



MASTER THE **ART** OF PRESENTATIONS AND SPEAKING

If you're a leader, at some time or another you are going to have to present or speak to groups whether large or small. In this training you will learn...

- How to think about speaking in a different way
- How to manage the emotional experience of speaking
- How to use slideshows well

OVERVIEW

The power of communication for a leader is often overlooked and underestimated. As a leader, your words have the power to influence behavior, propel better outcomes, and build morale.

The tactics for presenting business strategy, pitching an idea, selling a product, teaching, or preaching vary widely. However, there are certain principles that undergird them all. I will be focused on these, rather than the tactics of each. The three main categories are:

- 1) Reframing mindset
- 2) Using your emotional body
- 3) Refining techniques and tools

REFRAMING MINDSET

First, we need to get our headspace right. It begins by redefining who you are as a speaker.

You Are an Educator

Whenever you present your ideas no matter what the context, see yourself first and foremost as an educator. You are not primarily a persuader or even a communicator. A persuader is burdened with an agenda to change perceptions and behavior (i.e. sell), a communicator is merely transferring information.

An educator is someone with the responsibility to help people understand. They serve their audience. Educating takes courage and compassion.

- Courage is required to lead people into understanding even when there is resistance
- Compassion is required to appreciate and notice where they begin and meet them there

When these two things are in place, you offer a great gift-- to show them not how smart you are, but how smart they can be. When you meet them where they are and lead them into new understanding, they can grasp what you are showing. That empowers them.

You Are the Message

Marshall McLuhan famously observed "The Medium is the Message." When it comes to speaking and communicating it's important to remember that YOU are the Medium, and therefore, you are also the Message. Here are a few implications of this.

1) Your Physical Body Matters

Yes, body language is important. But I'm talking more about your own awareness of your body and the information it's giving you. Are you aware that your body is a conductor of your presence in a room.

How you breathe, how you stand, and how you gesture all impact the energy of a room. Begin by noticing this aspect of your "medium." Here are some questions for reflection to generate awareness.

- **Are you aware of your physical body?**
 - a. What is it doing?
 - b. Is it swaying, walking, or anchored?
 - c. Is it moving in repeated loops or predictable patterns or is it random and idiosyncratic?
 - d. Is it relaxed and flowing or it strong and immovable?

It's important that you don't apply judgements to what you notice. Only that you can see. Each of these will have a different impact on the room. As you become aware without judgement, your body will make micro adjustments to suit the context and the moment.

2) **Your Emotional Body Matters Too**

We have a physical body as well as an emotional body. Have you ever watched someone speak who is anxious? You immediately become anxious yourself. This is the interplay of our emotional bodies.

We are actually mirrors of one another. As an audience member, we tend to imitate the emotional experience of the person speaking. That means you as the speaker are the one who sets the emotional climate.

If you bring anxiety, people will feed on and mirror that. If you bring openness, ease, and confidence, people will begin to mirror that.

If you notice a room is closed, your job is to open it with your energy or emotional body. You have the power to alter the emotional climate of a room by how you show up moment by moment in a room.

Here are some questions to ask of your *medium*, prior to and during your presentation:

- **Are you aware of your emotional body?**
 - a. Can you sense the emotional state you bring to the moment?
 - b. Are you irritated, afraid, bored, full of excitement, or anticipation?
 - c. Can you feel these feelings in your physical body in the moment?

Here again, no judgement is needed, just awareness of what is.

In the next section I will introduce specific practices and techniques you can use to direct and tune your physical and emotional bodies the way you want.

USING YOUR EMOTIONAL BODY

I learned very quickly when I went from the pulpit to the boardroom, just how little of what I knew transferred in terms of structure and content. Business people had little tolerance for abstraction and were suspicious of anything that smacked of pulling at heart strings.

Whereas in the church, people wanted stories that inspired and moved them. They were hungry for understanding the subtle semantic differences of long dead languages and what this meant for their life.

