giving a performance, **make it a great performance**. It is certainly not any harder than putting on a mediocre “show”, and it is more fun for you as a presenter.

The top performers really do know how to put on a show when they present. The concept is very logical when you think about it. When we are entertained as well as informed we retain the information more easily and completely. Your presentation doesn't have to be funny or phony. Drama and sincerity are part of show business too.

In today's "communication saturated" world, **how** you say it is as important as what you say.

Presentations are
"Theater".

When you are getting ready to present an idea or concept to a prospect you often say "Let me set the scene for you". You are really saying that you want to create a little **theater of the mind**. The presentation should be viewed as theater. It is a performance, an opportunity to **make the audience "see" what you want them to "see"**. Years ago our entertainment came from radio, not television. The audience had to use imagination in order to envision the scenes created by the actors. The actors had to use inflection, pauses, and voice level changes in order to set the scene. That is your job as a presenter. Use every tool you have to help the audience understand what you are trying to say.

Use the environment, the material, your body language, and anything else that will help you make your ideas stand out from the clutter of communications that a prospect sees and hears everyday. Use meaningful analogies, shared experiences, and other devices to **add value** to what you are trying to say.

Remember, a great idea that isn't sold well may never be executed. **The "how" is as important as the "what"**.

Presenting is the
“performance art” of the
business world.

You are the **performing artist**.

People who make presentations should understand that they truly are the “performing artists” of the business world.

Most great presenters and speakers understand this, and that is one of the reasons they are so successful. If you are willing to dare to be different you can be among the elite in the “presentation world”. And, you will make a lot more money than your peers who are not willing to “perform” at the highest level.

Are you willing to try it? Will you try it in a real life situation? The ideas contained in the following pages are designed to help you understand some of the *psychology* at work during a presentation. In addition, there are ideas that will help you to calm your nerves and to break down some of the “barriers” that might be preventing you from making great presentations. You cannot be a great performing artist until you overcome “stage fright”.

People Only Listen When
Their Minds Have Been
“Captured”.

Take prisoners!

We have all been in the audience when a powerful speaker totally controls the room because he or she **“captured” the audience.**

Think of the success you can enjoy when you learn to get over your self-consciousness and become that speaker. Almost everyone can remember some speaker who captured his/her attention. Someone easily remembered because of how well they spoke. It might have been a teacher or someone we heard at a meeting. We remember them because they captured our minds for a few minutes through the power of their performance. They were able to control their nerves long enough to focus on their audience and “capture” them. You too have the ability to be that kind of speaker. You only need to let it out. **Dare to do it just once and you will never want to hide your talent again.**

Personal Performance Potential

The Best That You Can Be.

You can't do better than the best that you can do.

You also can't be anyone but you. The object here is to find out how far you can progress. What is your best? You will be very pleasantly surprised to learn that you can perform at a very high level if you just "let go of yourself" and become a performer.

Do you dare to try to be the best that you can be? I think that most people have it in them to make a story come to life when they let their guard down and act like themselves. You know how relaxed and uninhibited you are when telling a story to friends and family. That is the way you need to "act" when presenting in a business setting. Your guard is down because you are focusing on the audience's reaction to your story, rather than being focused on yourself.

You will find that **you have what it takes to be a much more interesting and memorable speaker.** You just have to be willing to let that talent emerge in front of a business audience. **Interesting people have interested audiences.**

Be A Communicator

Involve your audience.

The dictionary defines the word “communication” as “**the exchange of ideas, information or opinions between two or more people**”. You cannot communicate effectively unless you realize that you should be receiving messages as well as sending them. You cannot receive or send messages if your back is turned, or if your head is down. **Look at the audience** when you speak.

The most effective presenters know how to have a dialogue with an audience while they are presenting to them. Great presenters are also good “listeners”. Audiences communicate with body language, facial language and attitude. You can't be aware of these things unless you learn to “listen” while you present. Watch the audience. Speak with your audience, not at them.

If you turn your back on the audience, you give them permission to disengage from you. Good communicators are always focused on the audience.

ACT LIKE YOU MEAN IT.

