



DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING
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Victoria L. Crittenden, *Editor*

Presentation Skills

*Educate, Inspire, and
Engage Your Audience*

Michael Weiss



BUSINESS EXPERT PRESS

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Abstract

The popularity of the TED talk has raised the bar for public speaking and presentations. Audiences expect to be educated, inspired, and engaged whether they are sitting in a conference room or an auditorium. Yet too often presenters lack the skills to take command and deliver persuasive and entertaining pitches and presentations. Where most presenters fail is twofold: First, they often give into and accept their fear without fully understanding how their DNA is affecting their body and mind. Second, most people think the presentation is all about them and not the audience, which could not be further from the truth. The audience is the hero of the story and the presenter is their guide to take them on a journey. Like a one-act play, a presentation is not a meeting, it is a performance. And it is the job of the presenter to respect the audiences' wishes, wants, and needs. With the advent of smartphone the job of the presenter, which is to keep the audience's attention on them rather than on the tiny device in their hand, has become increasingly more difficult. The purpose of this book is to inspire you to take the next step in your presentation skills and practice. I simplify my theories and break it down into three areas: Identifying your unique style (Chapter 4), how to identify and work with different personalities in the audience (Chapter 5), and how to use tools such as PowerPoint, to create engaging and exciting slide decks (Chapter 7).

This book is intended to be used as a reference guide when you are creating a new presentation and figuring out how to deliver it to persuade the audience to take action. Whether you are a seasoned presenter, a CEO, a marketing manager, an Executive Director of a nonprofit, or a teacher, there are ideas, tips, and tricks within the pages of this book to help you better understand who you are and how to engage your audience.

Throughout the book are exercises to help you identify your own personal and unique style and practice by yourself or with others. Keeping with the theme of storytelling I share my own personal stories and anecdotes to illustrate my theories on how I became the seasoned presenter I am today.

Keywords

audience engagement, bullet points, fear of public speaking, keynote, pitching, PowerPoint, presentation skills, public speaking, slide decks, slides, storytelling, TED

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A recent survey stated that the average person's greatest fear is having to give a speech in public. Somehow this ranked even higher than death, which was third on the list. So, you're telling me that at a funeral, most people would rather be the guy in the coffin than have to stand up and give a eulogy.

—Jerry Seinfeld

CHAPTER 1

Why I Wrote This Book

Disclaimer: I love to perform. Whether it is presenting at a TEDx event, an industry conference, a pitch meeting, or a corporate event, I simply adore being on stage. It comes natural to me, and I have been performing since I was in the crib. I started playing in rock bands when I was 11 years old. By the time I was 14, I was playing all over Boston on the college circuit to crowds as large as 2,000 people. I am very comfortable on stage, and I truly believe that in every performing situation it is my responsibility to engage and entertain the audience. It is as simple as that. For many people it is not so simple. They are not comfortable on stage or in front of an audience. In fact, some people are downright frightened to speak in front of people. And it is becoming harder every day, mainly because of two things: The TED talk and the smartphone.

TED talks have set a bar that most people will never reach, yet audiences come to expect presentations to be TED worthy, even if the situation does not call for it. While there are thousands of TED talks that never make it to the TED website, the fact is that the TED talks we do see are the cream of the crop; these are talks given by some of the best presenters in the world. The smartphone is a totally different story. The smartphones that people hold in their hands have become the presenter's biggest obstacle because these can distract even the most engaged audience member. Whether they are checking e-mail, texting, or playing Candy Crush, every audience member is only a nanosecond away from losing interest in what you are saying. It is a huge task to try to bring them back once you have lost them to a text from their mother or their move on Scrabble.

Your first goal as a presenter is to be so engaging that you let the audience keep the smartphones where they belong—in pockets and purses.

Frankly, I think too many presenters are failing at doing just that. They do not take the time to create a presentation that goes beyond just

sharing data and information. Their presentations are flat, boring, and lack any kind of inspiration or call to action. Many of them are simply reporting and news casting, rather than taking a chance or quite simply—telling a story. Time and time again in this book, you will hear me saying that a presentation is not a meeting; it is a performance. Your job as a presenter is not to lecture; it is your job to engage and inspire. I want your audiences to leave the room educated and ready to take action.

While anyone who speaks, pitches, or presents can take advantage of *Presentation Elevation*, I wrote this book with ad agencies, web agencies, and creative types in mind. As the former CEO of a digital agency, it's what I know. Over the past 20 years, I have either listened to or given hundreds if not thousands of pitches, speeches, and presentations.

For presenters who, like myself, come alive onstage, there are just as many others who lack the skills to be effective while up on stage or in a conference room. That is where *Presentation Elevation* comes in. Perhaps you have read some of the excellent books out there on presentation skills. If you have not already, I strongly recommend reading *Resonate* by Nancy Duarte and *Presentation Zen* by Garr Reynolds. Nancy and Garr are brilliant and have inspired me to become a better presenter. In this book, you will build on what you have learned elsewhere and gain additional skills you need to transform your presentations. Like a great presentation, in this book, I will focus on a handful of ideas to pique your interest and get you thinking. It may feel at times that I am on rant, and, to be frank: I am. I am tired of the same old, and I am fed up with presenters who do not try. There is no reason a presentation cannot be engaging. There is also no reason you cannot become a better presenter; one who inspires your audience, challenges them to think and—most importantly—to take action.

Presentation Elevation is simple; anyone can elevate his or her presentation skills with a few pointers and some specific ideas—no matter how obvious they may be—to go *up* the path to improvement.

Included in this book are my opinions, some anecdotes, and suggestions to improve your presence, style, and presentation success. I applaud you for taking the initiative to become a better presenter. And I give you a standing ovation for accepting the fact that you are not perfect and

that there is room for improvement. Throughout the book, you will read many of my own personal stories that helped shape me to become the presenter I am. Each of these stories starts with what I believe are the most important six words a presenter can say: “Let me tell you a story.”

CHAPTER 2

Respect

When you are content to simply be yourself and don't care or compete, everybody will respect you.

—Lao Tzu

One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say.

—Bryant H. McGill

While you are reading this book through the eyes of a presenter, chances are you will be in the audience many more times in your life than you will be on stage. This is extremely important to remember because it puts everything into perspective. As an audience member you have wishes, wants, and needs. You have expectations to be educated, inspired, and engaged. And most importantly, you are human. You can be easily distracted, you have feelings and opinions, and sometimes you get bored. Knowing this as a presenter is critical because you have to respect the audience as if each member is just like you. I talk a lot about respect throughout the book because I believe it is the most important trait a speaker can possess. The more you respect your audience, the more you will hold their attention. The more you treat them the way you want to be treated, the better chance you have of enlightening them. Respecting the audience can be as simple as not going over your allocated time or as complex as choosing a subject matter that will motivate them. However you choose to do it, respect your audience and they will, in turn, respect you.

Quick Exercise #1

I want you to put this book down. Wait! Hold on! Do not put it down until I tell you what I want you to do! Find a random person in your

office, on the train, or the person seated next to you on the plane, and tell that person a story about the first time you went to Disneyland. If you have never been to Disneyland, tell them about the first rock concert you ever attended. The reason behind telling a personal story is because I want you to focus on *how* you tell it and not have to think about the content. So choose a story you have told 100 times; a story that is almost second nature.

As you tell the story, pay attention to how you feel. Nervous? Excited? Passionate? Are you able to weave a compelling tale or are you just stating facts? Take notice of the other person's body language and eyes. Does your listener seem interested? Bored? Did you get a laugh at the right time? An *ooh* or *ah* when you expected it? Did they ask you questions?

The objective with this exercise is to get a baseline on your storytelling ability and establish if you can engage an audience (even if it is one person) with a simple, personal story about yourself.

I perform this exercise all the time. It helps me to better read my audience and to know if I need to change up my story to make it more engaging. I begin all of my Presentation Elevation workshops with this exercise because it sets the bar for each participant because it shows them, in a matter of minutes, where they need to improve.

CHAPTER 3

First Things First

Most people are not good listeners. In fact, research has shown that the average person only listens at about 25 percent efficiency.¹ Twenty-five percent? What are they doing with the other 75 percent? This puts a lot of pressure on speakers and presenters. Knowing that your audience is more than likely not listening to anything that you are saying can be a tough hill to climb. Steven R. Covey said it best, “most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.”² We are all guilty of this; we are thinking about what we want to say rather than listening to the person talking to us. Think back to a recent meeting at work. Most likely you knew the agenda and topic at hand and chances are you went into the room armed with your laptop, some spreadsheets, and what you wanted to say, regardless of what anyone else in the room had to say. When others are talking, we are thinking about what we want to say. We all do this. I like to say, especially to my sons, “you may hear me, but you are not listening to me.”

Stop reading right now and write down what you are thinking about at this very moment. Is it about what you want for lunch? Or when you need to pick up the kids? Perhaps you are thinking about a post you saw on Facebook or what you want to do this weekend. The bottom line is that our minds are always working and thinking of the *next thing*. This is what every person in the audience is doing. They are either thinking about something else or maybe playing with their phone. Sometimes people’s minds go elsewhere. I call this a mental check out. How many times have you been in a meeting and you mentally check out for a minute or two? I know I do it and sometimes I get caught when someone asks me a question! We all do this and you, as a presenter, will never change this, but you need to be aware of it and use it the next time you get up in front of a group of people to present.

How many times have you felt that you were not truly heard or better yet, someone else has told you that they did not feel heard? This is not uncommon. Just ask my wife. If the television is on, I simply cannot listen to her. I hear her, but I do not listen. This is what your audience is doing. The good thing is that there are many ways you can encourage your audience to pay better attention and become engaged. That is what a majority of this book is about. But I want to be clear from the get-go; most of your audience is going to have a hard time listening to you. Now many of you are saying to yourselves, “wait a second, I am a great listener,” but with all due respect, you are not. You may *hear* really well, but that is very different than *listening*. By definition, *listening* means to take notice of and act on what someone says, where to *hear* means to perceive or apprehend by the ear. Very different definitions of what we perceive to be the same thing.

Let us say that you are speaking to a group of 20 people. We can agree with almost 100 percent certainty that there is one person speaking and 19 people listening. So, in reality, whenever you are presenting there is *more* listening in the room than there is talking. We can also assume that a majority of the people in the room can hear you, but are they listening? Are they taking notice of what you are saying or are their ears just taking in the sound? Let us take this a step further. Each listener has his or her own filters turned on and if they are actually listening to what you are saying they are doing it very differently. A filter is defined as a device to separate impurities from the primary material.³ It typically applies to solids, liquids, and gasses. But it can be applied to how we listen. When we listen we do so with an opinion, subjectivity, and our own agenda. Our listening filters channel the information we hear and apply feelings, emotions, assumptions, and opinions, and this alters the speaker’s intentions. So when you present, the words may leave your mouth with your own personal meaning, yet when they are *set free* they are listened to and processed by your audiences’ personal filters and thus they take on many different meanings.

Our beliefs or values come into play when we are listening to a speaker. For example, when the CEO of a large retail company presents the plan for the company’s Christmas sale, many people in the audience, who do not celebrate Christmas might be thinking, “What about Hanukkah or

Kwanzaa?” and they may form an opinion about the CEO or simply lose interest and pick up their mobile phone to check Facebook.

Again, this is not something you can change. You cannot tell your audience to turn off their filters. However, by knowing your audience—their demographics, interests, motivators, and so on—you can make some general assumptions of what filters they may have, and this will help you carefully choose your words, imagery, and message so that when your words do pass through their filters you will strike the right chord with them and keep them on the path you intended. If you strike the wrong chord, you run the risk of them turning on you or worse, grabbing their phone and losing interest. Some of the most popular filters include:⁴

- Beliefs
- Values
- Attitudes
- Personality
- Culture
- Prejudices
- Interests
- Expectations
- Assumptions
- Memories
- Images past and future
- Past experience

Take a look at this list and apply it to yourself. Do you use any of these filters? Do your beliefs or values play a role in how you listen? What about expectations? So often, our audiences walk into the room with great expectations—they expect to learn something or be entertained. I know that as a creative person, I typically use the images filter and my brain takes in the words and translates them into mini movies in my mind. This can go one of two ways. The imagery can help me to better understand what the presenter is conveying or I get lost in my own cinematic brain and I am off on my own journey, which may not be fair to the presenter, but at the same time they need to pull me back into the room. Sometimes

our distractions can go beyond our own mind and seem to be out of our own control—like someone coughing or a tray of drinks falling.

External Distractions

External distractions are out of our control—but they happen all the time and as a presenter you have to be prepared to deal with them. I once pitched a billion-dollar dog food company one hour before game six of the World Series in a boardroom that looked out over the baseball stadium where the game was going to be played. Captive audience? No. External distractions? Oh yeah! Everyone in the room was wearing baseball jersey and could not wait to get out the room! Sometimes we are all like Dug the talking dog from the movie *Up*. We are focused but as soon as we see a squirrel we lose our focus. Our audiences are the same way. Someone leaves to go to use the restroom and suddenly half of the crowd is thinking of doing the same thing. The air conditioning turns off and some members of the audience get hot, a truck drives by, a mobile phone rings, and someone laughs in the hallway. All of these are external distractions that we, as presenters, cannot control or change. Being aware of them and their effects on our audience is important.

Almost everyone in the room is aware of an external distraction. The people who are not are the people you have already lost to their smartphones or got up and left. When there is an external distraction, you can do what they do in television and movies and break the fourth wall—meaning to directly address the audience as if you are one of them. Woody Allen broke the fourth wall several times in his movie *Annie Hall*, as he explained, “because I felt many of the people in the audience had the same feelings and the same problems. I wanted to talk to them directly and confront them.”⁵ So when something happens out of your control, do not ignore it; make it part of your presentation by acknowledging it. By acknowledging the distraction you let the audience know that you too were distracted by it. Sometimes external distractions seem bigger than they are, because everyone is thinking about them but no one is acknowledging them. By verbally acknowledging it to the audience, you all share the experience and therefore diminish its size and presence. This is respecting the audience for what they are: human and easily distracted.

Trigger Words

If I tell you to *not* think about a pink elephant right now, what are you thinking about? A pink elephant, right? It was nearly impossible to not think about it. This is called the Ironic Process Theory, which states that deliberate attempts to suppress certain thoughts make them more likely to surface.⁶ This comes into play when you are presenting. Your audience is listening to you; they are engaged. But you say something, a single word or a sentence, and their minds wander and suddenly they are *somewhere else*. How many times have you been in a meeting when you mentally check out for a few seconds or minutes? Chances are it was from something the presenter said. It could be as simple as one word. It happens to me all the time. One word and I am gone.

I call these trigger words: Words or sentences that trigger thoughts in your audiences' minds that you did not want them to think about. You could say something as simple as “and that is why customers are not converting as well as last holiday season,” and half your audience will start think about their upcoming holiday shopping. Even a single word, like coffee, will force people to think about their next cup or the fact that have yet to enjoy their first cup.

There is no way to change this behavior or fix it. It is going to happen no matter what you say or do. However, knowing this will help you prepare what you want to say and keep you away from certain trigger words that will distract rather than engage.

Nonverbal Communication

When I lead Presentation Elevation workshops for organizations, the first thing I do is go around the room and have each participant tell the group what they love and hate about presenting. It is always a lively conversation and people are rarely nervous. Why? Because they are stating their opinion—something they believe in. Plus they are sitting down and they feel safe in their seats and at the table. The next exercise I have them do is to come to the front of the room and tell a personal story. This is a totally different situation. I am asking them not only to get up and stand in front of the class but also to be vulnerable and open to judgment and criticism.

