

Personal delivery skills



7

Chapter outline

Personal delivery skills

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Introduction

Remember - you never have a second chance to make a first impression. How often have you heard that? Even before you say a word, your audience are making assumptions about you. Your presentation does not start with your first slide or sentence, but from the moment you stand up at the top of the room.

7.1 Making a first impression

If you do not have an opportunity to set up your laptop or other equipment beforehand, you will probably be required to do so in front of your waiting audience. Even at this stage, most eyes are on you. Make sure you know what you are doing, and try to appear comfortable and confident with the equipment.

→ Stance

Where and how do you stand? Be sure to stand facing your audience and stand up straight, being aware not to put your hands in your pockets, but hold them by your side and slightly away from your body. Hold your head up level, as that makes you look more confident. Make eye contact.

Talk slowly and more deliberately than you normally would. Remember back in chapter 4, we spoke about being very familiar with your initial introduction sentences. The clarity and pace of those first couple of sentences makes a major impression on your audience and their decision, at that stage, as to whether they are going to listen to you or not.

→ What to wear?

The answer to this lies in preparation, and you thinking about your audience. What type of

industry or organisation are you presenting to?

What is the ‘dressiquette’ for them? If unsure, it is advised to overdress. It shows your audience that you have made an effort and that they are important to you. Also, even if you are over dressed, it is easier to take off a suit jacket to appear more casual than trying to dress up a pair of denims.

→ Demeanour

In making that first impression, it is important to have a warm, open facial expression. Even if you feel that it is not appropriate to smile due to the nature or content of your presentation, a warm expression, as you address your audience initially, looks far more relaxed and confident than a frown or anxious expression. If you look nervous and uncomfortable, your audience will notice that, and could start to feel uncomfortable even before you have started!

7.2 Using your Voice

Remember during the opening chapter, reference was made to the fact that delivering presentations is like acting, you need to know your script (the content), you need to know how the information will be put across (the design and structure) and you need to be very aware of your

RSVP (P)

R-Repeat **S-Speed** **V-Volume** **P-Pitch** **(P) Pause**

voice (projection and intonation). We now examine the importance of your voice in presentations. Your voice is one of the most powerful tools you have in your presentation skills tool box.

RSVP (P)

RSVP, “Répondez s’il vous plaît”, is the French phrase meaning “reply, please”. It has become an almost universal request for a response to invitations.

I use this acronym as a memory aid for the dimensions of the voice when making presentations, because if you want your audience to respond to you and the content of your presentation, you must develop RSVP in your voice.

R Repeat

Repeat key words, phrases, or sentences *in a varied tone*.

S Speed

This signifies slowing down for emphasis and speeding up for climax or urgency.

V Volume

Always speak louder than you would if you were just sitting around a

table having a conversation. Your audience has to be able to hear you at all times. You need to throw your voice to the back of the room. Project your voice louder than your normal speaking voice.

P Pitch

Similar to intonation, pitch is where your voice may rise or fall. For example, have you ever read a story to a child? You tend to raise and drop your voice to emphasise drama, humour, excitement etc. Make sure you listen to how you speak. Perhaps you could tape yourself? Be careful not to sound monotone. Think about what you want to say and how you want to say it.

There is another P that is important for you to consider
- *Pause*

(P) Pause

This technique is where you stop for a second or two to emphasise a point you have just made, or give your audience a moment to think about something you have just said. You can also use a pause as a thinking mechanism, where you might pause to gather your thoughts, before you move on

with your presentation or answer a question. Making a deliberate pause between slides, then taking a breath, can also be used to slow you down, particularly if you are nervous and are racing through the material.

7.3 Body Language

Remember back in chapter 2 when we examined the impact of communication and the 7%-38%-55% rule. This is where up to 55% of how we are communicating is reflected in our body language. Remember the example below:

- **Verbally:**
“No, I do not have a problem!”
- **Non-Verbally:**
avoiding eye-contact, having closed body language, fidgeting, low or anxious voice etc.

Here our verbal communication is telling the listener one thing, but non-verbally, our body language is telling them something else.

Body language is made up of the gestures, stance, and facial expressions you use. Body language, when matched with the message you want to deliver, helps build credibility, express your emotions, and connect with your audience. Your body language is a visual aid, which will influence your audience’s level of interest and level of participation in your presentation.

