

## Principles of Effective Presentations

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

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

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

**PRINCIPLE #1 YOUR BEST STYLE IS RELAXED CONVERSATION** Every day of your life, you convey your messages and your personality while engaged in conversation. You should therefore emulate conversation in your presentations. You’re not there to “download” information. You are there to create understanding that is based on a two-way exchange, and to facilitate an environment in which people can apply what you tell them to their personal or professional life. If you see a puzzled expression, don’t wait for them to ask a question. Handle it the same way you would in a conversation. Ask them if there

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

**PRINCIPLE #2 BE YOURSELF** You are unique. You have your own way of speaking and your own mannerisms -- how you talk, how you stand, how you hold your hands. To convey your personality to a group, you must express yourself in a manner similar to the ways in which you express yourself one-on-one. If you are expressive with your hands one-on-one, it's OK to be expressive with your hands when talking to a group. In fact, it's essential. You know it's important to be on your best behavior. You know there are certain standards that you must meet. You must dress appropriately. You must be attentive when someone asks a question. You must answer the question.

But worry less about how you "present" yourself, than how you communicate with the members of the group. Your body language must be natural. And what is natural for you is probably not natural for someone else, or vice-versa, which is why we hesitate in setting rules for gestures you should use or the body language you should attempt to convey. To understand this, think of the gestures you make when you are enthusiastically explaining a concept to a friend over the telephone. Who are these gestures for? The person on the other end? Understand that these gestures are part of who you are as an individual. Bring them to your presentations and let them happen naturally

**PRINCIPLE #3 RELAXED CONVERSATION IS TWOWAY** To be effective, relaxed conversation must be two-way. Indeed, by definition, all communication must be two-way. Even if one person does most of the talking in a conversation, he or she is looking for the nods, listening for the "uh-huhs," and stopping to answer questions. The sender quickly recognizes that a blank look means the receiver is not listening. He or she will respond by changing tactics -- pausing to let the listener catch up or asking if there is a question. Your presentations, like your conversations, must be two-way. If you treat people with respect, and create a two-way process in which their questions are answered clearly and concisely, you stand a better chance of having them use or act on the information you present.

**PRINCIPLE #4 RELAXED CONVERSATION IS RECEIVER-DRIVEN** In a relaxed conversation, the speed at which information goes from sender to receiver is driven by the receiver's needs, not the sender's. During a conversation, if the person listening doesn't signal that he or she understands -- with a "nod" or by saying "uhhuh" -- the sender stops to create a milestone of mutual understanding before moving on. If the sender doesn't do this, the receiver will stop listening. The same applies to your presentations. If you talk nonstop, you will quickly lose your audience. Instead, make sure the information you're sending is driven by the audience's needs, not yours. If you throw out an idea that creates puzzled expressions, it's probably a good time to stop and ask: "Are there any questions?"

**PRINCIPLE #5 LESS IS MORE** The less you say, the more your audience remembers. If you try to cram too much information into your presentations, you will not create a two-way exchange. And you certainly won't be receiver-driven. How can you be? The speed at which information travels from you to the audience is not driven by their need for understanding, but your need to get through it all in time. If you

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

**PRINCIPLE #6 PEOPLE CAN LISTEN OR THEY CAN THINK, BUT THEY CAN'T DO BOTH** As human beings, we can listen or we can think. But virtually none of us can listen and think at the same time. By definition, this means that you must "pause" when delivering your presentations. And those pauses must be as full and as frequent in your presentations as they are in your conversations. You want your seminars to be thoughtprovoking. You want people to think about what you're saying and apply it to their personal situation. But while they're thinking, if you're talking, they won't hear a word you say. If you talk nonstop, members of the audience will miss large portions of what you say. They'll rush to catch up once or twice. After that, they'll give up. And, if they give up, your chances of doing further business with them decreases proportionately.

**PRINCIPLE #7 PEOPLE WON'T REMEMBER WHAT YOU SAY** Participants at your presentations will not remember your exact words. Instead, they will remember what they thought about what you said — how they took your information and applied it to their frame of reference. But this process can only occur in silence, whether you give them that silence, or they take it for themselves. And remember, if they take that silence while you're talking, they won't hear a word you say.