I can literally see the anxiety on their faces and in their body languages as I watch them make the 10-foot walk from their seat to the front of the room. It is fascinating to watch how their emotions impact their physiologies and body languages. What happens in that span of 10 feet? Why do they change, sometimes so drastically? I looked into it and discovered that it comes down to thousands of years of evolution. Deep rooted in our DNA is a response that overtakes our minds and bodies when we are faced with stress: It is called the Fight or Flight syndrome,⁷ and while it affects us internally, our reactions are visible to the audience and this can be very distracting to both you as a presenter and everyone else in the room. Your body language is just as important as the words you speak.

Some experts say that 93 percent of our communication is nonverbal.⁸ Whatever the number, the fact is that the way we use our bodies, hands, and faces says more than the actual words we communicate. In the next section of the book, I am going to focus on your style—how you look, move, talk, and so on. What is important to realize is that the way you act on stage is going to say a lot more than you think.

Albert Mehrabian, famous for his 7%–38%–55% Rule, breaks down how an audience reacts to a speaker's emotions and feelings as 7 percent verbal, 38 percent vocal, and 55 percent facial.⁹ Mehrabian believes that our voice intonation and cadence, in addition to how we use our face (eye movement, smiles, etc.), says more than the words we actually say when we present our feelings and emotions to an audience. This is critical because when you present, your job is to urge your audience to make a change and take action. Nothing will convince an audience more than your passion, which is fed from your feelings and emotions. The more honest you are the more you respect your audience, because that is what they want—honesty, passion, and vulnerability—it makes you human and that is all they ask for. But what if you do not feel so strongly about what you are presenting? People who give TED talks typically believe in what they are presenting because it is about their lives. But what about an analyst at a big retail company? What if she does not feel passionately about last week's numbers? How can she engage an audience if she herself is not engaged? Can she fake it? Is that possible?

Amy Cuddy, a social psychologist at Harvard, believes that we can fake it. Cuddy believes that if you act powerfully you begin to believe

you are powerful. She believes that your body language influences and shapes who you are. Basically: Be it and the audience will believe it.¹⁰ As an audience member, how often do you judge or form an opinion about a presenter before they mutter one word. From the way they dress to the moment they walk to the podium we are judging. Just as we listen with filters, we watch with filters as well. We make judgment calls based on body language all the time.

Cuddy believes that the way we stand and move not only influences the audience but also influences ourselves as well. The way you stand and move in front of an audience will affect how you feel about yourself. For instance, when you stand with your hands clasped low across your body, you display a powerless posture. You are making yourself small, like you do not matter and what you say will make minimal impact. The audience will pick up on this and it will work against you. In contrast, when you stand up straight and use your hands appropriately, you look confident and powerful. Your audience will take notice and, in return, this will make you feel strong and influential.

Amy did a sizeable amount of research on body language and posture and, in the end, she learned that if you fake it, meaning actually fake feeling powerful, you will literally change your body chemistry and begin to feel powerful. Cuddy is simply suggesting that we should stand in a powerful pose before we do something that is scary or makes us anxious. I found this fascinating and decided to try it myself.

Recently, I was presenting to a group of seasoned ad executives—people who had been successfully pitching ad campaigns to clients for decades. Who was I to teach them how to present better? Needless to say, I was concerned; rather, I was scared. I got to the meeting early—as I always do, but more on that later—and my nerves were more intense than usual. Butterflies? No. There were 100 angry moths in my belly. My hands were clammy and my body was shaky. I remembered what Amy had said in her TED Talk, “Fake it ‘til you make it.” She truly believes that if we fake feeling powerful, we will start to feel powerful. So I went out to the parking lot and stood in power poses for five minutes. People must have thought I was insane. There I was, one minute looking like Usain Bolt after he set the record for the 100-meter dash—arms held high in victory—then like Bill Clinton the Democratic National Convention is

2012—talking and using my hands to make a point—and finally, and I am ashamed to admit this, I stood like Wonder Woman—head held high and hands on hips. After five minutes, I felt strong and ready. My hands were dry and I felt steady on my feet. The moths were gone and replaced by happy, pretty butterflies.

What I learned that morning was that Amy is right. We can influence our own sense of power and worth by acting the part. Our minds are extremely powerful and influential and we can change our physical feelings by simply changing our posture.

When we speak all eyes are on us. The audience is looking right at you. They are waiting for you to say something, anything that will engage them. But before you actually utter your first words, you either stand up from where you are sitting, walk onto the stage, or if you are sitting down make some sort of movement to call attention. Your body movement in that few seconds sets the stage—so to speak.

When you are presenting to an audience, you are doing more than just communicating with your voice. Your body language is communicating as well. Social psychologists call this nonverbal communication. How you stand, use your hands, your face, and your body can say as much as the words you are speaking.

Picture this. It is 9:00 a.m. and you have to present to your boss and a team of six people at 10:00 a.m. You are prepared. Your slides are in order; your handouts printed and stacked neatly on your desk. You have rehearsed and figured out answers to possible curveballs the audience will most likely throw at you. You are ready! So why are you getting nervous? Your heart is racing a bit, some sweat is forming on your brow, and your hands are shaking a little. Getting nervous is normal. In fact, if you do not get even a little nervous before you present, then you are not human. It is normal to get some butterflies. But, this level of anxiety is a bit high. The reason? You are thinking about the presentation too much and your body is releasing cortisol—better known as the stress hormone. Rather than shaking it off, you get more and more anxious. At 9:55 a.m. you enter the conference room. Your boss is already there as are the other six people. Your anxiety level is skyrocketing. Your heart is racing, you are breathing faster, and you are really sweating now. You want to run away, but you know you cannot. Why are you feeling this way? Adrenaline, the

fight or flight hormone, has just kicked in at high gear. Forget about the cortisol, your mind is telling you one thing: get away or fight! You take a deep breath and begin your presentation. Your voice is quivering and your hands are shaking. But you get through it. By 11:00 a.m., the meeting is over and all you want to do is take a nap! Your body and mind are wrecked and they are the ones to blame.

Cortisol and adrenaline can be your best friends or your worst enemies. Your body secretes these hormones because you are facing a stressful situation and you need to cope. This is a biological response that is rooted deep in your DNA and dates back to the time when your stress was focused on more important things: like not getting eaten by a saber tooth tiger. While we do not face those kinds of risks anymore, we do have stressful situations and our bodies will react the same. Your DNA does not discriminate between being chased by a lion or presenting your ideas to a rapt audience.

I have coached hundreds of speakers and presenters and the number one pain point for many of them is the quivering voice and shaking hands. In fact, I am often faced with the question, “How can you help me to stop shaking?” My response is always the same, “it is not your feelings of nervousness or anxiety that is making you shake; it is your stress hormones.” The anxiety you feel is a result of your cortisol and adrenaline racing through your veins.

There are a couple of tricks that can help you calm nerves. In the story I just told, we oftentimes begin to exhibit the nervous rush before we actually take to the stage or start the meeting. Hours before the event we can get butterflies in our stomach and start sweating and shaking. If this is a normal response for you, I would suggest these three tips to curb the initial cortisol spike:

1. Get more sleep—the more fatigued you are, the easier it is for cortisol to run its course.
2. Don’t drink anything with caffeine—sounds like common sense, but the truth is that stress can pollute the body. We want to keep it as clean as possible and get rid of as many stimulants as we can.
3. Exercise the day of the event—This is a great way to detoxify the body and clean out any stress pollutants.

Remember, the surge of cortisol is to prepare your body to deal with an immediate danger. Our blood pressure rises and our muscles tighten because we are in danger. Yet in our modern lives we are often not faced with the threat of being eaten or killed, but our body reacts the same way no matter the stress. Although some people may beg to differ, presenting to their boss is scarier than being chased by a wolf!

So your cortisol has kicked in an hour before the meeting and you are starting to be anxious. That is not where this story ends; it is only the beginning. Often your adrenaline rush will kick in 10 minutes before you have to present. This is when your mind is saying, “Run!” But you cannot run and you are faced with carrying on while thinking about the fact that you are sweating and panting. What happens when you think about sweating? You sweat more! It is a ruthless cycle. As the adrenaline takes over the cortisol, your muscles get twitchy and your voice starts to waver. Your breath gets rapid and you start to sweat from all places. For many of us, this is a nightmare. Remember the opening quote from Jerry Seinfeld? Many of us would rather be dead at this moment than have to get up and speak to the audience.

Let Me Tell You a Story

In 2011 I was asked to speak at a TEDx event. I had six minutes. The day before the event, I was informed that the opening speaker had to back out and I was going on first. They wanted me to get the crowd excited for a day filled with amazing speakers. Ten minutes before I was to go on, my adrenaline started to surge. I made the mistake of looking out to see the crowd. The room was packed—over 1,000 people in the audience ready to be inspired and engaged. My hands started to shake; my heart was racing and I had the sudden urge to run away. Being a speaker coach, I was well aware of what was happening, but stress hormones do not react to reason. I had to calm them and burn them off. I walked to an area behind the stage curtain, dropped to the floor and did 20 pushups. I then did 50 jumping jacks. I used the adrenaline the way it wanted to be used—for movement. I then stood still for two minutes, closed my eyes and did a deep breathing exercise. By the time I hit the stage, I was pumped and

ready to rock the room! I may have been sweating, but it was not from my stress hormones—it was from my exercise.

Here are some tips to help you when you feel the adrenaline rush come over you:

1. Do 20 jumping jacks and 10 push ups.
2. Go outside and sprint across the parking lot four times.
3. Walk a few flights of stairs.
4. If you have the time, take a 20-minute walk or jog around the block.

Any exercise to quickly burn off your stress hormones will help. Try a few and find the one that works for you.

If you are not able to do anything physical, then I suggest doing some deep breathing exercises. Dr. Andrew Weil created my favorite exercise. It is called the 4-7-8 (or relaxing breath) exercise.¹¹ It is very simple and takes very little time to do and master. Dr. Weil suggests you sit with your back straight. Place the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth just behind your front teeth and leave it there for the entire exercise. The only real challenge with this is that you will be inhaling through your nose and exhaling through your mouth. Go ahead and try to breathe out of your mouth with your tongue on the roof of your mouth. It's hard, I know. A trick is to literally “blow out” forcefully. Dr. Weil suggests this order for the exercise:

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of *four*.
- Hold your breath for a count of *seven*.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of *eight*.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

You may want to find a quiet place where you are alone due to the fact that you will be making the whooshing sound when you exhale. Doing

it on a crowded subway may get you some funny looks. The key to this exercise is that the exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important.

Weil says this exercise is a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. It is subtle when you first try it but gains in power with repetition and practice. You can do it every day as much as you want. He suggests that you do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month. You can up it to eight breaths when you get into shape. If you feel a little lightheaded when you first breathe this way, do not be concerned; it will pass. Once you develop this technique by practicing it every day, it will be a very useful tool that you will always have with you. Use this exercise before a big meeting or when you have to present. It does not matter if you feel anxious or not. The goal of this exercise is to focus on your breath and fight off your stress hormones. By taking deep breaths, you are cleansing your body of your stress hormone pollutants.

When it comes to stress, you need to reframe it and channel the energy in a different way, because it is not going to go away. If you do not learn to deal with it, then it could take over and I want you to take control of it before it overtakes you. At its core what you are feeling is nervous. That is what most people say when I ask them what they are feeling. They say, “I get nervous before I have to speak.” The challenge is that the word *nervous* carries a negative connotation. And for good reason—when we are nervous we feel uneasy and apprehensive. Yet at the same time, feeling anxious and nervous is the same as feeling excited. All three are high arousal states of being, where feeling calm is a low arousal state. It is too difficult to tell your mind and body to *just be calm*. Your hormones and nervous system do not work that way. Remember, these systems are acting on thousands of years of evolution—your DNA is not rational. So when you are nervous, and anxious you are aroused. But we do not feel excited; we do not think of this situation as a positive one. Rather than try to calm down, reframe your mind. Because you cannot simply tell your hormones to stop. Alison Brooks, a professor at Harvard, suggests that you simply say, “I am excited” rather than “I am nervous.”¹² Tell yourself how to feel. Label the feeling as a positive one and not a negative one. Say it out loud right now, “I am excited!” It is kind of hard to say it without a small smile. Like Amy Cuddy, Alison is suggesting we fake it. Tell yourself that the

feeling you are feeling is not anxiety but excitement. Alison simply wants us to re-label our anxiety. Do not be nervous—be excited. Use the nervous energy to your advantage. Own it. Take control of it. When you do, your body movements will slow down and be more controllable. Rather than your hands shaking and looking unnatural, you will be able to use them constructively.

Hands

We all use hand gestures when we speak. Think about the last time you were talking on the phone—chances are you used your hands to emphasize a point and there was no one in front of you. It was natural to use your hands when you speak. Blind people, who have never had sight, use hand gestures when they speak. It has been known for over 30 years that apes use hand gestures to communicate with each other. It is in our DNA to use our hands when we are talking, telling a story, or making a point. Hand gestures are so natural that we rarely think about how we are going to use our hands when we talk except when it comes time to speak in front of a group of people. When was the last time you worried about your hands when you went out to dinner with a group of friends? Zero times. But five minutes before you are about to present to your coworkers, you suddenly start to wonder about those things at the end of your arms. “What do I do with my hands?” is the number one question my clients and students ask me. I always reply with, “What are you doing with them right now?”

A speech-related gesture is an outward expression of an inward condition.¹³ This is extremely important because I want you to remain authentic with your hand movements. In the realm of respecting the audience, the more authentic you are the more they will believe you. If you are shy or more reserved, then big hand gestures will seem unnatural and out of place. If you are more extroverted and typically the life-of-the-party type of person, clasping your hands, or leaving them down by your sides will confuse your audience. Stay true to yourself and use your hands the way you always do.

Hand gestures play a major role for any presentation. While they help make your point and engage the audience, they are just as important for

you as a presenter. Research has shown that hand gestures help us think when we talk. They enable us to work through the challenge when we are “looking for the right thing to say.”¹⁴ Think back to a time when you were asked a tough question. What did you do with your hands? Chances are—you put one hand on your chin, or you scratched your head while you were thinking of the answer. I can say with near 100 percent confidence you did not leave them at your sides or on the table. Gesturing with our hands kicks our minds into gear and helps us figure things out with movement and thinking working together. A hand gesture during a presentation can help you make a point more dramatic and at the same time help you figure out the best way to say it.

We know that children who are asked to gesture in certain ways while learning new tasks learn better than children who are asked not to gesture. Considering that gesturing benefits children while learning, it is possible that gesturing plays a role in the development of fluid intelligence, perhaps by simulating action. If this proves to be true, children might be able to literally give themselves a hand in their own development by gesturing more¹⁵

There is no better speaker who uses his hands than Bill Clinton. His best visual aids are his hands. Watch any speech he has given in the past 10 years and you will see how he uses hand gestures to make his points, share his emotions, and excite the audience. Overall, his arm movements are open and wide, relaying an image of accessibility and authenticity.¹⁶ He never uses his hands to push the audience away. His hands make him seem welcoming, animated, and confident.

Clinton is probably one of the top five orators of the last century. But he was not always as good as he is now. In 1988, he was asked to introduce and nominate Michael Dukakis at the Democratic National Convention. He was given 15 minutes, yet he took 35. It was a perfect example of disrespecting the audience. The audience wanted Dukakis but Clinton was blind to it. He literally droned on and on. In fact, the audience tried to boo him off the stage. The only time they cheered and clapped was when he said, “In conclusion...” It was a perfect example of a speaker thinking he was Luke Skywalker when he needed to be Yoda (see Chapter 4). If you

take the time to watch the speech from 1988 and then the speech Clinton gave at the 2012 Democratic National Convention you will clearly see the difference. It is the same man, same cadence, but the confidence level in 2012 is light years ahead of 1988. In 1988, Clinton used his hands, but oftentimes his hands were clasped on the podium or he was pointing and using the “Clinton Thumb.” Not very warm and welcoming gestures. He comes off a little lost—a small fish in a massive pond. Flash forward to 2012 where Clinton spoke for close to 45 minutes and never once lost the attention of the crowd. Of course he was president for eight years and clearly had matured—that helped boost his confidence. But it is the way he uses his hands, his eyes, and his body that allow him to have total command and control of the audience and the situation. Bill Clinton exudes passion and confidence. Mehrabian’s 7-38-55 rule comes into play with Clinton because he uses his hands and face better than anyone in the business; and they play as important role as the words he speaks. Without his nonverbal communication Clinton would not be as confident and convincing as he is today.

