

The Secrets of Effective Speaking

“Nothing happens until something gets sold”

Thomas Watson Jr., IBM

If you can't sell your ideas or yourself, you simply cannot succeed.

And it all starts with speaking persuasively – to a group, or an individual.

Learning how it's done is rather like learning to drive a car. To drive, you need to perform lots of activities at once (press pedals, change gears, turn a wheel etc).

Each of these is straightforward – though putting them all together is more testing. But master each individual part, and the whole process becomes second nature.

It's the same with presenting. Each activity – stand up, move your arms, speak clearly etc – is easy. It's the 'putting it together' that's hard. Unfortunately, unlike when learning to drive, with presenting you don't have someone telling you each activity to focus on. Even worse, you don't have someone taking over the controls if you're about to crash!

This document will help. And, though it can't cover everything in just a couple of pages, follow the steps outlined here and your effectiveness will improve.

1. How to ensure your audience wants to listen to you

There is a simple, but devastating, rule of effective presenting...

'The audience is more important than you'

If you like, presenting isn't a 'presenter thing', it's an 'audience thing'. And unless you interest them, you will achieve nothing of note.

How to do this, then? How to get them on your side?

Only one word matters here. Empathy. Putting yourself in their shoes. Thinking *'Will they care about this content?'*

Notice how many sales presentations have a 'Founded in 1922' first bullet point? Or a world map showing the location of your offices? Hand on heart, do the audience really care? If so, keep them in. But if, as is infinitely more likely, they don't...

But, why do presenters include audience-unfriendly material? It doesn't make sense.

The only answer we – or anyone we've asked – can think of is *"because everyone does it"*. And this means presenters are basing their approach on what other presenters do, not what their *audience* wants.

And the weirdest thing of all? As an audience, you probably hate in others what you're guilty of doing as a presenter. You know the type of thing...you hate others' wordy slides, but you use wordy slides; you hate presenters giving lots of background, but you give lots of background, and so on.

To *interest* the audience throughout, you must *think* of them throughout. Put everything you say in terms they want to hear.

This is crucial. And never more so than at the start. Three magic words will help turn your first couple of sentences into a presentation your audience can't wait to hear:

'You' (i.e. the audience)

'Help' (or another empowering verb – see the examples below)

AFTERS (what your audience will know, feel, be able to do AFTER your presentation)

1. Running a training session on how to use Excel? Start with *“Today’s session will save you at least four hours per week”* (notice, no use of the word ‘Excel’, just the AFTERS of mastering Excel)
2. Delivering a sales pitch? *“We are going to show you how we can add £2million to your bottom line”* (again, no mention of ‘sales pitch’; just the AFTERS of hearing it)
3. When appraising your staff, *“This meeting will ensure you enjoy your next six months working here”* (no mention of ‘appraisal’; just the AFTERS of having one)

So the simple rule... think ‘why will my audience be better off AFTER hearing my presentation?’, and tell them this in Sentence One.

(Incidentally, if you can’t see why your presentation benefits the audience AFTER hearing it, neither will they!)

2. How to look confident, even if you’re not

Looking confident when presenting is crucial. And difficult, for the good reason that most people are, indeed, very nervous. It’s natural. Many great actors are known to have been physically sick before going on stage.

But no matter how you feel, if you look nervous, your audience suspects you lack confidence in what you are saying. This is not good. They may doubt your competence, credibility, integrity, professionalism... And all because you looked up at the ceiling and swayed from side to side a couple of times.

So, how to overcome that dangerous unconfident look?

Well, most important (by a mile), is to have a presentation you know is excellent. Without this, how can you possibly appear confident?

Secondly, practise it. A lot.

Thirdly employ these tricks to give you that confident look:

a) Walk as tall as possible

This is a great way to look confident. World-class presenters like Barack Obama are exceptional at this.

The simplest way to improve: focus on your head. If that is as high/tall as possible, everything else will be.

b) Eye contact

What do you think when someone is talking to you and they never look at you? It hardly transmits confidence to you, their audience, does it? Similarly, you *must* have eye contact with your audience. Anything less, and your chances of success diminish.

c) Head angle/“Chin contact”

Presenters’ nerves are often betrayed by the angle of their head.

Some have their heads looking upwards (making them appear aloof). Some hunch, bowing their heads slightly (making them look nervous).

To solve this, simply ‘lock chins’. You should be able to draw an imaginary line from your chin to their chins and a parallel imaginary line from your eyes to their eyes. You don’t want your eyes locked but your chin pointing down (nervous) or up (aloof).

d) Plant those feet

Presenters often think it is their hand movements that betray their nerves. And, it can be. Usually though, it is your *feet* that give the game away.

Ever seen a presenter rocking, swaying, pacing like a frustrated lion? It suggests nervousness and lack of confidence.

To stop yourself doing this, have a firm base. Stand with your feet slightly wider apart than normal (gives you more balance); and with 60% of your weight on the front of your feet, 40% on the heels (stops you falling backwards).

If you get nervous now, simply walk three to four paces (walking displaces nervous energy, helps your breathing, voice control and stops those ‘semaphore arms’), and re-root in the same way (*feet apart, 60:40 split*) in a new place.

In short,

1. Prepare a great presentation.
2. Practise. A lot.
3. Head up, eye contact, chin locked, feet apart and 60:40.

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