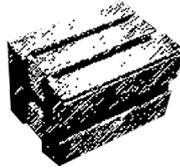




**I CAN SPEAK CLEARLY  
NOW THE PAIN HAS GONE**

A self-help guide to confident and  
competent presenting

**Amanda Fleming**



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## **READER FEEDBACK**

***"Fantastic - This is the best book on the topic I have ever read"***

Robyn Pearce, Robyn Pearce Corporation LTD

***"Your book is a great confidence booster for those that present which is clearly what you are aiming for and so have achieved. Your language is clear and unpretentious which makes your information very accessible. I liked the 'just for fun' bits and appreciated the summary of main points at the end of each chapter. Well done!"***

Jillian

***"I like the way the book is principle-centred. Some of the principles seem plain common sense but others are more insightful and overall the principles provide a solid platform of good advice. They also reflect a philosophy that is accessible/intelligible (at least to me). They are also actionable which is great"***

James

***"Thank you thank you for so masterfully weaving personal development with practical tools in your book. Your writing style made me feel like you and I were having a private conversation that worked so well for my style of learning. What really worked for me are the 'what's important' bits at the end of the chapters and then the big check-in at the end of part two."***

Vicki

## **DEDICATION**

This, my very first book is dedicated to  
Judy Egerton  
who taught me at the tender age of seven  
that writing was a valuable tool to express myself,  
and  
to everyone that is willing  
to find  
their authentic  
voice.

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## INTRODUCTION

### A 'DO I WANT TO READ THIS BOOK?'

#### PRE-READING BITE

Since this book was first published in 2004 much has changed, and much has stayed the same. The age of technology has exponentially grown our capacity to connect globally and instantly from pretty much anywhere in the world. In this age of social media and the growing influence of the 'voices of everyone', it is just as important, if not even more important that we *communicate effectively*. Do you yearn for simplicity at times?

The powerful spoken word can offer that simplicity. The live speaker who can truly inspire has always been a rarity. People who can communicate with others, the widest range of others, know human relationships are the key to our ongoing existence. Right now I believe we need a 'recovery programme' for inspiring speakers. I meet so many extra-ordinary people who have such wonderful stories and insights to share, who have CV's made of real life and who quietly stand **For The Good**. All that stops them sharing their wisdom is self-doubt (this seems especially so for women). No doubt you have felt your own at times, maybe it's a constant companion. Have renewed faith. The inspiring speaker is re-emerging, stronger and clearer and more conscious than ever before in our history. Our ability to make distinctions is astounding and there is plenty of room to move yet. In the coming years we will hear more truth. More plain talk. The Emperor's new clothes are threadbare. We must speak up. The opportunities are under our noses every day. All we need is the guts to take them.

You might ask me "Do you have an agenda in writing this book?" The answer is yes. I want to help. Surely technology cannot replace real human communication nor dissolve our fear of each other entirely (although it can

certainly help). Think what would be lost. We already have courses in basic social skills for young people who are too frightened to walk up to a stranger and introduce themselves at parties while all over the world there are those who are 'speaking' using all the principles of great leaders in history to foster hate and fear. These people understand what creates rapport. They understand how to influence malleable human minds - it's not that hard. Is it not time for a new breed of bravery? Is it time to learn how to understand ourselves better, really listen to others, and gently move towards that which frightens us most and talk of other things? I say it's high time. Whether it's in the boardroom or the bedroom, I believe we must reclaim our own powerful voice of humanity. You don't need any special qualification to communicate. You are human. It's what you do.

So, we need more people awake and willing to speak up more **For the Common Good!** That's my moot. Not just the good of people either, but **For the Whole Environment.** We can all be leaders in this at dinner parties, on stages, in meetings, in school, workplaces, in teams, communities, anywhere. It's up to us. There is no longer any point leaving it up to 'them'.

The internet and television are at once bringing our leaders closer and yet taking them further away as the 'medium becomes the message' (a notion this book will explore). Before you think I am advocating we could all be saving the world (hey there's an idea if we all did it together), I am simply talking about a wish for us to do our wee bit the best we can (I reckon we've got 'could do ever so slightly better' on our current report card from the angels, if there are any). Let's be real though. It's a reality that there is something that inevitably seems to get in the way around the whole 'speaking up/expressing ourselves' thing. It's called fear.

Amazing isn't it? We human beings have developed astounding technology that was science fiction when I was a child, we still haven't figured out where dreams come from *and* **Public Speaking remains the Number One social phobia on this planet!** We even have jokes about it...you know the one about the Christians being thrown to the lions? The rule was if they didn't get eaten they were allowed to go free. So one day one man went up to the lion and said something in his ear and suddenly the lion rolled over and started purring like a kitten. The man was duly released and everyone wanted to know how he had made the lion turn into a pussy cat. Our newly freed man told them all he said to the lion was "Remember, if you eat me you're going to have to make a speech".

When we refer to what is many people's number one fear we most often relate it to the 'public speaking' contexts many of us commonly find ourselves in. Public speaking is *one form of presenting*, which this book is all about. However when I refer to presenting I have rather a loose definition. I mean all kinds of presenting including public speaking. I define presenting as meaning any activity where you are interacting with others whether formally or informally, selling, teaching, entertaining, facilitating, passing on information, interviewing, inspiring one other person or ten thousand, or just plain old talking. Clearly, the development of specialist skills in addition to those presented here is necessary for effectiveness when presenting in different contexts and there are some amazing resources available. This particular book is intended to explore the **underlying attitudes, generic skills and theory** that will then form the foundation of any application. If the philosophy printed here can help one more person speak out it will have been well worth the journey. One great presenter can reach many, many ears.

My own journey in life so far has led to the teaching of many presentation workshops where the focus is on these generic attitudes and skills. In these programmes I have found the fears and concerns of participants surprisingly

similar in essence regardless of their circumstances, age, background, culture or status. Consequently I keep seeking principles and strategies that have lasting positive results and the broadest application. Fear of public speaking, or presenting in any form, is a human fear. It's not a 'men thing' or a 'women thing', or a 'teenager thing' or a 'this religion or that thing', or a 'this culture or that thing', or 'an intelligence thing', or an anything thing! The thousands of people who have taught me through their experiences as well as my own direct path of changing radically how I feel about presenting, form the basis of this book. It is designed to empower you to gain the **confidence and competence** which comes from celebrating who you are and learning the strategies which will help you create the results you want *in any* presenting environment.

The material in these pages represents the results of more than twenty years of dedicated study of real people in real situations. I have also had many wonderful teachers and much encouragement along the way. This is not a scientific or academic read it's simply time for me to share what I have learned on my own path of personal evolution. I trust this book will become an ongoing reference as you digest and understand its many different layers in tandem with your own development. Readers who are experienced presenters will gain different insights than those of you who feel like 'beginners' yet this book is designed for you both. Following my editor's first review of this manuscript and the feedback from it's first readers, it became clear to me that this book is not aimed at a type of presenter, rather it is aimed at a type of *person* who makes presentations or wants to increase their level of personal choice around talking in front of people. I would hope that those of you who want to increase your influence learn a little more about how to do that. The reader who will gain the most benefit is one who perceives a value in investing in their *inner life* as well as their outer, the one who is willing to delve inside, find their gifts, shine 'em up and let 'em out into the world for all of us to enjoy!

## THE APPROACH

Ideally I want this book to be as easy to read as eating something you know you will enjoy, with a healthy appetite! I'd love you to feel happily satisfied at the end, and looking forward. The approach taken here is a **common sense, principles-based, developmental** one as distinct from technical skill-development. In this way I have found although results are lasting and ongoing, they don't necessarily occur overnight. This is not a 'quick fix' option even though the information here may be immediately applicable. If you have a speech or presentation to make tomorrow and you are looking for some tricks to help you get through it, this is probably not an appropriate book to use. If you want strategies that will help you 'beat the other guy', you may find yourself frustrated. If however, your motivation is to **learn how to better serve your audiences and to thrive on your experiences**, no matter who you present to, or in what context, there will be plenty of food for thought between these pages that will keep you growing for a long time to come.

## WILL IT WORK?

This book will be most useful if you are willing to explore beneath the superficial with the courage to face whatever is in the way of you **freely expressing who you are anywhere, anytime, with anyone about anything** you choose. The issues addressed here *include and go beyond* the fear of speaking at a friend's wedding or funeral or making a keynote conference address. It is a practical, grounded approach to learning skills, which exist in us all in varying degrees, and emphasises **what works** rather than rules and etiquette. It is developmental. It will work best if you adopt an adventurous approach with the material here. As you learn more your consciousness and integrity will take care of the growth. The best thing about all this is that you already have **everything** you need inside you. You just might not realise it yet.

## **THE PROCESS**

Given that I most often work with people in a 'live' setting, I am attempting to provide you with the next best thing to that. In this format we cannot work together with your unfolding understandings as they arise - but you can. Write down your insights and understandings as you go, discuss your progress with a trusted friend or colleague, or contact me (details are at the end of the book). Because there are many books you can read which address more technical skill-development issues like the use of multi-media I see no point adding to what is already a vast array of good quality resources. Thanks to Google you can find these easily.

## **BE A GREAT GARDENER**

We will be taking an expanded approach here. It should challenge you, stimulate you, stretch you, frustrate you even, but ultimately it is designed to empower you to be in the driver's seat of your presentations. To this end I encourage you to be patient with yourself and your process. To use a gardening metaphor, treat the first sections as looking and learning the garden layout, followed by weeding and new seed planting. The later sections will tend to the new growth and, very importantly, help keep everything safe until nature takes over. All of which will ultimately lead to a bumper harvest! **Note:** It will be useful to remember we all have experiences that time can help us 'compost'. Time can't work alone though; we need to contribute some willingness to transform some of our limiting experiences. They can then be turned into fertiliser for our futures if we choose. We cannot hasten the harvest nor can we rush our own development so patience, compassion, willingness to learn and maybe even to forgive are your best assets.

## THE STRUCTURE

The structure is designed to start with the big picture and address the very personal issues involved with presenting, then gradually move into a generic level of practical specifics. Your choice of course, but you may find it most useful to follow the path as set out here at least for your first read through. I encourage you to highlight the bits that stand out as they will be relevant to what you learn. Second and third reads will draw your attention to different things in the same way it does with movies. The craft is to keep making distinctions. The parts, or bites that the text is divided into, are:

- **Introductory pieces**, including this one, which set the tone of what is to come at an overview level and provide a context for my approach to this subject - the Frame.
- **A bench-marking section** designed to help you clarify your perception of yourself in relation to presenting right now -taking stock.
- A section addressing the more **psychological and emotional factors** involved which will give you some insight into why so many people are afraid of presenting in the first place, a little brain theory, where your own responses come from in a generalised sense and keys to moving forward.
- **A self-development resource kit** which provides you with principles and strategies that will empower you to get the results you want in any presenting environment. This section will also stimulate your ongoing development.
- A practical and easy to use **8-step preparation tool** that will help you organise your material and yourself for best results.
- A **'Where to from here?'** concluding section.

Most chapters conclude with a 'wrap up' and 'what's important?' review. There is no reference section or bibliography. I have included references as I go and once I started a bibliography, true to form, I didn't know where to stop so trust your process and the right resources will find their way to you. As soon as you are on a particular path, that which is complimentary will come your way. You can take that to the bank!

### **TO GAIN MAXIMUM VALUE**

You may be tempted to skip straight to the resource chapters and indeed these may suffice for what you need. As I said though, I would recommend you work your way through the book at least once in the sequence it is presented for best results. Much of what comes in later chapters has links earlier in the text that could become confusing if you have omitted working through or at least reading these chapters.

I do not expect you to agree with everything I say, nor is it my intention to convince you of anything. Rather, the intention is for you to trust **you** even more when you have finished than you did when you started. This book comprises information and ideas that have helped many others and me become more confident and competent presenters. My encouragement to you is simply to 'play' with the material and use what works for you.

### **BE A DETECTIVE TOO**

If you find yourself feeling uncomfortable at any stage, treat your discomfort as an opportunity to learn more about your own responses. Get curious about it because it's telling you something. Our feelings give us huge clues as to what is going on and what to do next if we remain open and curious. Emotional Intelligence is now officially sought after - this book will help grow yours. Be aware sometimes people feel worse about presenting before they feel better

when taking a self-development approach, exactly like when they get some coaching on their golf swing. After practising for years doing it the same way and playing at the same level, learning some new technique can blow your game for a while until you integrate the new learnings. It's called a learning crisis and if you have one, rest assured you are in for a whole new positive step ahead so look forward to it, enjoy the ride and know you are getting your money's worth! Perseverance is the key to continued improvement as I'm sure you are aware so be kind and be generous with your process. ***Please treat yourself well.*** You are learning about something most people are too afraid to even confront so congratulate yourself for even starting!

**Please note:** Any errors are mine. They are one of the many ways I model the beauty of imperfection. The exercises here have evolved from many I have tested from all sorts of sources (some long forgotten). Feel free to continue their evolution so they become even more useful.



*“ This is the true joy in life – being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one; that being a force of nature instead of a feverish little cloud of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.*

*I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.*

*I want to be thoroughly used up when I die - for the harder I work, the more I love. I rejoice in life for its own sake.*

*Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got to hold up for the moment and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”*

*George Bernard Shaw*

## **PART ONE – CHAPTER ONE**

### **MY OWN BIAS ON PRESENTING**

Although one of our biggest fears *seems* to be public speaking, there is more to it. Yes, public speaking and other kinds of presentations can turn us into a blithering mess but let's look at what is really going on. What seems to feed our fears about presenting are even deeper fears of public humiliation, being stripped of our dignity, the judgements of others, fear of rejection and failure, getting it wrong and so on. In essence our fears are of finding out that other people don't think we are ok – especially it seems, authority figures and people we (often resentfully) perceive as 'superior' in some way. Public speaking/presenting is an activity that brings these fears closer to the surface because the emotion has more 'charge' in it. This makes it clear to me that our fears are quite understandable. After all, who wants to feel publicly humiliated, incompetent or inadequate?

#### **THE REAL ISSUES**

From my own experience, and that of the many people I have worked with over the years, the real issues are consistently to do with how we see ourselves, and a basic human need for love and approval. Once we realise we are who we are and accept ourselves **as we are**, we can let go of striving to be 'ok' in the eyes of other people and things can start to change. I have found over and over again that when we address our relationship with our own inner selves, presentation skill-development becomes much easier and more enjoyable.

Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "No-one can make you feel inferior without your consent". True? You decide.

To tell the truth about who we are then is a major key to our success as presenters. Simple? Yes, but not necessarily the easiest thing to do. Yet to ignore this aspect is to perpetuate whatever is getting in the way of our freedom of expression. This book is designed to support you in being willing to meet your fears about expressing yourself in the world, understand them, let them go where appropriate and make the very best use you can of what's left behind.

### **A REALITY CHECK...PEOPLE JUDGE OTHER PEOPLE**

Another offering at this point is a biggie... People judge people, often with very little sensitivity and in ways they wouldn't like themselves to be judged. **So *people will judge you***. They may even reject you, and they may not think you are ok! In other words, you (and every other person) are vulnerable and defenceless in the face of other people's judgements. What's more, the more you present, the more you risk finding this out! No wonder we have fear about presenting...unless we focus on only what just one person thinks of us. Guess who?

Even if everyone on earth told you you were brilliant as you are, if *you* didn't think so, *or the one special person* you really wanted to hear it from wouldn't or couldn't let you know it, you wouldn't believe what everyone else said anyway. The wonderful thing about this is that once you realise the truth of it you can stop trying to make other people see you in ways that make you feel ok about yourself and *that* is more liberating than anything else I know.

### **THERE ARE NO GUARANTEES**

One more thing... no matter how confident you are as a speaker already, or how confident you are in the process of becoming, there are never any guarantees anyone will listen to you. It would be naive to suggest otherwise. What I am interested in offering you are strategies that will give you more than a good

chance of being heard. We all have the right to hold opinions and even to express them. Equally we have the right to reject that which we don't like or agree with, and so does everyone else. That's life.

### **PRACTICAL DEFENCELESSNESS**

The realities I am suggesting here all lead to a notion I call **practical defencelessness** and it is a most powerful tool. When you practise defencelessness there is nothing to hide, no one to blame, nothing to fight for, and nothing to defend or protect – least of all yourself. Make no mistake; defencelessness is not a passive state. It is active and dynamic and very, very freeing. The path to it is also 'simple but not necessarily easy'. It can feel lonely and far too challenging at times but the prize is **inner freedom** and that is surely worth going for.

### **SELF-ACCEPTANCE FREES US TO GET ON WITH THE JOB**

Can you see how it works? As Louise Hay says "What other people think of us is actually none of our business." That notion doesn't need to prevent us from striving for a healthy reputation. We just need to be aware of our motivation for that. When we accept who we are in essence we are free to simply get on with the job, whatever it happens to be at the time. Combine that with an understanding of the dynamics of presenting, a clear preparation strategy and a desire to do a good job and suddenly you may find yourself confident you know what to do and very able to simply get on and do it!

The vulnerability that will always be there when you choose to present can become your strength when it is no longer your focus. You no longer need to attempt to conceal your vulnerability to yourself or others. When you get up in front of people you are vulnerable - end of story. What you have to offer is who you are and whatever you are imparting. Who you are includes *everything* it took

to bring you to that - so called good things, bad things and everything else. So let's work with that, accept that, appreciate it and offer who you *really* are, all of you, to the people you interact with. Before you panic and start thinking I am suggesting you become a blithering mess in front of others - I am not!

I am simply stating a truth that in the face of others we are vulnerable...it is the antics we get up to to cover that up that waste so much energy. Like creating a 'cardboard cut-out' of ourselves for others to interact with whilst we hide behind it hoping others can't tell the difference. I've got news. They can - and so can you. Life gets so much easier when we can drop the cut-out in the bin!

Given that these basic human issues relate to our wider experiences of life in general, what we are going to work with here is how they impact on us as presenters. We are moving towards increasing **confidence (the personal development aspect) and competence (the skill-development aspect)** because we need both in order to be most effective.

Helen Keller said "**Life is a daring adventure, or nothing**". Thankfully for both presenters and audiences these days many more people are realising there is no one right way to do anything and are giving themselves permission to look beyond the rules to explore their own style and uniqueness to support their message. This is a 'daring adventure' indeed.

Keller also said '**The only way out is through**'. This book exists to assist you with your own daring adventure of moving through what gets in the way of you thriving on presenting.

If you are willing to look beneath the surface for lasting changes in your experience i.e. Transformation, it is here for the taking. I will support you in

exploring where you are with the whole subject, how you got to be that way and what you can do to empower yourself and your audiences while remaining true to who you really are going forward. You deserve to rediscover the freedom and buzz that thriving on presenting can be, after all it is just a form of *sharing*.

### **IF I CAN LEARN - ANYONE CAN**

Although I have been perceived as a talker practically all my life, from early on I certainly didn't thrive on it emotionally. For a very long time I felt guilt about being compulsive about talking. I even remember a school report card saying just that, "Amanda is a compulsive talker". It felt like an accusation I couldn't combat because I needed to talk to understand. Talking and listening was (and still is) my primary method of making distinctions and learning about things but it conflicted with a system that in those days promoted 'sit still and listen up'. Consequently as a child I was strapped in front of the class virtually every day for a year, for talking.

This conflict combined with other (what felt like) accusations like 'show off' and 'chatterbox' was enough to make me feel self-conscious and fearful when just naturally expressing myself in front of people or receiving focused attention. Like many other children I also had experiences of intense humiliation as I publicly made a fool of myself in situations that can still make me cringe with embarrassment on a bad day.

None of these experiences were designed to make me feel that way. They were just experiences and I responded the way I responded. In fact taking into consideration some of the horror stories I have been told by people who did have experiences of humiliation or ridicule that seemed to them intentional, I was very fortunate.

These days I am still a talker. It's my profession. It took a long time, but eventually, with a willingness to learn, I sought out and discovered things that actually worked to help me let go of the limiting parts of my past and the guilt and shame that went with them. Using the principles and strategies I offer you in this book I have been able to learn useful lessons from my experiences which now actually help me in my work and my life in general. From feigning laryngitis in high school to get out of it, I now thoroughly enjoy public speaking, teaching and facilitating, making sales pitches and (surprisingly even to me at times), I actually seek out and look forward to opportunities to talk to groups of people about the very thing I was so afraid of! I am thrilled there is still so much to learn but knowing how I used to feel I am happy to say I feel totally confident I can support you on your adventure.

You know how you feel now. If there were the tiniest possibility you could feel even better about it all, would you be willing to check it out? I hope the answer is yes. After all, what have you got to lose?

## WRAP UP

The bottom line is: **presentation skills are not mysterious.** You don't need some special talent to enjoy expressing yourself in any context. Anyone who wants to can learn. And coming from someone who has had rather large issues about the whole subject, that is a promise! Just to whet your appetite a little, here are a few thoughts I have learned from my own experiences as a student of presenting.

- **Presenting is not a mystery - we are the mystery**
- **When I am willing to be a learner I make the fastest progress**
- **Inner freedom comes from knowing who we are and accepting that**
- **Self-criticism is the biggest hurdle**
- **We all do our best to survive**
- **Confidence evolves from the inside out**
- **Practise makes progress**
- **Conviction + Integrity = Credibility = Influence**

**A presenter is a leader.** I believe this world of ours needs more leaders willing to speak up so we can find ways for all of us to move forward without destroying our humanity or the hand that feeds us - the earth.

## PURELY FOR FUN - MR NOBODY'S RULES

They say it's very dangerous  
for you to get up front  
judgments, rejection, foolishness -  
your choice, just take a punt

So what to do to minimise  
the threat of what you feel?  
Rule number one just hide yourself  
don't let yourself be real

There's lots more rules and etiquette  
to 'better' public speaking  
Those rules demand you learn them if  
success is what you're seeking

Do not speak too softly,  
nor wave your arms around  
Remember to enunciate  
and never talk too loud

Make sure to memorise your lines  
and get your grammar right  
Minimise your accent or  
they might not think you're bright

Slow down, slow down, do not say 'UM'  
hands out of pockets stay  
Women wear a jacket  
nipples covered always, pray.

With those who talk all over you  
walk up and stand behind  
Intimidation works so well -  
too bad if it's not kind

Leave all their questions till the end  
and always give them notes  
Ignore all the distracting things  
don't swear or make bad jokes

For butterflies a drink or two

will send them on their way  
- stick with the programme you rehearsed  
and never ever stray

Pretend you do not notice  
when your audience looks bored  
Just keep on going strong because  
up front you are the lord

We think these rules will help us  
sad to say - it isn't true  
Why not take the biggest risk  
- to thine own self be true

Learn to speak beyond the rules  
they're really only guides  
someone made up to help us out  
not help us out to hide

When you do your homework  
and know you know your stuff  
just take the risk and be yourself  
you'll find it's quite enough

Now satisfaction's guaranteed  
you're audience will bless  
the day you dropped off all the rules  
and simply did your best.

## TWO

### WHO AM I?

Any audience will be curious about their presenter's background, particularly if they have never met them. A little background can help to build rapport and give the audience time to get to know you and your style so although you will be getting a handle on 'where I am coming from' here's some of my history to help you settle in. Just skip it if my background isn't relevant to you.

A desire to understand and be understood underpins my life and work. Talking and listening have always helped me explore what I know and what I don't, what I believe and what I don't and what is important to me and what isn't. Whereas some people reflect on things to understand and others try things out, my primary learning strategy has been to talk things through. This has had a tendency to drive friends mad at times although mostly I have found people who are pretty forgiving. For me bliss is spirited meaningful discussion and listening and learning about other people's lives and the way they see the world. I am fascinated endlessly by what is possibly God's greatest creative endeavour; human relationships in all their forms, paradoxes and permutations.

Having spent much of my early life as a talkative and curious child, I moved into adolescence and an often intense period of self-consciousness, analysing, talking, creating meaning, making distinctions and thinking about life as it unfolded around me and within me. During those years I used to believe the point of expressing my ideas, thoughts and opinions was to convince others to see the world the way I did like you do in a debate. If I ever managed to convert someone to my way of thinking, especially having started from opposing positions, I felt like I had won an Olympic gold medal! Often I was espousing

ideas I had heard from other people, seeing how they fit on me, hearing counter-arguments and changing positions as I learned more. Mostly I had no idea what I was talking about. There was genuine enquiry but not a lot of substance.

It wasn't until I joined the New Zealand Police in 1979 at the tender age of 21 that I really began to have some experiences that would start shaping my conscious exploration of how life works and what makes us tick. A policeman friend of my mother's gave me some brilliant advice as I was off to the police college and that was to treat everyone I came across the same way - with respect. He told me we never know to whom we are talking, who they have been or who they will be in the future. What he said worked for me and still does. I certainly found the concept difficult to come to grips with at times but funnily enough that was mostly where other police were concerned. It might appear that right and wrong are the lynch pins of policing but I found there was far more to human behaviour than that. I found that beyond what was right and wrong was a need to find solutions - what would work? The law was the law but in so many instances *that* fact was so irrelevant in the moment that it might as well not exist.

My seven years in the Police environment taught me how often *miscommunication* creates all kinds of problems. Offence taken where none was intended created misunderstandings which often escalated out of all proportion with crisis as the result. I saw people who were dead because they or others couldn't communicate or felt misunderstood. I fingerprinted people who had killed out of frustration, pride, and thoughtlessness. I attended endless domestic disputes where it was abundantly clear that families did not know how to say what they felt or hear how others felt. And all the time I was having challenges around communication in my own life that sometimes led to feelings of

frustration, powerlessness and a sense of being misunderstood and isolated from the people who really mattered to me.

I also learned people don't always have to agree but that to live and let live was easier said than done. I saw prejudice of infinite variety that seemed to come from fear and lack of understanding and I saw how much damage judging others created and how absolutely pointless it is. I saw all this and still I was one of the most self-righteous and judgmental people I knew. The trouble was, I didn't know how to do anything about it. At the same time I was also beginning to notice how just a little *real* communication, real expression of *real* feelings, can go a long long way towards healing, even though these communications only ever seemed to arise as a result of crisis - especially in my own life. I had grown up knowing there were some things our family just didn't talk about so I didn't. That didn't mean my *feelings* about those things were resolved though. Knowing what I know now, my unresolved feelings impacted on my life enormously and I wasn't even aware of it.

This was the state of affairs when I was about 26 years old and attended my first personal development weekend workshop. That course, the information I learned and the experiences I had changed my life. It sounds trite but it did. So much so that within a year I had resigned as a police officer and was training to teach that very course. In that context I studied hard and learned much about human behaviour and what drives us to do the things we do. It gave me a context for my life and my police experiences and enabled me to understand others and myself in a far healthier way. I was on my way. I really felt I had stepped into the fast lane and nothing was more important to me than learning about myself and helping others learn about themselves. I was happy and I was healing.

I was also fanatical. Here I was thinking I had found the answer to the meaning of life so off I went and shoved it down the throat of anyone who would listen. If they didn't want to hear I went ahead anyway. The trouble was, I wasn't convincing anyone. Much of the time I was being a pain in the ass. It was all words. I could feel the importance of what I was learning on the inside but somehow in the translation I was actually turning people I cared about off instead of on and I couldn't understand why. I judged them as not being 'ready' to hear me instead of realising *my delivery* was self-righteous, inflexible and unhelpful. It was a case of a little bit of knowledge being a dangerous thing. I had forgotten something very important my mother taught me about teaching, "Never forget what it was like when you didn't know what you know now." I can still struggle with this today but the awareness is there and that helps a lot.