There are many ways to use your hands when you speak. In “Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance,” Adam Kendon of the University of Pennsylvania explains what a difference the palm’s direction makes.

Palms Down

Gestures from the *palm down* family are used in contexts where something is being denied, negated, interrupted, or stopped, whether explicitly or by implication. Kendon is saying that when you *push down* with your hands you are implying that something needs to be stopped or the results may not be that good.

When a speaker says something like, “We have to stop this behavior” or “I’ve got some bad news,” an accompanying hand gesture where the palms are faced down would be appropriate.

Open Hands

Gestures from the *palm up* family are used in contexts where the speaker is offering, giving or showing something, or requesting the reception of

something. This is when the speaker is offering new ideas or asking the audience to join him or her in what he or she is saying.¹⁷

There are a number of hand gestures that have many meanings, for instance, putting your hands on your chest. Clinton uses this gesture a lot and it is quite obvious in its meaning. A speaker should use this when speaking about something personal or close to the heart. Using a chopping motion can be seen as negative and aggressive. Rolling your hands in circles may indicate you are struggling at articulating your point. Finger pointing can be seen as hostile. The point I am making is that we use our hands to help us to engage the audience and get our ideas across. At the end of the day, you need to remain authentic and not over do it. So try things out. Practice. Ask friends and colleagues to give you feedback on how you use your hands. The goal is to remain natural and use your hands the way you would when you are telling your grandmother a story.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, I never want you to *not* use your hands. It looks unnatural to speak for any amount of time with your hands on our hips, lap, or table with absolutely no movement. If you do not use your hands at all, that may be perceived as indifference. Your audience may feel that you do not care about what you are talking about.¹⁸

And the last thing I want you to do is hide your hands in pockets or behind a podium. When you hide your hands, you are showing distrust, and that you are uncomfortable or do not want to be speaking in the first place. It may seem subtle, but the audience will pick up on it and look at you through their filters. By hiding your hands you are not being 100 percent truthful and that will gain you no respect from the audience.

What to Do with Your Hands When Waiting?

There are two situations when you are waiting to speak. The first is when someone is introducing you and you are standing on stage. The second is when you are part of an ensemble and it is not your turn. It can feel awkward just standing there because chances are the audience is watching you. The best pose is to stand with your hands clasped behind your back. It shows respect for the current speaker while putting you in a relaxed and confident pose.

Overdoing It

Now that I have talked about how to use your hands, you have to be careful not to overdo it. Using hand gestures just for the sake of them will seem obvious and awkward. Making grandiose gestures, such as big wide arcs or “jazz hands,” will feel contrived. Like my mother used to tell me, “everything is fine in moderation.” I do not think she was talking about hand gestures, but you get the idea.

Quick Exercise #2

The next time you have lunch with a good friend (it has to be a good friend because you will be asking for honest feedback), ask him or her to give you feedback on how you used your hands when talking. Ask your friend to make hash marks on a piece of paper every time you use your hands during a two-minute period. Have him or her give you descriptions of your hand gestures. Did you make circles? Point? Chop? Sweep? Clasp? The goal here is to find out if you are using your hands constructively and how often. Ask your friend if you use your hands in a nervous way, such as touching your nose or playing with your hair. I want you to get an idea on not just how many times you use your hands, but also if you use them in a positive way. The second time you do this, have your friend pull out their smartphone and film you for two minutes, so you can actually see how you use your hands.

Let Me Tell You a Story

I was once coaching a TED talker and asked her to do a dry run before a group of other TED talkers. She was a seasoned speaker and very confident, however, when she spoke she would touch her hair. In fact, during her 12-minute rehearsal she touched her hair 32 times. That is every 22 seconds; it was incredibly distracting. When she finished I asked her how many times she touched her hair. Her response, “I was touching my hair?” She had no idea she was doing it. It was completely unconscious and most likely a habit she had for years. She and I worked for weeks on how else she could use her hands. It proved to be challenging because now

her entire focus was centered on her hands. My first exercise was for her to sit on her hands and tell a personal story. She was completely uncomfortable and fidgeted a lot, but the point was for her to realize how poorly she was using her hands. The next exercise was to give her TED talk in front of a mirror so she could watch how she used her hands. We did a lot of work and eventually she was able to use her hands constructively and give more meaning to a very personal story. I am happy to say that she only touched her hair two times during her TED talk. The moral of this story is that so much of our hand gestures are from habits and unconscious. What I want is for you to make it a more conscious effort and eventually better and more effective hand gestures will become second nature.

Eyes

It has been said that the eyes are the windows to your soul. They let people in without you even saying a word. Think about the last time you saw a little kid get hurt and before they can even cry you can read their emotions through their eyes? Or what about the last time you saw someone roll his or her eyes when you made a suggestion on where to go for lunch? How did that make you feel? You can tell a lot about a person by the way they look at you, or better yet how they do not look at you. When you are presenting to an audience, your eyes can say quite a bit about what you are talking about and if you are being truthful, passionate, or dishonest.

I am big fan of making eye contact with as many members of the audience as possible. It allows me to make a connection with every single person in the room. Sims Wyeth, a presentation coach suggests that, “focusing your eyes helps you concentrate.” When your eyes wander, they take in random, extraneous images that are sent to your brain, slowing it down.¹⁹ Remember back in Chapter 1, when I was discussing how external distractions could make it hard for the audience to concentrate? Well, the same thing goes for you as the presenter. The more you look around, the easier it will be to get distracted and lose your train of thought.

Eye contact can be uncomfortable for both parties. Some people just don't like to be looked at—especially from someone on stage. If you feel someone getting uncomfortable then look away. Remember we need to respect the audience—do not make people feel uncomfortable. Put

yourself in their seat. Do you like it when someone on stage looks directly at you? Maybe you do and maybe you do not. At least be respectful and pick up on the audience's cues and look away when someone starts to fidget when your eyes stay on them too long.

On the other hand, as a presenter you have to make eye contact with a good portion of the audience. If you look at your slides or the ground or just one person, the audience is going to think you have no interest in them or that you simply do not want to be in the room. A good trick is to scan the room as you speak and make eye contact with someone every 10 seconds. You can look away. In fact, you should, because you do not want to stare at anyone—you just want to make a connection. When we are talking with someone one-on-one, we will look at him or her for seven to ten seconds before we glance away. This is a natural response. The listener actually looks at the speaker much more than speaker looks at the listener. This is a great rule to use when presenting. The reality is that the audience is looking right at you. It is your job to look back but in a natural and authentic fashion.

Eye contact is actually a very good tool for the presenters who are nervous when speaking in front of large groups of people. It sounds counter-intuitive, but making eye contact with one person out of a room of 50 is a great way to ease your nerves because as soon as you make eye contact you will be having a one-on-one conversation with that person and the other 49 people will melt away.

I am speaking from an American perspective in regard to eye contact. Other parts of the world have different ideas and customs when it comes to making eye contact. The United States, UK, and Australia are basically the same when it comes to eye contact. In Japan, making eye contact can be deemed inappropriate. Often times in Africa and Latin American countries, direct eye contact can come off as aggressive and confrontational.²⁰ Please do research before you find yourself speaking or presenting in different countries or to different cultural groups in America. Again, as the presenter it is your job to give your audience the upmost and deserving respect. Do your homework and you will come off as a great presenter who understands the audience.

Much of what I have discussed to this point is about how your body plays a major role in your presentations. From dealing with your stress

hormones to how you use your hands and eyes, your body can give clues to the audience about how you are feeling and whether you believe in what you are saying. So much about how you are perceived and in the end, judged, is based on your physical being. In the next section, I am going to focus on you and how your personal style will take you to the next level as a presenter.

CHAPTER 4

You

Before I start talking about you, let me make sure we get something straight. When you are presenting, it is NOT about you. Too many presenters believe that when they get up in front of a crowd, big or small, it is all about them. It is their time to shine because all eyes are on them. This could not be farther from the truth. When you are on stage you are there to serve, educate, inspire, and engage. You are not the hero; the audience is the hero. To put it simpler and in the words of Nancy Duarte, the speaker is Yoda and the audience is Luke Skywalker.¹ Yoda was the teacher. His job was simple: He mentored and taught Luke to go on a journey to change who he was. Yoda helped Luke to realize his potential and led him to greatness. Every member of the audience will go through some sort of transformation when you present. Some will feel inspired to change something in their lives. Maybe you will have convinced them to hire your agency or buy your product, or maybe they will learn something new about themselves, their job, or the world. Whatever change, the fact is that your presentation will influence a new behavior. This is the basis of Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*. There are hundreds of books out there focused on *The Hero's Journey* (and I suggest you read at least one of them), so I will keep this short. Mr. Campbell puts it perfectly,

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.²

In this quote, YOU are the *fabulous force* that takes the audience on a *mysterious adventure*. How awesome is that? When you present you get to take people on a journey that will change them in one way or another. When I first realized this, it took an enormous amount of pressure off me

as a presenter and performer. Sure, people look at me and have expectations, but not for the reasons I once thought. They look at me because they want to experience something new, fresh, and exciting. They want to be entertained. They seek inspiration to make a decision. They want to be persuaded down a new path.

Aristotle once said that one of the most important parts of a speech is to produce persuasion.³ If you work in sales or business development, nearly 100 percent of your presentations are pitches. It is your job to get the audience to choose you over the other guy. After a job of 20 years of selling, I can tell you from my experience that nine out of ten times I won the pitch not because of WHAT I was selling but HOW I sold it. When you are presenting it comes down to three things: passion, persuasion, and respect. Passion is about emotion—how you feel and how you transfer that feeling to the audience. Emotions are contagious. When you truly feel happy, the audience will feel happy. When you feel excited, the audience is right there with you. Seth Godin said that communication is the transfer of emotion⁴—and he is right. When you get up to present, you have an opportunity to change the way the audience feels. That is a powerful position to be in. And at the end of the day, it is all about your presentation style. Persuasion is about getting the audience to take a chance with you—to join you on a journey of change. Whether you are selling something or telling a story on the TED stage, you are there to persuade the audience to trust you and believe what you believe. Once you do that, you are no longer working alone. You and the audience are now working together toward a common goal. TED conferences have become the *crème de la crème* of speaking opportunities. Whether you are on the TED stage in Vancouver or on one of the many smaller TEDx conferences around the world, it is a privilege and honor to be there. It's like making it onto a major league baseball team—only the best make it to TED.

Let Me Tell You a Story

I was the bass player and lead vocalist for a band in Boston for 10 years. We played everywhere they let us play. Needless to say, we played all the time—we were tight and frankly, very good. One Friday night we were

playing a Fraternity party at Tufts University. The room was packed and the audience was rowdy. We were halfway through our first set (we typically played three one-hour sets), when I realized I just was not playing as well as I usually did. I was missing chord changes and forgetting lyrics. I was frustrated and it was showing. The crowd had not yet noticed, and before they did, I needed to do something fast. It was my job to entertain them and keep the party going for the next three hours. Rather than worrying about my playing, I changed my focus to my stage presence. I went wild—jumping around, dancing on and off the stage, and doing call-and-response with the crowd. It was so much fun and the crowd dug it. My mood enhanced their mood. At 2:00 a.m., when we were packing up, a guy came up to me and said, “That was the best bass playing I have ever seen.” I knew at that precise moment that my emotions were contagious that night. He had no idea how poorly I played, and it did not matter. My style that evening was to have fun and go nuts and the crowd obliged.

Your Unique Style

Style is defined as: a particular manner or technique by which something is done, created, or performed. *Unique* is defined as: being the only one.⁵

As a presenter it is critical that you identify and accept your own unique style. As I have said before, the way you present will be as important as the words you speak. Yet, until you identify your style, you will not be capable of focusing on what you want to say, because you will be concentrating on your voice, clothes, the way you stand, your hands, and so on. An important thing to learn is that the way you look, speak, and act can have an enormous effect on the audience. In fact, if you look and act uncomfortable, then the audience will pick up on that and pay more attention to your physical presence and not the content of your presentation. Two weeks later, they will remember how you looked rather than what you said.

Think back to a time you saw a presenter who was uncomfortable on stage. Maybe she was shifting from one foot to another and her hands were shaking. Perhaps, it was a younger man dressed in t-shirt and jeans while the entire audience was in suits. Maybe it was a woman who waved her arms in big circles and talked quickly. Chances are you were focused

on their physical traits and had no idea what they were talking about because their style was so distracting.

It can be a huge challenge to identify your style. Are you cool and calm? Or, are you animated and excitable? Perhaps you are more casual and less formal in your style of dress. Whatever it is, you need to identify it and accept it so that you can move on and focus on what you want to say. Oftentimes other people and their styles influence us. As Sir Isaac Newton said, “We stand on the shoulders of giants.”⁶ There is nothing wrong with borrowing from people you admire. It could be a politician, a former teacher, a friend or relative, or even a rock star.

Let Me Tell You a Story

When I was 11 years old, I picked up my first guitar and I knew at that moment I wanted to be a rock star. The Who was my favorite band, so I modeled my playing after Pete Townshend—the swinging arms, the jumping, the singing—I did everything he did. I studied him—read books, watched movies, and did everything I could to emulate HIS style. All the while, I was ignoring the evolution of my own personal style. Truth be told, I would get extremely nervous when I would perform in front of audiences, so I would become Pete, rather than showing my true self; I was hiding behind his persona, HIS unique style. It became a mechanism for many years, which eventually caught up to me, as I started writing and performing my own songs. It did not seem right to act like someone else when I was playing my own songs. It took a long time for me to figure out that I could borrow little bits from Pete and incorporate them into my own style. The results were amazing, as once I was comfortable with my own style, I could focus on the music and entertain the crowd.

The great thing about your style is that it will always be evolving and is going to change over time. You will get older and your mannerisms will change. You may not use humor now but perhaps in the future you will. Most importantly, you will begin to adapt to your surroundings. An informal meeting with your colleagues can be casual and laid back, where a presentation to the board or a TED talk will require you to step up your game. Sometimes a t-shirt is acceptable, whereas other times you need to be more business casual. Whatever the arena, you need to stay true to

who you are. It is okay to borrow from others, but make your style your own. Not many of us can present like Steve Jobs or Bill Clinton. And that's okay. They are unique in their own way. Your job is to learn from them but not BE them. As Marilyn Monroe once said, "Wanting to be someone else is a waste of who you are." If we try to be someone else, then we are not being authentic.

I was once preparing to keynote a large technology conference. I felt underdressed and told someone on the event staff that I was sorry for what I was wearing. My good friend and colleague, Robert Rose pulled me aside and said, "Don't ever apologize for who you are. Now go up there and knock 'em alive!" Robert always felt that saying "knock them dead" was the wrong approach—I couldn't agree more!

As you identify your unique style, ask yourself a few questions:

1. Am I a fast talker or do I take my time?
2. How do I use my hands?
3. Do I like to wear a suit and tie, or am I a black turtleneck kind of person?
4. How do I use my body? Do I move around or stay put?
5. Do people think I am funny?
6. Do I speak softly or am I loud?

