

Rules of delivery.

by Gianni Anchois

Developing your public speaking skills.

In “Delivery Rules” I highlighted the three key principles that, I believe, are required to deliver a great presentation: content, structure and speaker. In part 2, I’m focusing on the personal skills that you need to develop to become a great presenter and speaker (I like to call it a “business communicator”), and that will set you apart from the others.

SOFT SKILLS

“Be yourself. Everybody else is already taken.”

If the delivery of a speech is more important than the content, then obviously there is a lot of work that we need to start doing on the most important element: us.

The core of the effort will be on building those soft skills that will make us more confident, more credible and more entertaining as well.

In principle, I believe that any business conference should be, at its core, a theatrical event. If you think of it, you have characters playing different roles in both the roster of speakers and in the audience, there is a script

(the conference's theme), and there are specific acts (plenary sessions, breakout sessions, thematic tracks). Unlike theatrical representations though, mostly the actors involved, specifically in this case the speakers, fail to be compelling, memorable or, at times, even professional. Not to mention the abysmal lack of entertainment value!

For some reason, popular belief is that “acting” is synonymous with “not being yourself”, or that by acting when presenting we run the risk of becoming melodramatic. Far from it, great actors actually feel real and honest emotions, the same emotions that we businesspeople need to feel and convey when communicating through verbal or non verbal engagements.

I know what you are thinking. Unlike professional actors, most of us lack the “stage presence”: those physical attributes, that hard to explain natural magnetism that commands attention.

Presence derives from knowing who you are and being comfortable with that. It's about finding and enhancing your own, authentic style of communication.

1. PRESENCE

People with presence know how to connect with others, no matter how large the audience is, and they have a sense of congruence about them: their voice, body, emotions, words, and energy all work together.

Are you born with “presence”? Well, actually it's a skill that can be learned through proper theatre-based business coaching and training. There are many companies who provide these kind of services, and, personal experience, it's incredible how quickly you can learn at least the basics of building your presence on stage.

By doing that you will be better at focusing on your performance, at reaching out and at involving your audience through questions, anecdotes or simple eye contact. Through presence you can build that trust and credibility that will enable you to truly connect with people.

You will become much more confident and you'll notice how you'll master your “space” — defined as the time allotted for your speech plus the actual physical area on the stage. Without presence, other tricks or techniques for better presenting make little difference.

2. PASSION

The second attribute you need to focus on beyond presence is passion. We expect it from a performer of music or drama, so why not from a business presenter?

The way we express passion is of course very subjective. Without going to extremes, like jumping in the air, shouting or weeping, in a business context we can convey our passion by presenting our material with conviction, emotion, and a natural level of animation.

A passionate speaker is always more authentic. However, be careful: if you do not deeply know and have a high degree of familiarity with your material, it's very difficult to be passionate about it.

3. STAGE FRIGHT

The third attribute you need to master is stage fright.

You'll be surprised to learn that many actors and stage performers, even after years of practice and successful careers, still feel sickly just before getting on stage.

The way they conquer their fears varies, but often is by relaxing their muscles, doing little voice exercises, warming up on their instruments or performing short runs to build up their breathing depth and oxygenate the body. All little tricks you can also apply just before going up those few steps leading to the stage.

One of the best ways to tackle stage fright, of course, is to constantly practice and rehearse, with purpose. Similar to a dressed rehearsal in theatres, ask your colleagues, your friends or your spouse to be the audience and practice the techniques explained so far.

Sometimes an element of fright comes from the unknown variable that is the audience itself: what if they don't like me, or if they ask difficult questions, if they object or interrupt?

Once again, as in many other things in life, preparation is critical. Try as much as you can to assess your audience beforehand, maybe by just walking around and introducing yourself to a selection of them. Often a

lack of engagement is caused by bad room setting, or poor acoustics, all things you can easily check and adjust in advance.

Once you are on stage, focus on your audience. Armed with your newly found stage presence and passion, talk to them with confidence.

If you want, you can connect personally with a few members of the audience by moving in close to them. This act will raise the energy in the room and focus the attention on yourself, so be mindful of your timing and choose the right moment to do it.

JOURNEYS

Take them with you on your journey. Make them part of it and be spontaneous. Always remember that ultimately, the best presentations are actually great conversations.

If you have built the right contents to support that conversation, in a structure that is enticing and building up to the climax in your speech, and have worked on your soft skills, by developing presence, unleashing your passion and beating stage fright, you will be in the perfect position to become a great presenter.

All that is left is for you to go out and do it. Enjoy!

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***Gianni Anchois** is a writer, blogger and technology enthusiast, with a background in electronics engineering, computer science and marketing. He has worked at Olivetti, Italia Online, Yahoo! and Hewlett-Packard, holding international responsibilities across IT services, business management, e-commerce, sales and marketing.*

<http://twitter.com/giannianchois>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/giannianchois>

<https://medium.com/@giannianchois>