It wasn't until I slowed down trying to control and change other people and started living what I was learning that the people in my life actually began to *experience* me differently. I didn't do this on purpose as a strategy. I just surrendered. That sounds so simple, and it is, but if you have ever truly surrendered you will know there is often a lot of tears and internal conflict before we take a deep breath and let go. When that happened, and I started minding my own business more and preaching to everyone else less, some of what I had been learning about became more than just theories to convince other people of. They started becoming ways of being and the quality of my life was greatly enhanced on all levels. It was like I had new foundations on which to move forward in my own life. I was starting to listen, really listen to other people. I was starting to tell the truth - a major. My relationship with my family was so much more real, as were my relationships with my friends and partner at the time. I was beginning to be honest and accept myself as I was and express that in the world. I was beginning to get real. What I was saying and who I was were starting to line up. Things were looking good and I was very inspired.

In my teaching career I was working regularly with groups of 80 to 100 or so people at a time of all ages and stages as well as chalking up hundreds of hours of one to one counselling. My own development as a presenter was ticking along nicely as my passion for the content I was teaching bounced up against my fears about presenting every day. What became more important than risking humiliation and other people's judgements, was learning to effectively pass on information and facilitate experiences which were supporting other people in exploring more of their potential and having a better quality of day to day life. And it was working. I saw results that made me happy inside and I really felt I was making a difference (that was a hot saying in those days). I felt like we had some keys that actually worked. The whole world peace, new age, personal development movement was in full swing and I was into it with a passion! My work was all about going for the ideal and yet it felt very relevant and useful in dealing with some of the harder realities of day-to-day life.

While I was the student teacher all was well. I was no threat to anyone else, I was hugely supported in my growth path and I seemed to be easily forgiven for the many mistakes I made on my journey towards teacher-ship. As time went by though I began to feel more competent in what I was teaching and my own creative process began waking up. Until that time the learning curve for me was steep and it kept me fully occupied.

Once I became capable of teaching programmes on my own though the dynamics changed. I was beginning to consciously learn about leadership now. I wasn't the baby teacher any more. I was feeling my inner push to keep growing and I was feeling stifled. My playground was no longer feeling big enough which was at once sad, confusing and frustrating for everyone involved. When the inner push of creativity is flowing it can wreak havoc. I have always been one to let the inner push push – eventually anyway. My feelings brought out the rebel in

me and she began having fierce thoughts about rights - like everyone has a right to say and do and be anything they want to, and what's more I had that right too. In retrospect my current work was born of my own need to claim my own right to speak about whatever I wanted, to say what I thought about things and to challenge people's thinking, including my own. And I wanted to do this in the context I had been working in - teaching.

I was told once that we teach best what we most need to learn. Here I was, wanting to learn how to teach people to communicate more effectively. The truth was, *I* wanted to learn how to communicate more effectively. I wanted to support other people in speaking out. I wanted to speak out. And maybe even more importantly, I wanted to demonstrate it was ok to keep learning. That was the guts of it. This attitude actually provided me with a platform for my own message. The short version is, I left where I was working in 1992 and started my own teaching business - the core programme - ESSENTIALLY SPEAKING - a presentation skill-development programme for all kinds of presenters that my business partner Jane Yates and I introduced to both the public and corporate markets in New Zealand. This programme became and still is affectionately known as 'The Rebel's Guide to Public Speaking'. We used a principles-based, no-judgement approach. At the time, most of the public speaking training was all about right and wrong, there were lots of should's and shouldn'ts and do's and don'ts, and here we were offering a 'no rules, get real' approach to anyone in New Zealand and Australia that was interested. There was no marketing budget. The courses filled by word of mouth and twenty years later they still do.

I had grown to believe presentation skill-development was really a personal development issue that could be offered in a professional development context rather than solely a technical skill-development one. A growing number of people were ready to step beyond the rules of public speaking and **get real**. I

was one of those people and judging by the popularity of our courses I was not alone.

Around the same time I was fortunate enough to attend some presentations by people who were simply being themselves and I felt the difference - it was unmistakable. Suddenly technical excellence was not a priority. The message was what was important and the delivery style integral to what I got out of the presentation. I was realising both had a whole lot to do with the *person* who was delivering the message. It was all intertwined and I knew we were on track.

One experience that powerfully influenced this perception was listening to Elizabeth Kubler Ross. She 'fell into' presenting as so many people do, in her case because she filled in for a colleague. By her own admission she didn't know anything much about presenting but she did know about her passion for supporting people who were in the process of dying. Kubler Ross is famous now for her work with people with terminal illness. Over time more and more people asked her to talk about her work and so she became an internationally known speaker. When I heard her, she spoke to a full house in the Auckland Town Hall and held us spellbound for more than three hours just talking about her life and her work. Here was a woman who wasn't trying to be anyone else, in fact she wasn't trying to *do* anything, she was just simply being herself. Her attitude seemed to be, I am here and I offer who I am to you in the context of my work. Needless to say she was very well received and I vividly recall the whole experience. By the time she died, she had also acknowledged that her body of work was not all she had thought it to be - in other words she was still making distinctions about dying as she went through her own dying process. She was a truly wonderful teacher and her contribution will live on.

Now in this new millennium there is still much expectation of form out there, especially in the business world where what's often still perceived as important are the rules, power dressing, influencing techniques, image making, and tricks and gimmicks that will help us survive the experience of being in front of people - it's very hard to keep up.

So, who do I think I am? I have no formal qualifications, no special powers, no big bank account (still working on that one). In fact I am by all accounts an ordinary woman doing my best to make my way in life. Maybe I'm just someone who has to justify not being perfect. That's ok. As my dear friend Jenny says, 'We're all like a good diamond darling - perfectly flawed'. I can live with that! Or as Patsy Rodenburg says in her book "The Right To Speak" 'God doesn't mind a bum note. After all, he made them all didn't he?'

I say to be a competent presenter, be willing to get to know yourself better and better, give up Mr Nobody's rules and celebrate your uniqueness, and use that to model imperfection to help us all get over ourselves faster! The trying to be the perfect person game is so tedious and only brings tears before bed. I trust what follows will support your exploration into the endless facets that make you **YOU** and inspire you to contribute that in your world. That way we all win. So the minute you feel ready - let's get to work!

## MORE FUN...

### PUBLIC SPEAKING MADNESS

It was easy at the time of course, piece of cake, a doddle, no sweat.

I love her for God's sake; she's my oldest friend...

Speak at her wedding? Of course! I'd be horrified if she *didn't* want me to.

I have so much to say - 5 minutes? Just try and shut me up.

Yes I know it's not for six months...no problemo...I'll worry about *exactly* what I'll say later.

#### **Boy time flies doesn't it?**

Right, get your act together...now, how do I start again?

Remember it's Bob - she broke up with Steve - Bob not Steve, Bob not Steve - (God Steve was a nice guy...)

Get It Together!!! – it's only a hundred or so people - you do this all the time at work...

Come on, just do what you practised - you're the one who didn't want to use notes...

I'M GOING TO BE SICK - no you're not, ok I'm not...

I can do this - come on it's no big deal, really...

It's almost time...God I don't *believe* this pressure...when did I EVER feel like this?

My legs may well not hold up...you will won't you? This is my friend, *I need to look good.*

MY IMAGE IS AT STAKE HERE - THIS. IS. SERIOUS!

What could have possessed me to say yes?

Ok, stay calm...think calm thoughts...gentle waves... lapping on the.....bloody sea shore.....

everybody's laughing as crashing dumpsters are drowning me and a surf board fin is going to slit my throat!

Right! That visualising rubbish isn't working....

I know...they are all lovely people.

Come on, you know they're her friends? They won't hurt you?

For goodness sake most of them don't even know you - what's the problem?

**The problem is strangers feeling sorry for the bride's stupid friend who made a dumb speech that's what!**

Look, there she is, she looks so beautiful.....

**Help**.....I'm going to cry, ouch my throat hurts - *wateerr*....I've forgotten how to breathe...God if you are really there I swear I'll do anything you say...I'll ring my brother, I'll remember birthdays, I'll stop drinking, I'll start exercising tomorrow...just HELP ME.....

**Oh, welcome. Ummm. I.....ahh. Yes. Welcome.**

**You may not know me but I have known Deirdre since I was four. Umm...**

**She loves Steve, oh I mean Bob.....(God WHY ME?????????????)**

**Anyway, when she told me she was getting married I wasn't surprised and I think it's great, and I'm sure Steve thinks it's great too.....hahahaaaa**

**Anyway, please raise your glass as we toast the bride and groom**

and I kill myself...someone better say nice things at my funeral!

What did I say? I can't remember a word - except I think I mentioned Steve.

Deirdre seems happy.

Right, get a grip - strategy required for next time. *Don't* make any more friends!

## THREE

### WHERE ARE YOU AT?

I do not assume here that you are frightened of public speaking. I do assume however that you might be vaguely interested in how to be more effective and maybe even enjoy it more so let's take that as a given and go from there. It matters not if you are looking to refine your skills or you feel right at the very beginning of your adventure so let's just begin.

Strangely, it seems to be much safer for us to talk to animals and nature than it is to talk to even small groups of other human beings. You don't mind that your pot plants or the family dog sees your best morning look do you? How about if you are in the supermarket in your best gardening gear and the boss you have been trying to impress sees you?

There seems to be a moment of transition when we perceive 'audience'. Once that happens all kinds of physiological changes occur. Self-consciousness can set in and we are suddenly gripped by sensations and feelings we have no apparent control over. Logic ceases to work as we look at a group of perfectly nice, friendly people who maybe have known us for years. Instead we feel a rush of blood to our face and the accompanying label called embarrassment, nausea, the butterflies thing, we **must** go to the toilet **now** feeling and of course the mental blanking out of any information we are being expected to sensibly and rationally allow to flow from our lips. That being said, the corporate environment can increase anxiety levels enormously because of the possibility our career success over time might well ride on our presentation skills.

So, we struggle to survive the experience or even remember what we said and swear we will do something about it so we don't make a fool of ourselves 'again'.....time passes, we get by without having to 'make speeches', or 'present' in any way.....until it happens again. Work or social, someone dies, gets married, is sick and can't do it - you must step in...you must do a presentation. Some people believe they would rather die than suffer the before and during jitters and the seemingly endless self-criticism that comes after (and that's without even considering the boss's need to offer us their own friendly little critique!)

### **IS IT ALL WORTH IT?**

We can be passionately in love with each other and yet paradoxically we are more afraid of each other than we are of wild tigers or moths up our nighties! We are afraid of standing before a perfectly ordinary bunch of other human beings waiting for us to say something, wanting us to say it well so they can get some value. In many ways our emotional responses just don't make sense, and that's part of the problem. Emotions don't make sense. They are not logical. When we try and make sense of them we can easily get tangled up in knots. Emotions are responses and as such are highly complex and often inexplicable. I cannot hope to address the nature and complexity of human responses here in this book. We can however have a good look at the roles emotions play when it comes to presenting.

### **LET'S FACE IT - THE ROLE OF FEAR**

Fear is a completely natural human emotion. It is a **response** to perceived danger. We perceive or see something a certain way as a result of the information fed into our brain via our senses combined with the myriad of experience and filters we have developed. Together this combination creates our perception. When we perceive danger, the resulting emotional response is

fear. The fear response activates a sequence of physiological responses as our chemical nature kicks into action. Adrenaline is pumped into our system that results in the alerting of our senses to be ready for action - fight or flight. A fear response can be activated in a nano-second, with no rational, logical processing having happened at all. Our instinctual survival responses are what kick in when we our system perceives danger. They are activated by the oldest part of our brain that governs the fight/flight response and is part of our creature human self.

We can feel fear when something in the here and now is scary but we can also feel fear when people around us are afraid or when a frightening memory is activated - even if what is happening here and now is not actually dangerous at all. This is often the case when it comes to presenting. Logically speaking there is nothing much to be afraid of when talking to a group of people about a business proposal or doing the best man's speech at a wedding - at a basic survival level. The fear we feel in these situations is more often to do with *past* experiences than with the present that is why it can be so useful to look there for the source. In other words when it comes to presenting we are often responding to our past memories of feelings rather than our current reality. People have even told me they are frightened only because they have come to believe they are supposed to feel frightened, so common is the expectation that public speaking will be scary. When we deal with the source of a fear, our responses in the here and now (the present moment) can be transformed but first we must be willing to turn and face it with a willingness to see what is actually triggering the feeling in the first place.

As I said earlier, presenting is an activity that does provoke strong feelings of fear for many people. Fear of making a fool of myself, fear of making a mistake, fear of being judged, fear of appearing incompetent, fear of boring the audience,

fear of humiliation, fear of forgetting what I am saying, fear of fear even. All of these fears can ensure we cannot give the presentation our best shot.

Some of them however, can *enhance* our performance. For instance, fear of boring an audience can provoke us to find ways to ensure this doesn't happen, unleashing new creative ideas. Fear of appearing incompetent can spur us on to make sure our research is thorough. Fear can add to a presentation or it can take away from it. It depends who is in charge - you or your fear? Physiologically our responses for both are very similar. A little adrenaline can go a long way to giving you an edge as a presenter without needing to employ strategies which have evolved from our fight or flight responses, like dominating others, being apologetic and submissive or moving into the pseudo-confident mode of the 'bluffer'.

Think about it. Have you ever had experiences where you actually enjoyed being a little frightened? You know you have. It's called a 'thrill'. Most humans enjoy the odd thrill, don't you think? It stimulates the nervous system and we call it having a 'rush'. Of course fear that is too much to deal with will paralyse us, as it does with phobias. I am not advocating 'overcoming' fear either. Overcoming something implies squashing it or controlling it. My point is this: What if you didn't feel fear in disempowering ways in the first place? Can you see that then there would be nothing to overcome or control? If you want to jump out of a plane or go for a roller coaster ride or apply for a job you are not sure you can do but you would really like to give a go, isn't the activity itself the main focus? Isn't your fear part of the whole experience? The same is so for presenting. Fear doesn't work for you when it is running your internal show. The good news is, ***it is possible to change the way you feel*** and it is certainly possible to take charge of what you think - ***if you are willing to learn how***. To get the most out of the following pages, that's about all you need - **willingness**.

## THE ROLE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

Another common experience for presenters is lack of self-confidence. This shows up on all kinds of different levels and is dealt with in all kinds of ways depending on an individual's early conditioning and how they feel about themselves now. Many individuals seem to have expectations of themselves (inevitably based on someone else's expectations) to the point where they are compelled to learn to *hide* any fear they have. This is an approach that can only lead to a dead end because it is **based on a lie** that they are not good enough as they are. The result of this compulsion to hide fear often shows up in people having underlying feelings that they are a fraud of some sort. This has been described to me on many occasions by people from all walks of life who feel they will one day be 'found out', exposed, seen as who they really are, and somehow that their image will be forever ruined. When we feel confident that who we are is ok already, there is no need to hide, no need to be afraid.

Fear and lack of self-confidence seem to go hand in hand in the presenting context. Often when we feel afraid, we lose our self-confidence. When we feel confident, fear does not play a major role. Cultivating genuine self-confidence *and* being willing to look at the source of our fears and resolve them can help us deal with our fear responses as they arise. The result? Empowerment for you, *and* your audience.

You may not relate to anything I have been describing so far so let's have a look and see where you are at personally with the whole idea of presenting. Your own responses may be similar to other people in some ways and they may be distinctly different. What is important is that you do not judge yourself in relation to anyone else and simply check yourself out **for yourself**.

## **BENCH-MARKING**

First up, think about how you currently feel about presenting yourself in traditional contexts, making a speech at say a birthday, wedding or funeral, presenting a report at work, pitching for some business, talking in a meeting, or even just going to a social gathering where you don't know many people, those kinds of common situations we can find ourselves in. Think about whether or not your feelings are different depending on the people present. How are you with people you know? Strangers? The boss? The Board of Directors? The client? Your staff? Colleagues? Your family? Friends? If you want to, answer the following questions.

### **BENCH-MARK ONE**

Note where you intuitively feel you are at in responses to these questions ie: don't think too hard about them and remember these responses relate to right now (you can always do them again later)

1. How do you feel about presenting and public speaking right now?

**LOOK FORWARD TO IT 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 DREAD**

2. How would you rate your current presentation skills?

**EXCELLENT 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 POOR**

3. How would you rate your own performance as a presenter?

**OUTSTANDING 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 POOR**

4. How confident do you feel about presenting when you have time to prepare?

**CONFIDENT 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 NO CONFIDENCE**

5. How confident do you feel about speaking impromptu (off the cuff)?

**CONFIDENT 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 NO CONFIDENCE**

6. How would you rate ***your potential*** as a presenter?

**GREAT POTENTIAL 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 NONE**

**Note:** These questions help establish a starting point for your ongoing development. You may want to check your responses again when you have completed this book.

**Challenge:** If you didn't mark '10' for question 6 above, I challenge you to take a risk and circle at least somewhere *above* '5' - you really can afford to even if you don't see that yet.

### **BENCH-MARK TWO**

To explore a little further, place a tick by any of the following that describe you and add any other comments that come to mind.

- I do not usually look forward to having to make a presentation
- I make presentations and get by but that's all
- I feel like other people think I am a better presenter than I really am
- I jump at any opportunity to present
- I feel fine talking within my own culture but not outside it
- I have had some formal training as a presenter
- No-one ever taught me how to make an effective presentation
- I think I do it quite well but I seldom enjoy the process
- I want to run away
- I don't know whether I am any good at it or not
- I feel like I've got potential
- Other people say I'm great but I don't believe them
- I'm afraid of being misunderstood
- I find it hard to express myself clearly
- I don't see how my feelings about presenting can ever change

- I want to enjoy presenting
- I don't feel nervous but my body reactions and voice say I am
- I feel fine presenting at work but not in social situations
- I feel fine presenting in social situations but not at work
- When I feel strongly about something I find it hard to articulate what mean
- I feel fine as long as I follow a set speech
- I am best when I talk 'off the cuff'
- I feel embarrassed when attention is fully focused on me
- I'm scared I won't know enough if people ask questions
- As long as there is plenty of audience interaction I'm ok
- I feel very defensive in front of hostile audiences
- I feel defensive in front of any audience
- I feel like an 'average' presenter - I don't know how to do it any differently
- At work I have to present in a style that doesn't match who I am
- I use Power Point and other multi media to take the attention off me
- I feel more confident on the phone than in person
- My preferred mode of communicating is via technology (social media etc)
- I prefer to talk to people face to face
- I am more effective expressing myself on paper than speaking aloud
- I find it difficult to prepare a presentation

Other ideas...

Write down as many other statements as you can which describe how you feel about presenting. Again, you may want to re-look at this list when you come to the end of the book and notice if there is a difference in your responses.

### **BENCH-MARK THREE**

If you have even considered the last two exercises you are doing well. Here is some more food for thought to help you make distinctions about your current

experience. This is a two-step questioning exercise that is most useful when you respond in writing. That way you will capture valuable information. This time we are looking for your awareness of your internal responses on three levels - physical, emotional and mental. You are paying attention to **what happens in your body, your feeling state, and the thoughts you have**. On a separate sheet of paper, respond to step one.

### **STEP ONE – NOW**

Imagine you are sitting in an audience and you are asked to stand up the front and introduce yourself to about 50 people for a couple of minutes. You only have a very short time to prepare. It's about to happen...Take half a minute or so right now before you read on to really feel into this idea. Imagine it as if it were real.

What are your first thoughts? (your mental response). Do you have an emotional response? (what do you feel?). A physical one? (what happens in your body?). Jot down or draw your responses and see if you can get *at least* two or three responses from each. The more specific you can be the better. Acknowledge your responses as they come to you. They will flow in their own particular order so just note them as they arrive in your consciousness.

**Examples:** eeeek! Great! Can't wait Fear Butterflies in stomach Nervous What will everyone think of me? This is silly I am boring Tight shoulders I hope I'm not first Oh shite! Excitement Opportunity What will I say? Sick Heart races I can't do it I can do it...

**NOTE:** There are no right or wrong answers with this - just your answers so simply notice your automatic responses and jot them down. **You are looking for how you DO respond - not how you *think* you should.**

Remember, it really helps to write your responses down.

## **STEP TWO – IDEAL**

Next, think about how you would *ideally* like to respond to the same request - same scenario - you are in an audience of around 50 or so people and you are asked to get up front and introduce yourself for a couple of minutes - **what is your dream response?** See if you can focus on your *ideal* physical, emotional and mental responses. Really go for this as specifically as you can. Don't worry about *how* that could possibly be the case. The point here is to stretch beyond your current reality into what may, right now, feel absolutely impossible. It doesn't matter what that reality is - go for what you want.

**Examples:** I was hoping this would happen! Can't wait Good, an opportunity to make an impact Excitement Adrenaline rush What shall I tell them? Smile Relaxed Confident I will be great Relieved People will like listening...Let me at 'em! Happy Vibrant and alive Looking forward to it Opportunity to learn more Opportunity to make a difference.

Now have a look at the two lists. Can you see a difference? Is there a gap between how it is now and how you would ideally like it to be if all your presenting dreams came true? If so, there is room to learn. If your lists are identical there would seem to be nothing more you need - your automatic responses *are* your ideal responses so I say great! You are clearly a happy presenter, but even if there is a tiny difference between how it is and how you would like it there is room to learn something. Even if you can't find words for it, you will feel a difference if there is one there.

**NOTE:** If the thought of introducing yourself is not challenging at all you may want to change the scenario to something that 'ups the stakes' a little by

choosing a situation that would stretch you. Example: Speaking to a larger crowd than you have before, or speaking in a new medium. You are looking for your growing edges so if you are feeling confident take responsibility for finding your own personal 'stretch' point. Already confident and competent presenters can keep learning as long as they are willing. I think it's vital. The distinctions we make just get more and more refined as the public speaking skill emerges as a real craft, and mastery is the mission. As long as we keep heading in the direction we want to go, our audiences can only benefit.

## WRAP UP

So now you have a starting point - how you currently see yourself, some of what you would like to be different, and how you would ideally like it to be. Make a mental note of the general flavour of your responses and particularly notice your answers to step two of Bench-Mark Three (**your ideal scenario**). I also encourage you to write down or record a paragraph that describes you as your own ideal presenter on the *inside* ie: physical, emotional, mental and spiritual if you relate to that too. This will support you in keeping your ideal destination in mind. Everything in this book is designed to support you in creating your ideal as a reality.

## FOUR

### WHERE DO OUR RESPONSES COME FROM?

Congratulations. Now you have some information on your current reality about yourself as a presenter. You are now more aware. You have begun to take control. Things can now begin to move as you face yourself and where you are at with presenting yourself. See if you can now gently put your bench-marking responses to one side in your mind where they are easy to refer to as we look at the larger picture of how in general terms your current reality (view of yourself, others and the world) developed, especially if you would like that reality to change.

If you are willing to *question what you know* (have learned) about yourself, particularly from your early experiences, you can begin to make rapid progress simply by looking at what you learned in new ways or from another angle. If you are open to it you might learn some more empowering ideas about yourself and presenting rather than being stuck with old patterns of thinking that are perhaps no longer useful, and that probably belong to someone else in the first place.

#### EXPANDING OUR VIEWPOINT

To understand this more fully it is important to look at some fundamentals in terms of how we tick. We all have a genetic imprint in every cell in our body, our biological endowment that is the combination of both our parents' genes. Our genetic imprint determines our height and race and hair and eye colour and our predisposition to certain things. In that genetic coding or blueprint there is **the abstract potential for our fullest expression and a natural built in drive to fulfil it**. We also have an amazing ability built in - absolutely free - that we can use to help us make choices towards that potential. Ultimately, this is our

intuition, the part of us designed to help us tap into an unlimited resource of creative potential and then to take action. We can use our will - also absolutely free - to live the life we dream of.

As well as our genetic material, other influences that shape who we are come from the information and experiences we gather from the culture, sub-culture and environment we grow up in. This is commonly called our '**conditioning**'. A field of study called epigenetics explores the relationship between genetic material and our environment and this whole field is expanding our understanding of ourselves more and more every day. The combination of our genetic information and our conditioning helps form our values and beliefs, about ourselves, and the world. Those **values and beliefs** determine how we will use our **potential**. Funnily enough, sometimes our values and beliefs **undermine** the use of our intuition and free will in ways that can be very frustrating. It's could be described as getting locked into disempowering patterns which, unless we become conscious of them, will simply drive us in whatever direction they are about. Such is the power of our thinking. We are going to learn how to use our gift of thought to work For us, to be a grand resource instead of our worst enemy.

### **WHAT IS YOUR POTENTIAL?**

So what is your potential as a presenter? I propose to you that you don't know. I believe you might think you know, but what you think is based on what you have **learned to think**. What you have come to *believe*. Let's be clear here. Beliefs are not facts. They are simply beliefs and they *can* change. Can you see from your responses to the benchmarking exercises your current perception has evolved as a result of what you have *learned* to believe - however that learning occurred? Remember what Henry Ford said: "Whether you think you can or you think you can't - you're right."

The filtering systems in our brain and body will rearrange information and experience inside us in ways that reinforce what we believe about ourselves and the world so we can maintain some reasonably robust sense of identity or self-image, some sense of 'WHO I AM'. We will then set about proving with thought and deed what we believe is true. Note: What we *do* believe rather than what we *want* to believe.

Coincidentally enough, it was **during the time we were developing this sense of who we are that we often had our first conscious experiences of presenting**. Because our limitations today often have their roots in the early stages of our development, we need to be willing to sift through what we learned, have a good look at it, keep what is useful and let the rest go with love (to the compost bin).

### **EARLY CONDITIONING HAD A BIG INFLUENCE**

How many of us heard things like 'chatterbox' or 'children should be seen and not heard', and worse, when we were growing up? These ideas can stay with us for years and years and they don't help when it comes to presenting. Such sayings, plus many more, become unconscious patterns that help form the foundations from which our self-expression is launched. Often only a trickle of our presenting potential gets off the launch pad because of them. I remember the 'showing off' one well.

As a small child my grandmother lived with us. I was rather expressive and open and would run around like a mad thing that was generally perfectly ok. I recall one day we had visitors and, while behaving in my usual manner, (which I thought was just sharing myself around) my grandmother told me to 'stop showing off'. She said this in front of the visitors. I didn't even know what showing off meant but I got a clear message. Whatever it is, it is not good. My

Nana doesn't like it and she is angry with me, she didn't want what I was 'offering' at the time. I knew it was bad because I felt what I now know was embarrassment and I didn't like that feeling at all.

Even years later as an adult I remember having attention on me at times maybe telling a joke, while this little thought would be lurking in my mind 'Am I showing off?' Fortunately, my mother was very encouraging of my self-expression at that stage so I didn't just stop being me because of one comment my Nana made but there was nevertheless a degree of inner conflict that stayed with me long after she said it. Thankfully too, I learned early in life about the value of telling a good joke or story. Consequently I love hearing and telling both!

Of course some people grew up absolutely supported and encouraged to do and be whoever they wanted to be, regardless of whether they sang 'in tune', had a lisp, were flat-footed or whatever. For many people however the drive for perfection, high achievement, social acceptability, knowing one's place and so on imposed internal limitations which, as we grow older, seem harder to leave behind. Maybe some of them can't be left behind, they are too much a part of us, *but*, maybe some can be...

### **QUESTION YOUR EARLY CONDITIONING**

The point here is about the danger of taking your early conditioning for granted as fact and never questioning the validity of some of your beliefs formed *before* your brain had developed enough to rationalise whether they were actually true. If some misguided nuns tied your arm to a chair forty years ago because you were left handed, and forced you to learn to write with your right hand, you can bet you learned some things about yourself and nuns in general that may not be at all true or useful! (I have been told that one and numerous variations often

and I have met some beautiful nuns too) ***What is important is what we learned from our experiences.***

This is not the same as 'what happened'. We all know that people in the same family can interpret the same event in many different ways. The facts of our history are almost less relevant than our ***interpretation*** of what happened. Think about what you learned about your potential as a presenter based on your interpretation of events growing up. What beliefs do you have about your potential as a presenter? Have your beliefs changed over the years? Have they been reinforced by your experiences? Can you see how easy it is to fit your current experiences into what you have come to ***expect?***

Some of your beliefs may be accurate and some may not. Whatever the case, you won't know which parts of you are set in concrete and which are malleable until you risk trying yourself out.