There are no right or wrong answers. The goal is to get you to think about who you are and how you appear when you present.

Your Voice

Your voice is your main instrument when you present. You will have your slides, your hands, and your body, but in the end it is your voice that connects you with the audience. It can be an extremely powerful tool that you can use in many different ways. Be it cadence, volume, or pitch, you can use your voice to excite, engage, and inspire the audience. A perfectly timed pause can make your point that more important. A whisper will force the audience to listen, and you will pull them in. A loud exclamation will make your audience sit up and listen. However you use your voice the most important thing to remember is that your

voice needs to be natural and authentic. Not necessarily conversational or too casual, but not forced or robotic. Not too loud, but loud enough to garner attention. Not singing, but with enough variation in tone and melody that it comes across rehearsed and engaging. Remember, the audience will know when you are trying too hard and in that moment you will lose them.

A Quick Exercise #3

Over the course of one day have three conversations with three people with whom you have varying relationships. Pay attention to how you speak—not what you say—but how your voice changes. Are you softer with some people? Louder? Do you talk quickly? Do you make jokes? For example, call your mother or father (or an elder you have a close relationship with). Then have a conversation with a close friend. And finally talk with a superior at work. Pay attention to how your voice changes: your inflections, your emphases, and your cadence. Do you feel more comfortable with some people and not others? Does your voice quaver? The important thing is to pay attention to how your voice changes based on the audience.

Cadence

Merriam-Webster defines cadence as a “rhythmic sequence or flow of sounds in language or the beat, time, or measure of rhythmical motion or activity or finally the falling inflection of the voice.”⁷ Think of your cadence as the pace in which you speak. It is your own personal rhythm. Sometimes you will speed up to show enthusiasm and excitement and other times you will slow down to emphasize a point and give you and the audience a break. What you have to say is important; using cadence makes it that more important. Cadence is something we all possess. The question is whether it is effective.

I am from Boston. While I don’t have the accent (I don’t say Cah in place of Car), I do talk fast. And when I am excited or passionate about something, I talk really fast. So fast that people can have a hard time understanding and following what I am saying. When I started presenting,

it was very hard for me to slow down. But I needed to. My cadence was quick and rapid fire. I learned very early on to slow down my pace, but not so much that it feels unnatural. I still talk quickly, but I use it to engage the audience. I start slowly, but near the end of a presentation I talk at a fast clip to show enthusiasm and passion. It works for me. Now is the time to see what works for you.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a master of using cadence. We are all aware of his “I Have a Dream” speech. Some say it may be the greatest speech of all time; who am I to argue? While it is an amazing speech in regard to its message, it is also a masterpiece on how to speak to a rapt audience. Take a moment to find the speech online and watch it from beginning to end paying attention to Dr. King’s rhythm. He starts slow and poised, and by the end, he is almost singing every single word. He used his voice as an instrument to play out his words. This is not something that came from the cuff. Dr. King worked tirelessly on his style and delivery. As you watch him from the perspective as a presenter, you will see how great he was at using cadence.

On the day Dr. King delivered the “I Have a Dream” speech, he had what I call the presentation trifecta:

1. *Set and setting*: There were 200,000 rapt audience members begging to be educated, inspired, and engaged that day in Washington.
2. *Subject matter*: Whether it was controversial, emotional, poignant, or simply needed to be said, Dr. King had it all.
3. *Confidence*: Dr. King had this in droves. He believed in himself and more importantly in the words he was saying.

When you have all three of these, it is nearly impossible to fail. And on that day in 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. had it all. And what he also had was a controlled cadence. What do you remember about the speech? More often than not people remember two things: The final few minutes and the use of repetition. And frankly that is all you need to remember. Some have said that it was at the end of the speech that Dr. King went off script and was improvising. What I know is that it is at the end of the speech when Dr. King has the audience in the palm of his hand and can do no wrong.

This will be the day when all of God's children will be able to sing with a new meaning, "My country, 'tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride, from every mountainside, let freedom ring."

And if America is to be a great nation this must become true.

So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.

Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.

Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania!

Let freedom ring from the snowcapped Rockies of Colorado!

Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California!

But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!

Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee!

Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi.

From every mountainside, let freedom ring.⁸

His use of the words "Let freedom ring" from the instantly recognizable song "My Country 'Tis Of Thee" is not only relatable but it also allows him to make his point over and over. He uses something that everyone knows and turns it into his own. By the end of his speech, Dr. King is at a fever pitch, pausing after each sentence to let the audience roar with approval and understanding. It truly is an amazing thing to witness, as it is a nearly perfect and flawless performance.

A Quick Exercise #4

There are two exercises I use to get people in touch with their own rhythm and cadence. First, I want you to learn and master a piece of dialogue that is not your own. I suggest taking dialogue from a favorite film or a couple of minutes of a favorite comedian's routine. The reason for this is to focus on the delivery and not so much the content. It is not an exercise on what you say, but how you say. It may feel like an acting exercise to learn a soliloquy, yet, what I want you to do is pay attention to the actor's pacing, inflection, volume, and overall delivery. Practice *with them* and then try it out with some friends and family.

When it comes to honing my craft as a presenter, I spend a large amount of time watching comedians. I do this because their entire success

of telling a joke comes down to one thing: timing. In 1991, I happened to be one of Roseanne Barr's personal assistants. The stories I could tell. . . . But I digress. Roseanne was a master at telling jokes. Jokes were faxed into the production office from random people every day (it was 1991, so there was no e-mail or Internet, yet). One day, I pulled a joke off the fax machine and read it to myself. It was not that funny. I shrugged and was about to throw it away, when Roseanne grabbed it from me. She read it over two times and then told the joke. Not only did I laugh but so did everyone in the office. It was not so much the words on the page as it was Roseanne's impeccable timing.

During a lunch break, fire up YouTube and search for your favorite comedians. From Jerry Seinfeld to Louis CK to Sarah Silverman, you will learn a lot on cadence, timing, and storytelling.

The second exercise is quite simple. Record yourself giving your presentation. I only want you to record the audio. If you video yourself you are going to get hung up on how you look, how you use your hands, and so on. Once you get over the sound of your own voice, you will be able to notice your pacing and your overall rhythm. People are always surprised by how quickly they talk when they are presenting. So often, people confuse passion and excitement with speaking too quickly (just as I used to). Record yourself a number of times employing different cadences and techniques. The one piece of advice I can give you without even knowing a thing about you, is to slow down and speak slower than you think you actually are. I suggest doing this every month or when you are working on a new presentation. Listening to your cadence and rhythm will give you enormous insight on how you present. Yes your words are important, but the way in which you deliver them is just as important.

Your Body

As I discussed earlier in Chapter 2, nonverbal communication and body movements play a large role on how you present and engage the audience. I discussed how the audience will pick up and focus on your body movements rather than what you are saying when you are physically and visually uncomfortable. Conversely, if you are comfortable and are feeling

confident, your body movements can play as big a role as the words you say and the cadence at which you speak. There are many ways you can use your body during a presentation. I have already talked about hand movements in Chapter 2, so for this section I am going to discuss the rest of your body.

I am a big fan of using as much of the stage as possible. Remember, I am a performer so I like to move around. If you are not on an actual stage, but in a conference room, you are still standing in front of an audience and, therefore, you *have the floor*; so use it. Sometimes you will have a lot of room and sometimes you will have a small area to use. Whatever you do, do not become confined and stay in one place. It will look unnatural. As I have said a number of times so far and I will continue to say time and time again, you have to be authentic and look natural when you present. By doing so, you are respecting the audience and their desire to be engaged by a real and authentic person.

Standing in one place for 30 minutes is not normal and the audience will know it. So move around. But, and this is a big but, don't move just for the sake of moving. The audience does not want to watch you pace back and forth across the room. Respect them and don't treat them like they are at a tennis match.

There are different ways to move around the room:

1. Pick a spot in the room where you want to emphasize your points. Think of it as a symbolic exclamation point. The idea is that every time you want to make a strong point, you go to the same place. The audience will begin to recognize the pattern, so as you make your way to that spot, they will know something important is about to be said.
2. If your presentation follows a linear path, such as a story with a beginning, middle, and end, you can start at stage right and make your way all the way to stage left for the ending. It will give your presentation a physical flow to help you move through your content.
3. When you are on an actual stage, it is implied that you are going to do more than just *talk* to the audience. There is an expectation that you are going to entertain in addition to educating the audience. There is an implication that you are going to put on a show. So

use the stage. Find two or three spots and consciously move within them. There may be no rhyme or reason to your movements, but at least you are moving and keeping the audience engaged.

A Quick Exercise #5

When I was discussing cadence, I suggested you to record your voice so that you can hear how you are speaking. This time, I want you to video yourself so that you can see how you present. But I want you to video yourself doing two very distinct things.

Before you begin, I want you to find a place in your home (or apartment) where you have some room to move around. Move chairs and lamps out of the way. Create a space to present. I do not want there to be an audience, unless of course you have a dog or cat.

First, I want you to video yourself telling a story that you have told a hundred times. I want you to choose something that you know every single detail by heart. The reason for this is because I don't want you to focus on the content. I want you to know the material as if it were second nature. Then tell the story to your imaginary audience. Get into it. Have fun. There is no one to judge you, unless you have a cat (a dog would never judge you). Do this a couple of times using the techniques I discussed earlier. Choose a spot to make your point. Move from right to left. Have fun.

Second, I want you to video yourself giving a real presentation to your imaginary audience. Choose a recent presentation so you know the material. Do the same things—find a spot to make your points, move from right to left, and so on.

This is an exercise you should do from time to time. Again, once you get over how you look and sound, you will begin to notice how you use your body to help you make your points and engage the audience. Your body, head, eyes, hands all play a major role on your unique style. It often feels odd to watch one's self, but this is a great way to see yourself the way the audience sees you. These videos are tools from which you can begin to identify and improve your unique style.

The truth is that some of you do not need to do these exercises. You are part of a special group who are born with the innate abilities to engage and entertain audiences. But for every one of you, there are one hundred

others who are not born with huge amounts of charisma. But I ask you, is charisma something we are born with, or can it be learned?

Charisma

What makes a person charismatic? Is it their ability to hold the attention of an audience and inspire them to take action and make change? Is it their voice, their story, the way they excite the audience? Is it the way they look, their personal, unique style? Truth be told, it is all of these things. Who do you know that is charismatic? For me, names like Bill Clinton, Jim Morrison, Martin Luther King, and Oprah Winfrey come to mind. Yet, when I did a Google search for “charismatic leaders of the 20th century,” I was surprised by the images on my screen: pictures of Adolf Hitler and Charles Manson were mixed among pictures of Steve Jobs, Caesar Chavez, and Winston Churchill. And when I sat back and thought about it, it made sense. Incredibly charismatic people can control an audience and influence them to do whatever they want them to do. Hitler and Manson may have used their charisma for evil deeds, but at the end of the day they were incredibly affective and influential leaders. And truth to be told, they were amazing speakers and presenters.

There are many definitions for the word charisma, but the one I like best is: “A special charm or appeal that causes people to feel attracted and excited by someone.”⁹ It is the use of the word *excited* that resonates with me. If I can excite the audience when I am on stage, then I know I am getting through to them and this in return excites and fuels me—which is the best kind of relationship you want with an audience. The Greek definition of charisma is *gift of grace*,¹⁰ which can be interpreted as a gift from the gods—or put simply, a special characteristic that we are born with. For years there have been debates that we are either born with or without charisma. While there are some people who are born leaders, I believe that anyone can learn to be charismatic.

Charismatic Leadership Tactics

In their *Harvard Business Review* article, entitled “Learning Charisma,” John Antonakis, Marika Fenley, and Sue Liechti state that the greatest leaders have mastered the art of communicating clear and visionary messages

that engage and inspire audiences of all sizes.¹¹ They go on to say that great speakers help listeners understand, relate to, and remember a message. The number one trait that these leaders possess is charisma. For many years, charisma was a trait that most people believed was innate. Great leaders were simply born charismatic. Yet, according to Antonakis, Fenley, and Liechti, charisma is something that can be learned. They break it down into twelve traits they call Charismatic Leadership Tactics or CLTs. Of the dozen CLTs, there are four that I believe are extremely useful when it comes to presentations: Metaphor, Story, Contrast, and Confidence.

Metaphor

Aristotle said in his work, *The Rhetoric* that metaphors make learning pleasant; “To learn easily is naturally pleasant to all people, and words signify something, so whatever words create knowledge in us are the pleasantest.”¹² A metaphor is a great way to create imagery in the minds of your audience and stir up their emotions.

In case it has been a while since you were in school, let me quickly define metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech that identifies one thing as being the same as some unrelated thing, thus strongly implying similarities between the two.¹³ It is more powerful than a simile, which simply compares two things. Examples of metaphors:

1. He broke her heart.
2. I am a rollercoaster of emotions.
3. You are the light of my life.
4. That homework was a breeze.
5. Her voice is music to his ears.

Metaphor is a wonderful way to take confusing or challenging subject matter and present it in a way that the audience can understand and relate. When you are presenting data or analytics to an audience, oftentimes you and the rest of the people in the room can get lost in the numbers and have a hard time understanding what it all means. I always urge people to dig deep into the data and find the story within the data. By using a metaphor, you can take the mundane and make it engaging and interesting. When you see your audiences’ eyes start to glaze over and the

smartphones come out, it may be a sign to use a metaphor to bring them back from the brink.

There are two ways to use metaphor in a presentation: planned and adlibbed—and both are easy to learn but hard to master. You can always take the time to figure out and create a metaphor for your presentation. If you are talking about financials, then using images of *deep valleys* and *high peaks* are great ways to illustrate trends. Do not use metaphors just for the sake of it. Use them accordingly and remember to respect the audience's attention span when it comes to the mundane. This is when the adlibbed metaphor is best used. If you notice that you are losing the audience or someone asks you to better explain your idea, then you may have to take a left turn, go off script, and create an image so that they can better understand the complexities of your subject matter.

A good example of this was when I was leading a seminar on e-mail marketing. I was talking about calls to action and explaining how e-mails have to have areas to click as calls to action. I started to talk about opens, click through rates, and how to measure success. My audience was made up of old school marketers who had spent most of their careers marketing offline. Email marketing was a new tactic. A click through meant nothing to them. They were not getting it and I was losing my audience. I switched gears and said, "We have to give the customers a big shiny red button to click. Each time a customer clicks the red button we will be able to follow their path from that e-mail to our website all the way to the moment they make a purchase. When we send a catalog in the mail, we don't know if the customer saw a product on page 12, drove to the store, picked the product off the shelf, walked to the register, and bought it. But with the shiny red button, we know exactly the moment they clicked it and can follow their entire path to the register which in this case is the cart on the website." I adlibbed a metaphor (the shiny red button) and it worked.

Story

I talk a lot about story in Chapter 7 and how it is crucial to use in order to engage your audience. By using story you will not only grab your audience's attention, but also take them on a journey filled with imagery,

emotion, and action. Charismatic leaders tell stories all the time. At his famous 2005 commencement speech at Stanford University, Steve Jobs opens up by telling the audience that he is going to tell them three simple stories each about certain periods in his life. Was Steve Jobs a dynamic speaker? Not really. He stands behind the podium the whole time and reads the speech from his papers. But because he is such a true leader, a successful businessman, and a visionary, he captures and engages the audience by using personal stories to reel them in.

Affective storytelling is a great way to engage the audience. Just saying these six words, “Let me tell you a story,” will open the ears and hearts of your audience. It is not a very difficult task to tell a story. We do it all the time. When someone asks you how your weekend was, chances are you tell them stories about what you did. To use story in a presentation takes practice. You have a captive audience. The opportunity is there to engage them. You can use a script or adlib to tell a story. It is a muscle that needs to be strengthened, and the best way to do that is by flexing it as often as you can. To be a great storyteller, you need to practice, practice, and practice some more.

