

PERSPECTIVE

CONTENT BY SPECIAL DELIVERY

Corporate trainer **Charles Serio** explains why communicators and leaders need to polish up their presentation skills.



A **T A TIME WHEN** people are questioning what they hear in the media, and doubting politicians, poor presentation in business is a big issue. The rise of social media and bitesize content is making us look positively on the efficacy and power of speech – but people aren't convinced by what they are hearing. There is a pressure to find the human touch through communication.

The way leaders, managers and communicators present themselves has ramifications across the workplace, because it affects culture – negatively or positively. Is what you say and the way you say it making people feel valued?

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CHARLES SERIO

When I teach presentation skills, one common mistake I see is a failure to connect with the audience – to lead them along in a forward momentum, and to influence the audience to respond in some way to what you are saying.

I ask people to think differently about what they already do. When we prepare a presentation, we first think about the main points to cover. My “pillars” methodology makes these headings the spine of the presentation – a super structure that allows the presenter to lead the audience along, pillar by pillar. Keep following these and you know where you're heading. You won't run aground.

QUICK TIPS

1 **Connect with people in the room and be clear on your agenda – lead your audience in a forward momentum, pillar by pillar.**

2 **Adjust your manner to connect with different audiences or to highlight a pillar. Any adverb can serve as a manner of delivery: serious, humorous, commanding, seductive...**

3 **Articulate all sounded consonants. If it is sounded, it is heard. It clarifies your message and helps control the tempo.**

Pillars help your presentation to be paced, not raced. If you're not working towards your next pillar, you can lose your train of thought or get bogged down in supporting information. With your pillars in place, you can slow down, consider your breathing technique and better manage the articulation of words.

For 24 years, I was a professional dancer. That has given me experience in managing behaviour. People tend to lose their body language during a presentation – they rock back and forth, slump in a chair or wave their hands about with no purpose.

Reboot by remembering your hands, feet and head. If you lose control of your hands, drop them to your side. That's a neutral body shape. Always keep your feet in contact with the floor, whether you are seated or standing. And keep your head parallel to the ceiling. These tips will help you stick to the task of connecting.

One thing I learned from my dance background is to gesture to the end of the extremity. Your energy goes through your toes, and the tips of your fingers. In dance, you keep a line. If you point at a slide, gesture with your full arm. It increases your presence and helps you keep command of the room. It gives the audience confidence in you. They feel like they are being led.

Not so long ago, I was asked to a community event hosted by a government group. It was a rather hostile audience who had come to voice complaints about promises made by the group that had not materialised. None of the members of the group addressed this elephant in the room. When the chairperson opened the floor to questions, all hell broke loose – it turned into a shouting match. The panel lost control and respect because they were fielding questions that were not in their presentation. They were rushing to answer without giving the comments due consideration.

When you present, you need empathy. Consider what the audience needs and wants. Why are you there?

You can only learn more about presentation skills and how to manage your behaviour by doing it repeatedly, in a workshop. You can read up on it, but that won't give you the same skills as practising. You could read or watch videos about swimming, but you're not going to know how to do it until you're in the water.

Communicators and leaders no longer have the option of not presenting. Face the givens – the reality of what's happening. People have come together in a room to hear and see you speak – so do it the best way you can. **V**



Charles Serio is a corporate trainer for the public and private sector, running workshops on personal impact and presentation skills in the workplace, and sales processes. He is also artistic director of arts charity Serio Ensemble, having run his own London theatre venue for 12 years.