Yes, you were born with some genetic predispositions, but ***I have yet to meet anyone who was born afraid of public speaking.*** It's true some people find learning how to present effectively seems to come easily to them and others seem to be more sensitive souls that prefer to stay behind the scenes. This is perhaps due to the combination of their genetic predispositions and their conditioning. Even if we are not predisposed to being effective presenters and enjoying the process, we still have the potential to make the best of what we have to offer by learning and developing skills that build confidence and competence. I have experienced this many times first hand with the most terrified presenters who have transformed themselves into 'success stories' in ways they didn't think possible when they chose to learn.

**"I SHOULD KNOW HOW TO DO THIS" - A MYTH**

A myth that needs busting well and truly at this point is “I should know how to do this”. It’s the myth that makes it wrong for you to feel nervous, it makes you wrong for being a fully grown adult and getting tongue tied or forgetting what to say. It’s the one that tells you *you* are stupid for needing to pee constantly before your presentation. When hands sweat and hearts race this myth tells you you’re being silly. We simply can’t get anywhere while we berate ourselves for how we feel.

### **ARE YOU LISTENING??**

I would be prepared to bet that the fundamental reason why you do not feel comfortable presenting is that **no-one taught you how** in a way you resonated with. “I should know how to do it” can come as easily from someone who had no training whatsoever and just learned what they know from bumbling about, to someone who feels they ‘should feel fine’ because they went to elocution lessons from the age of four! Many people give themselves an incredibly hard time because they feel far less than fine about getting up in front of people. If I am referring to you, please cut yourself some slack and **stop ‘shoulding’ on yourself**. While you are berating yourself for what you don’t know yet, you are holding up your own learning process. *Starting where you are* is the fastest way forward. Of course there is bound to be more we can all learn - isn’t there with everything?

Think again about who taught you about public speaking, presenting, teaching, leading, selling, all forms of presenting. Who taught you how to do it? How did you learn about it? Wasn’t it home, school, shopkeepers, sport, parties, ministers in church, elders, peers - *Life*?

Did you ever by chance get taught that ‘being yourself’ was your best resource as a presentation tool so you could develop your skills from there? You were

fortunate if you did, but many of us did not. From very early on we were learning which bits of ourselves *not* to show instead. We were learning how *not* to look stupid and how to be accepted by our caregivers and peers, and *we did that any way we could*.

Children are highly creative in the ways they attempt to get what they need - love, approval and acceptance. They (we) will go to extraordinary lengths to feel like they are ok. Granted, some of this adaptation is necessary for us to function effectively in a society where it helps if we all cooperate and get along. The other side of the coin of course is rebellion. With this strategy we take an 'I don't care what everyone else thinks or does' stance and we reject the majority view and it's pressures to conform. Adaptation and rebellion are not right or wrong, or good or bad. As we grow up we test - others, the environment, and ourselves. Sometimes we adapt and take the 'collective' stance without question.

This can be to our long-term detriment as much as rejecting out of hand useful guidelines for happy living *just because* they are valued by the majority. The process of maturing is surely one of growing our own individual sense of self-determination without needing to impose that on others, to cultivate true choice. This process seems to have a life of its own as initially when we are small we often tend towards adapting to our environment, then enter our teens and move through a stage of rebelling against it (privately or publicly). Finally, we may have the good fortune to move into a phase of recognising our right to exercise our free will, hopefully for the common good whilst developing a little wisdom along the way. Although it is difficult to live out at times, especially when other people's values seem to clash with our own, we might even learn that *everyone else has the same right* to hold their own values and exercise their free will as we do. Live and let live is an adage we don't seem to have a handle on yet.

Retracing a little, all this time growing up no-one necessarily *told* us that presenting was scary. They didn't have to because we found out all by ourselves. We found out as we grew up that just being us, however that was, was not ok in the raw. There were certain rules to be followed or else! Or else what? Or else run the risk of rejection, disapproval, humiliation, loss of love and consequent isolation (horrible for a child). Of course at 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 years old and even further both ways (younger and older) these messages didn't come to us necessarily in words.

We didn't need them to either. We got very clear messages with the briefest glance, the most subtle tone, and the tiniest gesture. We really are geniuses. Not only did we learn to survive in a world where we learned the rules or took the consequences, we learned very quickly due to another built in system that is part of being human - *our two primary motivators*.

### **PLEASURE OR PAIN?**

Pleasure and pain are two primary motivators for human behaviour - the desire to have one and avoid the other. Can you guess which is the stronger motivator? We are compelled to avoid those things that cause pain or even potential pain (physical, emotional and mental), and to desire those things that bring us pleasure. Remember, we can feel vicarious pain and pleasure too. Just as we can feel happy at someone else's success and that can inspire us to perform well, so too we can be put off for life by another person's painful or frightening experience.

Dr Stephanie Burns, an amazing teacher I received a lot of support from many years ago, specialises in researching and teaching about learning (have a look at [www.stephanieburns.com](http://www.stephanieburns.com) if you are interested in learning - anything). Steph used to do a very funny parody of what often happened to us as children

learning about presenting overtly for the first time in the standard education system of the baby boomers. When we were around seven years old, we did a class project on something or somewhere and at the end of the project we had to prepare a little talk. No-one told us what to expect or the best way to make a presentation so that it was memorable and effectively got the message across, we just had to do our best.

## **PLEASURE**

If you had a supportive teacher who liked you and he/she encouraged you, and/or you had a supportive family who loved and encouraged you, told you you were wonderful, helped you prepare and really turned it on for your big day, then that, combined with your own creativity may have meant a great result. You may have received smiles, hugs, clapping and congratulations all round.

This can all add up to a perception of success and with that comes an endorphin hit from your brain that makes you feel good. In other words, when we perceive ourselves successful in our endeavours, pleasure is the result and once that happens further improvement is much easier and something we can genuinely look forward to. The next time you were asked to do another talk you may have actually looked forward to it a little, felt supported again, had another good experience, got more juice, encouragement, endorphins and this success cycle can then just repeat itself over and over again. Consequently you may well have developed quite a healthy belief about yourself as a presenter - you have grown a neural network in your brain that tells you **presenting = pleasure**.

Learning about something we enjoy doing is much more stimulating than trying to learn when we perceive ourselves as unsuccessful or 'failures'.

## **PAIN**

For many of us our first forays into presenting were *not* pleasurable. Maybe it went more like: You were asked to do the project “talk”. You didn’t know what to do so you bumbled along doing your best and no-one at home had the time or the inclination to help you. In fact your big brother made you suffer humiliations beyond belief when he heard you practising, or your parents gave you some really helpful advice the night before when you just needed them to hear you and reassure you that you were great. Instead they maybe started telling you how it could be better and you got all confused and tried to change what you had prepared. You went to school, half in your old presentation as well as trying to add in the new stuff, you got lost and naturally started losing the plot. Redness started rising in your face as you began tripping over your words and then the worst thing happened. The whole class laughed - at you. Maybe the supportive smile on your teacher’s face looks a bit like a cringe to you.....?

The result? No juice, no endorphins, public humiliation, dignity gone, your powerful neural network is already saying loud and clear presenting = pain. Next time you are asked to do a talk, your clever brain has the nasty memory nice and handy. So blow me down...you better get the measles!

## **AN EXAMPLE**

When I was nine years old I had a teacher called Mrs McArthur. She was a lovely woman and all the kids loved her. Her classroom atmosphere was very laid back and relaxed and we pretty much enjoyed learning with her. One day a new teacher showed up and told us he would be our teacher for three weeks because Mrs McArthur was sick. That was ok except his rules were very different. That first morning one of the boys who was the class clown was playing the fool as usual when our new teacher suddenly roared at him. While the rest of the class shook in our shoes this teacher made Ronald stand on his

chair and hold a stack of maths books, big heavy new maths text books, over his head with his arms straight up in the air.

Guess what we all did when that happened? Yes, we laughed. At whose expense? Ronald's. This was partly a nervous reaction and partly because we had never seen anything like this before and it looked funny. After a minute or so Ronald started dropping his arms - they were tired. The teacher went up and whacked his legs with a ruler and made him straighten his arms again. Ronald was made to stand in that position until he was sobbing – with physical pain and humiliation. Only then did that teacher let him sit down.

He had no discipline problems after that. I learned that day that people, grown ups anyway, were all different. I began learning to observe very carefully and respond to other people's cues after that rather than risk initiating in case 'I got it wrong'. I also learned how to survive in that man's class - keep quiet! He might have been teaching the only way he knew how but he was cruel and he ruled through fear. I don't remember learning anything that he might have *meant* to teach us but I remember **him**. (Note: I have 'composted' this experience and choose now to see how much my observation skills helped me in the police and now in my current work).

### **SO WHAT WERE THE OPTIONS?**

Ask yourself why a perfectly intelligent human being (regardless of age) who has learned how to feel humiliated (emotional pain), and even worse maybe thinks they are not ok, would *ever* freely choose to put themselves in a position that potentially exposes them to all those feelings again? They would have to be masochistic. So what's the solution? We are geniuses remember, so we get creative. Now a powerful layer of automatic learning has occurred (often

unconsciously) ie. Some variation on 'Whoops! I cannot afford to be myself in front of other people (presenting) because it hurts'.

We now move on to the next layer of automatic learning – some variation on - 'What do I do about it?' This is not a conscious, logical processing going on. We are simply and quite naturally responding to our life experiences and interpreting them the best we can. We are faster learners as children than at any other time in our lives and we are also capable of 'magical thinking'. We can invent all kinds of things that are simply not true about ourselves and other people depending on how we interpret events. Any number of things can provoke feelings of insecurity or self-consciousness and therefore require a strategy to deal with them, and we will create one - every time – often without even being conscious we are doing it.

### **AVOIDANCE SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD IDEA**

One such strategy commonly used in the context of presenting seems very sensible. It's called avoidance. You might learn how, sometimes very skilfully, to avoid ever having to present yourself in public. Often that becomes so much a part of our lives we don't remember that we even have the strategy let alone what provoked us to employ it.

One man I worked with did realise he had developed his avoidance skill and he knew exactly why. He had had a particularly humiliating experience as a result of simply being a reasonably quiet and shy young man at high school and consequently vowed to himself he would never put himself in the 'up front' position again. He developed hobbies that reflected this as did his career. He became an anaesthetist. At work his interaction with other people was at a level where they were mostly unconscious! He certainly loved his work, but at the same time he knew it served him well by keeping his interactions with strangers

to a minimum. You may be wondering how I ever came to be working with him. I certainly did until he told me he had become so good at his work he was being asked to speak at medical conferences!! How's that for life offering an opportunity for growth?

Another example is that of a forty plus year old friend of mine who told me she always came second in her club golf championship - on purpose. She knew she could win but she was afraid of presenting and to which meant getting up and receiving a cup at the end of the year. She couldn't face it! This is a mature, intelligent and very competent woman who would have had to walk a few steps and say maybe 'thank you' and sit down again and she couldn't do it. To me that is a tragedy that denies her the pleasure of her achievement and worse, she feels powerless to change it. The other tragedy is, she is so convinced she could never feel any differently that she is unable at this stage to even contemplate changing her experience through learning. This is a classic example of fear determining a person's level of choice. The result is, nothing changes.

I have heard countless similar stories - these are in no way isolated human experiences. Avoidance works well until we become frustrated enough with the limitations avoiding the issue places on us. Facing our fear is a wonderfully freeing experience, even if we never make one presentation in our lives because we know in our hearts we can *if we choose to*. We have created more choice so have more freedom.

It is important to note **there is no point trying to force any person to change**. In my experience the avoidance strategy is always employed for good reason and people must be respected to deal with their own lives in their own ways in their own time. Forcing others to do anything sets up a pattern of resistance very quickly and is not useful.

## **THE SURVIVAL OPTION - A POPULAR CHOICE**

Another even more common strategy, especially for those in the business world that demands so many kinds of presentations as part of our work life, is to go down the survival track. Once you learn the survival game you can get up in front of people *without actually being* there ie: you use your 'cardboard cut-out' to make the presentation. There are lots of books and courses you can attend which help this process along. It's like there is a conspiracy afoot to perpetuate inauthenticity and 'technique' (remember Mr Nobody's Rules?).

I used to observe far more survival strategies in presenters in male dominated environments where posturing and power games were commonplace methods of self-protection in a ruthless competitive environment. These days far more men I work with are sick of the pressure and more than willing to acknowledge their real feelings. They are exploring their own 'personal power' rather than the pseudo power that goes with position or status alone.

## **SURVIVAL IS SENSIBLE**

Anything can be used to help you survive, and if survival is what your motivation is, you will use anything available to achieve it. Understandably, you may 'hide in the dark' when the Power Point or slide show is on. If you are not used to using notes to empower your presenting, you may well learn tricks that help you hide them while both you and your audience try to pretend they are not there. If you feel fearful looking people in the eye as you talk with them (if direct eye contact is appropriate) you may well want to learn to look like you are looking while you gaze over people's heads.

Some people even learn how to 'deal with' the challenging person in the audience by 'putting them in their place' with sarcasm or intimidation so they can feel temporarily good about themselves (it never lasts). We can learn how to

cover up, hide, protect and defend ourselves and play with all manner of other survival 'techniques'....all of which are based on one fundamental premise, *presenting = pain*. The trouble is, survival techniques can only work in a limited fashion because they are not related to what is REAL and worse, they actually prevent your attention being fully in the present moment where spontaneity and the real action is. When you believe presenting is a painful or potentially painful experience, your brain and nervous system will try and protect you by preparing for it based on many assumptions that come from the past and what you have come to expect. I am not saying survival strategies are 'wrong'. They are not. **We all do the best we can.** There is however, presenting beyond survival - if you want it. It's called **thriving, and it's where we are headed.**

## **FEELINGS PLAY THEIR PART TOO**

**Remember, presenting in itself is not what is scary.** Presenting *brings up* much deeper feelings we tend not to welcome. Many human beings are afraid of feelings. If we don't know how to deal with them, it's because, yet again, no-one taught us how to deal with feelings appropriately, especially not in modern western society. Our feeling nature is illogical and unruly. It is not sequential like our rational thinking brain.

When our feelings overwhelm our logic we feel out of control. It doesn't matter if we are telling ourselves not to be silly and just get on with it. Our bodies betray our real feelings because it's our bodies which express our feelings and *that* makes us feel uncomfortable. Feelings are friendly only when we like what we feel - happy, comfortable, confident, safe, loved, accepted, secure and so on.

The fear of our extreme emotional states keeps us trapped in a cycle of survival when it comes to expressing who we are although when it's important enough, all that can go out the window and we will forgive the Prime Minister who

publicly cries over something we all can relate to, or the policeman who gets upset at attending a cot death when he has a baby boy the same age asleep (he hopes) at home. We have rules for everyday use and rules for exceptional circumstances, all based on our judgements of what is right and wrong, appropriate and not and bottom line - ***what we are emotionally comfortable with***. Sometimes our feelings bulldoze our logic out of the way without warning. Presenting is one activity where this happens for many people, especially when what they want to say has an emotional component and is important to them.

On the very first ESSENTIALLY SPEAKING course I taught in Auckland there was a man we'll call Mark in the audience who showed me this graphically. By all accounts he was very confident and a powerful presenter. He was a manager who led sales trainings at work for groups of forty or so people at a time and he loved it. He really did enjoy presenting.

One day, Mark's mother died. In making the funeral arrangements the family chose to leave a space in the funeral where anyone who wanted to could get up and speak. Mark decided that he would publicly honour his mum spontaneously rather than having a prepared slot in the proceedings. So the funeral time came and the space in the service came and Mark's knees would not straighten. He said he felt more fear than he had ever felt in his life and he just couldn't bring himself to stand up and talk about his mother. The service finished and he was left feeling absolutely devastated and angry that he had missed his opportunity. What's more, he couldn't understand why he felt great presenting at work and yet he couldn't do it when it really mattered to him because he was afraid.

I am glad to say once Mark learned more about his own patterns of thinking, and he faced his fear of 'losing it' emotionally, he knew he would be able to speak at his dad's funeral (whenever that will be). What's more he left the

workshop looking forward to the opportunity he would create in his dad's service to honour his mum as well.

One day we may see real and mature expression as appropriate and even desirable as our everyday experience but we have to start somewhere - and that's where we are as individuals. This can feel incredibly challenging but we must be willing to get to know our own feeling nature and not be in fear of it otherwise it's fear that runs our life. I know this is an ongoing challenge but as we become more comfortable with all the facets of ourselves, so we become more comfortable with all the facets of others, which then makes life easier too. Our emotional life provides us with such richness and colour. It is such a huge part of us and very precious in many ways. Without our feelings we would be like robots, computers, predictable and boring.

### **BUT IT'S OUT OF MY 'COMFORT ZONE'**

James W. Newman created a concept in the 1970's that has become synonymous with a **sense of safety and security** - physical, emotional and psychological. He called this sense our 'comfort zone'. In our comfort zone is ***what we know that we know*** which is different from the real meaning of the word 'comfort'. Another way of saying it is, what is in our comfort zone is what is familiar or what we have learned.

### **WHAT IS YOUR COMFORT ZONE?**

With presenting, people have many different 'comfort zones'. Some people love to speak to children for example - teachers are often fine in this arena. It's in their comfort zone. I have worked with teachers who are gifted in this domain and yet when it comes to speaking out in the staff room or to their peers at a conference they feel uncomfortable or 'out of their comfort zone'.

Some managers are fine presenting to their staff but not to their colleagues or the managing director. Some people love talking off the cuff while it is someone else's worst nightmare. Time for preparation is what some people want in order to create a great presentation and yet others will sweat it out preparing at 2.00am the morning before a presentation they have known about for months. There are those who are fine presenting to people they know but with strangers they hate it and others for whom it is the exact opposite. All of this indicates we have comfort zones around presenting, just as we do around everything else in life.

### **THE UNKNOWN**

We often refer to what is outside our comfort zone as 'the unknown' and have labels associated with what it feels like to be there - scary, stressful, out of control and such. Depending on your attitude to learning and doing new things, you may have different labels for what it feels like when you are outside your comfort zone. What about feelings of excitement, thrill, exhilaration, challenge, opportunity, risk?

The truth is, if it's inside your comfort zone, in other words if it is familiar to you (even 'the devil you know') it is what you have learned. If it is outside your comfort zone, you haven't learned it yet. Therefore you could say that what is *outside* your comfort zone is *inside your learning zone*.

### **PLAYING IN THE LEARNING ZONE**

We can move beyond what holds us back and learn something new instead by **playing in our own personal learning zone**. Regardless of how competent we are now, these days we simply cannot afford to stop learning or we become like dinosaurs - unable to adapt to what are rapidly changing conditions as our current skills become obsolete. It actually helps to know our learning zone will

always be infinitely bigger than our comfort zone. This whole idea can drive us to keep learning. I saw a quote on a sandwich board years ago that said “If you’re green you’ll grow and if you’re ripe you’ll rot!”. These days to keep healthy we must keep playing outside our comfort zones. What’s more, the more we do it - the easier and more fun it gets.

### **THE MORE WE DO IT THE EASIER IT GETS**

Willingness to learn is your biggest asset and will help you to increase your choices, confidence and competency as a presenter - to increase your threshold of pressure and what you can cope with. While we are learning we are increasing the number of choices we have. It’s automatic and takes care of itself. As you expand your comfort zone you **increase your choices in life**. You consequently increase your **personal power**, your sense of **self-determination** and your **freedom to choose** how you express yourself in the world.

## **WRAP UP**

Now you have a better idea of where I am coming from on the whole presentation skill-development issue. You have explored a little about where you are at personally and we have looked at some ideas that can give us clues as to how we came to have our current relationship with presenting. We’ve also looked at common motivators for human behaviour and in general terms how we can support ourselves. The key? **Be willing to be a learner and to see yourself and others in new ways.**

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

- How you use your potential is determined by your values and beliefs
- What you believe about yourself is what you have *learned* to believe
- Beliefs are not facts
- People are not born afraid of presenting
- We began learning about presenting while we were developing 'self-consciousness'
- "I should know how to do this" is a myth which denies our real feelings about presenting
- The real reason for our lack of confidence and competence is "no one taught us how"
- Starting where we are is the fastest way forward
- Human beings are intrinsically motivated to avoid pain (danger) and desire pleasure
- Presenting itself is not scary - it brings up scary feelings
- When fear chooses what we can and can't do we are not free
- Outside our comfort is our own personal learning zone - willingness to learn is our biggest asset
- Expand your comfort zone and your choices, personal power and freedom follow
- Our world needs more clean, clear presenters



*“Human integrity is the uncompromising courage of self determining whether or not to take initiatives, support or co-operate with others in accord with the truth and nothing but the truth as it is conceived of by the divine mind always present in each individual.”*

*R Buckminster Fuller*

## PART TWO

### THE SELF-DEVELOPMENT RESOURCE KIT

Parts Two and Three together form The Resource Kit. Part Two provides you with a mental and emotional framework (the self-development focus or, 'retraining the brain'). This content will give you information about your role as a presenter and some attitudes that seem to work everywhere and always. It addresses **principles and strategies** that can underpin the practical skills and preparation plan which come in Part Three. We are still working from the ground up. The purpose of offering you the material in this way is to support you in having a solid understanding of the attitudes which will help cultivate effective results and which make your practical preparation of material so much easier.

**A note about principles:** Principles are not rules. They are more like lighthouses that can help keep us on track. They can help us see why we may not have achieved the results we wanted, provoke more learning and also see what works so we can repeat it. In essence they are what I call 'everywhere and always' guides. They apply to all kinds of presenting situations. Principles are not 'end points' either. We don't just read about them and say 'ok, got that'. Rather they serve as ongoing fertiliser for continuous development - if we allow them to. At times you may not want to accept the truth of them and at times they may lead to frustration but if you can embrace them they will be very helpful companions on your own journey as an effective presenter. The information in Part Two is as applicable to face-to-face teaching and web-based learning and communication as it is to formal presentations to the Chairman of the Board. It is as applicable to media presenting as it is to talking to 5 year olds face to face. Whether you are talking to one other person or ten thousand this information will apply. It will support you in being open and flexible enough to reach the broadest audiences in ways that are appropriate for *them* while remaining true to *you* so let's begin.

# FIVE

## RESPECT EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING

### – A PRINCIPLE

Respect everyone and everything is a principle of life I was brought up with as an ideal. For many of us, respecting our elders, our teachers, our ‘betters’, other people in general etc, are the food of our childhood. We had to learn respect as a matter of course, depending on our family environment. Sometimes the lessons were hard. Never mind if we didn’t *feel* respect, or maybe even know what it was.

As we grew up we made distinctions. We learned things like ‘respect must be earned’ and can be lost. We ‘lose’ respect for people (translation = *stop* respecting) because of the ways they behave or ‘just because’ we don’t like some people. We mistake respect for fear, reverence, and devotion even.

We sometimes even think feeling inferior to someone else means we respect him or her. We learn to judge others by rules we learned about what is right and what is wrong. Then we take those rules out into our lives and start expecting others to live by them. When they don’t, we don’t respect them. When I was a child, my grandfather taught me respect was something we all had the choice to give away. He said if we were respected back, that was a bonus, but if we weren’t, our challenge was to continue to give it. If we were unable to do that, my Granddad said that said more about us than it did about the other person.

#### **IT’S SIMPLE BUT NOT NECESSARILY EASY**

Stephanie Burns brought this principle consciously into the context of presenting for me. All the principles I work with teach me, maybe this one the most in many

ways. It's because on one hand "Respect Everyone and Everything" is an ideal that fits with many people's conditioning whereas on the other hand we live in a world where we still carry many judgements about how other people 'should' be. In other words, it all becomes conditional. The question is then, how deeply do we live out of this principle? "Respect everyone and everything" is not stated here lightly. It is a principle I still wrestle with often, but it also teaches me patience, compassion, forgiveness and tolerance where I thought there could be none because it implies that all things are worthy of respect - in bad times and good.

We humans seem to find it easy to respect someone or something when all is well. But do we respect the person who rubs us up the wrong way? Who seems to be intentionally talking while we are presenting? Who seems to be out to get us or humiliate us? How do we maintain an attitude inside that this 'horrible person' is still worthy of our respect? Hard to swallow?

Indeed. The opportunity with these people is to *allow them to teach us to see past an ego* and to open our heart even more than we already have. When we respect ourselves much follows. Taking this one principle on with a genuine commitment will shift your perception and your experience of presenting - anywhere, to anyone. You don't need to know 'how' it works any more than you need to know how your car works in order to drive it.

Respect will profoundly change the way you see the 'difficult' person or people in your audience, the ones you have been protecting yourself from, the ones who could run your presentation off the rails. Respect helps us see 'difficult' people as our teachers. They teach us respect beyond our own boundaries. Ultimately they teach us to respect ourselves.

## **EVERY AUDIENCE DESERVES YOUR RESPECT**

In the context of presenting, every audience deserves your respect. That means every person in your audience and it means the environment in which you are presenting. It means all of it. Further, if for whatever reason you feel justified in demonstrating disrespect for **any** person in your audience, be assured you will undermine rapport with **everyone**. Make no mistake; we can all feel disrespect.

## **AN EXAMPLE**

Many moons ago I had a series of team development presentations to do with a company in the throes of an ugly industrial dispute. On the first day we were treated with contempt and disrespect by an audience who perceived us as management 'mouthpieces'. It was tempting to respond defensively but it quickly became clear the issue was one of respect - or lack of it. These people did not feel respected at all by their management team and were taking it out on us.

Taking it all personally would have not been useful (although it was very tempting!). Holding to this principle however proved to be the key to what turned into a successful series. By the end of the third session (each with a different audience) we got a standing ovation. The audience responded to being treated with the respect they deserved. Defensiveness from me would have served no purpose and only inflamed what was already a volatile situation. This proved to be an uncomfortable but powerful reminder of this principle at work.

## **I WANT MY AUDIENCE TO RESPECT ME**

'I want my audience to respect me' is a common desire I come across when working with presenters. I say, start by respecting yourself and your audience. No one can make another human being respect him or her. We don't earn respect - we offer respect, we model respect and if we are respected back well and good. If not, it doesn't mean we need to withdraw our basic respect for

others. No one can make you disrespect him or her just as you cannot make anyone respect you. It doesn't work for us to wait to be respected before we decide to respect someone.

### **RESPECT STARTS AT HOME BASE**

Respect starts at home base. **It starts with you.** This can be even more challenging than respecting others. Can you respect yourself as a learner? Can you respect the fact that in order to learn you may make mistakes? Do you respect your own process? If you can, learning will be easier. One definition of respect from the Shorter Oxford Dictionary is: **to treat with consideration.** Is there anyone or anything unworthy of being treated with just a little consideration? I have yet to meet anyone who does not respond positively to being treated with respect (worthy of consideration) and

I have yet to meet anyone who thrives on its opposites - contempt, disdain, or indifference, other than for egoic intellectual sport. You deserve to be treated with the greatest respect, especially from the inside. What's more, the more you respect yourself the easier it is to respect other people. This is not about being soft or passive or unassertive. It's not about being a doormat that others can walk on, or being a sucker that stands for any treatment. It's not about being all serious and precious either. It is about knowing your worth and the worth of others, keeping your sense of humour (very important) and knowing we are all always learning about ourselves and others and taking the opportunity to do so. It is about holding your head up without needing to prove anything to anyone, least of all yourself.

## **WRAP UP**

As presenter, you are a model. If you model respect with every person in every audience it is much more likely they will reflect that back. If they don't, you have actually lost nothing. You must mean it though, which is where the real challenge lies with all of the principles. They are ways of being, not gimmicks or manipulations designed to keep you safe. So have a go - check it out even for a day and explore.

Where are your lines drawn around respect? You may find they are closer than you think. The principle of respect has much to teach. Planting and nurturing seeds of self-respect will empower you in every presentation you make.