Contrast

Contrast is a bit easier to use than metaphor because you just have to explain what you DON'T want. To tell the opposite of what you are trying to get across. As Antonakis, Fenley, and Liechti put it, “contrasts are a key CLT because they combine reason and passion; they clarify your position by pitting it against the opposite, often to dramatic effect.” Think of John F. Kennedy’s “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” When a leader is rallying the troops, he or she may say, “We don’t want to fail!” Or, when a store manager is talking to his staff, he may say, “I don’t want more than three customers in line at a register.” Or, when a teacher is prepping her students for a test she could say, “No one can get below a 75 on this test.”

Sometimes when we are presenting, we are so focused on ourselves and the outcome we want; we expect the audience to immediately understand and jump on our train of thought. But the truth is that sometimes the audience does not fully get it until we tell them what we do not want.

By using contrast, you can very quickly get across what you do not want. As soon as you get the contrast out of the way, you can then focus on what you DO want and the audience will understand. I believe that opening with a contrast statement will get your idea across, engage the audience, and create tension—which is always a good thing!

Some contrast statements I have used in the past:

- “A 1.5 percent conversion rate will be considered a failure. We have to get to 3 percent by January!”
- “Don’t just stand there and read your slides.”
- “The last thing I want is for our customers to come to the web page and not know what to do.”
- “Just because you are sitting in the back row doesn’t mean I won’t call on you!”

Confidence

In regards to the CLTs, confidence is about setting high goals and conveying that they can be achieved. This goes hand in hand with passion. The more you believe in what you are saying, the more passionate you will become and by doing this you bring the audience with you on your journey. Most of us can agree that Steve Jobs was incredibly confident; some confuse this with arrogance, but in reality Steve was passionate and believed he had the tools and knowhow to change the world with technology. What made Steve such a charismatic leader was that his confidence had no boundaries—he instilled it with everyone he worked with.

There is a wonderful story about Steve Jobs when he was first developing the iPhone told by Susan Kalla, a Forbes contributor, back in April 2012:

When Apple first started developing the iPhone, Jobs found the plastic display scratched easily, so he decided the front needed to be glass. Corning had developed a chemical process in the 1960s called Gorilla glass that was highly resistant to scratches. So, Jobs called Corning’s CEO Wendell Weeks and ordered a huge

shipment of Gorilla glass for delivery in six months. Corning had stopped making the glass years before and transitioned the factory to LCD displays, so Weeks told Jobs it would be impossible to make the glass in volume. “You can deliver, don’t be afraid,” Jobs insisted. A stunned Weeks, unfamiliar with the Reality Distortion Field, tried to explain a false sense of confidence would not trump the product’s engineering challenges. Yet, Jobs was unmoved. He stared unblinking at Weeks and said, “Yes, you can do it. Get your mind around it. You can do it.” An astonished Weeks called the managers of Corning’s Kentucky facility making the LCD displays and told them to convert to Gorilla glass immediately. “We delivered in under six months,” Weeks said.¹⁴

The real power behind confidence is simple: Believe in yourself. I realize this is a lot easier said than done. There are thousands of self-help books out there focused on confidence and self-esteem. This is not one of those books. And while I have a Masters in Counseling Psychology, my goal here is not have you delve deep into your psyche and figure out how you really feel about yourself. What I can offer are some suggestions to make you feel more confident in front of an audience.

The first is to believe in what you are saying. In fact, if you do not believe it, then the audience will not believe it. Whether you are on the TED stage telling your personal journey or in front of a client presenting media buy results, you have to truly believe what you are saying. Because when you do, you come across confident and passionate and there is no way the audience will lose interest.

Second, use words that instill confidence. Words such as *I think* and *Maybe* and *Possibly* do not instill confidence as much as words like, *I know* and *I believe* and *I am positive*. It may be subtle, but look how changing a couple of words can make a statement sound more confident:

- “*I think* you can rise to the challenge” versus “*I know* you can rise to the challenge.”
- “*I think* we can get this done on time” versus “*I am positive* we can get this done on time.”
- We will *try to* figure this out” versus “We *will* figure this out”

When you are putting your presentation together, use words that give you the confidence you need to get your message across. While it may have backfired on him, when George H.W. Bush said, “Read my lips; no new taxes,” he said it with strong conviction and confidence. It would not have been as powerful or frankly as memorable if he had said, “Read my lips; I don’t think there will be new taxes.”

As a presenter, being charismatic will enable you to better educate, inspire, and engage your audiences. By learning the four CLTs that I just described and working them into your presentations, you will be better equipped to win over your audiences and persuade them to join you on your journey. And while this all seems like a lovely relationship, the reality is that sometimes you simply cannot win over an audience. They can be a finicky group, so let us talk about them.

CHAPTER 5

Them

We present for one and only one reason—to educate, inspire, and engage an audience. If there were no audience, then you would be talking to yourself, and you already believe what you are talking about; so what is the sense? As we discussed earlier, you are on the stage to persuade the audience to join you on a journey; in essence you are there to serve their wishes, wants, and needs. But as I said, they can be a finicky group, and their needs must be attended to. First and foremost, as I have said countless times in this book, you must respect the audience and realize that each one is different and will have different expectations from you. They can be your best friend or your worst enemy; it is up to you how you choose to deal with them.

Before I move on, let me shed some light on my definition of the word *audience*. The traditional definition of audience is, “a group of people who gather together to listen to something (such as a concert) or watch something (such as a movie or play).”¹ We tend to think of an audience as a large group of people who attend a performance. However, for the purposes of giving a presentation, an audience can be as small as one person. For example, a job interview is typically a one-on-one conversation where the candidate has to sell himself or herself. Many business meetings where people present can be as small as six people sitting around a table. No matter the size, if you are presenting an idea, a report, or a pitch to just one person, you are *on stage* and have to attend to your audience’s needs. I would like to say that when I performed with my bands we always played to sold out arenas. The reality is that there were many gigs where there were a handful of people in the audience. But that did not matter. I had a job to do and that was to entertain them and persuade them to love our music. Partly, I did this by loving what I was doing. But more importantly, I truly believed I was a rock star—at least that is how

I saw myself. But did the audience see me that way? I cannot tell you that, but I did my best to make them see me as I saw myself. But that is not always the case.

How You See Yourself Will Greatly Differ from How People See You

Remember, the audience is Luke Skywalker and looking to you, Yoda, to take them on a journey. Each audience member walks into the room with the expectation to be inspired, educated, or simply entertained. They look to you, as the presenter, to be in charge and to know your stuff, to be a subject matter expert, and to lead them to a result. You may not feel this way, at all. You, being human, may not feel so confident or believe you have the chops to *own the room*. But that does not matter to the audience. They are relying on you to take them from step one all the way to an end result. And each member of the audience is unique in their own way with their own set of expectations, wishes, wants, and needs. As you are about to read, there are four personalities that make up a majority of audiences. It is important for you, as a presenter, to be aware of each type, so that you can cater to their needs. I will say it one more time: When you present, it is not about you—it is about the audience. By understanding who they are as people is how you show them the respect they deserve.

Four Personalities

In 1981, David W. Merrill and Roger H. Reid published THE book on social style and identified four personality types: The Driver, The Analytical, The Expressive, and The Amiable.² The book, *Personal Styles and Effective Performance*, has become the handbook for many human resources departments at thousands of companies for over three decades. Their theory is a simple one: “All people exhibit patterns of behavior that can be identified and responded to, and if we can describe and adjust to these behaviors, we can achieve more satisfactory relationships.”³ We cannot change the way people behave or react. As I stated earlier, your

audience listens to you with different filters and watches you ready to judge or form an opinion from the get-go. This is simply out of our control as presenters and we have to accept this. But, as Reid and Merrill say, “If we can control what WE say and do to make others more comfortable, we can realistically expect our relationships to be more positive, or effective ones.”⁴ In the end, how your audience reacts to you, is in your control.

In this chapter, I summarize the four personalities and give you tips on how each personality acts, views themselves and their primary needs, strengths, and weaknesses.

The Driver

The driver is often labeled as the decision maker, the boss, or the one in charge. Even if they are not, they like to think they are. The driver does not make a lot of eye contact and is not necessarily paying attention. The driver is thinking about what he or she is going to say next—he or she is mentally working on a reply to your presentation. He or she will interrupt you, summarize your thoughts and eventually control the conversation.

Primary Need: Results

Strengths

- Separates emotions from decision making
- Focuses on change
- Goal-oriented
- Handles *fire drills* with ease

Weaknesses

- Thrives on debate
- Intolerant of mistakes
- Manipulative
- A bit of a temper

Noticeable Physical Traits

- Loud voice; uses tone to make a point
- Tends to lean forward—elbows on the table
- Firm handshake
- Talks fast
- Makes statements rather than asking questions

When Dealing with a Driver

Dos

- Focus on the present. The past was yesterday. “What are you going to do for me today?”
- Be brief. The driver is typically impatient. In fact, the driver is anxiously waiting to interrupt you and take over. Get your points out fast and watch out!
- The driver wants short-term results. How will your ideas install change in the coming weeks and months? The long-term future is not as important as right now.
- Give options. The driver wants a menu to choose from. You cannot give just one answer, one solution, or one idea. The driver needs multiple options to choose from and in the end it will be their decision on which path to choose.
- Let the driver feel that he or she is in control. It may be your presentation and your ideas, but when the driver is in the room, you have to respect his or her need to lead. Let him or her take charge, when appropriate.
- The driver takes the role of the hero very seriously—the presentation you are giving is for them and all about them.

Don'ts

- Don't focus on the future. If your presentation is about where the company will be in a year, you are going to lose their focus. The here and now is what is important.

- Don't give the driver too much information. Remember, the driver is thinking about his or her response and when he or she is going to interrupt you. Too much information will overwhelm his or her thinking process and it will simply go unnoticed.
- Don't be ambiguous. You have to be clear and concise with drivers. Not having all your ducks in a row or answers at your fingertips will agitate them.
- Don't get personal. The driver views your presentation as a business meeting, even if you are presenting at a conference. There is no time for idle chitchat or interest in what you did over the weekend. Get in and get out!
- Don't back down. While the driver likes to interrupt and take charge, he or she wants to challenge you and debate with you. He or she values people like himself or herself—who believe in their ideas. If you kowtow to the driver, you will lose their attention and their respect.

The Amiable

The amiable just wants everyone to get along. He or she would rather be friends with all and avoid confrontation at all costs. When in the audience, the last thing an amiable wants is to see you fail as a presenter. The amiable reacts to what you say with nods and smiles and says things such as, “uh huh” or “I see,” so that you feel supported and heard. Yet overall, the amiable is quiet in nature. His or her voice will not change in tone or volume. Unlike the driver, the amiable leans back and listens intently to what you have to say.

Primary Need: Approval

Strengths

- Calm and cool
- Great team player
- Friendly and compassionate
- Easy to get along with and makes friends with everyone

Weaknesses

- Often worries about things
- Does not focus on goals
- Intolerant of change
- Gives in too easily

Noticeable Physical Traits

- Great eye contact
- Animated hands, face, and eyes
- Palms open and welcoming
- Slow talker
- Makes statements rather than asking questions

When Dealing with an Amiable

Dos

- Focus on tradition. The amiable does not like change, and they like things to stay as they are. If it worked in the past, then why rock the boat?
- Open it up to the team. The amiable likes it when everyone works together. They do not want anyone to feel left out.
- Be personal. The amiable is friendly and that means they want to go beyond work, tasks, and goals, and talk about your weekend, your family, and tell a story that shows your human side.
- Keep things easy. The amiable gets uncomfortable when it gets serious. While the topic you are presenting may be confrontational, do what you can to deliver it in a positive and friendly manner.
- Create a safe environment. This is critical if there are drivers in the room. The amiable needs to know that the atmosphere is a safe place to share and discuss ideas. This is something you will need to emphasize.

Don'ts

- Don't push an amiable for too much detail. It puts them in an uncomfortable place. So, if part of your presentation is to gather data, focus on the analytical for this part.
- Don't rush the amiable. The amiable likes to take time to not only absorb what you are presenting, but also to *hang out* and get to know you. If the meeting is set for an hour, you can use up all the time. Just realize that the drivers in the room may not like that.
- Don't come off as *cool* or *standoffish*. The amiable likes everyone, but if you come off unapproachable you will lose his or her trust.
- Don't be confrontational. The amiable is shy and does not want to debate, argue, or stir the pot.
- Don't push for an answer. The amiable needs time to absorb your information and ideas. If you go into a presentation expecting answers or commitments then focus your attention on the driver. The amiable will *get back to you*.

The Analytical

The analytical personality focuses on the task at hand. They are logical. When you are giving your presentation there is a good chance the analytical will be looking down, either flipping through your document or at his or her laptop. It may seem that he or she is not engaged, but in truth he or she is listening to everything you are saying. What he or she is doing is getting deep into the details, checking your sources, analyzing your math, and so on. While he or she focuses on the present and wants to know your future plans, his or her theories and ideas all rely on the past.

Primary Need: To be right.

Strengths

- Deep and thoughtful
- Wants things completed the right way (their way)

- Always finishes tasks
- Unselfish

Weaknesses

- Remembers everything—the good and the bad
- Rigid
- Not people oriented
- Comes off self centered

Noticeable Physical Traits

- Quiet in voice and posture
- Tends to lean back
- Asks questions rather than makes statements
- Their pace of speech is moderate—not too fast or too slow
- Limited eye contact

When Dealing with an Analytical

Dos

- Focus on the past, present, and future. The analytical is all about the data and information.
- Stick to the facts. They are uncomfortable when presenters embellish findings in order to make it more interesting.
- Focus on the details. Do not go off on tangents or fill time with things that are not pertinent to the task at hand.
- Tell exactly what you are going to do. The analytical wants to know the plan.
- Allow time to ponder. The power of the pause is greatly appreciated by the analytical. They need time to think about what you are saying.
- Assure them that they are right. These are people who live and die by data and facts. And by the way, they are *never* wrong.

Don'ts

- Don't be vague or illogical. The analytical is very uncomfortable when presenters are not sure or skirt around details because he or she doesn't know.
- Don't be intolerant of details. If you know an analytical is in the audience, you cannot shy away from details. In fact, you cannot speak of them as if the details do not really matter. To the analytical there is nothing more important than the details.
- Don't overlook the past. Data is their friend, and they rely on it. Any story you tell or results you share are rooted in the past—don't forget that.
- Don't rush. The analytical wants to take his or her time learning, analyzing, and figuring things out. If you rush, you are showing them that you may not really care about the presentation and that there are more important things to discuss.
- Don't be overly casual. I am not suggesting you wear a Tuxedo when you present, but, don't be too laid back and nonchalant. Be attentive and know your stuff!

The Expressive

The expressive is a talker. He or she uses his or her voice to emphasize a point. They may get louder or change their tone when talking. They are known to stand up and use their hands to make a point. Yet, no matter how much they talk, the expressive is a good listener. Unlike the driver, the expressive is tracking what you are saying and will react to it with his or her words, hands, face, or eyes. What the expressive loves more than anything is to be engaged—they cannot tolerate boredom. Spontaneity could be your best ally when in a room with an expressive. If you are not getting through to them, a little improvisation will go a long way.

