



Grand Gestures

How to Give a Great Presentation: Part Three

This three part – and possibly four-part – series began by outlining how to prepare content for a presentation. The second installment explained the most important skill in presenting, and, in fact, for communicating with others: How to use your eyes.

Now we get to the questions, which usually arise when you start to put the things you have learned into practice: The first one is: “Am I an Orangutan?”

These arms! What should I do with them? Are my knuckles hitting the floor? Do I talk with my hands? What should I do with my feet? Ohmygod, I’m yelling!” And on and on.

When we get up to present, or even open our mouths in a meeting or stressful social situation, we get a shot of adrenaline. Exposing ourselves (intellectually and emotionally) is dangerous, so we automatically go into fight or flight mode: thus the adrenaline.

Aunt Bossy

Written by Susan Murphy

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We generally interpret adrenaline as nervousness, and our instinct is to control it. We can't, and that makes us even more nervous.

You should not try to control your nervousness. Trust me, it is stronger than you are. What you should do is channel that nervousness, which is really just energy run amok.

When you lock eyes with the people with whom you are speaking, you are channeling your energy, as well as your knowledge, their way. That is the first and most important step.

People want to give their time, money, or attention to a person with some authority. If you come across as wimpy or weak, they won't listen. This does not mean you have to come on like gangbusters. You must remain true to your personality.

Here is what you need to do to look and sound as intelligent, experienced and valuable as you are:

Lock eyes, and deliver your message person to person.

Stand up straight and balance your stance. Your feet, male or female, should be hip or shoulder distance apart.

Plant yourself: there is no reason to wander around. It wastes energy and makes it more difficult to maintain eye contact.

Talk louder than is necessary to be heard. This helps get rid of excess energy, gains the attention of your audience, and shows that you are working hard. Your audience might never say to themselves, "Boy that speaker really worked hard. However, that will be their impression if you use volume, inflection and projection. Your audience is flattered when you work hard to give them your message.

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Whenever I have to coach a very experienced high-level executive who gives presentations and speeches regularly, I always ask them to double their volume. They don't take that advice, of course, but they do get louder and more "out there." It calms them down, and helps them target their energy more wisely. It also gives the impression of power. Power, used wisely, comforts the audience. They want to hear someone with power and authority in some way.

When you use your arms and hands, eliminate anything that does not support your image and your message. Hands in pockets are too casual, and even the most disciplined human will play with the coins or keys in that pocket. Executive fig leaf, where the hands are folded over the groin, is a submissive position. So is parade rest.

The prayer position leads to Velcro elbow, where your elbows stick to your side and any gestures make you look like t-rex or Baby Huey, or even the Donald. (I can see Donald Trump consciously trying to break that habit, but it is an old one.)

If you try to hold your arms still by your sides, you will start flapping like the star at Sea World. So, what to do?

All gestures should be above the waist and away from the body. You should drop your hands to your side occasionally, giving your audience a visual break.

Come up with a vocabulary of gestures. You bring people together, schedule things, have increases and decreases. Make a big gesture illustrating those concepts whenever you talk about them. The main thing is not to worry about them. If you make eye contact, balance your stance and speak loudly, your gestures will eventually fall in place.

We all gesture all day. Start noticing what you do. If you "talk with your hands" just drop one. The other will do something more illustrative or emphatic.

That's all folks. It is very simple, but not at all easy. The good news is that anyone can become

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a more effective speaker or communicator by practicing these skills. Practice is key. Of all the people reading this, the person who practices will be the best speaker in a year from now.

Reach out and let me know what else you'd like to know about his subject, or any other. My bossiness has no limits!!