The audience will “re-act”.

It is impossible to be as excited and energetic as we are supposed to be every day of our business lives.

Let's face it; no one can be “up” every day. We can't always care as much as we should about our business or our client's problems. But we can certainly learn to **act like we care**. When you let the audience know that you are as interested in them and their problems as you can possibly be, they will react to you in a very positive way. Audiences know more than we think they know. Just as we read their moods, so do they read ours when we are making a presentation. Common sense dictates that you cannot expect an audience to be interested in you unless you are interesting.

I always told my employees that **ATTITUDES ARE CONTAGIOUS. IS YOURS WORTH CATCHING TODAY?** A very corny old adage, but very true. *You cannot get the prospect to care about what you are saying until you show them that you care about them.* You can create a **powerful bond with the audience** through your attitude and your performance.

Butterflies.

If you are not nervous
you should be.

Phil Halstein, a wonderful teacher of presentation skills, once told me “everyone gets butterflies in their stomachs when faced with the prospect of presenting to a group of people, regardless of the size of that group. **Successful presenters simply get their butterflies flying in formation.**”

If you can learn to focus that nervous energy on what you are doing, you won't have time to worry about your nervousness. Think about the audience and forget about yourself. **Remember, your nervousness is a source of power when properly harnessed and controlled.**

You should focus all your energy on performing better and eliminate anything else that might take your mind away from the task at hand. The next few pages list things that you can do to get rid of those butterflies.

Look Good-Feel Good

You only get one chance to
make a first impression.

Remember, the audience is not thinking about you; they are thinking about themselves. Therefore, THE PRESENTATION IS NOT ABOUT YOU, IT IS ABOUT THE AUDIENCE. Get over yourself. Just before the meeting, look at yourself in a mirror and remind yourself there is nothing you can change other than to straighten your clothing and comb your hair, so stop worrying about yourself and focus on the audience.

Physical appearance is important, but don't drive yourself crazy worrying about things you can't do anything about.

If you can learn to feel good about yourself, you won't be worrying about how you look. Have your clothes pressed and get those ties and scarves straight. Dress for success and dress for the occasion. This means that, whenever possible, you will be more "dressed up" than the audience. For example, if the dress code is "dress casual", you should be dressed just a little bit better than "casual". It is important to look and feel like the person in charge.

Give your problems away to the audience! If you have spilled coffee on your shirt or lost a button at the last minute, get it off of your mind or you won't be able to concentrate on anything else. I suggest using humor. I would tell the audience that I spilled coffee and make a joke about it. By acknowledging the problem (or giving it away) I eliminate it from my mind. I no longer worry whether or not the audience notices the problem because I have told them about it. Remember, human nature dictates that the audience is going to be thinking about themselves, not about you. You are the only person in the room worrying about you. **Get over yourself for a few minutes and you will be able to focus all your energy and attention on the audience and the information you are presenting.**

Know The Audience

Who are they?
What do *they* need?
What do *I* need to do
to reach them?

The audience rules!

Worrying about who is in the audience can create as much stress as worrying about what the audience thinks of you.

Learn as much as you can about the people in the audience *before* you get into the room. Can you be funny? Should you tell a joke? Should the tone be formal or informal? Who is the power in the room? Who does that person look to for advice? I tell all my presenters not to avoid anyone in the room because you never know who will influence the buying decision.

Learn what the audience expects from you and then exceed their expectations. Audiences need a great deal of attention and nurturing to keep them focused. Why? Because human nature dictates that they are going to be more focused on themselves than on you. You can only learn how to “feel” the mood of an audience by paying close attention to, and caring about, their wants and desires. Believe me, they will tell you how they feel and what they are thinking as soon as you focus on them rather than on yourself.

Finally, try to envision the audience as a group of people you know and are comfortable with. Use your imagination. **Speak to people you like and you will be much more relaxed.**

Know The Material.

Perform, don't read!

If you have this one down, half the battle is won!

