



Principles of Effective Presentations

Every time you stand in front of a group, you must achieve two basic goals. First, you need to communicate a message. And second, you need to communicate your personality — who you are as a professional and an individual. If “the medium is the message,” your personality is the window through which the message must travel to be received, understood and acted upon by the audience.

You convey your message and your personality every day of your life in relaxed conversation. And relaxed conversation is, therefore, your best possible communication style.

By understanding the following principles, you can sharpen the skills you’ve acquired one-on-one and transfer those skills to group presentations, thereby increasing your effectiveness in both.

1. YOUR BEST STYLE IS RELAXED CONVERSATION
2. BE YOURSELF
3. RELAXED CONVERSATION IS TWO-WAY
4. RELAXED CONVERSATION IS RECEIVER-DRIVEN
5. LESS IS MORE
6. PEOPLE CAN LISTEN OR THINK
7. PEOPLE WON'T REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAY
8. BE CONVERSATIONAL IN YOUR DELIVERY
9. THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK
10. SILENCE IS ESSENTIAL



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PRINCIPLE #1

YOUR BEST STYLE IS RELAXED CONVERSATION

Every day of your life, you convey your messages and your personality while engaged in conversation. You should therefore emulate conversation in your presentations. You're not there to "download" information. You are there to create understanding that is based on a two-way exchange, and to facilitate an environment in which people can apply what you tell them to their personal or professional life.

If you see a puzzled expression, don't wait for them to ask a question. Handle it the same way you would in a conversation. Ask them if there is something you can explain more effectively.

Allow questions throughout your presentations. But be brief with your answers. Questions are an opportunity to create milestones of mutual understanding. But remember, you pass milestones. You don't camp at them.

PRINCIPLE #2

BE YOURSELF

You are unique. You have your own way of speaking and your own mannerisms -- how you talk, how you stand, how you hold your hands. To convey your personality to a group, you must express yourself in a manner similar to the ways in which you express yourself one-on-one. If you are expressive with your hands one-on-one, it's OK to be expressive with your hands when talking to a group. In fact, it's essential. You know it's important to be on your best behavior. You know there are certain standards that you must meet. You must dress appropriately. You must be attentive when someone asks a question. You must answer the question.

But worry less about how you "present" yourself, than how you communicate with the members of the group. Your body language must be natural. And what is natural for you is probably not natural for someone else, or vice-versa, which is why we hesitate in setting rules for gestures you should use or the body language you should attempt to convey.

To understand this, think of the gestures you make when you are enthusiastically explaining a concept to a friend over the telephone. Who are these gestures for? The person on the other end? Understand that these gestures are part of who you are as an individual. Bring them to your presentations and let them happen naturally.

PRINCIPLE #3

RELAXED CONVERSATION IS TWO-WAY

To be effective, relaxed conversation must be two-way. Indeed, by definition, all communication must be two-way.

Even if one person does most of the talking in a conversation, he or she is looking for the nods, listening for the "uh-huhs," and stopping to answer questions. The sender quickly recognizes that a blank look means the receiver is not listening. He or she will respond by changing tactics -- pausing to let the listener catch up or asking if there is a question.

Your presentations, like your conversations, must be two-way. If you treat people with respect, and create a two-way process in which their questions are answered clearly and concisely, you stand a better chance of having them use or act on the information you present.

PRINCIPLE #4

RELAXED CONVERSATION IS RECEIVER-DRIVEN

In a relaxed conversation, the speed at which information goes from sender to receiver is driven by the receiver's needs, not the sender's. During a conversation, if the person listening doesn't signal that he or she understands — with a "nod" or by saying "uh-huh" — the sender stops to create a milestone of mutual understanding before moving on. If the sender doesn't do this, the receiver will stop listening.

The same applies to your presentations. If you talk nonstop, you will quickly lose your audience. Instead, make sure the information you're sending is driven by the audience's needs, not yours. If you throw out an idea that creates puzzled expressions, it's probably a good time to stop and ask: "Are there any questions?"

PRINCIPLE #5 LESS IS MORE

The less you say, the more your audience remembers. If you try to cram too much information into your presentations, you will not create a two-way exchange. And you certainly won't be receiver-driven. How can you be? The speed at which information travels from you to the audience is not driven by their need for understanding, but your need to get through it all in time.

If you have one hour for your presentation, bring 30 minutes of information. This leaves plenty of time for questions, enables you to finish on time or a bit early, and allows you time for networking at the end.

PRINCIPLE #6

PEOPLE CAN LISTEN OR THEY CAN THINK, BUT THEY CAN'T DO BOTH

As human beings, we can listen or we can think. But virtually none of us can listen and think at the same time. By definition, this means that you must "pause" when delivering your presentations. And those pauses must be as full and as frequent in your presentations as they are in your conversations.

You want your seminars to be thought-provoking. You want people to think about what you're saying and apply it to their personal situation. But while they're thinking, if you're talking, they won't hear a word you say.

If you talk nonstop, members of the audience will miss large portions of what you say. They'll rush to catch up once or twice. After that, they'll give up. And, if they give up, your chances of doing further business with them decreases proportionately.

PRINCIPLE #7 PEOPLE WON'T REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAY

Participants at your presentations will not remember your exact words. Instead, they will remember what they thought about what you said — how they took your information and applied it to their frame of reference.

But this process can only occur in silence, whether you give them that silence, or they take it for themselves. And remember, if they take that silence while you're talking, they won't hear a word you say.

PRINCIPLE #8
BE CONVERSATIONAL IN YOUR DELIVERY

If you've ever read the transcript of an interview or conversation, you've probably noticed that people rarely talk in complete sentences. And if you participated in the conversation from which the transcript was drawn, you were probably shocked at what you saw written down.

There is a basic pattern in relaxed conversation. In the first step, which we refer to as the first pause, the sender thinks about what he or she is going to say. Once the idea is formed, the sender expresses it. If the sender is enthusiastic, the words come tumbling out at a rapid rate of word delivery.

Once the idea is delivered, the sender stops talking and allows the listener to absorb the idea and relate it to a meaningful frame of reference. During this second pause, the sender watches and listens for the receiver's reaction. Once there is a nod or "uh-huh", the sender forms the next idea. And so on.

PRINCIPLE #9
THINK BEFORE YOU SPEAK

In a conversation, you take time to form each thought before you say it. You should attempt to do the same thing at your seminars, although that can be much more difficult because of the impact of adrenaline. But stop talking. Think through the thought. Start talking again.

Use good notes. Focus on delivering one idea at a time. This will get you off to a strong start. And, as for nervousness, by encouraging questions, you take the emphasis off a presentation and switch it to an extended conversation. Never forget that the greatest reducer of nervousness in public

speaking is a question or two that you can answer clearly and concisely.

PRINCIPLE #10
SILENCE IS ESSENTIAL

There are two types of silence. The first is for you to think. This is the first pause. In a conversation, after you express each idea, you look to see if the other person has "gotten it". Again, you do so while pausing. We call this the second pause. The first pause is for you to think. The second is for them to think.

During your presentations, remember that you're not there to prove that you can talk nonstop. You're there to provide information that people can think about and apply to their own personal circumstances. But remember, they can only think in silence — whether you provide that silence or they take it for themselves.

If you lose your place or your audience, pause. If you're lost, the pause allows you to think about where you are, where you're going, and what you need to say. If they're lost, the pause will help them find their way back so they can listen to your ideas again, and relate those ideas to their personal frame of reference.