## **WHAT'S IMPORTANT?**

- Respect everyone and everything is a principle which teaches patience, forgiveness and compassion for ourselves and others
- All people and things are worthy of consideration
- 'Difficult' people teach us respect beyond our own boundaries
- Disrespect one person in your audience and you will undermine rapport with everyone else
- We don't need to focus on earning respect - just practice offering it. If it is not reflected back we have lost nothing
- The more you respect yourself the easier it is to respect others
- Remember to keep your sense of humour whatever else (respectfully of course!)

## SIX

### EVERYONE IS DOING THE BEST THEY CAN - A PRINCIPLE

#### KEEPING A BALANCE

Having talked about respect and how important it is as an ideal, it is equally important to be realistic in what we can deal with at any one time. It is important to note that **wherever you are in your development as a presenter you are doing your best**. That means some days we will have more available to us than others - internally and externally. In my experience this principle is big in the context of self-to-self **permission**. If we can accept that we already do the best we can, and *so do our audiences*, we can move forward **willing to learn** and from there develop more resources so 'our best' becomes even better!

#### IT'S NOT ABOUT JUSTIFICATION

This is not 'an excuse' principle. It is not offered here to support you in justifying yourself to anyone, least of all yourself. If you have not prepared your material and yourself to the point where you know you have done all you can in the circumstances, this principle does not let you off the hook. Rather, the implication is that human beings like to do a good job if we possibly can. We feel satisfaction from healthy effort. 'We all do our best' is such a cliché and yet it is true. In any one moment you will be doing what you can with the resources available at the time. I hear often from presenters a string of criticisms of themselves regarding their presentations when really they are expecting more of themselves than they currently have the resources for. The other way this principle can fly out the window is when we blame others. We make 'them' wrong for not wanting to hear us, for not paying attention, for talking while we

are, for anything we can think of which puts the responsibility for getting results onto someone else.

### **YOUR AUDIENCE IS YOUR TEACHER**

As soon as we take responsibility for getting our message across, our audiences become the people who help us do that. They teach us how to be better communicators by being distracting, snoring, talking, being rude, superior - if we care to look at it that way. Once again, I am not excusing these behaviours, I am pointing out that they can be a huge resource that teaches you about flexibility if you want to use them. Ask yourself, how do you learn how to deal with difficult people in your audiences if you don't ever have any? How do you learn to test the boundaries of your own sense of respecting others if no one challenges that? How do you get better at tennis if you always play people you can beat?

### **WRAP UP**

The essence of this principle is - cut yourself some slack, cut others some slack and **focus on learning** rather than judging or making excuses. We are all doing the best we can. If you want behaviour to change, add more resources. That goes for you and everyone else. From now on, this principle can support you in 'greenhousing' your own development on many different levels. It gives us permission to learn, keep learning and never ever stop!

## SEVEN

### FOCUS ON WHAT WORKS - A PRINCIPLE

As I write this chapter, a baby boy almost one year old is staying in my house. Matthew is a teacher and has been since before he was born. One day something will work to appease him when he is upset or frustrated and the next day it won't. So do we give up and ignore him or are we challenged to be even more creative than we were yesterday? Many people are aware a baby is the most powerful person in a household who teaches all around them about yet another principle.....

#### FOCUS ON WHAT WORKS

This principle introduces us to a whole other way of thinking, a quantum leap from the notion of right and wrong. **Being right or wrong is simply not relevant when it comes to learning.** Rather what becomes useful are words like 'valid' and 'accurate' and 'relevant' and 'useful'. For us to rapidly develop ourselves as effective presenters we can move a long way fast by focusing on **what works**. It helps in the battle with self-criticism and the criticism of others enormously and also helps develop coaching and leadership skills.

#### WE SEE WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR

Our mind is like a video camera. It pays attention to whatever we point it at (imagine what we miss out on?). Could you look at the world and find evidence to support a belief that it's a cruel and heartless place we live in? You only need to listen to the news or read the paper to see evidence of this every day. How about looking for evidence that the world is an exciting and endlessly creative place to live, packed with beauty and delight and full of more potential yet? We see what we are looking for. In other words we don't see the world the way it is,

we see it the way **we** are. The difference in how we see the world is in our **perception**. Where our attention is placed our energy follows.

When you focus on what works about you and your material as a presenter, your brain and body will focus there too. How often do we focus on what *doesn't* work? For the majority of people I have worked with, what's 'wrong' was the focal point they grew up with. The idea was, if we see what's wrong we can fix it or improve on it. Remember the 'red pen'? Our errors were highlighted in the most stimulating colour to the human brain. Not surprising that many of us learned to focus on what was wrong - mistakes - instead of success.

### **FOCUSING ON WHAT DOESN'T WORK DOESN'T WORK!**

A problem with this approach is that when we are learning about presenting we have a never-ending supply of things to fix because there is always room to improve! I find it far more useful to pay attention to what is *already* working, what presenters *already* have going for them, and building on that.

### **EXAMPLE**

In our seminars people are videoed if they choose to be. They go home after day one and report back what they noticed about what they saw on the tape. You may not be surprised to hear that more often than not all I hear after the first viewing are things like "I said 'um' 22 times", or "I hate my accent", or "I can't believe I do this funny thing with my left hand"...and a squillion others, all criticism. It is much more rare for someone to say "My content flowed well" or "I liked how I came across", or "I have a great smile"...or any number of other things that were clearly in the video as well!

While you focus on what *doesn't* work your brain will be forever 'trying' not to do those things. What a waste of energy. Believe it or not, even if someone does

see something they like they are often hesitant to acknowledge that in case they come across as 'full of themselves'. God forbid we should enjoy 'ourselves'! It's quite funny if you think about how much we are conditioned to hide under a bushel lest we be seen as arrogant or self-promoting. Can't we please tell the truth about at least *some* of the good bits?

A sales manager once told me she was all ready and quite looking forward to a big work presentation, a business pitch for her company. Her boss offered to sit down the back and field any tricky questions for her if she wanted him to. She felt very supported by this and agreed. A moment or two before she was due to start her boss said, "By the way, I'm going to count how many times you say 'um'." Can you imagine what happened? The woman said 'um' more times during that presentation than she had ever said in any other. Why? Because her focus was on 'DON'T SAY UM!' Your brain doesn't register the 'don't', it focuses just like a camera, on whatever you point it at. Focusing on what doesn't work is not the fastest way forward. It doesn't work. It's like the old story that there is a pot of gold buried in your back yard - it's yours as long as you can dig it up **without** thinking of a white horse. Try doing that!

When you focus on what works your attention follows and you automatically do more of it. That leaves far less room for the things that don't work as well and these tend to start dropping away on their own. Focusing on what works takes away the need to remember to 'do this' or 'not do that' as your system operates from an **attitude** rather than a set of behaviours. **Attitudinal change precedes behavioural change** that is why we need to look below the surface at so many of these ideas.

Can you see that if you don't get the results you want from a presentation you can now look with open eyes at what worked and what could work better rather

than berating yourself for not achieving? 'What could work even better?' has no judgement in it, no blame, it **questions**. From there you are free to examine - 'what next?'

## WRAP UP

This principle keeps us on track by again holding us in a context of learning. Presenting is a learning activity constantly and it is **public learning**. You are being seen as you learn whether your audience is aware of it or not. **Focusing on what works** helps us to stop taking it personally when we perceive we didn't achieve what we set out to do. This is one of the best principles for reminding us to stay positive and it opens the door to the concept of coaching, yourself and others, which is where we are headed next.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

- Focusing on what works helps balance criticism with coaching
- Our mind is like a camera - it pays attention to whatever we point it at
- There is always room for improvement - pay attention to what is already working and do more of it
- Attitudinal change precedes behavioural change
- Ask yourself 'What worked?' and 'What could work better?'
- Focusing on what works helps us stop taking results personally and speeds up development

## EIGHT

### SELF-COACHING - A SELF-HELP STRATEGY

The true power of our mind is becoming more and more evident as especially neuro-science begins demonstrating what mystics have said for aeons. Affirmations, visualisation, meditation and other practical mental tools are now more popular in the western world than ever before. Why? Because when they are effectively employed - they work! In the 60's, 70's and even the 80's, these mental tools were associated with the 'new age' and weird people but as time goes by and results speak for themselves more and more people are experiencing the benefits. It's not unlike the rapidly growing pro-wellness industry that is slowly but surely pushing the 'sickness' industry that treats only symptoms, aside. We have the power and the ability to take far more responsibility for our own wellbeing and, slowly but surely, we are doing it.

The whole concept of coaching has most often been associated with sport until relatively recently when the world of business began to include it as a strategy for increasing staff performance at all levels in organisations - often replacing traditional 'management' strategies. Peak performance coaching in a business setting plus life-coaching in general has become the hot new thing for the last couple of years. Once again, 'what works?' wins. We will see this more and more given that human evolution has not yet stopped.

We are going to apply the concept of coaching to ourselves in another context - guess what? I trust you understand that by learning to focus on what works we already shift our thinking in the direction of coaching, particularly **self-coaching**. To explore this idea further we need to make some distinctions between self-coaching and critical thinking. This chapter is based on the idea that as part of

being humans who express ourselves with language some of the time, we also *think* in language some of the time. The *quality* of that thinking is what we are about to address. In other words we are going to explore how we talk to ourselves, and the places inside that we talk to ourselves from.

### **CRITICAL THINKING – EXPANDING THE VIEW**

Critical thinking is a very useful thinking style in problem-solving situations, when we are trying to find out what is wrong with something - what we don't like, what doesn't work. By definition it is the application of judgement, particularly *unfavourable judgement*. I have found that when we use a critical eye to evaluate our own performance as a presenter, it more often than not *slows down* the learning process particularly if we already feel sensitive about our skill level. This is because we human beings don't seem to enjoy being told what is wrong with us. When that happens, we often feel under attack and the natural response to perceived attack? Defence, and rightly so, given we are programmed to defend our very life with all our might. We do this automatically and won't be changing that aspect of humanness in a hurry. What would be most helpful in today's world is to learn to see more clearly what is a real threat and what isn't. That way we can stop using critical thinking where it holds us back (when we are learning).

### **CRITICAL THINKING DOESN'T FIX PEOPLE**

Critical thinking is very useful when it comes to fixing 'things', testing for robustness etc, and not so useful when it comes to people and learning. A coaching approach seems to work much more effectively where learning and self-development are concerned because it helps focus the mind on enhancing what is already there and developing that. It is also sensitive enough to acknowledge the delicate emotional components that impact our experience.

Sensitivity has no place in critical thinking - it's wishy washy and gets in the way! This is not to say coaching as a strategy for improvement does not include discernment, it must. Werner Erhard said, "Creation is a matter of distinction". The distinction here lies in motivation. The implication of coaching is having someone on your side as it were, rather than pulling you down. The way we often critique ourselves it doesn't seem like we are on our own team at all. I know the way I have treated myself at times has not exactly been supportive, in fact I have been meaner to myself than anyone else ever has. I know I am not alone either.

To understand *why* so many of us become so skilled at criticising ourselves it helps to look once again at our developmental process. According to American statistics children perceive on average more about what is *not* ok about them than what *is* ok. This is not because parents, teachers and other authority figures are intentionally horrible and undermining. Rather it is from an 'everyone does the best they can' angle. More often than not this comes from parents love for their children and their desire for them to be safe and succeed in the world. Sometimes because of the circumstances they grow up in, even parents own fears are projected onto children.

### **SELF-CRITICISM**

Given we can interpret things others say and do and *don't* say and do as criticisms (and indeed they may be), it doesn't take long for us to internalise our experiences and develop our very own internal critic. We then need no-one else to find fault with who we are and what we do - we can do it all by ourselves. Jung called it the super ego.

A classic example comes from my own childhood and I bet you can think of situations of your own. My parents separated in the early 60's when I was three

and a half years old. My father was alcoholic and abandoned my mother with two small children to bring up on her own - my older brother and me. My father left because he couldn't cope with his life. *My interpretation?* (No one told me this by the way, I made it up all by myself) My father doesn't want to be with *me*. There must be something wrong with *me*. All this went on inside while I felt very loved and supported by my mother on whose very broad shoulders I now stand. Basically I was a happy enough child. Back then though, what mum gave me in the positive just wasn't enough to dissipate my underlying negative belief about myself. I *knew* it was true but not once did I ever say it out loud. It wasn't even a conscious, logical thought. This idea of mine was never disputed by my mother, or anyone else because no one knew it was even in my little head so, as I grew older, I often wondered and searched inside for what it could be that my father didn't like.

I now had a mission in life - find my fundamental flaw and....FIX IT! That way I could make sure no one ever left me again. Can you see how pointless that was? It really is quite pitiful. It kept me busy though! I was a very good little girl and tried to do everything right so I would feel ok while I kept working on this problem. The result? No change to the circumstances, my father didn't come home. A gross abuse of trust by a supposedly safe male role model cemented my perception of myself.

Time went on and I remember as a teenager feeling people seemed to think I was ok. I was popular at school, even became head prefect and *still* I remember thinking 'These people do not realise there is something wrong with me so *they* must be stupid!' Maybe I am the only person on the planet to have such twisted thoughts, but I suspect not. Can you see how this thought process may have impacted on me as a presenter - *and* it has absolutely nothing to do with presenting? It does however have everything to do with me and my *expression*

as a presenter. Who wants to get up in front of people when they *know* in every cell of their being there is something fundamentally wrong with them? So, I learned to cover up with the best of them.

I played at being who everyone thought I was. The hilarious thing is, when I look back, I was actually pretending to be parts of myself that really were me! At the time though, this bottom line belief about there being something wrong with me plus many others like 'I'm not good enough' which I managed to acquire as well, had the impact of pretty well turning my internal critic up full blast so that it was basically all I ever heard on the *inside*. I could find things wrong with what I did, how I looked and who I was that other people would never have noticed because they were not things other people were looking for in me. I simply didn't believe in myself.

I have never felt criticised by anyone with anything close to the talent I had for criticising myself! Mostly others have always seen my potential, believed in me, loved me and supported me. Thankfully the positive belief of others in me eventually worked - but **first I had to decide to let it.**

When we are growing our genuine sense of self-worth and esteem (for me this didn't begin until my twenties and continues today), we often need people *outside* of us to help, encourage and support us. In other words at that stage in our development our environment is helping define our sense of identity. What we learned about the world and ourselves as children becomes internalised and we end up hearing the same things *on the inside* as we grow older. We are grown up now - well at least we *look* like grown-ups. We have the luxury of choosing to define ourselves from the inside out rather than relying on our environment to tell us who and what we are. But to do that means sifting through some of what is outmoded.

## **SELF-COACHING LEADS TO SELF-DISCOVERY**

Our leftover needs from childhood spill over into adult life so it's not surprising many people harbour fantasies about being *discovered*. I know it would be lovely to know that we could just amble along in life and one day we would be whisked away by someone who can see us and our potential and turn us into whatever star we really are! We all have some variation on "If only"...a wish that we were in different circumstances in some small way. What bliss if we could really live that life, be that person.

This sense seems to often come from an inner knowing that we *do* have more potential than we currently express in the world but we don't know how to tap into it, or it all seems too hard. Too hard in case other people don't agree or like it, too hard because we may have to change our current perception of others or ourselves. Too hard because we are afraid of the consequences. Too hard because worst of the worst we might look inside for it and find nothing there!!! What a horrible thought.

The solution? We will do something spectacular *one day*, after this job is over, or the children are all at school, or they have left school, or we've finished our degree or any other reason we can think of to put off exploring our potential *now*, or even worse, decide 'this is my lot and there's nothing I can do about it'.

Maybe we will never be 'discovered'. Just in case that is true, what about an alternative? How about creating our own star maker, our own inner coach? That way we don't have to rely on anyone else coming to discover us. We can do it ourselves and to quote Enid Faust "We can start right now and it won't cost a red penny!" I believe we all have an inner coach. We call it by different names but in essence it is a part of you that has been with you since you were born and will be with you until you die. It is a part of you who believes in you and loves

you with exquisite fondness, sometimes secretly and sometimes openly. Unfortunately it is also often dominated by our internal critic. The critic's voice is often much louder and has a bit of a whine with it. The internal critic loves to find fault and point it out - endlessly it seems at times. Do you ever get tired of listening to yours?

### **WHAT ARE YOUR PATTERNS OF THINKING?**

To interrupt patterns of habitual thinking that are no longer useful, like self-criticism, we need to first be willing to observe how we talk to ourselves and then progressively step in and alter the quality of those thoughts. Learning to be an effective coach and applying your skills to **you** is what it's all about. If you plant carrots in the garden, what do you expect to harvest? Surely not potatoes! If you have planted weeds, don't expect sunflowers.

In the context of presenting, what do you say to yourself? Are you aware of a predominantly critical factor in your thought process? Many people experience the critic on air loud and clear inside their head. It is forever telling us what we did wrong and worse, what we are likely to do wrong. The critic is so clever it can lay out the worst possible scenario plus exactly what the steps are to create it. It is also good at pointing out our failings for us, hopefully before anyone else gets a chance. It is also the voice inside that justifies our behaviour and us on the grounds that others are behaving 'badly'. We undermine our magnificence incessantly it seems, right down to taking the tiniest of compliments.

### **'POSITIVE' FEEDBACK**

When someone offers you a compliment, what happens inside you? Watch what you do over the next few days and observe your responses. Do you debate it inside? Do you 'give it away' by justifying to the person why you *don't* deserve

the compliment? (I developed expert status in this field right down to the gravy being a bit salty).

Have you learned the social response to a compliment is to say 'thank you' in a gracious way while inside you toss it out as garbage? Can you genuinely receive and generously give your thanks in return? In every human interaction here is an exchange.

See if you can identify some of your own patterns of exchange to 'positive' feedback. Are you more used to hearing what is 'wrong' with you? Do you ever consciously congratulate yourself for anything you have done? If you do, is it often or do you reserve your own congratulations until you feel you have met your highest expectations? (Not easy to do I would guess.) Celebration is part of being alive. When did you last genuinely celebrate that you are who you are?

When there is room for improvement (isn't there always?), how about just pausing for a moment and acknowledging progress thus far *before* embarking on strategies for being even better, **especially** when we are developing a sense of who we are or learning something new. Sometimes it is a relief to just sit with what you did, know you did what you could on the day, and, it was enough - period.

## **GETTING OUR INNER COACH ON BOARD**

So how do we activate this inner coach of ours? Luckily, there is an exercise we can do to get things moving on this point. To start with, I have found that simply paying attention to her brings her to life (my inner coach is female). As I have said, I have long been one of the most judgmental and self-righteous people I know. The development of my inner coach has had a huge influence that has shifted my perceptions and although my critic is still in there and has things to

say from time to time, it is becoming redundant - especially in relation to learning. My coach is far better employed in learning situations than my critic and although she can be very challenging to hear at times, I know she wants me to 'win' and I have come to trust her belief in me - **my belief in myself**.

If you don't already have some variation on what I am talking about already working for you, now is the time to employ a coach of your own - a part of you who is solely dedicated to supporting and empowering you to be the best presenter you can be. The following exercise is designed to help you meet up with your own inner coach: Someone who will believe in you and empower you to be your best. Someone who will love you, and walk with you all the way to the finish line of your life. What comfort! What joy! The first step in making friends with your coach is to think about the idea *outside* of you.

**Imagine this:** You have all the money and resources you need to hire a *presentation skill-development coach*. You have placed adverts with agencies all over the world. This coach can command any salary and you can afford to pay it. The responses start coming in and you are preparing to interview. Think about the qualities you will be looking for in this person. They are going to be working *exclusively* for you so they need to be compatible with *who you are* in order to do a good job. You need someone who is a perfect 'fit'.

#### **STEP ONE:**

Have a brain dump about what qualities you will be looking for in your coach. (Brain dumping is just jotting down anything you can think of over the next few minutes without editing what you say - it's an 'everything goes' process.) Some examples might be: Patience Belief in me Confident Enthusiastic Integrity Compassion Sense of humour that matches mine Experience Good communicator Charismatic Encouraging Supportive Challenges me and so on.

Look for what *you* would ideally like in such a person. Never mind anyone else's standards. The qualities you are seeking can be as off the wall as you like. This person is your dream coach - you are inventing them right now. Spend a good few minutes on this and once you feel you have got down as many qualities as you can move onto....

### **STEP TWO**

Take what you have and consider all these qualities. Which are the seven most important? In other words, if you came up with more than seven qualities, choose the seven most important to you. (If you came up with less than seven that's fine, stay with those.)

### **STEP THREE**

Now put the seven qualities (or however many you have) in an hierarchy where number one is the single most important quality, number two the second most important and so on down to seven. This can feel quite tricky. To help, imagine you have two people sitting in front of you with very similar qualities - what would give one the edge over another? How would you decide whom to hire? Bounce the qualities up against each other to find which sits more as a priority with you and do this right through your list.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Now you have a list of seven (or so) qualities of a coach who would be great **for you**. Isn't it wonderfully validating to know you are your own best expert on you? This can remind you that **you know what you need in order to bring out your best**. You know better than anyone else on the planet what you need *if you care to ask yourself*.

My next question is probably obvious: **Who is the best person to give you what you need in the way of support and encouragement - much of it anyway?** You. When we are small we need what we need from *other* people. When we grow up, because life makes sure we never get *everything* we need just the way we need it, we keep searching as adults. The trouble is, by looking outside of ourselves we can't find it. Why? Because outside of us is not where it is.

We look in the wrong place. If I am trying to find the oven, I am probably not going to have a lot of luck looking in the bathroom! In fact even if I really look hard, I won't find it unless I change rooms and look in the kitchen. Then bingo - there it is. Typically we look to 'things' and other people to make us feel good about ourselves. Remember what I said earlier about how no one can make you feel good about yourself if you don't? Start looking in the right place for that which will help you feel what you deserve to feel about yourself. Look inside for the good stuff.

Of course it's great having people outside us to love us and support our development but if we are not doing it ourselves as well, it makes their job that much more difficult. Have you ever believed in someone and had him or her fight you about that? Whenever you offer support they somehow manage to not receive it? These people make life a very hard road. I know because I used to think I was being tough if I did it all by myself – whatever 'it' was - and I did make

my life incredibly hard. Employing your own inner coach can make life a lot easier because great coaches seek out the resources they need from anywhere they can find them.

Rest assured your inner coach has access to resources you haven't even dreamed of yet. Your relationship with your coach will become an interdependent one. Any coach's effectiveness is measured by the results of the person or people they are coaching. **Your success therefore becomes their success and they are successful when you are successful. This is what R Buckminster Fuller called "WIN/WIN".**

Are you ready for your next challenge? To consciously employ your coach? You can even create your own employment contract! All you need to do first is decide YES. Then, take just one of the qualities you have chosen as valuable and apply that quality to yourself for a period, maybe a week or a day, whatever you like. Gradually work your way through the list and see if you can progressively internalise those qualities. For example, if one of your ideal coach's qualities is patience, practise being patient with yourself. See what happens. What gets in the way? How easy or difficult is it to be patient with you? It doesn't cost any money to do this so really, what have you got to lose? Keeping a journal might prove enlightening as well.

### **NAMING YOUR COACH CAN WORK WELL**

To go even a step further, it may sound completely off the wall but you can enhance this process by naming your coach so as to make a distinction between them and your critic, then consciously develop your relationship. Be willing to listen carefully to what your inner coach tells you. He/she will not lie. Watch out for that critic too, it may try to impersonate your coach and undermine you very

easily so be alert! Don't be surprised if you hear internal conflicts going on between them to start with.

You may have some lengthy debate going on in your head while you sort out the wheat from the chaff. Your critic may have been employed for a long time and will not willingly hand over control of your thinking. It will not necessarily give the coach an inch to begin with so see yourself as CEO of your life and have an internal restructure!

Not redundancy (we need critical thinking), just redeployment. Once your critic can trust you, you will hear less from it. Let yourself have some fun with the idea. We are just talking about the quality of your thinking and making a game of it.

### **TELLING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE CRITIC AND THE COACH**

Your coach will make you feel good about yourself and what you are doing. Great coaches are optimists. They are generally a lot more forgiving than critics too. Great coaches will certainly challenge us if they are doing their job well but critics generally *take away* from our sense of self-worth and esteem whereas **coaches add to it**. You will learn to feel the difference very quickly.

Coaches can see past the clutter to our best bits. They can see our potentials. Coaches are great changers of perception too. They know how to look at any situation and turn it into an advantage. They know about the learning process and how practice makes progress. **Coaches encourage us and build our confidence**. They support taking chances and they are forgiving of mistakes because they know no learning happens without them. Coaches teach us that mistakes are not things to avoid (often what we were taught early); rather they let us know we are moving and learning. Coaches help us learn from mistakes.

All in all your coach can become a very dear friend. He/she has been with you all along anyway. All you have to do is consciously say “YES” and your inner resources will mobilise to a whole new level.

## **WRAP UP**

Once you employ your coach you will never make another presentation on your own. Invite the coach to come along and leave the critic at home watching TV or something. It helps to remember you are not trying to ‘get rid’ of the critic as such - reassure that part of you that it is needed. Remember critical thinking is incredibly useful *at times*. It just isn’t the most helpful style of thinking when we come to learning about challenging things like presenting!

The opportunity here is to treat yourself the way you would treat someone you respect and believe in, someone you trust and love, someone you would go the extra mile for. Is this what we describe as a true friend? Your coach can express that part of you - if you offer an invitation. Please don’t wait for others to tell you how wonderful you are. Start by applying your compassion and support to yourself. It’s a given that we can always do better and it’s also a given that we know more now than we knew even last week so stop making excuses for not acknowledging yourself - practise - having a coach helps.

Like everything else we have talked about, self-coaching is an offering. For some presenters it is the absolute difference in how they perceive themselves and other people. It’s all about common decency and treating yourself as you would a good friend. Remember going for *what works for you* is the check-in point.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

- Criticism is the application of judgement – particularly unfavourable judgement
- Critical thinking is useful for solving problems and fixing 'things' and not so useful when it comes to people and learning - coaching works better than criticism
- We commonly develop an 'internal critic' who tells us what is 'wrong' with us
- We all have the ability to employ an 'inner coach'
- Critics take away from our sense of self-worth and esteem whereas coaches add to it
- Self-coaching can help you bring out the best in yourself without waiting for someone else to do it for you
- Coaches seek to turn any situation to advantage
- Mistakes let us know we are moving and growing
- You can employ your very own coach and it won't cost you a cent
- Coaches help us treat ourselves well and build our confidence

## NINE

### “THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE” - A PRINCIPLE

Now that we have looked at some ways of treating ourselves that will help grow our confidence and perhaps move the focus away from fear and *towards learning*, we come to a highly significant principle. It is perhaps the core of all the principles in that it takes us right to the essence of any presentation – the presenter - you.

Marshall McLuhan, a Canadian journalist, Professor of English and theorist on mass communications said “**The Medium is the Message**” many years ago and he wasn’t referring to spiritual mediums. Rather the implication is it is the ‘sender that is sent’.

Traditional thinking tells us we (the medium) *have* a message so we are naturally inclined to work on preparing what that message is. Sounds logical. The trouble is our content or information is *not the whole story*.

Earlier I mentioned hearing Elizabeth Kubler Ross speak. I said then that her presentation demonstrated to me that content and its delivery had a whole lot to do with the **person** delivering it. Another person talking about the same things as Kubler Ross, would come across quite differently. This idea of the medium being the message also helped me see why early in my own development the message I wanted to send was not getting across. I was spouting words but they were not integrated inside so I was not ‘walking my talk’. The message I was sending was not convincing. This is often the case when we are in the process of learning something new and quite a natural stage to move through. Do you

find it more convincing to listen to someone who is speaking from experience than those who speak from theory only?

### **MUCH OF OUR COMMUNICATION IS NON-VERBAL**

The dynamics of human communication have long fascinated many people. As a result of this fascination there is a plethora of statistics available resulting from communication studies done in an effort to distil its components. Maybe none of these are definitive and yet all I have researched seem to point to some variation on the same theme. That is that **there is more to our communication than just the words**. It seems what we 'say' without words makes up more than half of our overall communication (significantly more than half in some studies). Our verbal communication (the words) is often what we want the audience to receive and yet makes up less than 10% of 'what we say'. Our non-verbal communication 'speaks' with far more volume. That is, the *way we say things* (our tone, pitch, pace etc) and what our body is saying at the same time (body language).

