

Presentation Skills - Psyche

“If all my talents and powers were to be taken from me by some inscrutable Providence, and I had my choice of keeping but one, I would unhesitatingly ask to be allowed to keep the power of speaking, for through it I would quickly recover all the rest.”

Daniel Webster

Have you happened to notice the dramatic changes that have evolved in training and teaching over the last twenty years? The basic focus used to be to educate. Now, the latest research is all about how to grab the attention of and maintain the interest of your audience. We can no longer focus simply on educating; we must now *entertain*. Why? Because our audience members' attention spans are getting shorter and shorter, so to keep their limited attention they must be kept entertained. Nowadays, you have only fifteen to thirty seconds to create a powerful, positive first impression before your audience begins to tune you out. Today, the process of combining education with entertainment is called “edutainment.” Like it or not, today's media-influenced culture breeds listeners who want to be entertained. I'm not saying that you've got to go out and learn how to juggle swords and swallow fire if you want to garner your prospects' attention, but it's paramount to your livelihood as a speaker and teacher to be engaging. Long gone are the days of counting on the subject matter to speak compellingly for itself, compensating for your inadequacies as a presenter. Nowadays, you've got to get inside of your prospects' minds, and you've got to get there fast—before you're even into the heart of your message. When asked what they thought made their managers most effective, 90 percent of all respondents mentioned communication and presentation skills. This tendency reveals how truly critical a life skill effective communication really is.

What are the key ingredients that will make you an engaging, compelling and persuasive speaker? How can you educate, inspire and entertain with passion, compassion and purpose? In this chapter, I'm going to take you through the five most critical components of a powerful presentation. They are what are known as the five Ps: psyche, preparation, presentation skills, people skills and persuasion. Let's start with the first major component.

Psyche

Above all, you must approach becoming and being a powerful presenter with the right mindset. There are many factors that play into this strategy, but two of the most crucial ones are visualization and the nature of fear. Visualization refers to what I like to call “mental programming.” I call it mental programming because I believe that you can literally program your mind to achieve certain goals, thereby controlling much of what actually happens. So much of what is manifested on the outside reflects what’s going on in the inside. These days, this statement is almost beginning to sound a little cliché, but I still hold firmly to the belief that it is indeed the case, perhaps sometimes more than we’d like to admit. Think of any successful Olympic athlete. S/he has seen her/his victories over and over again in her/his mind, long before the world ever saw them. Psychologists believe that the subconscious mind cannot differentiate between that which is real and that which is vividly imagined. Therefore, whatever you consistently and vividly rehearse in your head, your subconscious will accept as the truth.

So you see, “mental programming” is actually quite a literal thing. You can also see how it can be either a very powerful tool or a very dangerous one. Where are your thoughts taking you? What kinds of messages do you play over and over again to yourself? Mental programming has too powerful and too direct of an impact on your behavior to not take it seriously. How does all this apply to public speaking? Practice your presentation in your mind. Visualize your perfect performance mentally before you do it physically. Program even the smallest details, like your gestures or how you will tilt your head and raise your eyebrow when you make that certain point. Also envision your audience and how they will positively respond to you. You would be amazed at how things actually play out as precisely as you imagined they would. Choose to have the right mindset. Just remember that your thoughts control your emotions and your emotions control your actions. Don’t plant that negative thought in your mind.

I want to spend a moment analyzing the nature of fear. Fear is so debilitating, and yet it is so prevalent. I would say, in fact, that it is probably the number one obstacle standing in

the way of having a solid, positive mental mindset. Yet when its true nature is revealed, we are no longer bound by the mental and emotional limitations it imposes upon us. What are our most common fears when it comes to public speaking? That people will think we're stupid, that our message will be criticized or rejected, that we'll freeze up and forget what we're supposed to say. I want you to think about this fear thing from another perspective. Can you imagine members of your audience sitting out there saying, "I hope he does a terrible job," or "I hope she is really dry and boring," or "I hope he gets nervous"? Do you see how ridiculous this line of reasoning is? No one out there is hoping for your demise.

Of course, I'm being a little facetious here, but really, can you recall a time when you heard a speaker or a musical performer who really didn't do a good job? Perhaps the performer even performed terribly. When you witnessed her/his failure, you probably actually felt pained, didn't you? If the performer feels awkward and uncomfortable, then you as an audience member do, too. And who wants to feel like that? Your audience really does *want* you to do a great job. They want to hear a presentation that is engaging and credible, exciting and solid. Furthermore, consider the fact that they have made an investment of time, money or both into attending your presentation and would, therefore, be totally entitled to *expect* you to do a fantastic job. Sometimes something as simple as realizing that your audience really is rooting for you can go a long way toward alleviating your fear.

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