Panel 7.1

Gestures

Gestures: By using your hands or head, you can support what you are saying verbally. For example; if you are talking about something moving from left to right, you can support your words with synchronized movements of your head. Or sweep the room with an open palm, as you talk about including everyone in the room in a particular initiative or project. Some people gesture almost naturally, most of us have to practice. Always be aware of your gestures. Make sure your gestures do not imply one thing, whilst you are saying something different.

Panel 7.2

Stance

Stance: How you stand tells the audience much about how you are feeling during the presentation. Stand up straight, with your weight slightly forward and your feet about a foot apart. You should move around, but avoid exaggerated or constant movement or swaying. This could be off putting to your audience.

7.4 Eye Contact

Another key skill in terms of confidence and keeping audience attention is to demonstrate confident eye contact. Your audience are more alert if they are aware of the presenter addressing them, even if it is only for 2-3 seconds. Proper eye contact helps you control the room, where your audience are less likely to drift or have off side conversations.

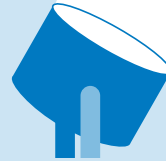
Panel 7.3

Facial expression

Facial expression: Move the muscles in your forehead. Now move your mouth from side to side. Move all the muscles in your face simultaneously. Why is it that when people stand up to make a presentation, their face freezes? The only movement is in their eyes. As I've just got you to experience, there are many muscles in the face. Practice your presentation in front of a mirror. Ask yourself, "if I was watching me, do I look boring or lacking enthusiasm?" Practice smiling, raising your eyebrows, raising and lowering your forehead.

Panel 7.4

Eye Contact



Eye contact: Picture a search light. Its beam of light moves at a steady pace, not too fast, but not too slowly. Now picture yourself at the top of a room, and your audience in front of you. Can you practice the same movement as a search light? Look at each member of your audience for a moment, as you move around the room.

Do not focus on just one side of the room, or just one person. This can often happen if you are nervous. Those people or that person can feel intimidated, whilst the rest of your audience do not connect with you.

7.5 Listening Skills

Perhaps the greatest benefit of good listening is, if you show that you are prepared to listen, your audience are likely to listen to you when you are speaking.

“HEARING is with the ears,
but LISTENING is with
the mind”

Steps to active listening are:

- ➔ **Step**
Step away from your laptop or equipment and make eye contact with the person asking the question. This shows that you are focused on listening to them. Remember not to exclude the rest of your audience though. Once the question has been asked, you might have to repeat it to ensure everyone has heard it, but always make eye contact with everyone when answering the question.
- ➔ **Look**
Maintain warm eye contact at all times.
- ➔ **Listen**
Listen carefully to what the person is saying. You may have to answer their question with a question initially to

ensure that you have the full understanding of what they are asking or saying.

- ➔ **Ask**
Active listening involves elaborating on a question being asked by you asking further questions to ensure understanding.
- ➔ **Be aware of your non-verbal listening responses**
As the person is talking, are your facial expressions and body language open and encouraging or, do you look closed, negative and intimidating?
- ➔ **Never have a disagreement with a member of your audience**
You may be in a situation where you have to correct something that is factually incorrect; however if the member of your audience continues to challenge you, do not enter into a full scale discussion or debate. Take it off line. Such one-to-one debate alienates the rest of your audience, who will begin to lose interest in your presentation very quickly.

Whether the audience agrees with the other person or not is irrelevant, they expect you, as the person in control of the presentation, to move the subject on.

7.6 Mannerisms

We all have mannerisms which are particular to us and are what make us individual, but they can be a distraction to the audience as well as yourself, particularly if you are nervous.

7.7 Overcoming Nerves

It is said that the fear of speaking in front of groups is one of the greatest fears people have.

Everyone has some level of nervousness, but it is how

people manage themselves, how comfortable they are with making presentations, and how they channel their ‘nervous energy’ which makes for an effective presenter. Your audience will always make allowances for nerves, but when you do make a mistake, do not try and blunder through; stop, admit to your audience that you have lost your train of thought, that you need a moment to gather your thoughts. Relax, take a deep breath, and then move on.