The pragmatism required to manage an organization (regardless of the kind) means theory is tolerated as long as it is immediately grounded in practice.

Brevity, clarity, efficiency are the values that reign supreme in this context. I learned this was also true in managing a larger church. Board meetings were governed by the same values as in the corporate world. One of the implications of this is we tend to strip away our emotions and speak from our intellect.

This is a problem for one reason. The key element required in any speaking context is audience engagement. Whether preaching, teaching, selling, pitching, or presenting, the last thing you want is a bored audience.

Engagement is the domain of emotion, the heart.

Content and stage craft is important when it comes to engaging people. I'll speak to some of that in the next video. But perhaps the most overlooked aspect is how you choose to tune your medium, your physical and emotional presence.

Here are a few principles that support engagement in any kind of presentation.

- **Manage Your Anxiety**

Anxiety in the speaker is one of the fastest ways to kill engagement in the audience. Learning to manage your own anxiety is important. Here are a few suggestions

- Ground yourself by becoming aware of your feet on the floor.
- Breathe deeply from your belly, speak from this place, the seat of power
- Use your breath to expand and relax the front of your body. Often the front of our body becomes constricted and tense.

- **Connect to Your Purpose**

Oddly enough, anxiety and excitement are two sides of the same coin. In other words, if you become too relaxed you lose the spark, a sense of being charged. One way to ensure this is to connect to your sense of purpose. Here are a few suggestions:

- Remember the specific purpose of this presentation, here are some examples:

| SURFACE REASON | DEEPER PURPOSE |
|----------------------------|--|
| Selling | To facilitate their decision-making |
| Pitching | To support their goals and introduce your real value to them |
| Business Update (internal) | To educate your people and give them context for how your decisions are shaping their lives |
| Teaching | To create clarity, stimulate thinking, and deepen understanding |
| Keynote | To awaken people to possibilities they didn't know existed. To inspire creativity and passion. |
| Preaching | To inspire, heal, and connect |

- Appreciate Your Audience**

One of the best ways to overcome anxiety and serve your audience is to focus on what you appreciate about them. What good things are they seeking? What fears and anxieties are you going to help them with? In some cases, it helps to place your hand on your chest and imagine sending golden light from your heart to the center of all their chests.

Remember, your audience may be disinterested, anxious, suspicious, guarded, or even angry depending on the context. Your job is to open them in the face of their own closure. The power to open and lead them starts with your capacity to love them where they are and call them beyond this.

TECHNIQUES AND TOOLS

Speaking in organizational settings is often associated by the experience of "Death by PowerPoint." They call them "bullet points" because they kill engagement. We'll get to slideshow rules later.

- Choose your slide show technology:**

I recommend either Keynote, if you have a mac or Prezi, which is an online tool. You can choose either Prezi Classic or Prezi Next. Prezi Classic is much more customizable, but more time consuming. Prezi Next is designed to be a simpler tool, easier to use, but much more difficult to customize.

2) **Consider Creative Constraints**

Think outside the Bullet Point

Here is a slide that a CFO built in preparation for a companywide update in a real estate development company:

Finance Update

- We hired a new Asset Manager
- We are aggressively pursuing new acquisitions
- We have established new capital partnerships
- We restructured our department

One way to move beyond a list of bullet points is to represent each point as a separate slide and to depict them with an image. Here's an example of how I took the first bullet point and turned it into a slide all its own.



Think in Story, Image, and Metaphor

In reality, the company did more than merely “Hire an Asset Manager.” This was actually their first foray into a new business function. They hired someone to build a business unit for a number of important reasons.

I redesigned the slide to tell the audience **why** this information matters to them, not just that it happened. Some part of this is an expression of This is now part of a larger story, not a data point.

Next, notice the magnifying glass. This is both an image and a metaphor I selected to try and help people in the company who don’t know finance understand what Asset Management does.

Don’t limit the number of slides

For some there is a desire to limit the number of slides in presentation in order to keep it short. But in point of fact, an audience is more engaged when they feel they are moving quickly through the material.