If you know the content of your presentation you don't need to worry about **what** you will say and can concentrate on **how** you will say it. I believe that we are all little children who got older. The child in each of us still loves to hear stories. We are still fascinated when someone captures our imagination. Just about everyone still enjoys good "storytelling". Put **life and energy** into your delivery.

Perform the material. Put all your energy into making sure that the audience "gets it". You can't do that if you are "reading" rather than communicating with your audience. If you must read from a text of any kind, trust your mind. Look down at the material, "grab" a sentence, then look up at the audience and deliver it. Your mind is a wonderful and powerful mechanism. It will allow you to retain the thought that you just read long enough for you to deliver it to the audience. Trust yourself. Organize your thoughts using key words to remind you of the thought you are trying to convey. Write the words in big, bold type so you can see them easily. **Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!** It doesn't take long and it pays big dividends.

Room Control

Don't let the room or the
equipment control you.
Eliminate the "worries" by
being prepared.

Know where you are going to present. Know the equipment you are going to use and how to use it.

Get into the room ahead of time whenever possible. If it is too big, make it smaller by seating people close together. If it is too small and can't be changed, eliminate as much non-essential equipment, furniture, and even team members as possible. Let the audience know that you are aware of the problem and will do everything you can to work around it. But don't be too apologetic. Keep the focus on the presentation and not on the problem.

Practice with the equipment before you get in front of the audience. It is very distracting and greatly detracts from your effort when you are fumbling with the switch on an overhead projector or, trying to figure out how to turn on the computer, while you should be focusing on the audience. If problems develop, don't panic. Ask for some time to get back on track. If the problem can't be fixed, be prepared to work without the equipment.
The show must go on!

Don't Start Until You Are Ready To Start

Who are you talking to
anyway?

This one sounds simple enough. Before you get up to speak have your materials prepared. When you are introduced, get organized before you start speaking. **Don't start speaking while you are setting up.** It is rude and no one will be paying attention to what you are saying. They will be distracted by what you are doing.

Often, our presentations are timed to fit within a specific schedule. Time may be limited to five or ten minutes. Set up ahead of time or tell your audience that you will need a minute or two to set up or pass out materials. They'll understand.

When you are ready, focus on the audience, thank them for their patience, and use the remaining time you have to reward them with a performance that they will never forget. A shorter, more focused presentation will be more effective than a longer one that confuses the audience.

Take A Deep Breath.

Relax and look like a
genius.

You can make yourself the calmest and smartest person in the room.

Whenever you see an athlete about to perform, you will notice that they take a deep breath before they begin. For example, a well-trained basketball player getting ready to shoot a foul shot will always pause to take a breath before stepping up to the line. One of the reasons for this is to help calm his nerves so he can focus on the shot. Presenting produces at least as much anxiety as foul shooting, so take a nice deep breath just before you start.

We only use about two thirds of our lung capacity in normal breathing. Fill those lungs with air and you fill your brain with oxygen. Relax! Remember, no one will know you are nervous or whether or not you have made a mistake unless you tell him. Give your brain a chance to help you by sending it all the oxygen it needs. Breathing helps you to **focus and relax**. A deep breath can wake us up, calm us down, and make us feel good. And it is free and easy to do. Try it. You have nothing to lose but your excess nervousness.

Now you are ready to
take command.

“When in command, take
command.”

Norman Schwartzkopf

It is time to take command.

You are finally ready to get up and make the presentation. Regardless of your position or rank within the organization, when it is your turn to present you are supposed to be in control of the room. General Schwartzkopf tells his audiences that **if you are given responsibility, take charge.** Take command by standing tall, shoulders back, and head up. Let people know that you are in charge through your posture, expression and attitude.

When you get up to speak, do you dare to act as though you are in charge? A lot of people don't, and they wonder why no one takes them as seriously as they want to be taken. There may be a few “control freaks” in your audience. Many executives fit that description. They don't like to give up control to people who don't deserve to take control. **Respect isn't given. It must be earned.** Earn it by acting as though you deserve it. It is easy because all you have to do is stand or sit-up straight. Your audience will be more relaxed and so will you.

Who Is That And What Do They Do?

- Introduce yourself.
- Introduce your presentation.