Our overall message then is made up of *what we say and how we say it*. 'How' we say what we say is inseparable from 'where we say it from' on the inside. We can feel nervous about a presentation and be committed to the audience at the same time, and yes, the audience will pick up on our nervousness (often far less than we think by the way because our perception of ourselves and our performance is often radically different to our audience perceptions) **but** people will also pick up on our commitment. Equally we can feel all the confidence in the world and not care at all and our audience will also receive **both** messages. Who would you rather listen to? A nervous speaker who wants to give you value or a confident speaker who doesn't give a toss?

This principle can cause considerable frustration as it is often our data, or content, we want our audiences to pay attention to. Your content is however, delivered through you. You can go out and study and research and come up with the latest greatest data on the planet, but if you pay no attention to the 'medium' - you, you may well do your message a disservice. To have the best possible chance of getting your message across every time, pay some attention at least to your own internal mental and emotional climate because that is the foundation of your presentation. It forms the basis of 'what you say', without opening your mouth. Suffice to say if your internal climate is unhealthy, it will be reflected in your delivery just as when your internal climate is healthy, it too is reflected in your delivery. By working on these intangibles **our feeling state, body language and content can all line up in one clean, clear and powerful message.**

### **AN EXERCISE TO EXPLORE THIS IDEA FURTHER**

Think of some memorable event that has happened to you in the last few months - anything at all. Just for fun pretend I am sitting across from you or perched on the end of your bed. Tell me about it - out loud from start to finish.

Next, do the same thing again, with the same story, actually say the words but delete as much body language and tone from your communication as you can. Do your best to use only the data, the content, and the words, to tell me your story. See if you can talk for at least one minute. You may even want to use a tape recorder to record yourself.

Check in with yourself as you talk and notice if you are using your facial muscles to express yourself, notice if there is inflection in your voice. Obviously you will have to use your body to speak but do your best to convey only the 'data' of the story.

What did it feel like to talk like that? What did you notice about your language? How do you think it was to listen to? Can you see there is more to your communication than just the words?

Now try this: **Think of the same event** and spend a minute telling me (or anyone else who happens to be with you right now) about it. This time go totally over the top in your expression. Really highlight your body language and tone. Use your face and hands and arms and even legs if you want to. Speak as if this is the most exciting thing that has ever happened to you. Get really passionate about what you are saying. Play with your voice and really go for it - it may feel unusual, embarrassing or silly but if you really want to notice the difference it will help enormously to give it a shot. Have a play in your learning zone; you've got nothing to lose.

How did you go? What did you notice? Did you notice anything different about your language or sentence structure? Did you notice whether your actual content changed even though you were talking about the same event? Was it easy? Difficult?

Many people notice that in the first run sentences were short and factual and generally harder to listen to because there was no animation or 'life' in the communication. In the second run there are often many more describing words and a lot more expression in the body which can help get the message across. Once again there is no 'right' or 'wrong' or even 'better' or 'worse' with any of this. The point is, there is more to what we say than meets the ear! Give yourself a chance to get used to little exercises like that and feel your confidence grow. Your communication will become more and more 'true' as you say what you mean and mean that you say. That experience is very different from the mixed

messages we frequently send and receive that can so easily create misunderstandings.

## **MIXED MESSAGES**

Have you ever received a “mixed message”? Mixed messages create confusion and vice versa for your audience because what is being said is not lining up with the millions of other bits of information peoples’ bio-computers are receiving and calibrating every second. The vast majority of this information reaches us at an unconscious level and yet it is that which we respond to as audience and presenter.

Much of our experience of *miscommunication* stems from mixed messages we often don’t even realise we are sending. Combine that with the same thing going on with even one other person and you can see how clearly communicating is such a challenge for so many people.

When how we feel, what we say and how we say it *don’t* line up our communication is **incongruent**. A simple example of this is standing up while you say the words ‘sit down’ or try nodding your head and saying ‘no’, or shaking it and saying ‘yes’.

## **IT’S NOT ABOUT LOOKING LIKE A TRAINED SEAL**

Your content is *part* of your message, and yes it’s an important part. If you have something to say it is your responsibility as a presenter to do your homework and ensure your information is accurate. Your delivery however, will be most effectively transmitted when your content, your body language and ‘how you say it’ are in sync. This is when we describe someone as being genuine, or authentic. We can hear them and we believe what they say.

This doesn't mean you need to suddenly start looking like a trained seal that has studied and practiced gestures in order to communicate because we are looking here beyond 'doing' anything, to our ground state of 'being'. If you have ever experienced a presenter who 'does' body language you will know it feels like an affectation. It is. An example might be a politician who seems to have been advised to smile every 30 seconds regardless of what they are talking about as a strategy for making the public like them? The smiles feel inauthentic because they are, and what's worse, they can take away from what might otherwise have been a great presentation. When smiles and other gestures are natural expressions that is how they are received.

### **A LITTLE PASSION CAN HELP**

It can be almost painful to sit through a 'data only' presentation even though we have become conditioned that this is one primary method (dry lecture style) of delivery. Yet the same content can be enthralling when delivered by someone whose passion is apparent. It can even ignite an interest we didn't know was there. What might have been dull and boring comes alive, and presenter and audience both win. We have seen Power Point replace the old overhead projector (OHP). How many of us heaved a sigh of relief only to find Power Point's colour, zooming arrows and changing screens only partly relieve us of the same tedium the OHP's provoked when used poorly. Audiences have been asking me about Power Point for some years now and a common attitude is "Oh No – death by power point!" People might be afraid of people, but we also enjoy the thrill of 'real' human interaction. We spark off each other, we learn together, and we make progress.

My high school history teacher demonstrated the difference between 'data' and 'real' clearly and often. She mostly taught from notes yellowed with age that she used year in year out. The 'message' we got was that she was bored with what

she was teaching so guess what we felt too? We made it a mission to get her out of her notes and into a discussion about some aspect of history we were interested in. Our teacher knew some fascinating stuff. When we were successful she came alive and we learned far more than when racing to keep up with her blackboard scribbles we could hardly read. It really was like having two different teachers. One on auto-pilot and one who was present, right there with us and **alive!** (Shame the discussions weren't in the exams...)

### **INTERNAL CLIMATES**

Your internal climate is like the 'soil' in which your preparation begins and from which your presentation comes. How you **feel** impacts hugely on **how** you say **what** you say and consequently how you are received. Try selling a product or an idea you don't believe in whole-heartedly.

It is not easy. Even if you believe in it there are no guarantees anyone will 'buy'. However you will be sending a clear message that tells your audience you mean what you say. Credibility follows conviction. There can be tiny nuances that in an audience, we are not even aware of. Non-verbal communication can be screaming loudly through the tiniest look or movement, and we pick it up. The human body doesn't lie and we can all sense it if there is something not quite right. We may not know what it is specifically but it can be enough to put us off, or turn us on.

## WRAP UP

So far we have been gently introducing some ideas to help your internal climate be one of confidence based on self-respect, trusting you are doing your best, focusing on what works and meeting up with your inner coach, all in a wider context of a willingness to learn.

When we do present from an empowered mental and emotional space our tone, body language and content line up, all by themselves. We don't have to *do* anything. You will notice this in general conversation. You don't need to remember to be animated when you are telling a friend about an exciting experience do you? It's just in how you are. Your body helps you communicate and so does your voice, all by themselves. For now it is enough to consider the possibility there is more to your message than meets the ear. We all know this intuitively anyway. Have you heard the saying "How can I hear what you're saying when what you are is ringing in my ears?"

If "The Medium *is* the Message" then 'how we are' most certainly comes across. It can be useful to note though, that presenters often have a very different image of themselves than their audience. An example of self-criticism I come across often is people who do not like the sound of their voice. They are busy telling me how boring it is or whatever and the audience feedback is that their voice sounds absolutely fine. Maybe it's not Richard Burton but then who else is, except Richard Burton? Once again, **how we see ourselves** comes into the equation. Regardless of our message, that is what we present in the end - ourselves. With a willingness to be conscious of this principle, you will notice it showing up in all manner of ways and in all manner of circumstances. Observe others and ask yourself "If the medium *is* the message, what does this person 'say' about themselves?" - what do *you* say about yourself?

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

- “The Medium *is* the Message” Marshall McLuhan
- There is more to our message than meets the ear
- Non-verbal communication has a huge impact on the message we transmit
- Mixed messages create confusion and vice versa
- Your ‘internal climate’ impacts what you say and how you say it
- A congruent communication is one where our feelings, body language and content all line up in one clear message

## TEN

### THERE IS ONLY YOUR WAY - A PRINCIPLE

Following on from “The Medium is the Message”, this principle implies the best way for you to be effective is to ***do things your own way***. That is, the way that is most comfortable for you. This is not a long chapter because my encouragement in essence is to explore what ‘your way’ is. Do what works for *you*. This will make preparation and presenting infinitely easier than trying to follow some arbitrary well-meaning advice that doesn’t fit with who you are.

To do it your way requires you to discover your strengths, who you are and how you can maximise yourself for effectiveness. It’s an ongoing chapter in your development. Your coach can help now as you really look at how you feel most comfortable presenting and present that way. It also means if you discover something that works for you, even if it works for no one else in the world, you can feel happy about using it. We often miss things that work because we don’t know anyone else who does it that way so we assume it can’t be right.

Training programmes can be very valuable when exploring your way as well because you can take opportunities to try yourself out without risking a million dollar deal, your reputation or anything else. Listen to others, gather all the feedback you can *and* honour what feels right for you in the end. Stay focused on what works for you *and your audience* and you will be fine. You can then in adult fashion, see what gets the results you want and what doesn’t. It really pays to take some risks with this one - especially when ‘what works?’ is your base question so I encourage you to let your creativity out to play. Be willing to be different.

The value of being willing to be different was highlighted to me in one seminar I was facilitating, at a point where I was talking about preparation. The group I was working with happened to include an Olympic skier and at the time I was offering the best I knew about how to prepare for optimum performance. I asked her opinion on what serious sportsmen and women do in the thirty or so minutes before competing, hoping she was going to reinforce what I had been saying about the need to warm up - your body, your voice, and your mind. My point was to illustrate how often we leave things till the last minute and end up feeling flustered and under-prepared and consequently 'not really there' when beginning a presentation.

Fortunately for me our skier reminded me again of this principle and of 'Focus on what works'. She said that her best skiing came when she left everything till the last minute so she had to genuinely rush to be ready in time to race. Her description of the frantic energy she created both inside her and around her horrified me and yet for her it brought out her best. She had no time to get nervous or have her mind filled with extraneous thought. Rushing helped her focus - it was her way and it works, for her.

**A cautionary note.** This principle can be interpreted as permission to hold an attitude that supports a defensive feeling of 'like it or lump it'. It's a variation on the "I don't care what other people think" scenario. Well, if you are working with audiences, you'd better care, otherwise you won't have anyone listening to you for long! We have another principle that kicks right in to provide a balance and challenge us to be flexible enough to meet our audience's needs coming up next.

## ELEVEN

### RESULTS DETERMINE THE QUALITY OF YOUR SUCCESS - A PRINCIPLE

Do you ever look at your results and analyse how you achieved them? Are you willing to look at the results you get in your presentations? All results are an achievement of some sort. Results are feedback from the environment. We are often critical about the results (feedback) we get based on our perceptions of what success and failure are. Success is defined here as meaning you achieve something you set out to achieve or as the Shorter Oxford Dictionary states: "To attain a desired end, to bring one's labours to a happy end." When we perceive success we *feel* good. 'Success is sweet'.

When we do not achieve what we set out to do, we do not 'attain a desired end', we perceive failure that for many people *feels* unpleasant, and it's supposed to. Our brain design makes it so. The idea is to use our failure to avoid feeling the same in the future, by ***doing something different***. Feelings of failure are one of nature's greatest gifts. Many people have not learned how to use failure to the best advantage. I use failure to fertilise my dreams. It is important when you are truly ready, to evaluate your success based on results, to be conscious of *what you do with failure*.

#### **A CLOSER LOOK...DOES FEEDBACK = PAIN?**

Both success and failure are forms of feedback. If you have a mental pattern of feedback = criticism = pain you will do the same things you do with the pattern of presenting = pain. You will avoid feedback or condition yourself to survive it. If we *fear* failure because of the feelings it provokes we can never honestly

evaluate results and move forward. Think of your first reactions when someone has said to you “I need to see you in my office”, or “There’s something I need to talk to you about”. Does that situation make you prepare for the worst because you fear having done something wrong? For many people it does (regardless of chronological age). We don’t often assume we are going to be told we are getting a promotion or a raise in pay!

It’s obvious; we cannot stay in our comfort zone forever and still expect to grow. As I put the finishing touches on this book that has taken seven years to ‘birth’, my teaching apprentice Elizabeth is patiently waiting for her baby (currently called Tiny) to decide to come into the world. So far she has been waiting an extra 10 days. No doubt if Tiny doesn’t come on his or her own he or she will have to be induced. Tiny simply cannot stay in the womb indefinitely. That wouldn’t work. Anyone can see that, and yet out here in the world we seem unable to see the obvious when it comes to us getting moving for our own good.

### **USE RESULTS TO KEEP LEARNING**

So the key lies in how we *perceive* results in our life. I am advocating looking at them with open eyes and a willingness to **keep learning and growing**. I can promise you if you are willing to look at the results you get when you present yourself **and** you are flexible enough to look truthfully at what could work better from the perspective of your commitment to the *audience*, you are guaranteed to grow in your effectiveness. If you hide from your results you will look good (possibly) and go absolutely nowhere. You will just keep getting the same results you have always had, and what’s more, you will seek (and no doubt find) reasons for those results.

## **AN IDEAL JOB FOR YOUR COACH**

For some people, perceiving failure undermines self-confidence and evokes a defeatist attitude. Not helpful. Cultivating a healthy attitude towards failure and mistakes is part of your inner coach's job. Falling over is not the issue. What you do when you're down, how you get up again and what you do next is. I'm sure you are aware that some of your biggest failures have taught you valuable lessons? This principle encourages us once again to focus on the learning opportunity. This is critical. As long as we are unwilling to change 'our way' and tend towards believing it is 'out there', the audience, the boss, the colleague, the mother-in-law, that is 'the problem', we will fail to see the learning potential of the situation and we will continue to get the same results. This can be incredibly confronting, especially if we really feel right while others seem to be so wrong, but remember, anything taking us towards a stretch is there to educate us. It is free education and there for the taking, so you might as well make the most of it.

## **MEASURING RESULTS**

With a healthy attitude, what becomes important is defining what we want to achieve before we go for it, and then being willing to look honestly at our results in order to measure 'how we did'. Success can be measured any number of ways. It is up to you to determine how you will measure your success, how you will know if you achieved what you set out to. Having said that, success is often measured by someone else's expectations. For example a teacher may be charged with leading a class through a particular curriculum and the measure of success is the exam results of the students. The individual teacher probably didn't set the exam or set the standard for passing and yet the class performance is the teacher's measure of success. If on the other hand, the teacher's measure of success was to 'get through' the required curriculum, and they perceived the exam results to be a measure of the *student's* individual success, then the parameters for measuring results are different.

If necessary you may need to negotiate regarding what results are expected by someone else. That way you can both have a common understanding about what you are setting out to achieve and have common measures for success. It can be hard to accept feedback which conflicts with your own perceptions so the key is to clarify the results you are going for with an appropriate person. If you agree to measure your success on someone else's terms you must make the results *they* are seeking the results *you* are seeking as well. Ultimately I encourage you to think of success in your own terms. Did you achieve what you set out to achieve as defined by **you** (even if influenced by someone or something else)?

#### **A NOTE ABOUT PERFECTION**

When we have high expectations of our own performance as presenters we can easily fall into the 'perfectionist trap'. This trap does not allow for total success ever. It will only allow for partial experiences of it. Even when an audience is fully satisfied with a presentation, some presenters will endlessly find reasons why it wasn't a total success. Keeping the idea that we are all always in process with endless opportunities to learn and grow can help with perfectionism *if you feel it is holding you back*.

For some people it is a drive that generates striving for excellence, the outcome being satisfaction. For others it is a compulsion born of their conditioning and actually belongs to someone else in their environment, often a parent or sibling. Being aware that **practice makes progress** is a handy thought to hold if you know you tend towards perfectionism, as is exploring the root cause of your perfectionism in the first place (a self-development issue).

In my experience there is a kind of 'divine perfection' in every result if we care to look at it that way. Not easy in the face of a disastrous mistake leaving you with egg on your face, but if you stay open there will always be something in your result that can help you next time. As my wise mother always says "Wear your disasters with flair!"

Clearly if you get the results you want I absolutely support you in keeping on doing what you are doing - it's working! To create **different** results though we need to do something different. These two principles, 'There is only your way' and 'Results determine the quality of your success' go hand in hand. One supports you in being yourself and doing what works for you, the other supports you in continually being willing to learn and grow around 'your way' so you can best meet your audience's needs.

### **AN EXAMPLE**

A very shy and reserved young man I worked with demonstrated both these principles really well. He perceived himself as not competent in the 'up front' position at all. At age nine or so he had attended a parent interview at his school where his teacher told his parents - in front of him - that he was 'unteachable', he was a very poor speller and basically useless at English. These comments caused considerable agony and did more than a little damage to this boy's self-esteem. A few years later though he discovered he was 'quite good' at maths. He went on to become joint dux of his high school and was presented with a cup by the very teacher who had told him she couldn't teach him - she was at that stage the chair of the school Board of Governors.

Now in his twenties, he told us he had learned the importance of focusing on what he was good at and not worrying too much about the rest. He confessed he was still a poor speller but does have a degree in computer engineering, a

great job and an understanding of himself well beyond his years. His presentations are clear and unpretentious. He is still shy and quiet as a personality but he doesn't even attempt to be someone he is not. He just gets on with the job and his results speak for themselves. It is a real pleasure to listen to him speak.

Before you decide you are no good at presenting so why not just leave it at that, consider why you might bother to learn. I cannot know the answer to that, only you do, but you need to have an answer otherwise why should you bother indeed? It all boils down again to choice and our inner motivations. If it were important enough to the young man I just mentioned, I'm sure he could set about learning to spell more accurately and given there are some great spelling strategies around these days, it's likely he would improve. Right now it is not important enough for him to bother. The issue is **not that he is afraid** to learn to spell. Rather he is happy as he is. He is freely choosing, just as you are choosing by reading this book, to enhance your presentation skills.

The point then is to check our motivations and tell ourselves the truth which brings us right back to **are we choosing or is fear choosing for us...?**

## **WRAP UP**

Both 'There is only your way' and 'The measure of your success is in your results' again stretch us beyond looking for what is 'right' or 'wrong' to simply enquiring as to '**what works?**' – for both you and your audience. Together they provoke an attitude of win/win. Don't believe me on these two. Test them and find out for yourself **WHAT WORKS - for you and your audiences.**

## **WHAT'S IMPORTANT?**

- Find out what 'your way' is - it will work best for you
- Be willing to look honestly at the results you create
- Your inner coach will always be willing to help - 24/7
- Be willing for your way to grow and change as your confidence and flexibility grows
- Flexibility will grow as your willingness to learn grows
- If you don't get the results you want, maybe it's worth looking at 'your way' before you blame others

## TWELVE

### THE ESSENCE OF PRESENTING

I trust that by now you are at least beginning to see or sense what a whole new experience presenting yourself can be and how many different aspects there are to human interaction that we can work with to enhance our own enjoyment, and that of our audience. Before you read on, I suggest a little review. If you want to support the information here being imbedded into your system, **read over the ‘what’s important?’ summaries** at the end of most chapters so far. This will help your brain make the best use of what you find useful as we now to move into making some more subtle distinctions about presenting that will help you even further. You may well find your creativity provoking lots of ideas and insights. Create somewhere to collect your ideas, on your phone or tablet, in a voice recorder or a plain old-fashioned hard copy journal.

Now, let’s have a good look at the word **PRESENT**. It is one of those multi-meaning words. You can *be present*, you can *give a present*, and you *can present*.

#### **BEING PRESENT**

When your full attention is in the moment rather than scattered and thinking about other things, when you are fully conscious of what is happening where you are right now, *you are fully present*.

**ACTIVITY:** Bring your attention into the physical space where you are reading right now. Notice all the things in your surroundings that have been there all the time and yet you may not have noticed them. Pay attention to the sounds

around you, what you can feel on your skin, taste in your mouth, and what you can smell? Your brain was probably paying conscious attention to only a fraction of those things before I mentioned them. Your heart has been beating, you have been blinking, thinking, seeing these words on the page, and maybe your attention has wandered to what you need to do later, or something you did yesterday.

Great presenters have their attention in the **present** moment – the here and now - because here and now is **where the action is**. This is the key to all your questions about how to respond to your audiences needs, how to know what is going on at a dynamic level in the presentation, and how to know what needs to happen next in your presentation. Being in the present is not something you can rehearse for because the present moment will bring whatever it brings. You can however, practise being present. **For many people being present is the biggest single issue to work with when learning to be more effective.**

When your awareness is focused in the present you have access to **spontaneously appropriate actions and responses to any situation**. When you are fully present you may surprise yourself with some of what you say. You may wonder where on earth responses to questions come from, or even have no idea why you said something. If you are paying attention you will learn from what you say in these spontaneous moments. When you are present you are open to the source of infinite creativity and can present through your personality, from your very essence, you are open. What's more, your audience will feel that. What can then occur are those magic moments where a collective experience occurs - and that is special! If you are not fully present, your audience won't be either.

## **WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?**

The issue here is not how do we *do* this because it isn't something we 'do' in the first place. Rather, a better question might be “**what is in the way** of us being present?” Remember for most of us what is in the way in one form or another is fear. Fear of being out of control. Fear of perhaps realising the audience is not interested in what we have to say, fear of being misunderstood, judged, ridiculed, humiliated in front of our peers, being perceived as incompetent, inadequate etc.

All of these possibilities can and may be your past experience *and* they get in the way of your whole self being in the moment. If we are afraid of feeling these things we cannot afford to be 'present'. The present moment is where we **feel**. As we have explored already, we *learned* to be afraid and consequently did whatever we needed to survive. That is totally forgivable. We know fear absolutely has a place - to warn us of danger. It is an emotion that sparks instinctive survival responses. We need those responses at times but what if we didn't perceive presenting as dangerous any more? Would we need to have a fear response in relation to it? The answer is no. **Without the need for a fear response it is effortless to be present.**

## **POWER AND AUTHORITY**

To be fully present we must also address our own issues with power and authority. What does power mean to you? Is it power over others? Is it positional power ie: I am powerful as long as I am in a powerful *position*? In other words does power equate with status? Do you perceive yourself as a powerful person? Are you submissive in the face of people you perceive as powerful? Do you feel equal to other people? To men? To women? We often carry old beliefs about men, women and authority figures in general into adulthood as leftovers from

our childhood. Do you believe the person 'up front' has the power? These beliefs can have a profound impact on how we show up as presenters.

One CEO of the New Zealand arm of a multi-national was brave enough to tell me that when he had to present to his New Zealand board he felt fine. When he talked to his senior managers he felt fine. He especially enjoyed making presentations to the entire staff that were designed to inspire them *but* whenever he had to present to his international Board of Directors he felt like he had little grey shorts on with long grey socks up to his knees and a little cap on his head (his junior school uniform!). Of course he didn't let those feelings show....he just toughened up and pretended he really was one of the big boys. The funny thing was he *is* one of the big boys in that context. He just had a few leftover feelings in relation to perceived authority figures. Happily, they are easy enough to address once you accept they are there with a willingness to let them go whilst acknowledging your right to be an adult. The truth is, in essence you are neither superior nor inferior to anyone. We are all equal and we all have our own contribution to make if we choose to. Show me a row of babies and point out which one is 'better' than another. It's all about perception. Anything else is simply a belief, an opinion, or a preference, some of which may need to be relegated to the compost bin!

## **POSITIONAL POWER**

Believe it or not, when working with groups of people I have found one of the most common things presenters *think* they want to learn is 'How do I control my audience?' My response is always the same 'I don't know - it's not what I teach about'. The *need* to control others is an issue of defence and feelings of underlying powerlessness. We do well to remember that ruling over others through fear can only ultimately create a revolution because sub-mission (our mission, unexpressed), is not a pleasant state nor a natural one for human

beings to be in over time. Mostly I think people are really asking, “How do I control *myself*?” and “How can I have more influence?” If you need to use your position as a presenter to wield power over others you will probably not get effective results. Think about it - why would anyone need others to feel frightened of them? The average audience does not feel safe nor behave well with presenters who try to control them through fear. In my experience people respond to being treated with respect and feeling like they have choice. Disrespect and no choice is a great recipe for resistance or worse, rebellion. Audiences will appreciate a presenter taking responsibility for their role up front as long as the purpose of that remains ‘for’ that audience.

### **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY - FOR YOURSELF**

Because we often don’t really like taking responsibility for ourselves, in many ways it is easier for human beings to have someone else to blame if things don’t work out according to plan. It is easy to control an audience of people who would rather not think for themselves and take responsibility for their own lives. Equally, audiences do not feel particularly safe with presenters who are overly submissive and whom they can’t feel any confidence in. Taking responsibility for our role as a presenter is a necessary step in our development. Take that responsibility on with good grace from a stance of ‘personal power’ rather than ‘positional power’ and you and your audience will have the best chance of success.

### **PERSONAL POWER**

Your own self-esteem is a big part of the issue when we talk about personal power. **Personal power is about self-determination, the ability to exercise genuine preference in your life, freedom of choice.** These things have nothing to do with culture, religion, *positional* power, status, money, socio-

economic groupings, what kind of car you drive, where you live, or any other kind of symbol we stereotype each other with in order to define ourselves.

Personal power has nothing to do with power struggling or the control of other people. Real personal power is just that – *real personal power*...the ability to determine what *you* do with your life and how you express yourself based on *your own* integrity rather than someone else's rules. Again, it costs no money. We have come from whatever source we choose to believe in “with this power and the right and the ability to use it” to quote Enid Faust again. It is our choice.

Personal power is our best individual expression of our unique self. When expressing this in the world it can be like tapping into the national grid, whilst at the same time, feeling it's the most natural thing in the world. All sorts of resources are available that simply cannot be accessed when trapped in patterns of defence and powerlessness. When we feel powerful from the *inside* we can express our own choices without having to struggle for power with others (egoic entertainment). Beyond all that we surrender and choose to be what we are in truth, a contributing part of the whole, one other, family, group, community, society, nation, species and all of nature of which we are a part.

Knowing we are separate and in the same moment intimately connected with everything that is right here right now makes the present moment an infinitely exciting space to play in. The more you are willing to trust yourself to embrace what occurs from moment to moment in your presentations the more fresh, spontaneous and real they will be. How can they not?

To be present before others you need to **have faith in yourself and faith in your audience and you need to have faith in your 'process' of life**. Can you see how our past experiences can get in the way of just that one thing - *faith*?

So practise. The more your confidence grows the more 'present' you will become and the more easily you will bring all of who you are to the party. Being present is a buzz, especially when you are presenting!

### **YOU ARE A GIFT**

Another look at the word '*present*' gives us another definition - ***being a present***. This aspect of presenting presupposes ***you are a contribution***. Note that terminology. *You are a present* and so is everyone else. Your contribution in the scheme of things is unique and that contribution is a gift. The most effective presenters I have experienced recognise and highlight who they are and **use it**. What's more, the best ones seem to use it with no attachment to what is done with it. Some people will not want to receive your 'gift' and that has to be ok too.

