



The Eyes Have It

How to Give a Great Presentation: Part Two

I am assuming you all did your homework and have some content you can use. If not, don't feel bad. I understand procrastination extremely well. Let's pretend you have it even if you are going to do that part "later."

By now, if you did your homework assigned in the [last issue's Aunt Bossy](#) , you should have your message hammered out and it should sound like you.

The last election taught us that audiences respond best when the speaker shows, rather than tells, whom he or she is. Your content must reflect that. That is what Sanders and Trump did, and what Hillary Clinton failed to do.

Speak simply. I always tell my clients "Don't apprehend the perpetrator" if you can "Catch the crook." "This point in time" should be "Now."

I don't even like "utilize" in place of "use." If you start sounding condescending or pompous, you will lose or alienate your audience. If necessary, go back over your content one more time and adjust the language if you have to.

Fancy talk is not impressive. There are lots of examples of this kind of language and I will outline that in my next column. You have enough to worry about right now and I don't want to overload you.

Now it is time for you to get that content out of your brain and your mouth and delivered to an audience. If you have some humans who will keep their mouths shut while you talk, ask them to help you out by being an audience. If not, and this does work, either post head shots of people, draw heads with features, or seat stuffed animals with eyes around the room. You are going to need an audience with eyes.

The most important skill you can master, the skill that will set you apart from other speakers, is eye contact. It is also the most difficult skill.

We are hardwired to scan. If we didn't scan, we would be hit by cars, get lost, walk into dangerous situations, and remain ignorant of what is going on around us. Our ancestors would have been eaten by tigers if they hadn't scanned. We also learn much of what we know visually. Scanning is vital in life.

However, when you are gathering your thoughts and presenting them, scanning is your enemy. As you move your eyes rapidly about the room, you are bombarding your brain with information, consciously or not.

Your brain has a job to do: get your words out of your mouth to an audience. If you flood it with other information, you will create a mental traffic jam. That will make you nervous. The more nervous you are, the more you will scan, and eventually you will be a wreck.

Mastering eye contact has great benefits. It will calm you down and help you think on your feet. It forces you to pause between sets of audience eyes, and thus breathe and collect your thoughts. (Do you know how many people don't breathe regularly when they are presenting?) Eye contact gives you constant audience feedback, which will help you target your words. Your eye contact engages the listener and allows him or her to take in what you are sharing.

We all want to be validated as valuable humans. Looking a person in the eyes acknowledges his or her value. Any time words are coming out of your mouth, your eyes should be locked on those of another. You are sharing the gift of your knowledge. You worked hard to know what you know and it deserves more than just being thrown out to space. GIVE that gift to another human.

So, how does this work? How can you be certain to address everyone in the audience if you lock eyes with people?

Start by locking eyes with a member of the audience; give that person a thought, a phrase, a sentence. You will learn by practice what is appropriate. Then, PAUSE, breathe, and focus on a person in a different part of the room, or conference table. Give that person another thought, and continue the process, being certain you choose people in all sections of the room. In a large conference room, I like to focus from one side to another to build in pauses and let my message get absorbed.

When you focus on a person, eye to eye, you really connect, you include them. The bonus is, if they are at any distance at all, the people sitting around that person will feel as though you are including them as well.

This is a difficult skill, so you will come up with excuses for not doing it. One of the most popular is "I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable, or I don't want to stare."

First of all, you are not staring if you are actively sharing a thought. Secondly, if a person looks uncomfortable or shy, just pause at the soonest appropriate moment and direct your message to another person. Don't assume that you can never make eye contact with that person again. People tend to get more comfortable with you as you talk, so give that eye contact another try later on in your talk. If you never look at him or her again, they will feel left out.

Since you have been scanning since birth, this will take some practice. Start immediately by looking every person with whom you come in contact in the eyes.

Aunt Bossy

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Start making eye contact with people you usually don't even look at: the valet, the grocery clerk, the ticket seller, and the bus driver. This will not only teach you the skill, it will change your life. When you validate others, even in the simplest way, you enrich their lives, and create uplifting energy for yourself and others.

This is a serious skill to practice and takes some effort. Start now, and next column we'll take a look at what you should be doing with the rest of your body to make you look and sound as brilliant as you are.