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Helping organizations drive revenue and generate profits through stronger business communications

High Impact Presentation Skills

The ability to present yourself — your ideas, your services, your products — powerfully and persuasively comes naturally to only a very few people. Ronald Reagan, with his ability to weave personal stories into the lessons of history, Bill Clinton, with his ability to charm the pants (literally) off his listeners with his charismatic delivery, Winston Churchill, with his precise way of crafting his words, Martin Luther King, Jr., with his passionate, compelling presentation style, come to mind. For the rest of us, presentation mastery comes only after understanding what makes a great presentation — and practicing those skills until we get it right.

The good news is that anyone can speak with power, poise and professionalism. Here are 4 tips to help you exude confidence, and move your audience to action!

1. Whatever you do, don't picture your audience naked! If I hear one more person tell me that they do this — and claim to be a compelling presenter, too — I'm just going to laugh out loud. Thinking about your audience and picturing them more successful because of your message (your ideas, your product, etc.) is an awesome idea. Thinking about your audience and realizing that they want you to succeed with your message and that as much as you may be concerned with your hair flopping into your face, or the occasional "uhm" or "ah" that comes out of your mouth, they really don't care, is a great idea. Thinking about your audience with love, and literally leap frogging over those people who may be, for whatever reason, sending you negative vibes, is smart. But thinking of your audience, naked? Don't picture them naked. Picture yourself, and your message, helping them to dress in the finest of cloths. See yourself connected to them, conversing with them and caring about them.

2. Let go of your fear. Yes, just let go. Ask yourself: What is the worst that can happen if I mess up? Will you die? It may feel like it at the moment, but it's not going to happen!

The interesting thing is that what most people are afraid of is not forgetting, or fainting, or not having the right answer. Most people are fearful of making fools of themselves. They're afraid that they'll look and sound well, stupid, and that people will laugh at them.

Prepare yourself so that the bad stuff doesn't happen, of course. But keep this in mind, please: If the worst thing that you can imagine does occur, and pay close attention please, if it does, so what? You will not die of embarrassment! Instead, you'll learn to be a better speaker because you'll prepare differently next time!

Give yourself positive energy before your next presentation. Don't allow yourself — or anyone around you — to put negative thoughts into your head. If you catch yourself saying something like, "I'm never going to be able to do this," cancel that thought and replace it with, "I'm going to be great. I'm going to wow them. I'm going to make a difference in someone's life. I'm going to close this sale." Admittedly, just because you say positive affirmations, it doesn't guarantee that it will happen! I promise you, however, that you'll have a far better chance of performing well when you think well of yourself than if you're reminding yourself of that time in the 5th grade when you were so embarrassed that you went home crying, or how you tripped walking to the flip chart when the CEO, unexpectedly, walked into your staff meeting!

Skiing in Vail, I saw a sign near the gondola that said, "If you think you can, you can." Whether it's skiing, selling your ideas or influencing others, you don't stand a chance if you tell yourself you can't. Picture speaking success.

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**Increasing
Professionalism and Profits
Through Improved
Communications**

High Impact Presentation Skills *continued*

3. Have a clear purpose for your presentation. Most people begin preparing their presentation by thinking of how they'll start. My suggestion is that you think about how you'll end. Ask yourself: What do you want your listener's thinking, or doing differently, after they've listened to your pitch? Is the purpose of your presentation to get them closer to saying yes to your idea, or do you want them to say yes at that moment? Is the purpose to get them to become an advocate for your ideas, think differently about a situation, motivate others to take a position, schedule an appointment, take a site tour, or act in a changed manner? Spend the most amount of time thinking about what you want them thinking or doing when they are ready to exit your presentation, and work backwards.

Once you have a clear vision of the end of the presentation, ask yourself: If that is what they should be thinking or doing, what can I say — and how can I say it — to move them in that direction?

4. **Less is more.** One of the worst mistakes a presenter can make is to think that the listening audience are as interested and as excited about what you're saying as you are! (Notice I started with the premise that you are excited about your topic. You must be if you hope to influence their thinking.) Resist the temptation to tell them more than they need to know. I call it DBI: Death By Information.

Focus on the benefits to them and present those benefits in the most sensory way possible. Avoid being a talking head. Get them involved. Ask questions — and wait for the answers. Use props. One of the best business presentations I've ever witnessed involved candles and potpourri! (And when decision time came, they were the ones everyone remembered because they did something different. They may have gotten the business anyway, but it didn't hurt that their pitch was interesting and memorable.)

Involve your listeners as often, in as many ways as possible. Consider that your presentation — any presentation — is simply a conversation (enlarged). Consider how you feel when the other person monopolizes a conversation. The more they participate, the more they buy in to your idea. Honor and respect what they bring to the table — and you'll be on your way to giving your best presentation ever.

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If you aren't thinking of presentation skills as part of your corporate communications strategy, you may be shooting yourself in the foot! Be certain your entire team has the confidence to present your brand in the professional manner it deserves. Sue will change the way your team — and your meeting attendees — communicate your message. Visit Sue's website, www.speakersue.com, or call Sue's office (480-575-9711) to schedule Sue to speak at your next conference.

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