### **TALL POPPY SYNDROME**

I am aware that for some people this notion can bring up an internal conflict. Human beings have a drive to belong, to be part of something bigger than ourselves as individuals. Sometimes our drive to be ourselves fights with our need to belong. Our fear of not belonging can be traced right back to living together in groups where our reputation was something worth preserving. If we behaved in ways the group didn't like, we could be tossed out in the snow, no food, the elements to contend with etc.

From a deeply buried part of us, we fear being different from 'the group' in case we can't survive without them. In today's environment we'll do almost anything to keep parts of ourselves hidden rather than risk rejection from our family, community, peers or tribe (tall poppies get their heads chopped off!). Our fear of standing out or being different can mean aspects of ourselves that are actually important to us can go under-expressed. That is not freedom. Maybe this is why so many young people go off to find a new group where they feel they can

express themselves. Do you believe we all have the right to express ourselves fully **without encroaching on anyone else's right to express themselves fully**? This idea certainly creates tension but that is where growth occurs. For example the young will always push the boundaries and stretch the next generations up. The old will always attempt to temper the impulsive with the wisdom that can come from experience. It's all about balance. We can choose to grow or be left behind. It's all up to us.

### **THE PARADOX**

The paradox is we are all unique and yet we are all made of the same stuff. Remember though that we have a built-in drive to fulfil our potential, our unique contribution. So what happens? Often we will sacrifice our uniqueness for 'sameness' and the false sense of security that goes with that. We then submit to the power of perceived expectations. This is a classic recipe for unhappiness and often ends in tears when something or someone pushes us over the edge and out we come guns blazing (literally sometimes). When this happens, the people in our lives seem terribly shocked and we hear things like "How out of character" and the like.

The good news is that more often than not, when people express who they really are, the people who love them just go on loving them regardless - often even more so. We can find we have been making a mountain out of a molehill all along and our fears about the way others would respond have been unfounded, or at worst take a while to be processed and worked through. Others often feel envy that they 'can't' do that because of their own situation so they justify betraying themselves and stay unhappy.

Sadly at times though our worst fears are realised, sometimes temporarily and sometimes it's permanent. We choose to express who we are and others can't

cope and we are rejected. That is always the risk, there are no guarantees. A gang member for example, who decides to become clean living and help troubled teenagers may risk losing the friendship of associates (the gang family). A gay man or woman may decide to come out to their family and risk loss of love and acceptance. **What is important to note is whether we are living from free choice, our own internal compulsions or someone else's expectations.**

What is appropriate - for you? Your own integrity is what counts on this one because it's *you* you have to live with. Our integrity is what counts when it comes to making distinctions about whether we are hiding who we are because of the expectations of others, whether we are disempowering ourselves all by ourselves because we know our secrets are undermining us, or whether we are simply choosing to keep private things that are simply none of anyone else's business. You are the only one who knows *the truth* about your motivations. The question is, are you aware of your own motivations? There is a big difference between hiding things from yourself and keeping private things that are, well, private.

In the movie 'Mad Max' there is a line that says 'Remember, wherever you go - there you are'. Ain't that the truth?

### **HOW COMFORTABLE WITH YOURSELF ARE YOU?**

A measure of how comfortable you are with yourself is to consider becoming instantly world famous. How comfortable would you be with tabloid journalists digging into your past, interviewing your friends and generally doing an exposé on you? Your life is your business and I am a great believer in our individual right to privacy. I can recommend though that you make peace with anything in your past that holds you back – for whatever reason. This contributes

significantly to the quality of your relationship with yourself and consequently other people and it also helps you stay present.

### **YOUR UNIQUENESS IS YOUR BEST ASSET**

You may have noticed, my offerings here *will not* support you in being a clone of someone else you can't be anyway). They are *not* designed to give you a set of rules or formulas to follow so you can survive presenting by trying to be someone you are not. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. They will support you in realising that **your uniqueness is your best asset**. My offerings are about using *who* you are to get your message across. In business these days everyone is looking for 'the point of difference'. YOU are the point of difference. The generosity of your particular spirit makes the difference.

Am I then advocating wearing your heart on your sleeve and announcing your innermost secrets to your audience, or becoming a corporate lamb on its way to the slaughter? **NO**. I am advocating **you** get comfortable with *all* of yourself so all of you is available to you in your presentations. Beyond that is something called appropriateness. To sense what is or isn't appropriate requires maturity and for your attention to be in the present moment.

### **BE THE FULLEST EXPRESSION OF YOURSELF YOU CAN**

You may have seen the piece written by Marianne Williamson that was used by Nelson Mandela in his inaugural speech. In essence it reminds us we are all magnificent expressions of creation, and that the more we express ourselves, the gift of that gives others permission to do the same. When we are free on the inside we are powerful indeed because we are slaves to no-one. Presenting is one activity that actually allows you to **offer the gift of who you are**. If you respect and appreciate who you are, warts and all, and you do your homework

(I'm big on doing our homework), your audiences will get value from your presentation, which brings us to another view of it all.

### **YET ANOTHER ANGLE**

Now we come to actual **presenting - the verb**. This, believe it or not, is the easy bit. The actual presentation you deliver. Delivering from a position of freedom instead of fear on your insides means you can simply 'be there' for your audience. I propose the verb presenting **is all about 'service'**.

We have begun to look at the impact our internal climate has on a presentation and the way it is reflected in our attitudes and behaviours, all part of the overall message we deliver (whether we like it or not). Our internal climate is that combination of how we are physically, emotionally, psychologically and spiritually. In addition to what we have explored thus far, **'service' is another flavour to add to our internal climate**. When we are presenting we are in a service position, a giving position. When I look closely at the idea that 'presenting = service', it takes me on a journey to the source of *real* communication with *real* people who genuinely want to give something, to be of service to others and to be willing to offer one's self with no attachment or conditions. That journey takes us ***right to the heart where our communications are meaningful***.

What does that mean? Am I saying that a scientist can effectively present highly complex material to an audience of lay people by presenting from the heart? Yes. A sales person can be effective by being willing to present their product or service from the heart? Yes. That a teacher can take boring school curriculum and present it to uninterested students if they present from the heart? Yes. How about that an unpalatable yet truthful message can be well received if it is presented from the heart? **Yes**.

## **WE ARE THERE FOR THE AUDIENCE**

True service is from the heart, presenting = service, so effective presentations emerge from the heart. This doesn't mean I am saying presentations need to be airy-fairy flaky things from lala land. It simply means we are clear **we are there for the audience** and anything we may gain from that is a side effect, a bonus. Of course when you are there for the audience you can bet you will gain enormously and often. If you are the one who is taking though, your audience will feel cheated so don't be surprised if you don't get the results you want. You can't pretend to be giving when you are really taking, just like **you can't pretend to be real**. Human beings can sense inauthenticity very quickly.

## **WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?**

Again, the real question is - *what stops us* being of service? What prevents us from giving of ourselves? What stops us presenting ourselves 'from the heart?' In other words, what stops us being ourselves? I know some of you will now be thinking "Hey it's entirely inappropriate in our culture to wear your heart on your sleeve" or "That's asking for trouble" or "People will think you're a fool", "You won't be taken seriously", "You'll be taken advantage of", "It's dog eat dog in business" ...and all the other patterns of thinking that might be there.

These ideas may seem valid and you may have loads of evidence to prove them but I firmly believe great presenters allow their heart to be open to the individual and collective hearts of the audience - and it works! I'm referring to aliveness, vitality, stimulation and authentic interaction. The climate I am describing is one in which true synergy can occur, when the sum of the parts can unleash creativity, energy and exponential value.

## **INTIMACY**

When true service is the context for any presentation a connection can take place between presenter and audience where an exquisite intimacy emerges which unites both. It is in this intimate space miracles happen. I have been fortunate enough to have experienced these moments first hand many times from both perspectives. I call it 'when the angels sing'. They don't happen with every audience or every presenter but anyone who has experienced this coming together will never forget the experience.

## **WRAP UP**

Presenting really isn't about *doing* anything, it is about '*being you*' in different contexts. Presenting is about being there, being 'a present' - a gift, a contribution. It's about offering the gift of yourself to your audience, whoever you are and whoever your audience is. It's about *sharing*.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

- The present moment is where the action is
- When your attention is in the present you have access to spontaneously appropriate actions and responses to any situation
- Fear for the wrong reasons prevents us being fully present
- Needing power over others is an issue of control and defence that is born of fear - it has nothing to do with presenting
- Personal power is the ability to exercise preference and freedom of choice
- You are a unique contribution, a present. Great presenters highlight who they are and use it - warts and all
- Our drive to belong can conflict with our drive to fulfil our potential as an individual
- The more we express ourselves, the more permission others have to do the same
- When we stop hiding who we are we can focus on getting on with the job
- When we are comfortable with all of ourselves we have nothing to lose - we are free
- Presenting is all about service
- True service emerges from the heart - its all about generosity of spirit.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT IN PART TWO?

**Respect - everyone and everything** - no one can stop you

**Everyone is doing the best they can** - including you

**Focus on what works** - is a faster way to learn than focusing on what doesn't

**The value of self-coaching** - vs self-criticism is a no-brainer. Be willing to keep 'discovering' yourself

**"The Medium is the Message"** Marshall McLuhan - it is the sender that is sent

**There is only your way** - so find out what 'your way' is

**Your success can be seen in your results** - truthfully evaluate. It develops flexibility and provokes growth.

**Present** - being a present, being present, and presenting

**Presenting = Service** - true service is an offering from the heart.

Everything we have looked at so far is designed to help create a mental and emotional framework for what comes next. What you think and feel has a profound impact on the message you beam out into the world. The flavours of yourself you are willing to give others directly relate to what your audience receives. This may feel challenging until you get used to the idea but I trust you can by now see the usefulness of considering the self-development aspect of presentation skill development.

By addressing your own issues with self-confidence your competence can grow more rapidly. I can assure you the effort you put in will pay off in the long run because your skills will have more substance to stick to. We have dug over the ground, done some weeding and planted some seeds. Maybe we even have some personal 'compost' to help the new growth along. Cultivate with care and we are ready for the next steps.



*“Until one is committed there is hesitancy,  
the chance to draw back - always ineffectiveness.  
Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation),  
There is one elementary truth,  
the ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans:  
That the moment one definitely commits oneself,  
then providence moves too.  
All sorts of things occur that help one that would  
not otherwise have occurred.  
A whole stream of events issues from the decision,  
raising in one’s favour all manner of unforeseen incidents and  
meetings and material assistance,  
which no man could have dreamed would have come his way.*

*I have great respect for one of Goethe’s couplets:  
“Whatever you can do, or dream you can, begin it.  
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it NOW”.*

*W.H. Murray*

## PART THREE – CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE AUDIENCE

So we come to information, applications, exercises and skills that will support you in taking what you have read so far into your actual presentation. With the ideas we have already explored there is no need to **do** anything different (other than perhaps with self-coaching). You can completely trust your own integrity to process the information and exercises and use what resonates, just the same way once you plant a seed, something else takes over the growing process. All you need to do is maintain the right conditions and the growth will happen seemingly all by itself. You can take that to the bank as well! What follows is going to help you put it all into practice. Let's start with...

#### THE AUDIENCE

No two audiences will ever be the same just as no two live presentations will ever be the same. Even when presenting the same material over and over, you are continually evolving just because you are alive and your audiences are too. If you do find yourself feeling like it has become totally repetitive and boring, its time to change your style or job! Your audience deserves to be given more than your boredom. It is your job to meet your audience where *they are* and lead them to where your presentation is headed. Many presenters expect (think of school) audiences to meet *them* and just take what they are given. This does not cut it anymore. It is the presenter's job to reach the desired outcome - sure we don't ever do that on our own but we must be willing to take the lead. A presenter is a **leader**.

## **YOUR AUDIENCE CAN HELP**

A common attitude that often needs shifting in relation to the audience is one that tells us some variation on 'The audience is my adversary'. Fear and instinctive patterns of defence make it easy to forget that most audiences are there to gain in some way, and *you* are there to help. Another myth to bust at this point is the idea we are separate from our audience. No presentation is complete without an audience *and* a presenter. They can both be connected and complimentary in the equation, just with different roles. What if you could see your audience as *helping* you to achieve what you are there to do?

## **ONCE AGAIN, IT'S ALL IN YOUR ATTITUDE**

A good place to start on the inside with any audience is to *like* the people in it. Even before you have met the people in your audience, liking them can help set up a useful internal state. We have already addressed the principle of respect, and the idea we can present from an internal climate of service so if you put it all together do you get a sense of what that would feel like? Don't you think 'I like and respect my audience' has an uplifting ring to it? From a stance of liking, respect and service we can focus on what works to best get our message across.

For many presenters this simple shift in focus makes all the difference. I remember one woman telling me she couldn't believe how her own fear and self-consciousness dissolved when she simply put her attention on her audience and what they needed. For this particular woman her commitment to doing a great job replaced her fear. She was very customer oriented so when she saw her audience as the 'customer' she was completely engaged from that perspective.

## THE ENERGY DYNAMIC

We know when we perceive 'audience', all kinds of internal changes can occur. For some people, an audience switches something *on* inside them and aspects of character appear that we may not see in other circumstances. This is so for people who love to perform. They need an audience to do so, and isn't it great there are those of us who enjoy being entertained!

For others, the opposite happens. With the perception of 'audience' something inside switches *off*. Self-consciousness and shyness that may not be apparent in day-to-day interactions may suddenly dominate awareness and expression. Both these responses can occur in the same person depending on the situation. This is certainly so for me. I can be as bold as brass in some contexts and excruciatingly shy in others. I have worked with performers of many types who have felt great performing to big audiences and yet terrified of the intimacy of simply talking to a dozen or so.

All behaviour is contextual and there are no rules that apply to every individual or every situation. That's why it is useful to explore your own responses without comparing yourself to others. Having focused attention on you can feel daunting but it can also be very enjoyable. The more comfortable you become, the more you will learn to use the focused attention of the audience as part of your presentation. **Attention is simply energy** and when you can embrace the charge of energy from your audience you can cycle it back for their benefit. That way, everyone is in the flow playing different roles in the dynamic generously sharing the energy present with each other. For this to even begin to occur though, there are things the audience needs from you.

## **SETTING THE SCENE - THE CONTEXT**

At the beginning of any presentation there are things the audience wants to know. These things can help create a **context** for your presentation. A context is created both verbally and non-verbally. You can create the context or you can leave it to create itself. By being clear about the context you want for your presentation you can set about intentionally creating it. One thing we know about human beings is that **what we don't know, we make up**. Your audience may 'make up' an appropriate context for your presentation and they may not. Setting the scene so that your audience makes up what **you** want it to helps you create the best results. It is the context of your presentation from which all the rest flows. Get that part on track and the rest flows more easily.

If "The Medium *is* the Message" the non-verbal information you transmit will have a big influence on the context. It is in the 'how you are' that your audience picks up your degree of comfort, desire to be there, enthusiasm and your style. Much of this kind of information is gathered and responded to unconsciously. It's what I call the 'invisibles'. In a sense all we are doing here is making the invisible visible so we can work with it to everyone's advantage.

Right now, think about how you want to feel *when you are in an audience*. Do you want to feel relaxed, open and looking forward to what is going to happen? If you did feel those things do you think if the presenter and their material matched those feelings and reinforced them you would have a good chance of enjoying the presentation and gaining from it? If the answer is yes, how do you contribute to creating these feelings when you are presenting? It's obvious isn't it? **You feel that way**. Your *feeling state* will have a profound effect on the feeling state in your audience (more about this later). Your attitude towards your audience impacts maybe more than you realise. When coming from an uplifting and generous internal space it is easier to then look at the practical support you

can give an audience so it has the best chance of receiving you - after all, isn't that what you want them to do?

## **UNASKED QUESTIONS AT THE BEGINNING**

In every audience I have been with, some of the same needs seem to be present. Let's look at them now. Think about your own experiences in audiences and see if any of the following are relevant for you. ***The most commonly unasked questions that sit in an audience's mind are:***

- Who is this presenter?
- What's the presentation about?
- What gives this presenter the right to talk about this topic?
- Why are they doing it? What is their point?
- What relationship do they have with the topic?
- What's in it for me?
- What will be expected of me? Do I have to *do* anything?
- What sort of structure will the presentation have? Time frames, breaks etc.
- What sort of style does this presenter use?
- Will I enjoy myself?
- Am I safe here? (This applies on all levels and is often not a conscious question)
- Where are the toilets?

There may be others more specific to your presentation context, eg: there may be different questions in a sales presentation as opposed to a lecture or a speech at a wedding. Obviously if your audience knows you their needs will be different than if they don't. Without their unasked questions being satisfactorily dealt with it is harder for an audience to 'get on board' your presentation. To help you get clear about this point think about the thoughts you have when you

are in an audience. What helps *you* get on board? Asking friends and colleagues for their feedback on this one can be a useful exercise too. The key? Get curious. **It is important to understand the audience's needs because that is who you are there to serve.**

Consider how difficult it might be to get your message across to someone who needs to use the bathroom and is too self-conscious or polite to interrupt you, or someone who has an important meeting coming up who is unaware of the time frame for your presentation. These issues can be unnecessarily distracting and you can do much to help minimise them.

### **IT'S ABOUT BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIP - RAPPORT**

How we address all these questions is not fixed. I am not suggesting you begin your presentation by answering questions one by one although it may be an option. I am suggesting that *early* in your presentation these questions and maybe others may need to be addressed in some way, **in your own style**. You may be choosing to leap out of a cake in a spectacular start to the proceedings or you may simply sit down and have a chat with your audience and achieve the same result.

The point is, if you are aware of some of the more common unasked questions, you can **take the initiative** and find out what your particular audience needs are in order to ensure people are as engaged as possible in the circumstances. This is the beginning of the rapport-building process and demonstrates to the members of your audience they are important. You be the one to initiate making things as smooth and easy for the audience as possible so people have the best chance of hearing you. Creating rapport is difficult when your audience is in a state of confusion. Make sure those present are clear about why you are both there and address *their* questions and concerns about the presentation. This

idea brings up the whole issue of the purpose of the presentation (which will be addressed in step two of the 8-step preparation plan coming up) but the key is to take nothing for granted. Maybe the audience has information prior to the presentation, often it doesn't. Someone else introducing a presenter can work well and is a popular way to give the audience some background and deal with at least some unasked questions.

Although there are many ways a presenter's background and **relevance** to the presentation can be established, the important thing is that **it is established**. Making no assumptions is a good starting point. Being willing to ask your audience questions also works. This willingness demonstrates to your audience that you care about them. When you care, rest assured that will come across. "The Medium is the Message"! The questions in the audience's mind can provide you with the information you need to prepare your introduction to the presentation. If being of service is a priority, it will add to your desire to stay present automatically. That way, as you progress through your material, it will be easier to respond openly in a genuine effort to meet and truly connect with your audience throughout your presentation rather than feeling trapped in a defensive stance where fear is your ground state of being.

### **PRACTICAL SUPPORT**

Also, consider the physical needs of the audience and yourself. These things are commonly related to logistics and venue. If at all possible make sure you can change the room temperature if you need to. I sat through a presentation I was really interested in recently and froze. I was so distracted by the 'chiller' room we were in that my lasting memory is of the venue, not the material I went to hear. Refreshments are another thing. Is the presentation long enough to justify coffee or a break? Are refreshments required at all? It can be useful to have at least coffee and a range of teas available on arrival at some

presentations. If this is appropriate, make sure the coffee is hot and fresh. Make sure any food requirements are taken care of. Fresh fruit is great brain food in a longer presentation. Peppermints and jellybeans or some other “sweet treat” can be useful in small doses during the presentation.

Learn about what helps the human brain function at it's best. Heavy carbohydrates can contribute to sluggishness after lunch. Light food and frequent breaks can add value. Get curious instead of making assumptions that may not be accurate. Consider how the audience will be seated? Behind tables creates a different dynamic to sitting in a circle, sitting on cushions, or theatre style set-ups. What will be most appropriate for your presentation? Can you influence the set-up or not? If at all possible **make sure you visit the venue prior to your presentation** and familiarise yourself with any equipment such as hands free or free standing microphones, Power Point technology, slide or video equipment, sound system and any other variable in your staging. If you have never heard your voice amplified before your presentation - practise and get used to it. Set the stage as much as you can right down to the distance you will be from the audience while presenting. Can everyone see you? Are you artificially 'high' in relation to the audience?

These practical considerations can make a big difference to whether or not you reach your outcome and although they are all common sense issues, they are easily missed. Have the confidence to request what you need from whoever is setting up your space. It won't take long before you tune in and consider all of these things automatically. It really takes very little effort once you get used to asking the questions. Making fine distinctions about the environment you will be received in adds value to the experience you and your audience will have. Honour that physical environment and it will give back to your presentation every time.

## FOURTEEN

### FRAMING AND REFRAMING

Framing is a term used to describe the process of creating meaning for who you are and what you do in your presentation. Given there are many ways to perceive the same event or circumstance, **framing creates a way of looking at something**. It helps create a perception that can ensure you and your audience are heading in the same direction. What people don't understand they will make up - accurately or not - and what's more you will not necessarily know if they are off track. It's all about **context**.

#### AN EXAMPLE

When I am presenting I sometimes begin in bare feet. There I am, all dressed up...with bare feet. It is rare for any member of my audience to ask me why I have bare feet or even acknowledge they have noticed. Much later in the presentation I ask the audience why they think I had bare feet at the beginning. People give me many different ideas; from believing I was just more comfortable that way to thinking I'd forgotten my shoes, blisters and all manner of other thoughts, some of which are quite outrageous. The real reason I start with bare feet is to illustrate that **if you don't frame it - your audience will**, another Stephanie Burns special.

The full realisation of this idea has helped me be far more clear in setting up whatever I am doing with an audience, whether it is teaching, selling my services, facilitating meetings, speaking engagements - the lot. It helped me realise why sometimes the audience has seemed confused or hesitant, even resistant. I had not 'framed' appropriately what I was doing.

The other point to note here is that **you can frame anything**. Your audience will accept almost anything you offer if it is framed appropriately and they perceive the meaning is valid to them.

### **FRAMING CREATES RELEVANCE AND FRAMING MAKES IT SAFE**

Another way of saying this is **framing creates relevance**. A simple example of this is when we play charades in our seminars (which we often do). Charades is a game where you use nonverbal communication (body language) to get a message across to your audience.

The 'frame' I use for charades is 'a learning exercise'. Charades are framed to support people in learning more about what makes a communication effective and what gets in the way. If I introduced this exercise by saying "We are now going to play charades" I would have a very different response to "Next up is an opportunity to explore what makes a communication effective and what gets in the way. Charades is the best metaphor for communication I have come across and it is also a fun and challenging way to explore this topic."

If I add on the fact that no-one has to play, it is completely optional (there is no compulsory element in any of my seminars), it is easier for people who feel out of their 'comfort zone' playing games to either observe and maybe play after a while or to step in and have a go right up front. People who have never played charades before and who say they hate playing games have a ball and learn a lot from the game because of this approach.

### **YOU CAN ALSO FRAME WHO YOU ARE**

Another angle is on framing yourself, or even aspects of yourself. In essence you are letting the audience know how you want them to think about you. We all

use mental short cuts that delete much of the information that comes into our system. One is the process of stereotyping. We observe certain things about people and situations and make decisions based on a minimum of information. Framing can help enormously to break through stereotyping and assumptions.

### **AN EXAMPLE**

You can frame your accent, age, height, dress, your wooden leg, ANYTHING. One man I worked with in a corporate environment was very self-conscious of a stammer he had developed as a child. He was responsible for making presentations to all kinds of staff on issues of a technical nature and what he wanted most from the seminar was to 'get rid of his stammer'. I am not a speech therapist and I have little idea how stammers develop or how to 'treat' them, but I do know about framing.

I checked out with him if getting rid of the stammer was the only option or whether feeling ok about it would be just as good from his point of view. After consideration he agreed if he felt ok about it, it wouldn't be an issue. From there we set to work to find a frame for the stammer that was satisfactory to him. As it turned out, this man had studied his stammer closely and he knew exactly when it occurred. In case this is relevant for you I will tell you what he had noticed.

When presenting, his stammer occurred far more often than in general conversation. He was quite particular about his communication and liked to be specific in his information. The trouble was, when his mind went searching through his 'bio-dictionary' for the words that would say exactly what he meant at times, sometimes that search took a few moments. When it did, he felt an internal pressure building that was the signal his stammer was coming, so he would abandon his search, choose a word that sort of said what he meant but

he was left feeling dissatisfied with the *quality* of his communication. Highly frustrated, he *felt* he lost credibility and respect from his audience. That is not to say he *did* lose those things but as we have seen, it is what we feel that makes the difference to how we behave. Our challenge was to find a way to frame the stammering so he could feel ok, if not empowered. Can you think of a way this man's stammer could be framed so it empowered rather than disempowered him?

### **A SOLUTION THAT WORKED**

Here's the solution another man in the same audience came up with. He told us he'd had a teacher at school that stammered and made it work *for* him. The teacher would introduce himself at the beginning of the year and **tell** his class they would hear him stammer from time to time. He also told them that the times he stammered were when he had something important to say....so....if they heard him start to stammer it might be a really good time to pay attention! For whatever reason it was there, the stammer was part of him the teacher accepted and more, he polished it up and made it an **asset**. Needless to say our man in the seminar couldn't believe how differently he felt when he looked at his own stammer that way.

After all it was the truth. He *did* stammer when he had something important to say and it *was* a great cue for his audiences to really pay attention. Further, can you see that by framing it that way, it may have had the audience right there, waiting for him to stammer? Not a bad way to help the audience stay present. In framing it he made it easier for the audience to hear him with a little humour and *without* sympathy or other judgements. He had taken the initiative instead of waiting for the audience to make it up. **He had been real.**

When a presenter is real there is less chance of losing credibility or respect. You cannot lose these things anyway - they are yours to give away or hold firm. Remember you cannot control what other people think of you so why bother with that. What is more important is how *you* feel about you. I could give you countless examples of people finding ways to highlight what might be perceived as a disadvantage. It's all in the way we look at things, perceive them, frame them. And the great thing is - the 'frame' can always change! Framing is not something to labour over. It is a matter of understanding your own and your audiences' needs and meeting them as best you can. Look for the way you want the audience to perceive you and your material and offer them that perception so they can gain the most from your presentation. Framing is a great tool I encourage you to develop. Practise in your everyday communication and you will rapidly see how much more effective you are in getting your message across.

### **REFRAMING – A POWER TOOL**

Another application of framing is **reframing**. Often we know the audience has a particular perception of us or our material based on past experiences of 'people like us' and 'topics like ours'. By reframing, or **offering an alternative perception**, you can support your audience 'being present' with what you are doing rather than leaving people to sit with assumptions that may be inaccurate. Just as our own perceptions have been shaped by our past experiences, so have those of our audiences. People will hear you through filters to do with authority, learning, school, men, women, your particular subject matter and who knows what else. You can do much to build rapport without knowing exactly what is going on your audience's mind just by being aware of some possibilities.

## **THERE IS NO BORING INFORMATION**

I have seen wonderful examples of reframing in action with presenters offering material on numerous topics including for example, accounting and computer-based material. A common perception for those who do not enjoy accounting or computers is that presentations on these topics are dry and boring, often because we think we won't understand. Let me say right up front - **there is no boring information** - only boring delivery. Remember everyone does their best, so with a willingness to look at the results you create and an openness to learning new ways of doing things for greater effectiveness even the most dry data or content can be brought to life. All it takes is a little effort to change what an audience and presenter may not look forward to into something exciting and stimulating to both! The content of your communication is presumably what you want to get across and will be as alive as YOU are presenting it. This is not to say every person in every audience will be interested and engaged every time. We are simply looking to give it our best shot. Combine that with a willingness to learn what works based on our audience responses (feedback) and presenting will certainly be a stimulating challenge every time because your creativity will be more in the mix.

