

THE SCIENCE-BASED HABITS OF GREAT PRESENTERS

What makes someone an effective presenter? Why do some sales people seem to effortlessly captivate their buyers, while others struggle just to keep them awake?

The way you present your ideas matters because it is often the deciding factor in whether or not your message will be met with acceptance or rejection. Neuroscientist Gregory Berns summarizes this reality with the insightful statement, “A person can have the greatest idea in the world – completely different and novel –but if that person can’t convince enough other people, it doesn’t matter.”

So what makes great presenters so effective? The answer is found in their habits. Top presenters create presentation habits that help their audiences mentally process what they are conveying. The exciting news is that anyone who engages in these habits can also instantly improve his or her presentation skills. Here are five of the habits that top presenters have.

1. Gesture Purposefully

One of the leading experts on gestures is University of Chicago’s Dr. David McNeil. McNeil’s research findings have shown that gestures are connected with the spoken word and together produce meaning. He has also identified that the very act of gesturing boosts the brain’s ability to process information and formulate thoughts.

It is important that gestures are natural and displayed with intentionality. Gestures should visually illustrate your words. A common trap that many presenters fall into is using the same gesture over and over again, which distracts away from their content.

One productive way to analyze your gestures is to record a presentation. Watch the recording three times. The first time study your verbal and non-verbal signals. Are they in sync, or do your gestures contradict your words? At the second viewing turn the sound off and focus on what your body movements convey. Finally, view the presentation a third time, in fast-forward mode. This will exaggerate your gestures and will often cause you to notice things that you may have previously missed.

2. Use Power Movements

Power movements are movements or poses that alter body chemistry and enhance performance. Research has confirmed that holding “high power” poses, such as placing your hands on your hips, will trigger an increase in testosterone. This release of testosterone will amplify feelings of confidence.

The simplest way to create power movements is to observe how you naturally move when you are extremely confident. You will notice that there are certain gestures or poses that you instinctively adopt. Power movements are the intentional use of these movements and poses.

The reason power movements are so influential is because science has revealed that they are reflections of confidence and produce confidence. Though feelings influence our body movements, the opposite is also true. If you are feeling one way and you purposefully display body language that reflects a different feeling, soon you will begin to feel more like what your body is representing.

3. Leverage The Picture Superiority Effect

Imagine if you could significantly boost your audiences' ability to comprehend and retain the information you present. There is some very compelling research that has shown how the human brain perceives pictures much differently than words. When presenters use pictures they are able to help their audiences understand and remember the content of their presentation. Researchers refer to this phenomenon as the picture superiority effect.

The impact of the picture superiority effect is profound. Neuroscientist John Medina comments on this in his book *Brain Rules*, when he affirms that if you add a picture that represents the words a speaker is saying, the ability of the audience to recall the information skyrockets by up to 65%.

Consequently, when building your next presentation, incorporate pictures to visually illustrate your words. This will guide you in delivering your presentation in a way that is in line with how the brain encodes, stores and retrieves information.

4. Eliminate Filler Words

Top presenters rarely use filler words such as “um” or “ah.” However, for the rest of us, these filler words often creep into our presentation when we are transiting between thoughts. These filler words are more than annoying; they actually erode credibility and often distract your audience away from the content of your presentation.

Instead of using annoying filler words, speech coaches recommend incorporating pauses. Many resist pauses because they feel uncomfortable with silence. Yet, allowing a brief silence serves you by providing you time to think and also allows your audience the space to mentally digest what you have just said.

Many prominent professional speakers strategically utilize pauses after every key point. Professional speaker Craig Harrison aptly illuminates the importance of pausing as something that turns “the monologue of the speech into a dialogue with the audience.”

5. Share Stories

There is no doubt that stories are a powerful tool that every presenter should use. Many top business leaders use stories in their presentations. Effective storytelling will take a good presentation and make it exceptional.

Brain science has revealed that stories bypass the normal mental route the brain goes through when evaluating data. Stories instinctively evoke an emotional response and as a result are more easily remembered than facts.

One science-based strategy to further amplify the impact of stories is to share stories where the characters are similar to your audience. The more alike the characters in a story are with those listening, the easier it is for the audience to picture themselves in the story.

By adopting the habits of top presenters you will prompt your audience to respond more favorably to you and your ideas.

About the Author

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