Primary Need: Recognition

Strengths

- Focuses on the here and now
- Very creative and a great storyteller

- A lot of energy and willingness to change
- Excels when recognized

Weaknesses

- It is all about him or her
- Too much talk wastes time
- Looks for compliments and credit
- Restless

Noticeable Physical Traits

- Animated in voice and posture
- Tends to lean forward
- Makes statements rather than ask questions
- Their pace of speech is fast and loud
- Great eye contact

When Dealing with an Expressive

Dos

- Focus on the future. The expressive wants to hear how the story is going to end.
- Tell stories. Data is good. Analytics are interesting. But creating stories, characters, and painting a picture is what the expressive wants. Find the narrative in the data and you are going to engage the expressive.
- Inclusion. Ask the expressive what they think. This is all that they ask of you. They are listening, but jumping at the chance to put in their two cents and get credit for it will make them very happy.
- Compliment the expressive. He or she needs to know that their participation is not only warranted but also good.
- Encourage creativity. The expressive is all about expressing his or her ideas and telling their stories. By creating a space that encourages this, they will feel comfortable and engaged.

Don'ts

- Don't jump right in. The expressive is not all about business tasks and goals. If you start there, you will lose them immediately.
- Don't focus and dwell on the details. The expressive will reach for their mobile phone if you get deep into the details. You need to keep things light, bright, and high level.
- Don't be impatient with tangents. Stories have twists, turns, and multiple sections. Sometimes the expressive will take you down a rabbit hole. Don't let this bother you. Use it to your advantage and get creative.
- Don't be so serious. The expressive likes to have fun. If you get too serious they will most likely shut down.
- Don't put down their enthusiasm. The expressive is excitable. Don't make them feel bad when they jump up and get animated. Encourage this!

Quick Exercise #6

Which personality are you? Many readers may have taken personality tests and know *who* you already are. For those of you who do know, is it accurate? Are you happy with the results? Do you want to change? Based on what I have discussed above, where do you fit in? I urge you to take the time to identify who you are. By doing this you will begin to have empathy for audience members who fit into your category. As well, by understanding the other personality types you will begin to have empathy for them as well.

The next time you find yourself presenting to a small group of people, take a moment before you speak to survey the room and identify which personality types could be in the room. If possible, take notes based on how the audience members are reacting, asking questions, and so on. Once the presentation is completed, analyze your notes, and see if you were correct. Did you attend to each audience members' needs? How did you feel when you were facing off with the driver? Were you prepared for the analytical? If you have good relationships with the people in the room, take 10 minutes at the end to ask them if you met their needs. The more feedback you can get, the more you can learn and adapt for the next time.

CHAPTER 6

Pitch Versus Presentation

As we have just discovered, there are four basic different audience member types. Some want to listen. Some want to talk. Some just want to take control. These individuals make up the entirety of an audience. Chances are if you have more than seven people in a room you are going to have at least one of each personality type and will have to deal with them individually and as a group. Now that you are aware of this, you will often feel like the conductor of an orchestra—keeping everyone on time and in harmony. It may feel like a lot of responsibility, but remember, you are there to guide the audience to an end goal. It was about them, not you.

While there are different kinds of people there are also different audiences for different situations. There are audiences to be presented to and audiences to be pitched to. The pitch audience is a very unique group of individuals, because not only do you have to educate, inspire, and engage them—but you need to persuade them as well. Earlier I talked about how your intention as a presenter is to persuade the audience. And this is true for every presentation. You need to get them on *your side* and get them to believe what you believe—to go on a journey with you. While this is true for any pitch meeting, it goes from being an intention to becoming your number one goal. In a pitch meeting you need to persuade your audience to literally buy into what you are saying.

Two weeks after a presentation, be it a TED talk or a client meeting, the audience will more than likely forget mostly what you presented. What they will remember is how you made them feel and not be able to recall specifics. However, two weeks after a pitch meeting, the audience is most likely talking about you, your company, your product, or all in great detail. This is because they are about to make a major decision—to hire you and spend money on you. This can put a lot of pressure on you as a presenter because your livelihood may depend on your success as a presenter.

Create Tension

A great writer will use tension to urge the reader to continue on with the story. Whether it is inner conflict with the main character or with supporting characters, creating a challenge is what makes the story tense. It is uncomfortable and the reader is hoping the tension will be resolved. Without a challenge, a story is boring—and we do not pay attention to boring things.¹ Remember the audience is the hero of the story, and to become a hero, the character must face and overcome a challenge that changes the character in a profound way. It is the challenge that creates the tension that moves the hero toward change. And that is precisely what we want from our presentation—to take our audiences (our heroes) on a journey that changes their behavior and enables them to take action.

Creating tension at the beginning of a presentation does two things. First, it makes the audience uncomfortable and literally on the edge of their seats to see what comes next. Second, it puts you completely in charge because the audience is invested and wanting resolution.

I have pitched products and services to thousands of clients over the course of 30 years. Nine out of ten times, the one thing the client cares about most is the budget. They just want to know, “how much is this going to cost me?” And for many years, I followed the same storyline. Talk about myself (my company, my services, etc.), then talk about the client, and then tell them the cost. I had created a simple path to get the audience to what they wanted. What I realized, after so many years, was that I was completely disrespecting the audience. I was doing what I wanted and not giving them what they needed. I had my own agenda. I made the presentation about me. I thought I was Luke Skywalker. And while I was very successful, I was not treating the audience like the heroes they were. I realized that while there was tension in the room, it was the wrong kind. My audiences were tense because they were bored and waiting for the punch line.

Let Me Tell You a Story

Five years ago, there was one meeting that forced me to change my tactics forever. I was half way through my pitch when a driver stood up and said, “For goodness sakes, we read your proposal and looked at your website.

We know everything there is to know about you and your company.” I felt like a deer in the headlights. I was frozen. The driver then said something that profoundly changed the way I looked at pitch meetings: “You’re in the room because we know you can do the job. Just tell me why we should hire you and let’s move on.” I got through the meeting and on the drive home I replayed that one simple sentence over and over. “You’re in the room because we know you can do the job.” And then it hit me like a ton of bricks: Most of us do not like meetings. They get in the way of getting real work done. So, if a client is going to take the time to assemble a team for a vendor to come in and pitch, then chances are the client already believes the vendor can do the job. The meeting is not the time to sell your capabilities. The client already knows them. The meeting is your time to show why you are the right vendor for the job. This is the exact moment I realized that a presentation is not a meeting; it is a performance. The pitch meeting is not about whom you have worked with in the past; they already know this. The pitch meeting is not about your budget—you already sent that in the proposal. The pitch meeting is a chemistry test. The client wants to meet you and see if they like you and want to spend time and money with you. It’s your time to shine, to tell a story, to get the client to like you and hire you.

Back to creating tension. Introducing tension creates a mystery. It sets up a puzzle to be unraveled. It puts the audience on edge and puts you in complete control of the mood and emotions in the room.

Benjamin Zander, the conductor for the Boston Philharmonic, in his TED talk, *The Transformative Power of Classical Music*, calls this “going home.”² He uses a prelude by Chopin to make his point. Chopin moves from the B note all the way to the E, but does it slowly. He gets close to it, but moves back up the scale, just before the piece is resolved. And once he gets to the E, he plays the *wrong* E chords—some are suspended, some are minor, some have odd notes. Then finally he plays the *right* E chord and the piece is complete and the audience breathes a sigh of relief. If he had played the *right* E chord too early, the piece would have been over and the listener would have never taken the uncomfortable journey to *home*. As Zander says, “Follow the line all the way from B to E, and you’ll hear everything that Chopin had to say.”³ This is what I want you to do with your pitches. Take the client on the path from B to E. But do not resolve

too quickly. Create some tension. Force the client to pay attention. And then, take them *home*. They will feel resolved and appreciate you closing the loop. It's a wonderful feeling to end a meeting when everyone is satisfied and has closure.

Up until this point in the book, I have talked about how to use your unique style to engage audiences of all types in two different situations: the presentation and the pitch. For the remainder of the book, I will discuss the tools you will need to present. Now is the time to talk about how you will present to an audience of any type and size.

CHAPTER 7

How

This chapter focuses on tools that you can use to better educate, inspire, and engage your audience. From storytelling to how to use PowerPoint, I want to fill your quiver with as many arrows as possible so that you feel empowered to *knock 'em alive!*

Storytelling

Stories are how we think. They are how we make meaning of life. Stories are how we explain how things work, how we make decisions, how we justify our decisions, how we persuade others, how we understand our place in the world, create our identities, and define and teach social values.¹

Before we became inundated with content, social media, and YouTube, we told stories. Think back to when you were a kid. What do you do every night before bed? You read books and told stories. I like to say that stories are in our DNA. It is how we have been relating to each other for thousands of years. It has not changed and it never will.

We can all probably agree that Walt Disney is one of the greatest moviemakers of all time. From Snow White to Bambi to Sleeping Beauty, Walt Disney was at the helm of some of the most memorable stories of past 100 years. The truth is that Mr. Disney did not need characters on the screen to engage an audience; he was a master storyteller. Four years before Snow White and The Seven Dwarves premiered on the silver screen, Mr. Disney performed the entire story, by himself, for a very small audience. It has been said that Walt told a group of 40 of his top animators to go out, have a big dinner, and return to the sound stage at 8:00 p.m. Always taking care of people, Walt knew it was going to be a long night and he wanted to make sure they were all fed and able to pay attention. At 8:00 p.m. the animators walked into a darkened room with a single light in the middle of the floor.

They all took their seats and waited. Walt walked into the room and said what I believe are the seven most powerful words a presenter can ever use, “I’m going to tell you a story.” And for the next three and a half hours, Walt Disney told a story that had been in his head for all his life: Snow White and The Seven Dwarves. He played every part and created every scene all by himself. He became each dwarf, the evil queen, and Snow White herself. At 11:30 p.m., when he was finished, he had not only thoroughly entertained his audience but also convinced all 40 animators to dedicate the next four years of their lives to create the greatest animated feature of their time.

A story is one of the best ways to convince anyone of anything. It is hardwired into the architecture of the brain, and there is no overriding it. We think in story, because story provides a context for the facts so that we can make sense of them. Lisa Cron, in her book *Wired For Story* put it perfectly when she said,

we are so wired for story that we don’t even recognize its super-powers. Because stories feel so normal and weaved into our daily lives that we think of them as optional. When the reality is that we need stories to grow, change and survive.²

Story allows us to step out of the present, remember the past, and imagine a future.

It has been proven that when we tell a story, especially about ourselves, our Dopamine levels surge. Dopamine is the neurotransmitter that plays a major role in reward motivated behavior—it is like a drug in our brain that makes us feel good for doing good things. This is why we feel so good when we share stories about ourselves—it makes us feel good. It makes everyone feel good. So the next time you have to present take the time to turn your presentation into a story. Like Walt Disney, become the characters. Like Chopin, take the audience *home*. It does not matter if you are meeting with a client to go over website analytics. There is a narrative in the data. When you take the time to find the story in the subject matter, you will engage the audience because their brain chemistry is asking for it.

The Rule of Three

Three Is A Magic Number

—Schoolhouse Rock

The Rule of Three has been around for centuries. It can be found in ancient texts, folklore, modern literature, and just about everywhere. Here are just a few examples:

- The Three Little Pigs
- Goldilocks and the Three Bears
- The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly
- Stop, Drop, and Roll
- Location, Location, Location
- Duty, Honor, Country
- Veni, Vidi, Vici
- Blood, Sweat, and Tears

“The rule of three is a very general rule in speaking, in writing, and in music that states that concepts or ideas presented in threes are inherently more interesting, more enjoyable, and more memorable.”³ Carmine Gallo goes on to say,

The rule of three is one of the most profound concepts in communication theory. It simply means that the human mind can only hold about three “chunks” of information in short term (working) memory. Since that is the case why overload your audience with 18 messages, or 22, or 30? Stick to three.⁴

We have become proficient at processing information by using patterns, and three is the smallest number to make a pattern.⁵

Knowing this is extremely important for speakers and presenters. We must respect the audiences’ abilities to take in and digest information. How many times have you sat through a presentation and been bombarded with multiple ideas or an immense amount of data and your brain was overloaded? Too often, as presenters, we get caught up in the details and feel this need to tell the entire story. I liken it to the same experience as walking into a 99 Cent Store. There are literally 10,000 items for sale and each one costs 99 cents. It is sensory overload when you walk into one of these stores. The fluorescent lights, the colors, and the rows and rows of products. For me, it is simply too much

information and I am reminded of the Police song, *Too Much Information*, when Sting sings:

“Too much information running through my brain
Too much information driving me insane”

The reality is that the audience cannot process more than three things at a time, and frankly, chances are they are not going to remember a thing you said two weeks after your presentation. Carl W. Buehner, along with Maya Angelou and many others, has said something that I believe is one of the most critical things to remember when it comes to presentation skills and public speaking:

“They may forget what you said—but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

There is nothing more poignant than that. As I have said before, when you get up in front of an audience, be it big or small, it is your job to educate, inspire, and engage. You cannot do that if you overload them with too much information. You do not want that to happen to you when you are in a meeting or a theater. Remember to give the audience the respect they deserve. Their brains can only take so much. So choose the three things that allow you to get your ideas and story across.

Let Me Tell You a Story

As I mentioned earlier, I was once the opening speaker at a TEDx conference. It was a big room with a lot of people in the audience. I had them laughing, clapping, oohing, and awing at all the right moments. I walked off the stage feeling that I truly connected with the audience. During an intermission, a couple of people came up to me and remarked on the stories I told and the jokes I made. I thought to myself, “Wow, they were really listening to me.” About two weeks later, I was at another event and was approached by a young woman. She recognized me from the TEDx event. She said, “I saw you a couple of weeks ago at that TEDx event. You had me and my friends laughing so hard.” I asked her what made

her laugh and she said, “Oh ... I don't remember what you talked about. I just remember laughing Sorry.”

The Power of the Pause

Punctuation is to readers as pausing is to your listeners

—Keith Bailey

Mark Twain said it perfectly, “The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause.” A pause at the right time for the right reason can be an extremely powerful moment in your presentation. The pause does three things:

1. Gives The Audience Time To Think
2. Shows Confidence
3. Slows You Down

Gives the Audience Time to Think

Oftentimes when we present we just want it to be over. So we power through it without taking a break or a moment to breathe. This is disrespectful to your audience. Remember, your job is to persuade them to take action and change their behavior. You cannot simply steamroller your way through the presentation. Chances are you are sharing new information with your audience or in many cases a lot of data. It is not fair to expect them to remember it all. The truth is, they will not. But in the moment they need time to absorb what you are saying. A pause gives them a moment to think and process.

Shows Confidence

When you take a pause after you make a strong statement you are not only letting the audience absorb it, you are showing confidence. By pausing, you show that you are not in a rush to get out of there. You feel strongly about what you just said and you want the audience to know that. Let it sink in.

Slows You down

Yes it sounds obvious. When you take pause you stop talking. What I am talking about here is to take a well-timed pause to give yourself a chance to take a breath or a sip of water. Sometimes a pause will give you a chance to gather your thoughts, recollect yourself, or both, after you make a major point or lose your train of thought.

A Quick Exercise #7

Pausing takes practice. It cannot be forced and it needs to be well timed. There are two exercises that can help you understand how the pause can help you with any presentation. First, choose a couple of pages of dialogue from one of your favorite books and strip out all of the punctuations. Take out the periods, commas, quotes, and so on. Have a friend read the punctuation-less version out loud without taking any pauses. It will sound incredibly rushed and most likely take on different meaning. Then you read the version with the punctuation. It sounds different. Doesn't it?

Second, I want you to tell a story to a friend emphasizing taking pauses. Choose a story that has some tension in it. Perhaps a story about a car accident or maybe an injury. The first time you tell it, be very deliberate with your pauses. Overdo it. Tell the story a couple of times and take note of where you are pausing and how that affects the flow and rhythm of the story. The goal here is to learn how and where to put pauses for the best effect.

Let the power of the pause help you and your audience to take a moment to either absorb the information, to make a point that much more affective or to simply take a break.