Let us look now at some tips for managing nerves.

Panel 7.5

Mannerism tips

- Remove loose change and mobile phones in pockets before you start.
- Pens, markers and props you might use can be distracting. Put them down when you are not using them.
- Watch that you do not wave a pointer around when you are not using it.
- Know the layout of the room, the sockets on the floor, corners of desks etc. You do not want to fall over, or walk into them.
- Be aware of the verbal mannerisms - ‘OK!’ ‘You know’ ‘Em’ ‘Yeah, Yeah’. These can sometimes occur when you are unsure of where you are going next in the presentation, or when you have lost your train of thought. Practice is vital here in helping overcome this. Also, once you become aware of yourself saying these, you begin to hear yourself saying it, and by practicing taking a breath before you utter it, can help eliminate the problem.

Panel 7.6

Tips to manage nerves

- Try and be familiar with the room. Even if you have not been in the room before, take an opportunity to stand at the top, taking in the breath and depth of the room.
- Know the equipment.
- Remember the 2 P's, Preparation and Practice.
- As mentioned earlier, have your introduction and closing remarks well prepared.
- An opening hook, such as a statement, photograph or image, or asking your audience to consider a scenario, can help take the focus off you for a few moments, particularly when you are at your most nervous at the beginning of the presentation.
- Start slowly, and concentrate on your breathing. Take deliberate breaths, more slowly and deeper than you normally would. You might feel foolish, or think that your audience can see you do this, but they can't. Training yourself to take a breath between points on your slides, or sections of your presentation, will help you to slow down.
- A technique to take the initial spotlight off you is to start with a question. "Has anyone used this before" or "does anyone know anything about..." This is an opening hook and it gives you a moment to compose yourself whilst your audience considers the question.
- If you feel your legs are shaking. Stand with one leg slightly in front of the other and rest your weight on the back leg. This will help ground you. Be careful not to rock back and forth by moving your weight from one leg to the other.
- If your hands shake, do not hold them clasped at waist level for everyone to see. Hold them loosely by your side, raising them and holding your palms outwards, from time to time. This allows for some movement so that any shakes you may have are not so obvious.

Managing your nerves is about teaching your butterflies to fly in the same direction. Adrenaline manufactured by nerves can help you make strong, lively presentations.

7.8 Humour

➔ Jokes

The words and timing needs to be precise, otherwise the joke will fall flat. If you are nervous, it can be difficult to pull that off. Also, you might think something is funny, but your audience might totally misunderstand your humour. So, if using jokes you need to be very comfortable with the presentation, and know your audience.

➔ Situational humour

This relates to humour that ‘just happens’ on the day. It can involve making reference to something that is happening there and then.

➔ Laughing at yourself

This type of humour is where you highlight and can laugh at something you said, or did during the presentation. Most presenters do not want to appear like the clown, but having the ability to laugh at yourself shows that you do not take yourself too seriously, where it is not always necessary too.

Chapter Summary

Let's jog your memory of this chapter!

- Making that first impression – stand tall, practice eye contact
- What to wear? Remember the 'dressiquette' of the people you are presenting to. Dress a step above
- Utilise projection and intonation of your voice
- Remember - RSVP (P):
 - Repeat
 - Speed
 - Volume
 - Pitch
 - Pause
- **Repeat** key words and phrases in varied tones
- **Speed** up and slow down your speech to provide impact
- Project your voice more than you would your normal speaking voice. Add **volume**.
- **Pitch** adds variety
- **(P) Pausing** at different stages allows for your audience to take in information. It also breaks the pace of the presentation, allowing you to slow down if you are talking too fast. Pausing can add impact if you want to put a focus on something
- Be aware of your 'Body Language' the 'Gestures' you make, your 'Stance' and the message your 'Facial Expressions' are giving your audience
- Eye contact and practising the search light technique is important to ensure you engage with your audience
- Listening Skills encourages audience questions
- Mannerisms can be part of you, but be aware of those mannerisms which distract your audience from your message
- Overcoming Nerves by practicing some of the techniques which help those butterflies to fly in the same direction
- Humour and jokes can fall flat if you are nervous. Situational humour can work best when the humour is in the moment and reacting to a situation