

Pack Your Presentations With Power

By Christine W. Zust, M.A.



We have all experienced the magic that certain speakers weave into their presentations. What makes them so great? What sets them apart from other speakers? You can learn their secrets and apply them to your next presentation, beginning right now. Here are a few tried and true tips that the best speakers use when addressing their audiences:

1. Connect with your audience through eye contact. They say the eyes are the windows to the soul. What do your eyes say about you? Once you learn to master eye contact, you will reap the rewards of immediate connection with your audience. By using a relaxed, steady gaze, you position yourself as confident and at ease. Your stories become more believable when you tell them directly to someone. A word of advice: Make friends the moment you walk in the room. Arrive early before your presentation begins, and introduce yourself to audience members. Create relationships before you get to the platform. That way, as you make contact with audience members during your presentation, you will feel like you are talking to a group of friends instead of a room full of strangers.

2. Add power through silence. Silence is one of the most golden techniques that we can use as speakers, because silence is powerful. It is one of the most commanding forms of nonverbal communication if you let it. All the great orators of the Twentieth Century used silence in their presentations – Civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., President John F. Kennedy, television host Charles Kuralt. Effective use of silent pauses allows the audience to absorb your message. As speakers, we may feel uncomfortable with pregnant pauses; we may worry that the audience might think we have forgotten our place. Silence does several things for you as a speaker -- it gives you time to collect your thoughts and stay on track, it lets the listener digest your message, and it gives you some extra time to “read” your audience’s response. A few extra seconds, sprinkled here and there throughout your presentation, can add greater influence and power to your presentations.

3. Stand tall. There is nothing more appealing than watching a speaker who exudes great confidence through a powerful body stance. The audience is watching every move you make, and that includes how you stand, use gestures and move around the platform. The formula is quite simple: Stand erect, with your shoulders back, chin up, and chest open, with your weight evenly distributed to both feet. If you feel more positive about yourself, you will send that message to your audience.

4. Smile, and your audience will smile with you. Smiling helps your audience relax and feel good about you because, after all, you look like you’re having a great time. There is a danger here, though. Some speakers come out on the platform with an artificial smile pasted on their faces. Believe me, the audience knows the difference between someone who is genuinely interested in being there, and one who is simply putting in time. There is nothing more dreadful than watching a speaker who looks tired, bored or emotion-less. On the other hand, don’t feel compelled to smile during every minute of your presentation, as if you’re competing for some beauty crown. Find a relaxed balance between serious and lighthearted facial expressions.

Each of these four tips is a nonverbal form of communication, a very powerful tool for speakers. As you prepare your remarks for that next presentation, follow these simple steps, relax, and get out there and have a great time...with confidence!

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