As we have discovered, the brain plays a huge role in the way we present and the way the audience absorbs the information. From our neurotransmitters to our hormones, whether we are in the audience or on the stage, our brains help us figure out what to say and how to say it.

Brain Rules

I am a huge fan of Dr. John Medina, the author of a book entitled *Brain Rules*. In the book, he details 12 rules that explain how the brain works. His rules range from survival to sensory integration to gender. For the

purposes of this book, I am going to focus on two rules because they deal with things that can affect and influence your presentation. The rules are attention and vision. In fact, these are two rules that Garr Reynolds discusses in his wonderful presentation “Takeaways & Quotes from Dr. John Medina’s Brain Rules—What all presenters need to know.” I highly suggest you find Garr’s presentation on Slideshare and watch it.

Brain Rule #4: Boredom

Dr. Medina puts it very simply, “We don’t pay attention to boring things.” This is an incredibly important rule. Basically, what he is saying is not to be boring. Easier said than done. But if you are boring, or your presentation is boring, then you are going to lose your audience. It is as simple as that. Sometimes this is in your control. You can be more engaging, daring, create tension, sing, and dance. Do whatever it takes to keep all eyes on you and have the audience begging for more. Yet often times losing your audience is not in your control. According to Medina and a study by Hartley and Davies in 1978, audiences tend to lose interest within 10 minutes of a lecture or presentation. It is not necessarily known why this happens, but it does. Hartley and Davies studied professors and their students and found that the students began to lose interest within the first 10 minutes of a 50-minute lecture, only to regain interest within the last five minutes (probably because the class is almost over and the students are eager to wrap things up).

The important takeaway here is that like the students your audiences are going to lose interest and you need to take action to make sure that does not happen. Medina calls this the *10-Minute Rule*. His suggestion is to do something emotionally relevant every 10 minutes to regain the audience’s attention. I like to take this a step further and urge you to tell a story, make a nonsequitur remark or do something silly. The goal here is to *snap ‘em out of it* and reset their brain and attention.

I had the pleasure of seeing Dr. Medina speak in 2006. He was promoting *Brain Rules* and got booked to speak at a church one evening in a neighboring town. The audience was made up of parents of young children—many of whom did not have babysitters (including my wife and myself)—so the room was packed with more than 200 parents and

many young children. It was after 8:00 p.m., and the room was hot and the pews were uncomfortable. Dr. Medina spoke for two hours and had us all on the edge of our seats. I for one never lost interest. At the end Dr. Medina asked us if we remembered the story he told about the car accident or the other story about his family holiday, and so on. We all nodded yes and Medina went on to explain the 10-minute rule, and how he was telling these stories every 10 minutes to reset our brains. And by golly it worked!

The 10-minute rule, like the power of the pause, takes a lot of practice. The best way to master it is to work it into all of your presentations and practice, practice, practice. If you are using slides for your presentation then work in a slide every 10 minutes that resets your audience's brains. Tools such as PowerPoint have presentation tools that enable you to monitor your timing as you move through your slides. I urge you to use these tools as your practice and rehearse. You will soon see where your 10-minute marks are and be able to work in content to reset your audience. Now as we all know, rehearsal is one thing and the live presentation is another. Things will get delayed and questions will be asked that throw you off your timing. With practice you will be able to *feel* the 10-minute markers and use them to your advantage. Be patient, this is a skill I am still working on mastering.

Brain Rule #10: Vision Trumps All

Visual aids play a huge role in any presentation. Images support your point and can make an emotional impact. A bullet list is flat, boring, and unnecessary. But a high-resolution image will make a lasting impression. I cannot tell you how many times I have shown images during a Presentation Elevation workshop and the audience reacts more to the picture than what I am saying. In fact, when I see attendees weeks or even months later, they typically remember two things about my presentation—my sense of humor and my slides. Do they remember the details? No. Do they remember what I said about eye contact? Probably not. Do they remember how I made them laugh? You bet! Remember what Maya Angelou once said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

A lot of how people remember how you made them feel can come from the imagery you use. And it can actually help them remember the point you are trying to make. As Medina puts it, “We are incredible at remembering pictures. Hear a piece of information, and three days later you’ll remember 10% of it. Add a picture and you’ll remember 65%.”⁶

The goal of any presentation is to make lasting impression. To have people talking about you weeks after you have presented is the best feedback you can ever get. It may not be about what you want them to remember and more about the imagery you used. But at least they remember you.

Take the time to find the right images. It is amazing how much they can impact what you are saying and how they engage the audience.

Let Me Tell You a Story

In 1995 I was finishing my masters in counseling psychology. There was no Internet. There were no smartphones. There were no iPads. We had notebooks and textbooks. As often was the case, one of my professors would complain about how poorly his psychology 101 students were doing. He had not changed his teaching style for years. He lectured; the students read and he quizzed them. Why were they all so close to failing? This was a common discussion in our classes. One day he came in and told us that he solved the problem. He figured that these kids were raised on MTV. They were an image-driven generation. So, for one week, instead of standing up in front of the class and lecturing, he played videos about psychology—interviews, social experiments, sitcoms, and so on. He gave the class pop-up quizzes and the all scored a B or higher. The content was the same as his lectures, yet the delivery was different. He could not engage the students by simply talking. He needed to use a visual medium to get them to learn—a medium they grew up on—a medium that could educate and engage.

That was then. Now, we are overwhelmed with imagery and tools to help us with our presentations. Whether you use PowerPoint, keynote, or Prezi, chances are you use slides for nearly all of your presentations. It has become what is expected. In fact, if you do not have slides, the audiences get uncomfortable. They want more to look at than just you. But we are

using slides in a way they were not intended. We create decks for nearly everything!

Swab the Decks

Campfires have been replaced with projector bulbs.

—Nancy Duarte

As the concept of storytelling becomes more and more intertwined with business presentations, we are telling stories more than ever before. Not so long ago we used to tell stories while sitting around campfires. Now, as brands and organizations are using stories to differentiate and engage, we are telling and listening to stories everywhere—especially in the conference room. When we sat around the campfire, all we had was our imagination, our voices, and our bodies to bring stories to life. Now we have projectors that display PowerPoint slides, spreadsheets, YouTube videos, analytics, and anything else we can think of to make our stories more engaging. But the reality is that the more we project the further away we get from real storytelling. Slide decks, be they built in PowerPoint, keynote, or Prezi, have become a crutch and we use them like Linus uses his blanket. We rely on our decks to help us get through a presentation. They give us security and confidence and we feel naked without them. The truth is that you do not need slides to deliver a compelling and interesting presentation. As I have been discussing at length, your unique style and your respect for the audience is what makes a presentation successful—not a bunch of slides. PowerPoint decks should be used only to support your presentation—they should never be your presentation.

What if you show up to a pitch and the client decides to go out to lunch instead of sitting in a stuffy conference room? Where are you going to present your slides—the wall of the restaurant? Of course not. If you cannot get your point across without a slide deck, then maybe you do not know your point in the first place. Of course, there will be times when you will be presenting data and the audience will have to follow along—but those should be handouts and not presentation slides—there is a big difference and I will soon tell you why.

If it sounds like I am standing on a soapbox, I am. And I will be the first to admit that I use slides for many of my presentations. But the slides I build support what I am saying. They do not say it for me. I use big images and as few words as possible. One reason I use slides is to help me remember certain points and to move me along. Another reason is because today's audiences expect to look at something and I want to respect that expectation. Yet, there is a time and a place to use slides, and this is what I intend to discuss in this section.

First things first:

1. Do you *recycle* a past slide deck to use for an upcoming presentation?
2. Do you tweak your slide decks until it is time to present?
3. Do you hand out or e-mail your slides to your audience before you present?
4. Do you believe that bullet points are the best way to get your point across?
5. Do you read your slides to your audience?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, then I am glad you bought this book. Every answer should be *no*. Do not get me wrong, slides are good and can be useful, but since the dawn of PowerPoint, presenters from all over the world have pretty much taking advantage of the slide deck and ruined it for the rest of us. In 2003, Seth Godin wrote an e-book entitled *Really Bad PowerPoint*, which he republished four years later. In my opinion Seth should republish it every year. The e-book's first three paragraphs say it all:

It doesn't matter whether you're trying to champion at a church or a school or a Fortune 100 company, you're probably going to use PowerPoint.

PowerPoint was developed by engineers as a tool to help them communicate with the marketing department—and vice versa. It's a remarkable tool because it allows very dense verbal communication. Yes, you could send a memo, but no one reads anymore. As our companies are getting faster and faster, we need a way to communicate ideas from one group to another. Enter PowerPoint.

PowerPoint could be the most powerful tool on your computer. But it's not. Countless innovations fail because their champions use PowerPoint the way Microsoft wants them to, instead of the right way.⁷

We have taken a very powerful tool and continue to use it incorrectly. I do not care if you use PowerPoint or Keynote, chances are you are doing it wrong. I could not write a book about presentation skills without allocating a fairly large amount of space to decks and handouts. Every presentation skills teacher and coach has his or her own perspective when it comes to building and using slides. I have come to the conclusion that it is a waste of time telling people not to use slides. You are going to use them, so instead of fighting it, I have come up, with some influence from Garr Reynolds, my 10 commandments for using slide decks:

1. Thou shall only use slides if absolutely necessary.
2. Thou shall never use an old deck to build a new deck.
3. Thou shall stop tweaking your deck 24 hours before thou presents.
4. Thou shall beware the bullet point.
5. Thou shall only use one idea per slide.
6. Thou shall never, under any circumstances, read a slide out loud.
7. A slide deck shall never be used as a handout.
8. Thou shall say *no* to animation.
9. Thou shall only use high-resolution images.
10. Thou shall not build a presentation around a deck, but rather build a deck around a presentation.

While most of these commandments make sense on their own, let me elaborate on a few.

Thou Shall Never Use an Old Deck to Build a New Deck

How many times have you opened an old presentation deck to start work on a new presentation? It is a common occurrence and you are not alone. There really is nothing wrong with this as chances are you are going to tell

a similar story and use some of the same slides. If it is a capabilities pitch, then chances are 90 percent of the pitch is already built. The problem is that you are starting a presentation by using technology, and before you know it, you will be knee deep in slide tweaking and not focusing on building a storyline. One of John Medina's brain rules is to unplug and go analog.⁸ By this he means to go old school and use pen and paper. Remember, your presentation is a story and your slides are to support your story; they are not the story. Figure out what you want to say first and then see if there is an old deck you can use.

I tend to use a pad of Post-It Notes® and a Sharpie® whenever I start a new presentation. Each Post-It is a *slide*. It is a great way to generate ideas and start a *slide* layout on my wall. I can move them around, insert new slides, delete slides I do not want, and all I am using is my imagination. By the time I am finished with this exercise, my wall is covered with Post-Its and my slide layout is complete. Only then can I turn on my laptop and get started in PowerPoint.

A Quick Exercise #8

Chances are good that you have a handful of presentation decks on your computer. Find one and open it up. Most likely, it is a PowerPoint presentation filled with bullet points, clip art, charts, and graphs. Take a look at it and spend five minutes reminding yourself of the content and the purpose of the presentation. Try to remember how long it took you to give this presentation. Now, close the program, stand up, and give the same presentation but without all the slides. Can you do it? Or do you need the slides? As I said before, if you cannot deliver the presentation without the slides, then there is a good chance you do not know what you are talking about.

Thou Shall Stop Tweaking Your Deck 24 Hours before Thou Presents

As I have said many times, a presentation is not a meeting; it is a performance. In fact, your presentation can be thought of as a one-act play and it needs to be treated as such. Meaning, no edits or changes 24 hours before show time. Can you imagine the director of a play walking into the

lead actor's dressing room two hours before show time with new dialogue? It would never happen and the same can be said for your presentation. Any changes the day before the presentation will mess up your timing, your cadence, and more than likely throw you off your game. This is especially true when it comes to ensemble presenting.

Let Me Tell You a Story

I was once ensemble pitching with an ad agency. They brought me in as a social media consultant for a project with an existing client. The team consisted of the agency's president, a senior account executive, the CTO, and me. We had two weeks to put the presentation together. The president of the agency was a PowerPoint expert and was in-charge of the slides. All slide content was finalized four days before the presentation. Forty-eight hours before the presentation we were well rehearsed; we knew our roles, subject matter and the flow of the presentation. Twenty-four hours before the presentation, the president sent us all a new deck. There were tweaks that changed the flow. We got together as a team to go over the changes, but did not rehearse. All of us, not including the president, were feeling a bit uneasy. The morning of the presentation we were sent a new deck. On our way to the meeting, the president was in the back of the car, laptop open and making changes to slides. He rearranged the order, added and deleted content, and even switched out some images. By the time the meeting started we were presenting version 14. Not only was our timing off, but also we came off confused and bumbling. The presentation was a complete disaster.

Thou Shall Beware the Bullet Point and Thou Shall Never, Under Any Circumstances, Read a Slide out Loud and Thou Shall Only Use One Idea per Slide

Commandments 4, 5, and 6 go together. The idea here is that the content on each slide should be minimal and focus on one idea. If you find yourself creating a bullet list with three points, then you should create three slides. It is that simple. Two things happen when you put up a slide with multiple bullet points:

1. Your audience reads ahead
2. The presenter reads the slide

Basically, everyone in the room reads and no one is presenting. If you are going to read your slides, then just e-mail the deck to everyone and cancel the meeting. With everyone reading, there is no time to perform and engage the audience. It goes against everything I have been saying in the book.

Let Me Tell You a Story

I was once in the audience of a presentation and the presenter opened up with a slide that was just awful. Small font, multiple bullets, clip art and a background that made the words unreadable. But that is not the worst part. The worst part was that he read every single point—every word! By the fifth slide the entire audience knew what was happening. When the sixth slide came up, you could hear the moans and groans. By slide 12, half the audience was gone and the remaining audience members were tweeting about how terrible the presentation was.

His slides looked something like this:

Why I Love Dolphins

- ★ My son kissed one!
- ★ It was a summer day in Florida.....
- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean enim massa, aliquam et bibendum eget. consectetur adipiscing elit.
- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean enim massa, aliquam et bibendum eget. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit
- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean enim massa, aliquam et bibendum eget. Lore issue dolor sit amen, consectetur adipiscing elit
- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean enim massa, aliquam et bibendum eget. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit
- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean enim massa, aliquam et bibendum eget.
- Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Aenean enim massa, aliquam et bibendum eget.



(c) 2015 - - Why I Love Dolphins Presentation February 2015



This slide (built by me for this book), if read aloud, breaks all three commandments. Instead of putting *all* of your thoughts on one slide, keep it to one idea and use an image that sets you up to tell a story.

This all comes back to respecting the audience. Remember *The Rule of Three*—the audiences can only process three things at a time. By having multiple slides with multiple bullet points, you are disrespecting the audience because bullet points and bad design are distracting. You want the audience looking at and listening to you, not reading your slides.

Below is what I think is a great opening slide for the first bullet point: “I Met One Once.” It clearly shows the emotional tie to dolphins. The image will get an *Aww* from the audience and allow the presenter to tell a story, instead of boring everyone with a recitation of a bunch of bullet points. It will also allow *you* to focus on *them*; to move around, make eye contact, and entertain.



Photo Credit: www.dolphindiscovery.com

A Slide Deck Shall Never Be Used as a Handout

A great presenter once said, “A good slide deck should be meaningless without the presenter there to present.” What he means by this is that if you follow my 10 commandments you will develop slides full of

imagery and few words that will mean nothing without you there to tell the story. Why? Because slides are there to support the storyteller not tell the story. This is why you should never use your presentation deck as a handout. If you need to give your audience something to follow along with, then you are going to have to create a separate document. When you follow these commandments you will be creating so many slides for your ideas that your slide decks could total 100 or more slides. Who wants to print all that out when it means absolutely nothing without you there?