## **A PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT ANGLE ON REFRAMING**

**Reframing** is also a very useful self-help tool when looking at your personal history. It can help to perceive disempowering experiences in a new light. This strategy is one your inner coach will likely be very good at. When we reframe something, **the circumstances don't change, our perception of them does, and so does how we feel about it.**

## **BE WILLING TO LOOK FOR THE TREASURE**

Hindsight is a wonderful thing. It often takes time for us to be able to look back on events and circumstances in our lives and see the treasure in them or the

bigger picture. It can sometimes feel there is no treasure but it is worthwhile having a jolly good look anyway. I can't count how many times I have felt like there is nothing good in what has happened in some situations in my life and yet if I am willing, there is always a benefit in there somewhere as a result of the way things have turned out. Reframing can turn 'crap' experiences into compost. Compost can turn into fertiliser so remember - **everything** in your life can be useful - recycle it all!

### **AN EXAMPLE**

I mentioned earlier that my father left our family when I was around three. From that time I never saw him before he committed suicide when I was 18 years old. What possible good could that have done me on top of his original abandonment you may ask? I wondered for a long time. Apart from feeling deep down inside like I was flawed in some way (as I mentioned earlier on), life was ok without a father and I didn't know anything different anyway. But as I grew older I focused on the fact more and went down the self-pity path as a result. Then when he died I decided it was my fault for not making the effort to see him and include him in my life. The guilt that went with that hung around for years – until I reframed the whole experience. I didn't do this consciously. I didn't even know what reframing was at that time in my life. Reframing is just a label. It's just a word that describes a change in perception. When our perception changes so does our reality.

Over time I learned much from my experience of *not* having a father, like the preciousness of my close relationships with people I care about. This has motivated a desire to be willing to work hard to maintain friendships that began in childhood. I also learned 'girls can do anything' (still a relatively new idea for a baby boomer at the time). I learned to be independent early in life as a result of my circumstances and that has stood me in good stead all my life. Maybe the

most profound lesson my father's death taught me was the importance of being and doing what makes me happy. He had been a very unhappy man deep inside and did not have the resources to change. This was no more his fault than it was mine. It was just how it was and a sign of the times. There are many more things too and I am still learning from them. The point is, although I cannot change the 'facts' of my history, I can change how I view those facts and how I feel about them. That's what 'reframing' can do, help us change the view.

### **REFRAMING CAN EMPOWER US**

The same is so for any experience. When we take disempowering experiences and reframe them we can empower ourselves. I encourage you to look for past experiences that may have disempowered you in the context of presenting (or in any area of your life) and see if you can reframe them. A good starting point is to ask yourself 'what can I possibly learn from that experience?'. If you come up with a useful attitude it taught you, or realise the experience put you on a path towards something you like about your life, it can be enough. You may not get an answer for years, yet even being open to asking the question will empower you more than feelings like bitterness, resentment, regret, remorse, revenge or even indifference.

### **YOU WILL FEEL THE DIFFERENCE**

Like the principle of 'Everyone is doing the best they can', reframes are not the same as justifications. It's not about having an intellectual understanding of our past on its own. You can tell if you have genuinely reframed something when you truly *feel* differently about it. A bonus is you will find you come more into relationship with yourself. That is very healing and supports our move towards 'being present'. It also helps with the rapport building process with our audiences.

The process of reframing your past so you feel accepting of it and free from inhibiting patterns of thinking exercises your flexibility and is part of an emotional 'growing up'. There are an infinite number of ways of seeing and interpreting the same situation as I often discovered when interviewing 'eye witnesses' as a police officer. As Anna points out in 'Mr God this is Anna' by Fynn, the difference between us humans and Mr God is that we have points of view whereas Mr God has infinite viewing points.

### **CHILDREN ARE THE MOST FLEXIBLE OF THINKERS**

One who demonstrates reframing really well is Tom Sawyer in the book by the same name. Tom, a young tearaway boy who gets up to all kinds of adventures with his good friend Huckleberry Finn, uses reframing brilliantly with regard to whitewashing a fence. Tom is not allowed to go fishing until the fence is done and is stuck with the task when his friends come along and tease him for having to do this 'chore'. Tom takes the tack of convincing his friends he actually *wants* to whitewash the fence and would far rather do that than go fishing. Gradually his friends become intrigued and soon enough the prospect of whitewashing becomes so desirable and exciting that his friends end up giving Tom their prized possessions in exchange for a 'turn'.

For practical purposes Anthony Robbins, presenter and author, specialises in 'mental technologies' and reframing is a topic he discusses in detail. The best reference point however is your own life. Have a look at it, your history, and see if you can find anything you feel is holding you back today. Create a new perception or way of looking at it - reframe it, find the gift in it and move on. Being stuck in the past keeps us out of the present. Willingness to choose the optimistic view works.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

- Your audience can help you achieve what you are setting out to do - if you let them
- What your audience doesn't know it will make up
- How you are impacts how the audience is
- Address your audiences' needs to give them the best chance of receiving your message
- Framing helps create relevance and meaning
- You can frame anything
- There is no boring information - only boring delivery
- Reframing can help you see disempowering experiences in an empowering light
- The facts of our history cannot change but our perception of them can

## FIFTEEN

### THE 8-STEP PREPARATION PLAN

This strategy for the overall preparation of your actual presentation is a combination of several I have tried. In using it you will find you end up with clear thoughts and outcomes, the 'why' and 'how' to achieve them, and organised material. You will thus find any gaps or hiccups in the presentation that need more attention or research, an understanding of your audiences' needs, a plan of the presentation with the end in mind, practical support for a clear effective communication and, not least of all, you will stimulate your whole brain in the preparation phase so your creativity is readily accessible.

As you learn to play with this plan you will evolve your own style and preparation can become a stimulating and enjoyable part of your presentation, something to look forward to rather than avoid. You will find each step is not rigidly separated from the others as you move in and around them at different levels as your preparation unfolds. The more you use it the easier it will get until preparation is speeded up and literally propelling you towards your presentation with the energy and enthusiasm you have when planning for a holiday or something else you are looking forward to.

The preparation phase always used to bug me. When I was first presenting I had no idea how to prepare - no one taught me how. I would labour over what I was going to say and wonder why it seemed so hard to get my thoughts clear and write them down. It caused me incredible frustration, stress and worry and more than a few grey hairs. I wanted to do a good job and I definitely *didn't* want to make a fool of myself.

In addition to all the other issues I had with presenting, I was also very sensitive to people laughing at me so I took myself and everything else far too seriously at times. The big fear was that I would be laughed at for something I didn't know I had done or not done. This had happened to me as a seven year old in a public performance at my school and my feeling response to it hung around for years. I learned I was very out of control in relation to presenting because it seemed like I could get it horribly wrong without even realising. The prospect of public humiliation made presenting a very scary prospect for me.

Consequently, **preparing** for a presentation was something my brain knew was going to lead to actually presenting (which brought up my fears) so I used to put it off, worry about it and generally not support myself at all. I also felt genuinely blocked when I tried to write down my thoughts. That is until I learned about two things that radically altered my experience. In retrospect, the more I learned about the first, the easier and more useful the second became.

### **IT'S ATTITUDE AGAIN**

First up I had to acknowledge the truth about what was really going on. That ended the 'trying to overcome my fear' mission in its tracks. Once I started learning the value of working on my *internal environment* instead of trying to control my *external environment* I really felt like I began making progress. Learning where my responses came from and then working with the unhelpful beliefs I had about myself and presenting meant they could actually change. It took a good few years of 'bumping around in the dark' for me to hit on what was really useful in this process - the principles and self-coaching, along with plenty of opportunities to continue to practise in 'real' situations all made a huge difference.

Once my *internal* battles were pretty much over in this context *I actually looked forward* to (an attitude) the opportunity to present and found I had a genuine commitment to *wanting to do a good job* (an attitude) rather than hoping I could survive a bad one (another attitude). With a 'look forward to' attitude I realised this was actually the *beginning* of my preparation for any presentation.

The second major thing I learned was a series of practical steps for preparing, which evolved over time from a combination of different strategies I had tried. Now I felt confident I had an *easy* way of preparing which worked for me and which I thoroughly understood, it speeded up my preparation and made it enjoyable to boot. The following 8-step preparation plan is the result.

## 8-STEP OVERVIEW

- **Step one** is always the '**attitudes**' and '**state**' you are in about the presentation.
- **Step two** is getting crystal clear about your **outcome** - the results you want and makes you question the '**why?**' of your presentation.
- **Step three** looks at the **content** of your presentation - the '**what?**'
- **Step four** is formulating **the style** you will use to deliver your content - the '**how?**'
- **Step five** is **mapping** your material or creating a track for you to travel on through the presentation.
- **Step six** is **visualising** (imagining) the presentation happening exactly the way you want it to.
- **Step seven** is letting the whole thing '**cook**' so your unconscious mind can prepare what your conscious mind cannot.
- **Step eight** is **practise** and **evaluate**.

When I ask people in my seminars where they begin their preparation they almost always tell me - Step three - content. *What* is it going to be about? *What* am I going to say? That is where I used to start and I now understand why I had so much trouble. Just because we may have a 'topic' to present on doesn't mean we have enough information to prepare. We need more information before our brain can begin to organise our content and we need to be clear in our **attitudes and feelings**. So let's begin the preparation process at the beginning.

### **STEP ONE - ATTITUDE/STATE**

Once I realised the importance of my attitude towards the presentation and discovered it was the first part of my preparation, I was once again reminded of the importance of our internal climate, or environment - how we think and feel about making the presentation in the first place. We could call this step '**the inner game of presenting**'. When the internal environment is healthy the outer environment reflects that. Essentially, everything we have worked with up until now has been moving us towards a healthy internal environment. As we have seen already, the combination of what we are thinking and what we are feeling has a huge impact on our subsequent behaviour ("The Medium is the Message"). Attitude then, is part of step one.

Attitudes I have found most useful are the principles we have already explored as well as ones like:

**I am willing to do my best.**

**I am willing to learn.**

**I have an expectation of success and enjoyment.**

**I am looking forward to this presentation.**

**This is an opportunity to make a contribution**

These certainly helped me more than my old attitudes, like:

“I can’t wait until this is over”.

“I don’t want to do this”.

“Why did I agree to do it?”..... and so on.

When you are clear on the attitudes that will support you, engage your inner coach to keep reminding you of their usefulness and they will gradually grow into unconsciously solid foundation attitudes for every presentation.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUR STATE OF BEING**

The other aspect of step one, connected to attitude, is commonly called your ‘state’, your overall mood, a combination of how you feel physically, emotionally, mentally and even spiritually if you relate to that. If you cannot access a ‘resourceful state’ you will not have the best of yourself available for preparation and the presentation itself.

Having the best positive attitude can mean nothing if your underlying feelings don’t match. I agree with my friend Shona on this one. She says, “Your state creates your fate!” When we are not in charge of ourselves it feels more like ‘Your fate creates your state!’

**Emotions** play a major role in determining your state. We can learn to choose our emotional states or we can allow our environment to choose them for us.

**NOTE** The emotional aspect of our development can feel uncomfortable and tempting to skip over, particularly if you grew up in western culture that has tended to place a low value on emotional expression. The material here is not intended to provide full guidance in dealing with deep seated emotional issues but we do need to at least be willing to look at our emotions in general as they are very relevant to our development. The problem with missing this aspect out

is we don't ever get to the roots where lasting change is possible. This could therefore be a point where you are noticing tiredness, feelings of boredom or distraction. My encouragement is to pay attention to your responses to the idea of looking at your emotional life because it will give you clues as to what prevents you from 'being present'. Another idea could be to have a pause in reading and consciously choose to return to this piece when the time is right. The key is to respond to your own needs as they arise and be aware that emotions are just another form of information.

### **IT'S ALL ABOUT CHOICE**

For presenting purposes we want to be able to access any state we want to, when we want to. We want to be in the driver's seat of our emotions rather than being passenger to emotions like fear. In essence the idea here is to learn to have **choice** around our emotional life and expression. Fear is the most common emotion that inhibits our expression as presenters and can lead to other 'states' like defence and aggression. These states are also less helpful in the presenting context. Others such as openness, flexibility, and confidence are more useful.

Exercising our power to choose how we feel is not always easy. Choosing is different to gritting your teeth and 'controlling' emotions so they become *suppressed*. Suppressing emotions because you feel you can't express them for whatever reason is not exercising free choice.

### **BACK TO OUR CONDITIONING**

Emotional suppression has its roots in our conditioning. Beliefs like 'big boys don't cry' and 'good girls don't get angry' are classics. These beliefs don't change the fact that we all need to cry sometimes, and we all feel anger

sometimes when things aren't happening the way we want them to. All those sorts of beliefs make it harder to express ourselves. As we learn more about the importance of healthy emotional expression in the wider context of life we are slowly learning that suppression of emotion most commonly leads to disease, unhappiness and crisis of one sort or another (another good reason to learn to express ourselves cleanly - for good health!)

### **RESPONSE-ABILITY**

I am talking about exercising our emotional **response-ability**, our ability to respond in any way **we choose**, to any circumstance. This is an ongoing life lesson for many of us because emotions are so irrational, unruly and sometimes spontaneously expressed before we even know it.

When provoked our emotional life can take over the moment and as a police officer I often saw powerful examples of the results of many people's lack of resources around emotional expression in very destructive ways.

### **AN EXAMPLE**

As a police officer, I fingerprinted a man once who wanted more than anything in the world to re-live a few moments of his life. He had gone to a public bar where his partner was drinking and told her to go home and feed her 'kids'. She took exception to this and told him to go home and feed his own kids. He got angry and told her again to go home. She repeated that *he* should go home. The argument continued as a classic relationship 'power struggle' unfolded in a country pub where other people who knew the couple were also socialising. The man, now in a state of public humiliation and rage walked outside, got a shotgun from his truck, walked back into the bar and shot his partner dead.

By the time I met this man, less than an hour after the shooting, he was devastated. His 'state' had changed dramatically and all he wanted was another chance to choose how he responded. He knew he had destroyed the lives of the people he cared about most in all the world and he could do nothing to change it. He was in a state called powerlessness - likely the underlying state that ultimately provoked his behaviour in the first place. Unfortunately it was too late and his lesson came at a very high price.

Having looked at the concept of reframing our experiences, can you imagine how challenging it would be to find any treasure whatsoever in an experience like that? I believe it is never too late to take responsibility and make peace with our demons, however I would advocate ensuring our emotional life is healthy enough that it need not get to an extreme situation like this one. Sadly we have far too many examples that demonstrate the lack of emotional resources in our communities. The worst of it is, instead of working with the real issues we keep looking for ways to punish those who 'break the rules'.

Although this example may seem extreme I cannot stress strongly enough the importance of learning how to appropriately manage your emotional responses. Losing our temper is only one example, albeit a common one, which in our society is expressed in destructive ways every day. We seem to constantly be 'fighting' this or that instead of seeing a positive future and standing for that.

### **HOW WE REALLY FEEL LEAKS OUT ALL THE TIME**

Remember, "The Medium is the Message". Our real feelings will show themselves eventually.

Sometimes, how we feel has sneaky ways of getting out of our systems that are not helpful to our pretending. The truth eventually shows itself subtly and not so

subtly. If we take the time to look in someone's eyes we see the truth. Some bury it so deep that the pressure builds and builds until one day - boom!!! Maybe it could be useful to have a healthy relationship with our emotional selves. Remember **everyone is doing the best they can with the resources they have**. There is not a lot of point blaming others or yourself for not having the resources to behave differently. If you want to change behaviour remember to add more resources. That is what leads to more true choice.

My police story also highlights another point. **If you are not in charge of your emotional life, your environment will be and in that you will feel like a victim to your own impulses**. Have you ever felt the infectiousness of someone else's happiness? Even if we are not feeling great we can be swayed by another's good mood. Equally, if someone is in a 'bad mood' and they seem committed to staying that way, isn't it true that we can start feeling angry too, or at least 'lose' the good mood we were in? We do not exist in a vacuum. We are impacting and impacted by our environment all the time and people are part of our environment. *How we respond is the issue*. Common experiences of the impact of another person's state can easily be seen in the movies and on the stage. When great actors 'feel' terrified, angry, funny, loving, sad in their character, *we can feel it too* - **when it's real**. We give people who do this well accolades because they help us **feel**.

An actor's capacity to authentically access the state required for a scene, on demand, with cameras and people all around them must be quite a challenge. How often do we hear actors say they need to 'live' their character for it to come across to the audience as real? When it does though, we sit in a theatre, logically knowing we are watching something that is not real and yet feeling *real* feelings in response.

In the context of presenting, does it make sense then that when we feel fear, our audience feels nervous too? When we feel confident and happy, the audience can relax and feel confident and be possibly more open to receiving our message? When you feel confident that you are 'in-charge' of yourself emotionally, you can feel confident you will be able to effectively deal with anything that happens in your presentation. You can trust yourself. This means there is nothing in the way of you being present and responding spontaneously to what happens in the moment, and that is much more stimulating for presenter and audience alike. When your attention is fully present, in the moment, anything can happen and that adds to the excitement and adventure every presentation can be.

### **WHICH 'STATES' ARE USEFUL TO US AS PRESENTERS?**

Have a think about the states you feel will be most useful *to you* as a presenter.

Some examples of popular states (or overall feelings) people want to feel in the context of presenting are: Confident, relaxed, sensitive to the audience, ability to listen, clarity of thinking, humour, spontaneity, enthusiasm, inspiration, open, passion, leadership, authority, respect, credibility (yes, it is an internal state), trust, flexibility....

Which states of being, which attitudes, bring out the best in you? Clues to support you with this might be found in your responses to your benchmarking exercises, especially step two of benchmark three. Your inner coach can make all the difference in supporting you to maintain healthy attitudes and can be a major resource in that regard.

## **HOW DO WE MASTER THEM?**

As far as mastering your emotional states goes, the issue is how to access the states we want to, *when* we want to - **for the presentation**. Most people have felt happy, confident, relaxed and so on at some time in their lives. Often though, when a challenge comes along it is at that time the state called fear takes over. When fear *dominates* our feeling state there is no room for anything else. We have hooked into an instinctive survival mode that will only pass when the perceived danger has passed. When you are feeling fear is it easy to feel happy and relaxed at the same time? When fear is present in smaller doses, we can have some room to choose to '*Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*' as Susan Jeffers suggests in her book of the same name.

## **EMOTIONS ARE PHYSICAL**

**Emotions are energy** expressed through our physical body and so emotions show up in our physical body. The stronger the emotion, the more energy it has in it. Our man in prison had a huge amount of energy in his expression of powerlessness and the rage that went with it.

A key place to begin to take charge then is with your body. Take regular garden-variety depression, another common response to feeling powerless. Are you aware that to feel depressed there is a certain *physiology* or posture that goes with it? Charles Schultz even did a cartoon using Charlie Brown which illustrated this and helped many people laugh at how committed we have to be to stay depressed - once you are in the right posture, you can't move or you will stop feeling that way! For many people the shoulders droop, head and eyes go down, the spine collapses and the walk is not exactly perky and bright. When we feel depressed our thoughts are depressing and our voice changes. For many people it becomes quite flat and lifeless, just like the rest of us.

**Check out this exercise** (from the “school of Neuro Linguistic Programming”) which I have come across in many different environments, and put your body in a ‘depressed’ posture for a few moments and notice how you start feeling...(this works best if you stand up).

Now try putting your head back and standing up straight, put a smile on your face - for no reason, and even a step further, hold your arms out wide with your palms facing up....now, without changing anything about your posture see if you can feel depressed while you are standing or even sitting like that.

Do it now. Actually stop reading and try it out. Most people find it very difficult, if not impossible, to hold that physical posture *and* feel depressed. (Note: I am not here referring to *clinical* depression which is a much more complex issue).

Another example is with the state called ‘cool’. For many years now there have been sets of physiologies that go with ‘cool’. There are clothes that go with it, language and certainly body postures. Teenagers seem to have it down to a fine art. They regularly redefine what is cool and what’s not and the physiology and image has to change to match!

### **EVERY ‘STATE’ HAS A PHYSIOLOGY THAT GOES WITH IT**

We have physiology for every emotional state. Passion has its own physiology, as does anger and fear. Try exploring how your own body expresses those emotions. Sometimes the difference between the physiology for one feeling state can be only subtly different to the physiology for another, for example ‘relaxed’ and ‘bored’. The key to recognising the difference is **pay attention**. The more attention you pay to your physical body the more you will notice.

## **WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENCE?**

If you find what physiology goes with feeling really **confident in your own body**, you can repeat it to actually help you get yourself into a confident state whenever you choose. Try standing in a confident way. You may find you *breathe* differently when you do that. How you breathe makes a big difference to how you present which is why much attention is paid to breathing in a relaxed way as a strategy for enhancing performance. Notice how you breathe when you are relaxed, excited, sad, frightened and so on. How we breathe impacts how we speak and how we feel. Yoga and other exercises can help you access and recognise useful breathing patterns that can only enhance your presenting.

As you stand in a confident posture notice how you feel. When you stand confidently you will not only feel more confident, you will communicate those feelings to your audience. Equally, if you stand as if apologising for even taking up space, your feelings will match and your audience will get that message too. Using your physiology as a resource helps you perform at your best.

## **USE YOUR BODY AS A RESOURCE**

Change your physiology and your feeling state will follow. This is much easier than trying to use your mind to control strong emotions. Logic doesn't seem to cut it when it comes to strong feelings. We know this instinctively anyway. We go for a walk to perk up, go for a run to let off steam, have a game of squash, meditate, dance, paint, get out in the garden, walk on the beach, or do something creative to change our state. Once our body changes position our mood and thoughts change much more easily than using our mind on its own.

## **REMEMBER - "THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE"**

How we feel influences how we think and how we behave - "The Medium is the Message"! As a medium you are *body, mind, heart and spirit* and to have a

congruent message that lines up inside and out, **all four aspects need to be working together** rather than in conflict. There are many other ways you can support yourself in accessing the state you want for presenting. Do you have certain clothes that make you feel like a million dollars, a special jacket? Tie? Suits? Or accessories that change your state? Music can change our state too, having a bad hair day can change our state, giving yourself flowers can change your state, and food can change our state. Your internal critic can change your state and **so can your inner coach**. You can allow your environment to control your feelings, or, you can use it to support your choices.

### **CREATE A RESOURCE KIT**

It's a great idea to create yourself a resource kit of things, music, memories, and rituals that help you access the best of your resources - these will change over time so keep it updated. Remember our skier? She made sure she had to rush - that's what got her into her own state for optimal performance. I used to wear what I called my 'power belt'. I really liked wearing because it made me feel all snug and safe, plus the knowledge of the love and support of the person who gave it to me. Altogether, the belt helped me access a healthy state. Having a jolly good laugh always helps as well.

One hilarious man in his forties told me whenever he had a 'big' presentation to do, he always wore an ancient pair of rugby shorts underneath his best suit. His wife had been threatening to throw these shorts out for years because they were worn and ripped, practically useless, rags at best. This man wouldn't hear of it because that pair of shorts was the one he wore in a peak experience game of rugby he played as an under 19 representative and they made him feel 10 feet tall and bullet-proof! No-one else knew he had them on and more relevant, they supported him in performing at his best. They *worked* for him. Imaginary clothing can work just as well as real clothes too.

Self-development specialist Anthony Robbins, uses a visualisation exercise to help people create an imaginary 'cloak of confidence' you can wear to instantly help change your state. An old friend of mine who did this exercise came up with a bright yellow life jacket instead. It didn't matter that he didn't imagine a cloak - the imaginary life jacket made him feel more secure in himself, and consequently he and others perceived him as more confident and competent in his presentations. No matter how strange this may sound – WHO CARES? - It works!

The whole power dressing industry grew out of attempts to create an image both internally and externally. I am all for whatever works, just be aware an image will work for the first few seconds but what is going on underneath will shine through your clothes so make sure you have **inner and outer lined up**. Resources to support you accessing the most useful states for your presentation are just that, resources. The essence is still **who you are - the medium**. Anything else helps highlight that.

## **WRAP UP**

Attitude and state control are both important areas of potentially continuous learning in our development as presenters and in life generally. There are many resources that can help you understand yourself better emotionally and psychologically and which can help you express yourself in empowering ways. If you feel this area is a biggie for you, I encourage you to seek the help of a professional who can provide you with guidance as you explore this delicate aspect of being.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT

- Attitude and state influence our internal climate and vice versa
- Your 'state' is a combination of how you feel emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually
- 'Your state creates your fate'
- Emotions play a major role in determining your state
- Cultivating choice around emotional expression works
- If you are not in charge of your emotional life your environment will be
- Emotions are physical
- Change your physiology and your feeling state will follow
- Image will work temporarily but what's underneath will shine through because "The Medium is the Message"
- You deserve the support you need in order to feel free - seek out professional guidance and make use of your inner coach

## SIXTEEN

### STEP TWO – OUTCOME

With all my talk about emotions and attitudes, the trickiest part of presenting to deal with, you may be relieved that we are now ready to **get very practical**. Dealing with our unruly emotions first makes it much easier to move forward. The next steps will help you with a logical perspective on preparing. These steps will continue to add to your confidence because they will help you realise you know what you are doing, a much less risky option than not feeling secure that you are properly prepared and a myriad of other insecurities going on underneath. **Knowing you are prepared helps your state enormously** as you will see.

#### **CLEAR OUTCOMES LEAD TO CLEAR RESULTS**

The key here is to **start with the end in mind**. Clear outcomes lead to clear results. Without a clear outcome your presentation will be a 'hit or miss' situation in which you could under or over pitch, or miss the point completely simply because you don't have enough information to prepare well. This can lead to a feeling in your audience that they have wasted their time and for you that you have added no value - not necessarily a great outcome for either of you! Clear outcomes come from clear thinking. You can practice taking charge of the quality of your thinking, therefore you have all the ability you need - right now - to create clear outcomes. It's just a matter of practice!

#### **WHAT'S THE POINT?**

There must be a point to the presentation otherwise it wouldn't be happening - it's your job to find out what the point is. Some outcomes are obvious and speak

for themselves; others can be more complex and need closer examination. This step is frequently skipped over superficially when preparing. We think that because we have a 'topic' we must get straight to the content. Maybe we have learned that clarifying a few agenda items to cover is enough. Sometimes it may be but often it's not.

### **WHY ARE YOU THERE AND WHY ARE THEY THERE?**

What works even more effectively is to first consider the '**why**' of the presentation - why are you there and why is the audience there? When you are clear about the **purpose** (why?) for the presentation your content will often take care of itself. This aspect of your preparation can take the longest to clarify, especially until you are used to doing it. Once you are familiar with this style of preparation it will become a habit. You will know you need to know the 'why' of your presentation before you go any further.

A judge I worked with once told me this was an enlightening step in preparation indeed. This person was not afraid of speaking and did so often in a wide variety of contexts. Looking closely at a desired outcome however was not part of the judge's preparation. There had always been an assumption the people in the audience were there to hear what the judge had to say about whatever the topic happened to be (pontificating), rather than any thought as to what the audience wanted to hear about! Needless to say, including **outcome** as a step in preparation and considering the audience helped the judge's presentations be more focused, effective and enjoyable for all concerned.

### **WHAT DO YOU WANT THEM TO LEAVE WITH?**

This step leads easily to **what you want the audience to leave the presentation with and what you want to happen as a result of your presentation**. Do you want to influence them to change their thinking or

behaviour in some way? Eg: buy your product instead of someone else's? 'Buy into' the new corporate strategy? Learn something? Be able to do something? Understand something? Do you want them to leave feeling a certain way? Do you want to share your experience of someone, say at a wedding? Whatever the context of the presentation it will be helpful in the preparation stage for you to consider what you want the audience to go away with.

### **WHAT DO THEY BRING WITH THEM?**

Thinking about the **purpose** of your presentation also provokes thinking about **what information and skills they (the audience) bring with them**. This information may be highly relevant or not so significant depending on the type of presentation you are making. It will certainly be useful to at least attempt to find out what prior knowledge your audience has on your topic if you are there to teach them something or you are attempting to persuade them in some way. You are responsible for achieving your outcome so it is up to you to research what is appropriate for you to know even if it is in general terms. If you are unable to access this information before your presentation it might help to set aside some time somewhere near the beginning to ask the audience some questions so you can get clear that way.

