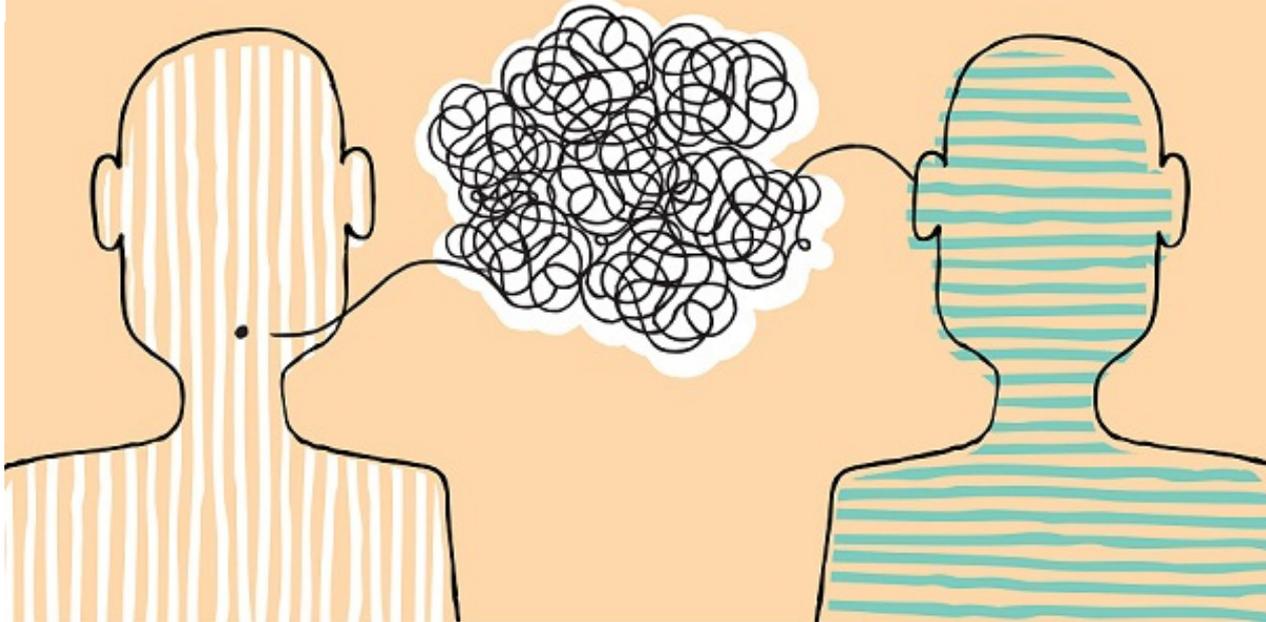


Convey Your Thoughts Effectively ...

The sixth in this soft skill series, considers Group Presentations, with an eye on Strategies to help gain a little more Influence.

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Presenting to Others, is an Influential Conversation

Early on in my IT career, I needed to get two senior executives to change the way they viewed implementation of an innovative solution. I remember asking my Mentor to suggest what might be helpful ways to influence people in authority.

Almost by reflex he told me "A Leader would go & have a conversation with them".

Though I thanked him for his insights, I was little the wiser for that exchange, especially as I never saw myself as a leader back then. Curiosity got the better of me, so I probed deeper, and asked him how best to do that. He retorted ... "Find a way to present your ideas to them ...".

Years later as I reflected on my leadership growth journey, things crystallised; contained inside my Mentor's mindset, he had packed the content of a very powerful message. I had seen the container, though I had never appreciated its content.

In that one exchange, he taught me three significant lessons, that ...

- Leadership was a continuous process of conversation
- Influence was creative conversation with the people that matter
- Presenting was a conversational process, designed to bring about influence

Presenting, is a very Natural Act

Whether for a personal goal, a project at work, or a professional qualification, we are all called on to present, aren't we? To some, this can pose a barrier, despite the reality that we've all been "presenting" ourselves since birth, and, been doing it in order to influence others.

Think back to the past as a baby, screwing up your face, or bawling aloud. You sought parental love and attention, didn't you? Years later, with curled lip, pouting face, and pining voice, you tugged at your mother's heartstrings to get that ice-cream. Influence yet again, yes?

And come now into the present, to that last "selfie" you shared on Facebook. If that's not an overt attempt to present yourself in an influential light in front of others, then what is?

"Rather than see "presenting" as a barrier, as something you do infrequently, you also have the power to re-frame it. Accept that presenting is a natural act; it's something you do all the time. It's also an intentional activity you do for others, to influence them in some relevant way."

I've learnt to frame "presenting" as "participation"; to simply show up, and share some "thing". That "thing" could be a thought, feeling, image, sound, gesture, or just my physical presence.

It's an intentional choice, one where I've opportunity to join in the dialogue, as I impart an idea, express a viewpoint, persuade someone, entertain others, or just be there to support them.

Reframing your interpretation of what presenting is, is powerful. It frees you to turn attentions away from you and your concerns, toward your audience and their needs. To help in that process, here are six steps to pace next time you embrace opportunity to present before others.

Presenting with Excellence, Requires that You ...

Are Authentic

You've spent the whole of your life becoming exactly who you now are; you know it's a risk to try to become someone you are not. So just focus on being "your best self" when presenting.

Present like a leader as you reveal your authentic self to your audience. They'll quickly decipher differences between the real you, and a "container" acting as if they're someone else.

Believe in Preparation

Because you want to put on your "game face", it helps to have a "game plan". Presentations are intentional; they have a purpose, are pitched to a particular audience, and are structured.

Delivery time always races by, so position yourself to win your biggest battle; content vs. time. Prepare ahead by first structuring for content, then, pruning judiciously to meet the time budget.

Commit to Practice

Ask any sportsperson, and they'll tell you the differences between practice and performance. The practice phase is where they correct mistakes, try out new ideas, take risks, and hone skills.

However in business, the focus is mainly on performance isn't it? Separate both phases, and use presentation practice to synergistically form new neurological associations with the content.

Deliver with a Smile

When you smile your natural smile, people automatically warm to you; it's hard for them to resist. When you frown, grimace or growl, the opposite happens; you'll naturally repel them!

"Choose to pop a smile on your dial, and you'll discover that body language has a positive internal impact too. It's difficult to feel emotions negatively, when the body beams positively."

Enjoy their Moment

We seldom get better opportunities to influence than when presenting material for others. Therefore, choose to embrace and savour these special occasions; they really are quite rare.

Sure, adrenalin will naturally alert you to important moments as it courses through your veins. So choose to counterbalance the onrush, actively slowing things down, breathing deeper; enjoy.

Find Time to Reflect

After adrenalin, elation; when you make a presentation, you always take away an "experience". Embedded within that sits a deep cave, where learning moments, ideas and emotions still dwell.

Tap into all the richness that it affords you; capture what you did, how they responded, how you felt. Learning & growth via reflection is another quality that leaders deliberately embrace.

"Like a box of chocolates, bowl of rice, or cup of tea, presenters ensure harmonious relationships between container and content. They create rapport between the two, ensuring their audience concentrates not on the person or their PowerPoints, but on enjoying the content as contained."

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