Tell the audience who you are and what you do. There will always be someone who can't remember your name. They will not be focused on what you are saying until they find out.

Tell your audience what you will be talking about; How long it will take. Whether or not to hold questions until the end, or to feel free to interrupt you while you are presenting.

Give them some positive expectations. (E.g. "For the next twenty minutes, I am going to show you how to increase productivity by 25%.")

There is a very old adage about presenting that says: "**Tell them what you are going to tell them; tell them; then tell them what you told them.**" You will be helping your audience and yourself.

Forget About “I” Focus On “Them”

Talk to the people, not at
them.

Watch the eyes!

Whether it is one person or a room full of people, talk to their eyes. Spend your time “visiting” with the audience. Look at different people just as you would in a conversation with a group of friends. Talk to everyone in the room including your fellow presenters.

Remember you are communicating. You can’t do that if you are not focused on the audience. Look the audience in the eye to get the feedback you need.

Never turn your back on the audience. Don’t make the mistake of constantly looking at the screen or other visual aids instead of looking at the audience. It is rude, distracting and very confusing. If you must point something out, place your hand on the spot and turn back to the audience. Next time you are watching the TV news, observe how the weather person from your local TV station does it. They talk to you, not the map on the wall behind them.

Stop For Distractions.

If something is distracting you, it
is probably distracting your
audience as well.

Remember it is your show. You are in command. If people start talking among themselves while you are presenting, **STOP!** Politely ask them whether they have a question or if they need a break. Don't try and compete. **Get them to focus on you.**

If there is any kind of distraction in the room that is bothering you, it is probably bothering your audience too. My favorite is the assistant who comes into the room in the middle of a presentation and sidles down the side of the room to hand a phone message to someone. No matter how quietly or unobtrusively they enter the room, the audience will follow them around the room. The focus is no longer on the presenter. Stop and let them deliver the message. Don't try to compete.

Eliminate a potential problem by waiting until the focus can get back on you and your "show". Just as a nightclub comedian has to learn how to handle hecklers, you must learn how to handle "distracters". It takes practice, patience, and self-confidence, but you can do it.

S-P-E-A-K
C-L-E-A-R-L-Y,
S-L-O-W-L-Y,
L-O-U-D-L-Y

Proper pacing makes for
easy listening.

I have rarely heard anyone speak too slowly or too loudly in a presentation, seminar, or new business pitch. In my workshops it is harder for me to get people to slow down and speak up than it is to do just about anything else. (I must add that when I have heard that rare person speak too slowly, it put others in the audience and me to sleep). But the most common problem today among speakers is “fast talking”, a distraction that loses more audiences than you can imagine.

Speak in syllables. **Use proper grammar.** Don't run words together. Just pronouncing all the syllables and words clearly and precisely will set you apart from most public speakers.

So that everyone can hear you, imagine that you are recording your presentation and the microphone is in the wall at the back of the room. When you go to a stage play the actors speak loudly and clearly. They adjust their performance to the size of the audience and the room. They exaggerate the enunciation and the volume. **Speak at a pace and a volume that is easy to listen to.**

Remember, this is show business. You are a performer and you have to act like one. Exaggerate your pronunciation, volume, and pace.