In that sense, sometimes breaking each bullet point into a separate slide can create a feeling of momentum. See the remaining bullet points depicted as separate slides below:

ACQUISITIONS IS PART OF BUSINESS SUSTAINABILITY

Supports becoming an
“Evergreen” company
through real estate cycles



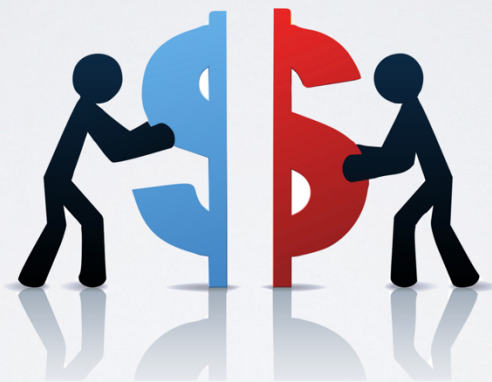
Expands our Property
Management Platform
into 3rd-Party Management

Creates new career
paths within the
company

NOW HIRING

Acquisitions

NEW STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS SUPPORT GROWTH



WE REORGANIZED TO BETTER SUPPORT YOU

COLLABORATION

CLARITY



ALIGNMENT



3) **Make Headlines Content Rich.**

The examples above reflect this point. Notice how each headline could be read without ever looking at the content of the slide and you would know what the slide was about. In fact, they hang together as a story.

When creating headlines, a good test is that you should be able to flip through an entire slide deck, read the headlines only, and understand exactly what is going on. The content under the headline is merely there to support the statement in the headline.

4) **Use the Element of Surprise**

One of the most powerful and effective ways to keep an audience engaged is to create the unexpected and keep them guessing. Provoke their curiosity and you will have them sitting on the edge of their seats wanting to see what happens next.

This can be done in a variety of ways. It could be a surprising statistic or factoid. Equally effective is to use an **open loop**. An open loop is when you introduce an idea or concept, but you don't resolve it until later. You might let them know you will resolve it later, or you might just leave them hanging on purpose.

In a larger context where stage craft is critical in holding attention, more dramatic means can be used. When I preached in front of a few thousand people, I would employ visual open loops.

For example, I once had a bubble machine running on stage producing bubbles the entire sermon and didn't reference it at all. People were naturally confused and intrigued all at the same time. It didn't matter what I said, people just wanted to know when I was going to explain the bubble maker.

At the very end of the sermon I used it as my primary illustration of the point I was making. This kind of open loop is powerful in holding attention.



Or it could be a wishing well...



Or an object covered in a cloak (a stove in this case)



Obviously, these examples don't apply in most contexts. But the underlying principle of creating intrigue and curiosity are very powerful motivators to help people to stay engaged.

Consider ways you could create that surprise and curiosity in your presentations and speaking. Are there open loops you can install early in a presentation and resolve them near the end?

Some examples include:

- Starting your presentation in an *unexpected place*
 - Perhaps on a completely unrelated to the subject and let them know you will tie it in later. (i.e. They say the New Zealand Rugby team...Now, that may seem unrelated, but I promise I will come back to it and show you how it applies to our topic...)
 - Start in the *middle or end* of the content and then tell them you will show them exactly how you got there (i.e. reveal all the findings or conclusions, especially if they are surprising or difficult to understand, then return to the beginning and take them on a journey)
- Use a startling research fact or two that creates a sense of need to know. Here you are looking for information that convinces them this is important to listen to what you have to say. This is about creating the need. Ask yourself, what would happen to them if they didn't learn this information?
- Start with WHY you are having the conversation in the first place. This can include outlining goals and objectives which is helpful. But consider what it might look like to connect what you're about to talk about to a much higher purpose (i.e. Either organizational purpose, or their sense of purpose, or even yours)
- Start with a story. This could be a person story or perhaps a parable or something much bigger. Stories are always more engaging than facts.