Guy Kawasaki has a great concept he calls the 10-20-30 Rule.⁹ While it is focused on Venture Capital pitches, you can adapt some of it for your own presentations. It is quite simple: A PowerPoint presentation should have 10 *slides*, last no more than 20 *minutes*, and contain *no font smaller than 30 points*. It is the 30 point that resonates with me the most. When you have one idea per slide you have a lot of room on the slide. Increase the font size. Make it big. Let the people in the back see it clearly. So often slides use small fonts that make it near impossible to read from a few rows back.

Ensemble Presenting

So much of what I talk about in this book applies to the individual. From your personal style to how you build your slide decks to how the audience perceives you. I have been focusing on you and your relationship with the audience. This works if you are giving a TED talk or keynote at a conference, but for the most part more times than not, you will not be presenting alone in a pitch meeting or a work presentation. In fact, you will most likely be presenting with a team. This could include peers, your boss, or both. It could be two people or six people—it all depends on the meeting and the purpose of the presentation. Now, a majority of what I have discussed in this book can be applied to your presentations whether you are alone or in a group. Yet, when you are presenting with a group the dynamics change. I call this ensemble pitching and I equate it to performing like a Jazz ensemble. There are moments to take a solo and times when you should simply hang back and be quiet. This takes patience, practice and, most importantly, the ability to listen.

The most important thing I look for in a musician is whether he knows how to listen

—Duke Ellington

What Duke saying is that as a musician you have to listen to what your bandmates are playing: the notes, the phrasing, and the emotion. Every solo is a story—it has a beginning, middle, and end. You have to be able to read the cues and understand the difference between a horn player taking a breath or ending his or her solo. It is an intimate experience between the band that when pulled off smoothly, the audience can simply enjoy the music not knowing what is actually happening between the musicians on stage.

Like jazz musicians, when you present as an ensemble, you have to be able to *read* each other. You have to know when it is your turn to *solo* and when you should just sit back and listen. More often than not your roles will be set beforehand and each member of the group will know when he or she will *drive* the presentation and take control of the slides. Yet, much like jazz musicians, you need to know the song's structure and the chord progressions. And more importantly, you need to be able to improvise. Most people think that improvisation simply means to make *it* up on the spot. While that may be true, the fact remains that a jazz solo or improvisation is based on a set chord structure, not unlike a script. While your presentation will have slides and a script, you have to be prepared when one of your teammates goes off-script and begins to jam.

In Jazz, improvisation isn't a matter of just making any ol' thing up. Jazz, like any language, has its own grammar and vocabulary. There's no right or wrong, just some choices that are better than others.

—Wynton Marsalis

How many times have you pitched with your boss and he or she goes completely off script and on a tangent that sends the entire presentation down a rabbit hole? Or a client throws the group a curve ball question that no one was expecting and suddenly you are in a free form jazz jam? This is not necessarily a good or bad thing or right or wrong. As Wynton

is saying, it comes down to the choices you make, such as, who in the group should take over? Who has the best ability to answer the question?

I had the unique experience of pitching with a business partner of 14 years. And before we were business partners, we played in two bands together. We each knew how the other played and how we spoke. I could tell when he was finishing up and when he needed help with a tough client question. We were able to play off each other flawlessly and it worked most of the time but not all the time. Rare is the pitch team that is perfectly synced, though. You could be ensemble presenting with people you recently met or coworkers you do not really know.

Let Me Tell You a Story

I was once asked to help a small agency put together a social media pitch for a large consumer goods company. I helped them organize their story and construct their slide deck. A week before the pitch they were ready to rock and roll. I got a call from their VP of business development who asked me to join them on the pitch. I was surprised because I was hired as a pitch doctor and did not work for the agency. I told the VP that it would be a bad idea because what if the client liked me and wanted me to work with me on the project. He assured me that it would be okay. So I flew to Dallas the day before so I could meet with the team and we could practice the morning of the pitch. I was feeling confident because the script was solid. We planned on meeting at 8:00 a.m. and the pitch was at 4:00 p.m.

I walked into the room at 8:00 a.m. and met the three other people I would be pitching with. The first thing I said was, “So when you guys present together, who typically takes charge and runs the meeting?” They all laughed and one of them said, “We’ve never pitched together.” Oh my! It turns out that one person was brand new, another was a consultant like me and the other two were not the best of friends. For the next six hours we crammed and jammed. We focused on each other’s strengths and weaknesses. I took them through a few of the exercises I have detailed in this book. We spent a two-hour lunch telling stories about ourselves. I wanted us to know about each other and see how we each told stories.

We were not the Miles Davis Quintet, but we were not a garage band either. Needless to say, the presentation was not a great, but it was not a train wreck. We stuck to the script, but lost our confidence when the client threw curve balls at us. We simply were not prepared.

It is important to know the people you are presenting with. What do they love and hate about presenting? Do they get nervous? Do you like them? You do not have to go out and start a band together, but there are a few things you can do to learn more about each other's styles and presentation skills.

1. *Spend Time Together*: Have lunch, get coffee or chat by the water cooler. Ask questions about each other's weekend, favorite movies and restaurants. Do they like sushi? Do they play video games? iPhone or Android? Gauge the way they answer questions. Throw in a curveball question and see what kind of reaction you get.
2. *Take Calls Together*: Invite team members to conference calls and sit in on theirs. You do not need to participate in their calls and they do not need to participate in yours. This is a chance for you to hear them in action. Listen to how they take questions, how they react, the way they begin and end the call and take notice if they use humor, or if they are good at small talk. Again, you want to learn more about their style.
3. *Band Practice*: If you have an upcoming pitch, then of course you are going to practice. Even without an impending pitch, you can still practice. Go into a conference room with the team and make up a pitch. Make it fun, funny, and have a good time. Pretend you are selling lollipops to a bunch of kids. Anything. There is no audience, so you can make mistakes. The purpose is to begin to work together. See who is better at opening, at closing, at making jokes. Get a feel for each other's timing, cadence, inflections, and body movements. You will soon tell when your pitch partner is wrapping up a point, giving you the opening to take a solo. Keep doing this. Malcolm Gladwell, in his book *Outliers*, wrote that the Beatles practiced 10,000 hours in Germany before they took over the world in 1964.¹⁰ Or, as my piano teacher, used to say, "Practice makes *permanent!*"

The objective is to figure each other out, to be able to end each other's sentences, to be smooth with transitions, and how to jam.

Setting up the Room

Remember that your presentation is not a meeting; it is a performance. Therefore, the room you are presenting in needs to be set up so that you feel comfortable and the audience is ready to be educated, inspired, and engaged. While you may not be in complete control of how the room is set up, there are a few things you can do to ensure a workable and pleasant atmosphere.

First, get to the room early. Set up your laptop, check all your connections and that you are able to project onto a screen or a wall. Clean up the table. Remove any papers, menus, napkins, paperclips, and so on. Straighten all the chairs. Make the room as neat and clean as possible. The reason for doing this is to get rid of any distractions. You want all eyes on you.

Figure out where you are going to stand. If there are windows in the room, then *you* should face them. Do not give the audience the chance to lose interest by watching planes or clouds go by. Figure out where you think the decision makers are going to sit and stand closer to them so you can maintain solid eye contact. Have your laptop on the table facing you so you can see your slides and do not have to turn around to look at them on a screen. I tend to stand on the side of the room opposite of the door. This way I can see everyone who walks in and greet him or her as they take their seats. It is your time to shine. So appear that you are in charge and ready to take the audience on a journey.

Chances are your presentation will take place in the morning or after lunch and you are more than likely going to have a sleepy audience. You need keep them awake and alert. Thus, turn on all of the lights. While it is a performance, it is not a theater. When you dim the lights you dim your audience's ability to stay engaged. On that note, when you get into the room, find the thermostat and turn the temperature down. The goal is not to make it freezing but to cool the room down before the meeting begins. The logic is that it is very hard to cool down a room, so have it on the cool side before the temperature rises from all the bodies in the room.

The last thing you want to do is freeze people out of the room. But it is better than a room full of sweating people—especially the presenter!

Let Me Tell You Story

When I was a freshman at Boston University, the university was running out of classrooms and lecture halls, so they rented space from a movie theater on campus and held classes there in the mornings. I happened to have a class at 11:00 a.m. in Theater #1. This was the last class before they started showing movies in the afternoon. The room was clearly set up to screen movies—the chairs were comfy, the lights were in a constant setting we liked to call *dusk* and the aroma of freshly popped corn wafted its way to our noses. There were no desks, so the professors handed us pieces of plywood to rest on our laps for note taking. Needless to say, if I was not dozing off, I was hungry and craving buttery popcorn. It was a complete disaster for the professor because he could not engage a bunch of drowsy, comfy, carb-craving students. Talk about external distractions!

Top 10 Things to Do Before You Present

There's always a Top 10 list for something. Top 10 Best Restaurants in London, Top 10 Things Marilyn Monroe Loved, Top 10 Van Halen Songs. You name it, there's a list. I wanted to keep with the trend and close out the book with a simple Top 10 list for you to check off before you make a presentation. So many of these are going to seem completely obvious, but believe we all need to remember them. So, behold—*The Top 10 Things You Must Do Before You Present Using Your Own Laptop*:

1. Clear Your Cache: The last thing you want is an unwanted URL automatically popping up in your browser. Be it something naughty or plain silly. I suggest clearing your cache “from the beginning of time.”
2. Close Outlook (or your mail program): There are many people out there who have yet to turn off the pop-up that alerts the user that a new mail has arrived. The audience does not need to know that you received an e-mail—let alone an invite to lunch or some completely inappropriate *spam* about manhood.

3. **Close Your Instant Message Program:** Like your mail, we do not need to see a bunch of pop ups from colleagues asking if you are available for lunch or your significant other asking you to pick up Thai food tonight.
4. **Check Your Speaker Volume:** If you plan on showing a video or playing a bit of audio you need to make sure your laptop is hooked up to speakers (never play audio through your tiny laptop speakers) and that the volume is at a respectable level. Having to tweak volume during a presentation looks sloppy and could throw you off your game.
5. **Save Your Presentation On A Flash Drive as a PDF:** There are many reasons why you may not be able to use your own laptop for your presentation—your battery died, you do not have the correct adapter for the projector, you have a Mac and they only have adapter for PCs, and so on. Whatever the reason, you will be prepared because you saved your slide deck as a PDF on a flash drive. You save it as a PDF so that all of your fonts, spacing, and so on are preserved. You may lose your transitions and animations, but you were not supposed to have any of those in the first place (see Chapter 7).
6. **Close All Your Browser Tabs Except The Ones You Need:** How many times have you seen a presenter open their browser and they have 10 or more tabs open? It not only looks sloppy, but it is distracting and frankly too revealing. We all look at things, click on embedded links and have our favorite pages, but there is no reason your audience needs to know this.
7. **Move Your Presentation to Your Desktop:** Have your PowerPoint or keynote file named appropriately and smack center on your desktop. There is no reason to keep your audience waiting for you as to sift through your files and directories. **BONUS:** Clean up your desktop while you are at it. Even if you have 100 files on your desktop, organize them.
8. **Change Your Desktop Image:** I cannot tell you how many times a presenter has made the switch to the projector and a desktop image of their kids or the cats has popped up on the screen. There is no need for this. Keep it professional and clean. Choose a default image or a simple solid color.

9. **Make Sure Your Wireless Remote Works:** If you are going to stand up and drive your slides using a remote, make sure it works.
10. **Take a Deep Breath:** Not necessarily something you need your laptop to do, but do not forget to take a deep breath and have fun because it is showtime!

One More Thing

Everyone has tips and tricks when it comes to pitching and presenting. As I mentioned earlier, there are hundreds of books, blogs, and articles focused on presentation skills from experts all over the world. I have quoted or made reference to many of them in this book. However, one of my favorites is by a fictional character from a sitcom from way back in the early 1970s—The Brady Bunch. Jan Brady had to give a presentation to her entire school and was very nervous. Her father, Mike Brady told his daughter to picture the audience wearing only underwear when she had to be on stage. While it goes against my cardinal rule of respecting the audience, it is a funny reminder that the audience members are just people, who like you and me, wear underwear. Mr. Brady's reasoning was that it is hard to be afraid of a group of people in their underwear! I have yet to try this exercise because I am afraid I will start laughing and lose my train of thought.

That said, I want to close the book with what I consider two of my secrets for delivering successful pitch presentations. As someone who has given pitches for close to 30 years, I have learned quite a lot of what some would say they are tricks of the trade. But truth be told, they are things I learned by growing up in a Jewish household.

Kibitz

Kibitz is a Yiddish word to describe someone who is quick to offer an opinion, or someone who likes to make conversation. I am an expressive, so I like to talk and get to know people. I learned early on in my career—do not be so formal and *wait* for the meeting to begin. I like to get to the pitch early, set up the room, and walk around to kibitz with the people as they file in. I find that you learn more about people's wishes, wants, and needs during the small talk before the actual pitch begins. Sometimes critical client team members shut down during the pitch because the *bosses* are in the room. My goal is to get to them before that happens. You may

gain insight and can call attention to it during the pitch. I learned this first hand when I was invited to pitch to a large university in the Boston area. I am chronically early to almost every meeting. So I got to the conference room 30 minutes ahead of schedule. I set up my laptop, checked my slides, changed the thermostat to cold, and sat down to wait. Fifteen minutes passed and people started coming into the room. We started chatting about the weather, the city, and eventually we got around to the school and their online marketing issues. I heard everything from complaints, disappointments to actual finger pointing and blame. The room was now filled with about 20 staff members. Everyone was talking about the problems at hand. I was learning so much! At the top of the hour, the director walked in and everyone clammed up. It was amazing to witness. The good thing is that I had heard everything before he entered, so I used it all in the presentation as key talking points. Needless to say, the director was quite stunned with the amount of knowledge I had; I won the pitch.

When a presentation starts, it becomes a formal affair and there are these unwritten rules of when people can speak and when they need to be quiet and listen. It is after all a performance. Just like at the theater, audience members chat it up before the lights go down and once the performance begins the audience goes quiet. I like to think that when the presentation starts the four personalities (driver, analytical, amiable, and expressive) are turned on. So, before the curtain goes up, use that time to talk with the audience and gain as much insight as you can.

Nosh

Another Yiddish word, nosh, means, *to snack*. Growing up Jewish I noshed a lot. Who am I kidding? I still nosh a lot! I always remember going to my grandparent's house and my grandmother would always have a tray of food out on the dining room table. We would all gather around the food so we could kibitz and nosh. My favorite was my grandmother's meatballs. Some of my fondest memories are sitting around the table listening to my relatives tell stories and noshing. It was comforting and homey. I always went home full of food and happiness.

One day many years ago, my agency had the opportunity to pitch a large restaurant chain. We were one of two agencies that made finals.

Taking my own advice, some of which I talk about in this book, I realized this was a chemistry test. The client knew we could do job, so this was a time to shine and differentiate ourselves from the competition. Krispy Kreme doughnuts was all the rage, so I picked up four dozen glazed doughnuts and brought them to the pitch. We spent the first 30 minutes kibitzing about and eating doughnuts. It was a huge hit!

Based on that story, my advice to you is to bring something to nosh on to every pitch meeting you have. Everyone loves free food, and everyone loves to kibitz about it. In addition, if you are creative (e.g., cookies with the client logo on them), the nosh can act as an icebreaker. While the doughnuts were a great choice, a good friend of mine suggested that chocolate is the best thing to bring. Everyone not only likes candy but chocolate is also euphoric and everyone will leave the meeting feeling good. Also, a little sugar in the morning or after lunch is always a good thing to wake them up and keep them alert!

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