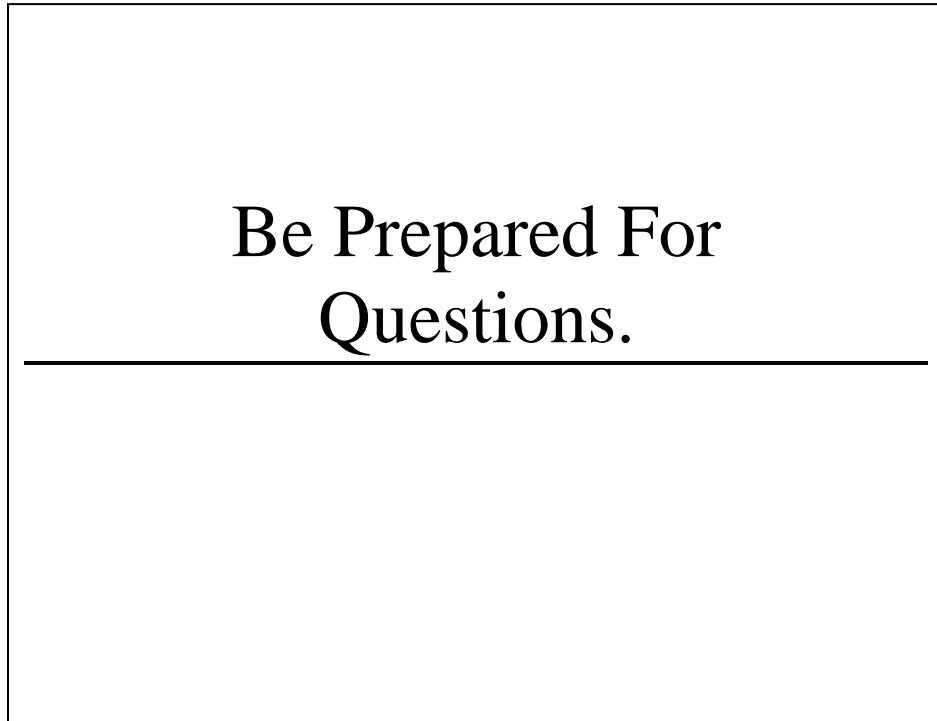
Give Yourself A Helping Hand.

A picture is worth a
thousand words.

Don't be afraid to gesture!

We all seem to have a hard time deciding what to do with our hands when we are speaking. **Use them to help the listener “see” what you are saying.** Make pictures with them. Use them to drive home a point.

Practice in front of a mirror until you are comfortable with the way your hands work with you. **Don't repeat any one gesture constantly or you will drive the audience crazy.** Don't keep your hands in your pockets, folded in front or behind your back, and don't leave them hanging at your side for the duration of your presentation. Doing that makes you look like you either don't care or you are nervous. Mix up your gestures. Move casually and gracefully. Use your hands to help you. When you speak slowly your hands can keep pace very nicely and will help you **be a more powerful and professional presenter.**



Questions can kill you if you are not ready for them! Be prepared!

You have done a great job and you finish by asking for questions. Someone gives you a killer question and you panic. **Suddenly all your hard-won credibility is destroyed because you don't know how to handle tough questions.**

Focus on the questioner. Find out exactly what they want to know. Are they trying to impress their boss or just "bust your chops"? Have they misunderstood something that you have said?

Don't fake an answer. Tell them you will get back to them with the answer. If someone else knows the answer defer to him. There are entire chapters of presentation skills books that are devoted to the subject of handling tough questions. Buy one and read it.

Know How To Leave The Stage.

Close well.
Tell them what you told
them.

When you started you **told them what you were going to tell them.** Then, in your presentation, you **tell them.** When you are done, simply **tell them what you told them.**

Summarize your presentation by focusing on the most important points you made. **People can usually remember three things.** Tell them the three things you want them to take away. Then thank the audience and ask for questions. If you have closed well, any questions should come from the things you told them were important.

Remember, this is the “Show Business” part of the business world. **The finale is a very important part of the show.**

Practice Makes Perfect!

Learn to watch yourself
carefully.

You can't become a great performer without rehearsing.

Did I say, "Rehearse"? Yes, because there is no substitute for it. Many executives say that they don't like to rehearse because "it takes the spontaneity out of their presentations". Baloney! Even the greatest stage and screen actors rehearse so they will know exactly where the "spontaneous" moments will fit into the presentation. Use a mirror and watch yourself perform the presentation. When you do it in front of a mirror you will get used to looking at your audience when you speak.

Don't look at the podium, screen, or presentation boards when you are presenting. Don't read the presentation—deliver it. **LOOK AT YOUR AUDIENCE.** It is easy if you practice. "Grab" a sentence or point from your notes or the screen. Hold it in your mind, then look up and deliver it to your audience. Repeat that process over and over. **Don't be a reader—be a performer!** Great presenters rehearse, just as great actors do.