

## **Speaking Style of Great Persuaders**

Now that you have some pointers for the opening, body, and closing of your presentation, I'd like to give just a few pointers on the speaking style of great persuaders. We often overlook these things, but they make a big difference.

Make sure you don't speak too fast. We tend to rush through our presentations, especially when we're nervous. Obviously, if your audience can't understand you, your whole point in talking to them in the first place is defeated. On the other hand, speaking too slowly is not a good idea, either. Don't speak so slowly that you seem sluggish. Let the tempo of your speech just be natural, with enough energy that you keep things rolling, but not so fast that you seem jittery or uptight.

Another important consideration is volume. We've all had the frustrating experience of straining to hear someone. Be sure that you project and can be easily heard, especially if you will not have the aid of a microphone.

Be sure to consider the impact of pauses and moments of silence. These gaps also add meaning and impact to your message. The sound of well-timed silence can be more powerful than a dozen words. Because of this technique's dramatic effect, however, it can be overdone. Don't use pauses or silence too much. If you do, they lose their effectiveness. Besides highlighting important points, pausing also increases comprehension. When you pause in your story, it allows your audience a moment of introspection, which helps them absorb your message, both mentally and emotionally. Whether it is a moment to reflect or to enjoy a good laugh, a lull allows your audience members to process your story on a deeper level.

During a presentation, use gestures very carefully. Certainly there is room for spontaneity, but as a general rule, rookies should plan their gestures out ahead of time. They have to fit the story you are telling and not seem awkward or thrown together. Don't overdo gestures, but do use them to keep your audience's attention, to add drama to your story, and to underscore your key points. Think of your body as a prop that serves

as a visual extension of the story you are telling with your voice. Above all else, your gestures must come across very naturally. Don't be robotic in your presentations.

### **Managing Expectations**

Great persuaders know how to manage expectations. Individuals tend to behave in a manner that is consistent with how others expect them to perform, whether those expectations are positive or negative. When we know someone expects something from us, we try to usually satisfy them in order to gain respect and likeability.

Expectations are communicated in a variety of ways. It may be through language, voice inflections, or body language. Think of a time when you've been introduced to someone. Usually, if that person introduces herself by her first name, then you do the same. Likewise, if she gives you her first and last name, you do as well. Whether you realize it or not, you accept cues from others regarding their expectations and you act accordingly.

Have you ever noticed how your expectations become reality in your personal life? Expectation is literally a self-fulfilling prophecy. We become slaves to our expectations on both a conscious and subconscious level. We see this used in the business world all the time. For example, when a car salesman says, "You're really going to love how this TV makes your sports come alive," he is shifting the focus away from the sale and creating an exciting image in your head. He is also speaking as though you had already agreed to the sale because you wouldn't be watching the TV unless you were going to buy it. He's acting like it's a done deal—and the truth is, the more he acts this way, the more it is!

I love seeing door-to-door salespeople use expectations to their advantage. They approach a door, ring the bell, and with a big smile, tell their audience that they have a great presentation that needs to be seen. Of course, they employ this strategy while they are wiping their feet on the prospect's doormat in expectation of being let in the house. You would be surprised by how often this technique actually works. You see the

persuader handing over his pen in expectation of the contract being signed. Have you ever felt bad leaving a store or situation where you did not buy something? Why do you think you felt this way? It's because the store created and imposed upon you (often through very subtle means) the expectation that you would make a purchase.

### **The Elements of Mystery and Suspense**

Using the elements of mystery and suspense is another way to enhance communication. Great persuaders are able to get their audience members sitting on the edge of their seats, wanting more. When we feel as if we've been left hanging, it drives us crazy! We want to know the end of the story. This is also known as the "Zeigarnik Effect," named after Bluma Zeigarnik, a Russian psychologist. This effect is the tendency we have to remember uncompleted thoughts, ideas, or tasks more than completed ones.

We see the Zeigarnik Effect in action on the television news and other programs all the time. Right before a commercial break, the newscasters announce some interesting tidbit that will come later in the hour. This information piques your interest, and rather than flipping the channel, you stay tuned. Movies and dramas on television also leave you hanging in suspense. By leaving something unresolved right before the commercial break, these programs draw our attention, keep us involved, and motivate us to continue watching. We don't feel satisfaction until we receive finality, closure, or resolution.