Your preparation would then need to be done by making some assumptions (ones you can afford to make) about the relationship between your topic and your audience. For example in my courses I can afford to assume many people are afraid of public speaking. Knowing that, I will still always check in with my audience how they feel about the subject matter as individuals, which helps me pitch the programme at an appropriate level even though the outcome remains the same in essence.

## **A CLEAR OUTCOME WILL GIVE YOU START AND END POINTS**

From this understanding come the start and end points of your presentation. With these two parameters, the question then becomes ‘what does the audience need in order to get from A to Z?’

## **CLEAR OUTCOMES WORK**

This step is as applicable to a meeting situation as it is for a formal presentation or a speech at a social occasion. Have you ever been to a meeting where by the end of it you have no idea what the point was? It is your responsibility to be clear about the purpose of the presentation because YOU are the one responsible for reaching the outcome.

## **REVIEW**

Some useful questions to ask yourself are: What do I want these people to walk out the door with at the end of my presentation (the end point)? What am I trying to achieve? Why will these people be in the audience? What is the point? All of these questions can help clarify the outcome and design an appropriate pitch for your presentation. It’s about making the best use of the time you have available. A list of mental joggers can be found at the end of the chapter. These joggers include all sorts of questions that can help you feel more informed about what you are doing.

## **YOUR AUDIENCE CAN HELP**

Your audience can help you achieve your outcome if you let them. To work together to achieve something everyone needs to know where they are headed so their best resources can come to the party. Anyone can perform better when they know where they stand. Getting clear about the outcomes you are seeking helps you do exactly that. After all, in any presentation you are all in it together. With a clear outcome in mind you also have an easier path towards evaluating

your success. When you are clear about what you are setting out to achieve you can more easily see if you have achieved it - **'your success is measured by your results'**. To measure results you need to be clear about what you are aiming to achieve - your outcome.

**Note:** Some presentations go ahead with audiences that feel no choice about attending at all. An example quite common to corporate environments is staff being instructed to attend a training course or meeting when they feel they have better things to do. Similar situations show up with high school aged children who perceive no value in some subject they are compelled to study. Framing can be very useful to help members of the audience choose for themselves to listen to you. Framing and reframing combined with authentic respect for your audience offers the best chance of success in these circumstances. Think ahead to possible resistance points and do your best to address them 'up front', ie: You take the initiative and you will save yourself much unnecessary angst.

### **OUTCOMES AND TIME FRAMES MUST MATCH**

When asked to make a presentation we are often given a topic and a time frame. Sometimes we have the luxury of deciding the time frame ourselves. To determine how much time we need for our presentation we need to know a few things. What am I trying to achieve? What's the outcome? What does the audience already know? How much time do I need to deliver my content? This is the information my audience will need to get them from what they already know (starting point) to the outcome I am seeking (end point). **If you do not have enough time to reach a specified outcome, negotiate for more time or change the outcome.** Timing and outcome need to match or you can rest assured you will not easily achieve the results you want.

## **AN EXAMPLE**

Let's say someone asks you to make a 20-minute presentation on the two-year strategic plan for your company to the Board of Directors. Assuming you are the right person to make a presentation of this kind, do you have enough information to go away and prepare? **No!!**

What you currently have is a topic and a time frame. Here are some potential outcomes for a presentation like this:

- The person who asked you to make the presentation wants to look good for the Board and wants an impressive show for 20 minutes. There is no need for the board to 'do' anything with the information other than be impressed with progress. Outcome = the Board has enough information to leave us to get on with the job - everyone on it leaves feeling confident we know what we are doing.
- The General Manager is seeking sign off on proposed budgets to provide funds to implement the strategic plan. Outcome = the Board understands the proposed strategic plan is appropriate for the business and happily signs off the budget.
- All members of the Board need to understand the philosophy behind the strategic plan because they are likely to be interviewed by the media for comment. Outcome = everyone leaves feeling confident they understand the plan.

There could be many other reasons for a presentation on a strategic plan. **Your content needs to be appropriate for the outcome.** In exploring this aspect you may find 20 minutes is simply not long enough to do justice to the plan for budget sign off in which case you need to negotiate for more time or *change the outcome* whereas to impress, 20 minutes may be plenty. The same presentation

may need a different outcome depending what it is needed for. Maybe the audience is the marketing team. The same content may be appropriate but the presentation needs to be for a different outcome. Choosing appropriate content without clarity on what it's for makes your preparation harder than it needs to be.

### **WE OFTEN KNOW MORE THAN WE NEED**

You will often have more information on any topic than you have time to present. In choosing your content you must be clear about the outcome you are seeking. Otherwise how do you choose from all you know what is appropriate for the circumstances? Step three - content, always depends on what outcome you are seeking. From time to time I am asked to present on 'presenting' for quite short periods of say 30 minutes. In talking about the outcome it usually turns out to be something like " We want our staff to feel more confident and learn some new skills". I could go ahead and attempt to prepare something with these outcomes in mind but in my experience it's rather pointless. I now need to negotiate.

If my potential client can find someone who can provide what they want in that time frame I say go for it and I would love to sit in so I can learn how to speed up the teaching of such things. I know I can provide what they want in two days, but not 30 minutes. What can be done in 30 minutes may provide ideas and provoke some thoughts about presenting which may help the audience explore further. This is a very different outcome to 'feeling more confident and learning new skills'. I have a performance guarantee that is based on results. This means if I do not reach agreed upon outcomes I don't get paid. This ensures I always do my best to get clear about what our clients really want.

### **CAVEAT ON 'OUTCOMES'**

Once you are clear about why you are making the presentation it is important to then let go of any 'attachment' to it. An outcome is a 'from here this is where I

would like this to end up' and that's great, it focuses your system, your preparation of content and it helps the audience too. It pays to remember though that we don't always know what will work best. Sometimes a presentation needs to go somewhere other than where we think. When we are willing to be flexible as well as being clear on the purpose of the presentation an even better outcome than you were going for could be the result. I am reassured of this truth over and over again as each audience teaches me the value of 'being present' and being willing to be flexible.

### **JOGGER QUESTIONS FOR FACE-TO-FACE PRESENTERS**

What do you need to know in order to reach your desired outcome?

What is the purpose of the event?

Does it have some sort of theme?

What is the purpose of my presentation (think in isolation or if it's part of a bigger event)?

What results are expected?

What does the client want the audience to leave with?

How long am I required to speak for?

Should I be prepared for a question time? (This is more common in sales presentations and formal situations eg: court hearings etc)

Who is my audience?

Is their age, sex, culture, relevant?

Is there any particular etiquette I must observe?

How many people are expected?

Are they familiar with my topic or is it new to them?

How will they be dressed?

Is anyone else presenting at this event? Who, on what topic?

What will be happening before and after my presentation?

May I use handouts?

Can I provide promotional material about myself?  
Will I receive a mailing list of those attending?  
What about equipment - Power Point presentation, microphone, flip chart etc?  
Will the audience have nametags or not?  
What kind of seating will there be? Theatre style? Tables? Webinar?  
What kind of stage?  
Will I be introduced (or will I be introducing myself)?  
Will I be paid a fee and what are the terms of payment?  
Will the audience be paying a fee?  
Do they need an invoice?  
What do they need next? Bio, photo etc?  
When and where will the event be held?  
Can I see the venue prior to my presentation?  
Who is my contact person in relation to this event? Where will I meet them etc?

**(...And anything else you can think of that will contribute to you making the best presentation you possibly can!)**

**Note:** There will always be things you haven't thought of – those are the things that grow our flexibility. Just get clear about the 'definites' and trust yourself to deal with the surprises as they arise. It's all part of the fun. You want enough structure to support the outcome, balanced with enough flexibility to respond in the moment with what is most appropriate. The key here is being 'present'.

In today's rapidly growing 'distance learning' context there are other questions to ask and new technology to learn about. There are many online conferencing services available today that teach you how to facilitate great webinars and increasingly efficient video conferencing facilities emerging. This trend will continue, as more and more people don't need to travel physically to hear your

presentation. You can access your audience globally now by posting on YouTube or stream live on your very own channel – anyone can as the voices of the many have access to the eyes and ears of the world.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

- Before you know 'what', you need to know 'why'.
- Clarifying your outcome helps you start your presentation with the end in mind.
- Outcomes support the easy preparation of content - the 'what' of the presentation.
- Sometimes you will be able to define the outcome and sometimes it will be defined for you - either way, it's your responsibility to gather whatever information and resources you need to reach it.
- Time frames and outcomes need to match.
- Once clear about your outcome, let go of attachment to it – be flexible.

**NOTE:** This step can be particularly helpful with **written presentations**. Take this book for example. My outcome or end point is for you to understand some principles and strategies that work in all presenting environments and which will help you **build confidence and competence** - in essence to support you in moving towards **thriving on expressing yourself in a presenting context** by taking a self-development approach. My starting point is that many people feel afraid of presenting in one form or another. In writing this book it was very difficult to order my thoughts until I was clear on what the purpose of writing it was. With a start and end point however, I have found it much easier to fill in the gaps - that's what step three is all about.

## SEVENTEEN

### STEP THREE – CONTENT

Content is the ‘what?’ of the presentation. **‘What’** does the audience need in order to reach the outcome? This is a step many people get really stuck with. They start preparing by starting at the start of the presentation eg: “Good morning, my name is Amanda...”, decide they don’t like that beginning, screw up the paper or delete the line on screen and start again, and again, and again until the floor is littered with paper balls or the computer trash is full! Attempting to prepare this way by editing as you go (a left brain activity), might feel like the fastest way but it often isn’t. It can create a block that gets loaded in with all the other history you have that tells you presenting sucks as the internal pressure builds and builds and you start to panic that you won’t be prepared in time.

Fortunately there is another tool we can use that is once again absolutely free (apart from some paper and pens). Like all your other potentials, you were born with the ability to brainstorm. Brainstorming is ‘data dumping’. Anything you can think of in relation to the topic gets written down in brief. I find post-it notes very useful for this step because they can be later moved around. Put one idea on each post-it note and stick them to a wall or board dedicated to your presentation. Let the silliest, really really unworthy ideas come forth. You never know when they will come in handy even as an example of how silly the ideas can be when it comes to unleashing creative energy! There simply are no rules when it comes to creativity - that’s the whole point so let yourself fly a little when you data dump.

Brain mapping is another handy tool. Teacher and author Tony Buzan coined the term 'mind mapping' which means the same thing. Essentially brain mapping is making use of the way your brain works naturally in order to record information. For preparation purposes we can use it to gather our thoughts on our topic. A book, with its' title, chapter headings, sub-headings, paragraphs and so on, is a useful metaphor to use to this explain further.

### **PRACTISE BRAINSTORMING WHAT YOU ALREADY KNOW**

**Exercise:** Choose a simple topic to work with like a hobby or something else you feel confident you know something about. Take a sheet of paper and turn it sideways so it is in a 'landscape' position. In the centre draw a circle - not too big or small – and write your topic in it. Using the book metaphor, your topic would be the title of the book. To create a brain map think of what the 'chapter headings' for your topic would be. Draw branches off your centre circle and write one heading on each branch. Off those branches draw more branches, which might be subheadings, or points that relate to the branch they are on.

This form and the post-it notes, with one idea on each, helps you release what you already know about your topic as well as capturing new ideas for the presentation as you think of them. Both these processes are very useful and can be added to and worked with over time (I take post-it notes with me most places) so you can jot down ideas as they come to you, or they can be focused exercises to do when beginning your preparation proper.

Once you have brainstormed what you already know, check in with your outcome and begin to establish **what your audience needs to know in order to reach the outcome?** This can provoke another brainstorm. You may even find it easier to do this one first and then proceed to brainstorming your own related knowledge. You may find in looking at your notes that you already know

more than is needed or you may find gaps in your knowledge that need outside expertise or further research. The point is, your outcome can now determine the content you will deliver. Once you are clear about what *you* know about the topic, you can look at what **the audience** will need in order to achieve the outcome and from there think about what *they* already know?

### **ACCESSING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE**

Can you find out what the audience already knows about your topic in general terms before you prepare? If so, it will help in this step of your preparation. If my presentation is on rocket science and I am presenting to rocket scientists I may choose slightly different content than if I was presenting to school leavers about *becoming* rocket scientists. Remember, if you have no information on your audience it might be helpful to include near the start of your presentation some method of finding out what they are already familiar with in relation to your topic. Accessing prior knowledge will help you define what information and skills your audience needs to achieve the outcome. Many a presentation has gone off the rails because inaccurate assumptions were made about the audience. Having said that, you can only do your best with the resources you have. Find out what you can and apart from that, just prepare in good faith with a willingness to play perhaps with a few options. Accessing prior knowledge is of course less relevant to social presenting situations than it may be in a business or educational setting.

### **FROM SUB-HEADINGS ONWARDS**

When you have some clarity about what you are setting out to achieve (outcome) and you have brainstormed some ideas which you believe will help your audience reach that outcome, you may want to prepare your material in a little more detail. This can involve writing/typing out longhand what you want to cover, or it could mean you do some reading or other research and make notes

that will become part of your presentation or a combination of both. You may already be moving into step four as you consider this part because many delivery styles have more to them than talking alone. You may need handout material, props, exercises, demonstrations, statistics, charts, photos, video clips and all manner of other support material that makes up your overall content. Some people choose to write the whole presentation out and then distil it into bullet points or a brain map. This can help with feeling secure in our knowledge and makes it easier to then decide *how* to get our message across (step four), whatever it happens to be. The idea here is to explore and find what works best for you. You will develop preferences for preparation once you start looking forward to doing a great job.

### **FRAMING CAN HELP**

When stepping into the dark with a presentation, in other words when you have been unable to access the information you need to prepare for best results, framing can help light the way as you let the audience know *why* you have prepared what you have and also open the way for people to tell you what they want/need to know if that is relevant to the situation. Remember, you are the person who has either been invited to present or you have decided to do it for yourself. This means someone thinks you are the right person for the job. Prepare in good faith and tell the truth and you will be easily forgiven if you have not hit the needs of the audience right on the button. You can only do your best in the circumstances and that's what matters.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT

- Brainstorm what you know about your topic
- Brainstorm what your audience needs in order to reach the outcome
- The outcome determines the content you will use
- Can you find out at least some of what your audience already knows in relation to your topic?
- Framing can help you let the audience know why you have prepared what you have
- Once you are clear about the content you will deliver, the next step is to decide **how** you want to deliver it.

# **EIGHTEEN**

## **STEP FOUR – STYLE**

There are many different ways to deliver the same content. In order to decide what will work best it can be useful to think here about your own style as well as what might be appropriate for the audience. The more your confidence grows, the more clearly your very own unique style will shine through. The key is to be willing to be curious and flexible and to find ways to get information across that are engaging and stimulating - **to you and your audience!**

### **WHAT WE ARE USED TO**

Many of us are used to a small range of options as far as the delivery of content is concerned. Standard models of delivery in the past have been lecture/speech style, handouts, overhead projections, slides, storyboards and in more recent years Power Point/slide share and other computer generated information. Much of this style places the audience in a passive state for receiving information. This is not right or wrong, as many people prefer to receive this mode of delivery. For others it can feel boring because there is little room for interaction and active involvement in the subject matter, especially in longer presentations.

### **DIFFERENT PEOPLE HAVE DIFFERENT NEEDS**

When addressing how to best present your content it is important to be aware of the differing needs of your audience as well as the nature of the presentation itself. Some people enjoy discussion and exploring information so that they can come up with their own answers and consequently feel more 'ownership' of their learning. Others prefer to get in and try it out in order to claim their learning. Some like to passively receive information and then reflect on it to come to

understanding and still others prefer active experimentation. (These people need to have the space to explore the boundaries).

Some suggestions for how to get information across are listed at the end of this chapter. Most people do not respond to long periods of being talked 'at'. Visual cues can aid understanding as can active involvement. That is why we see these styles used in presentations, particularly technology based visuals. It helps when people can 'see' what you are talking about.

### **YOU WILL TEND TO DELIVER THE WAY YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE**

Your own delivery style will reflect how you best like to receive information. For example, if you prefer 'doing' as a way of learning about something you will likely present in a style where your audience gets to 'do' things. If you prefer to passively receive and reflect on information you will likely deliver lots of information in various ways - talks, written material etc.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF FLEXIBILITY**

In order to reach the broadest possible audience you need to be willing to be flexible enough to deliver in a variety of ways. This can mean moving out of your own comfort zone and 'playing' with styles you are not familiar with until you get yourself familiar with them to the point where you are comfortable. Once again, training courses can be a great help in providing opportunities to 'try yourself out' in different ways which don't impact your 'real' audiences so that you learn in safety. I would hope that by now this option would feel like one well worth pursuing if you have come from being afraid of presenting. (Is that changing yet?).

Personally, I have a preference for discussing what I am learning about as I go so it took me a long time and many practise opportunities to feel comfortable

delivering a standard lecture. I still prefer audience interaction so even now my 'lectures' are interactive and 'two way'. I like people to ask questions as we go along so understanding is maintained as we progress. Even when presenting in a sales context, which I did for many years selling seminars to groups of one to around one hundred people at a time, I still needed to find ways for the audience to respond as the presentation progressed. I have spent many years enhancing my flexibility as a presenter so I can appeal to as many different styles in an audience as possible and I am still learning. I know other presenters who feel far more comfortable having very little interaction through the body of a formal presentation and who prefer to wait until they have delivered their 'content' and then have questions/discussion about it. The key? Go for what works (of course) and stay open to continue your learning.

### **FRAMING WORKS YET AGAIN**

Your style becomes even more relevant when the presentation is designed to **educate**. Framing is vital to ensure you have the best shot at reaching your outcomes. If I am presenting to a group of senior executives I will gain far more rapport by embarking on a 'simulation' exercise than I will walking in and telling them we are going to do a 'role play'.

Framing can cut through much, if not all, audience resistance to your presentation simply by letting the audience know what you plan to do, how you plan to do it, and why. Lack of relevance is one of the perceptions that will turn your audience off faster than anything else. If you feel your style is not what the audience is used to and yet you feel it is your best option in relation to the outcome for whatever reason - frame it. That way, members of your audience can support themselves and you in achieving what they are there for in a safe and non-threatening way.

## WHAT ABOUT PROPS?

Common perceptions I hear when I ask people about the purpose of props are, 'They are to take the attention off the presenter' or 'They are used to make a point'. **Props are only useful if they help you reach your outcome.** If your outcome is to *survive* the presentation, then a prop which takes the attention from you may well help you reach your outcome!

What is a prop anyway? **Anything** can be used as a prop. The measure of whether to use a prop is simple: Does it help you and the audience reach the outcome? If not, why use it? I remember being given a fantastic plastic toy pointer once that I thought would be a great prop in our seminars. I didn't have anything specific to use it for as I don't use a pointer when presenting so I tried to invent a use for it just so I could use it. Bad idea. I used it a couple of times and although it was fun and novel to use, it added no value - in truth it took away from my presentation. **Note:** Props can support the creative process as well. My 'white elephant' prop could just as easily provoke an idea for getting a message across more effectively. The point is that the prop needs to have a purpose - why use it if it doesn't add value?

Props have commonly come to mean 'crutches' rather than things that support a message in getting across. Think of live theatre - props are what **add to** the production when well used - not crutches for actors to lean on so the audience doesn't pay attention to them. Props in themselves are not good or bad. How they are used determines their value and remember - **you will always be your best prop!**

## **SOME IDEAS ON HOW TO GET INFORMATION ACROSS**

Stories	Webinars
Demonstrations/video	Interview an expert
Questions	Computer enhanced presentations eg:
Practical examples	Power Point
Music	Researching opportunities
Metaphors and analogies	Guest 'experts'
Discussions	Theoretical problem solving
White Boards and flip charts	Games and exercises
Questionnaires	Simulations
Self-exploration	Case Studies
Handouts	Applications that test ideas
Reading and other printed matter eg: diagrams	Activities involving the body eg: active problem solving
Multimedia	Anything active and reality based
Storyboards	Jokes with a message, cartoons, slides, posters
Lecture	

**WHAT ELSE CAN YOU THINK OF???**

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

- Different people have different needs in an audience
- Your style of delivery will reflect the way you prefer to receive
- Explore training opportunities to increase your flexibility and develop your style
- Props are only useful when they help you reach your outcome
- Anything can be used as a prop
- You can frame your style and mode of delivery to maximise results
- YOU are your own best prop

Now we have discovered **why** we are making the presentation, we have determined **what** content we need to deliver and we have looked at **how** we might deliver it, we come to step five, the actual sequence of the presentation.

# **NINETEEN**

## **STEP FIVE – MAP**

This step is simple and logical and organises our material into an appropriate sequence for best results. It gives us a map to follow which will get us where we are heading. This is particularly useful if you need to feel secure that you know where you are going. But just as with any map, once you are confident you know the way you can get there from many different directions and in many different ways. With an ongoing commitment to flexibility your skills will develop more and more so your presentations can be effective and stimulating for all involved.

With the parameters you have established by getting clear about your outcome you will have a fair bit of information already to help you along. The great thing about your presenting maps is that you are the architect so you know how the map was made - ground up. This means even years after designing one, you will still have the process imbedded in your consciousness and all that will be required to bring it to life again is a little review. Isn't it good news we don't have to keep reinventing the wheel?

### **WHERE TO START?**

Some presenters create their maps by starting at the desired destination and working their way back. Starting from the conclusion, summary or whatever finish point they have decided on, they then work back through a time line of the presentation. When preparing my own maps I do several drafts. I can end up all over the place until it starts becoming clear the audience needs 'this' before it will understand 'that', or the audience needs to be inspired to listen before I offer

the most valuable information, which means I need to use some time to frame where we are headed. If there are break times, I sometimes put those in first and work around them. My own maps end up looking like a colourful 'yellow brick road' with joggers and time frames on it that squirm all over the page. Other people have a chart-like format they can easily read and work their way through. As usual, my encouragement is to get curious about what works best for you and do that!

### **WE REMEMBER STARTS AND FINISHES**

Brain research tells us human beings have a higher retention around beginnings and endings so a long presentation needs more than one start and finish. We also recall information best when it is presented in chunks of not more than 45 or 50 minutes with frequent reviews. Humans love regular 'state changes' too. Seriousness punctuated with fun can really help the message get through and be remembered. Your average 20-minute after dinner speech is likely to have a start, middle and ending of some sort. For those occasions this point is relevant only in that it can be useful to be aware that what you present at the beginning and end will stick more easily in the audiences' memories.

We also seem to remember that which we experience for ourselves so make sure what is most important in the presentation is highlighted in ways that empower people in the audience to remember what you want them to, and make it easy to take plenty of value away with them.

### **YOUR MAP IS A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE PRESENTATION**

This step can not only help you organise your thinking, it can provide you with a visual of the whole presentation which then can double as your notes. You can get a lot of information on a map that in a longhand only form can be more bulky

and confusing. A map provides you with an 'at a glance' check-in of where you are up to. It can also help if you include time frames for each piece of the presentation. Some presentations require time frames to be tight whereas with others loose time frames are more acceptable. If you are used to one or the other, learn to be flexible enough to play with both.

### **A NOTE ABOUT NOTES**

The purpose of notes is presumably to support you in ensuring your audience receives all the information you want it to. If you need notes to refer to, let them be part of your commitment to doing a great job and use them openly. Frame them. For instance you could say, "You will notice me using notes - that's because I don't want you to miss out on anything I have to offer today...". Pretending not to have notes or feeling uncomfortable about using them is pointless. So many times I have seen speakers with '3x5' cards they pretend are not snugly in their hand, hoping the audience will pretend they can't see them. Notes are a resource, a prop. If you need them, you need them, end of story. After all, don't notes *help* you help your audience get the message? Why hide notes? Be proud to use them if you need to. Let's love NOTES!

### **CAVEAT ON YOUR MAP**

Remember the caveat on outcomes? Letting go of 'attachment' to the outcome is as important as being willing to **let go of attachment to the structure** in favour of **what works best in the moment**. This is where having a **clear outcome and being 'present'** will always be your best allies. Structure is great. It provides a pathway to your destination. Remember though, there are *many* paths to the same place and the members of your audience and their needs will always be a variable in any presentation.

## HOW ARE WE GOING SO FAR? – REVIEW

Let's assume you are now looking forward to your presenting opportunity. You have clarified *why* you are making it in the first place and know a little about who the audience is, why the people are going to be there, or at least have a plan to find out. From this you have decided on the *outcome* you want from your presentation, or the outcome the audience wants to achieve more common in facilitation environments). You have brainstormed *what* content you believe will reach the outcome and you have sifted through it to come up with the most useful information and/or skills. You have decided *how* best to get the information and/or skills across and have organised your material into a sequence which provides you with a *map* of the presentation overall. By this stage you could walk into your presentation and feel confident you are well prepared indeed but **there is even more support available....**

As important as it is to find a resourceful state for preparation, the next step supports you in accessing that for the presentation itself by **using your mind to imagine or visualise** the best possible scenario - step six. And guess what? You are about to engage one of the most powerful resources you have - if not THE most powerful resource. It's been there all your life, and you have been using it all your life. It's already yours, it has infinite supplies and for everyone everywhere it is absolutely FREE.

## TWENTY

### STEP SIX – VISUALISE

It is now time to mobilise your most magical asset. Einstein said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge”, I believe him. Mentally and emotionally moving ‘towards’ rather than ‘away from’ is what we are going to do next. Before and during your preparation your brain will be working on the presentation in certain ways, depending on how you feel about it all. Visualising (or imagining) is part of your preparation whether you are conscious you do it or not. Often visualising takes the form of ‘what could possibly go wrong and how on earth will I deal with it?’ (It’s called catastrophising). It is useful to be aware of any contingencies that may be required for the presentation but also it helps enormously to have a balance of thinking that is heading you **towards** the direction you want to go rather than away from the direction you don’t.

It is this ‘**towards**’ style of thinking that we are going to take charge of and that step six is all about.

#### **MENTAL POWER IS YOURS TO USE**

Visualising a positive outcome is another step many people miss just because *no one ever taught them how* to use the power of their mind and how to focus it for best results. This and step one are your most valuable assets as a presenter because you can be 100% in control of them both - if you choose to be. No one can make you feel anything you don’t want to and no one can control how you use imagination.

The other steps *may* be in your control but sometimes they won't. Others may tell you the outcome you are there to achieve, the content you must present and even the style and structure to use. This is mostly the case in corporate environments, and sometimes in educational ones where there are standard procedures and material that must be covered which fits in with a particular organisational or system's culture.

Unless you can find an outlet for your own creativity in these arenas you will likely find it difficult after a while to function at your best. In rigid environments it is more difficult for your own style to come through. People who insist on being themselves certainly stand out in these settings and will generally only be tolerated if they get results or the culture celebrates diversity.

Visualising can be used throughout your preparation in both focused and unfocused ways. You could be seeing yourself succeeding (whatever your measure for that is) for months before your presentation or even before you do any written preparation. Some people don't even do any written preparation. This is most common with presenters who are very familiar with their material and who only need to 'order their thoughts' a little before they present. Give them an outcome and a time frame and away they go - they do the whole presentation in their heads.

Muhammad Ali was known for fighting his big fights hundreds of times before he got near a boxing ring. Famous Kiwi cricketer Sir Richard Hadlee saw himself as the No.1 all round cricketer in the world as a young child practising in his garage. Basketballers who only visualise doing perfect free throws score as well, often better, than those who actively practise.

As part of this step, these days I automatically like my audiences ahead of time as part of this step. My visualising goes much further than that though. I will often imagine myself chatting away about what a wonderful audience it was and how much I enjoyed working with them, how it was one 'out of the bag'. I get clear about how I want to feel when I have finished, satisfied I did a good job, happy with the way it went and looking forward to the next opportunity to get up front. I have conversations with my inner coach who tells me it's going to be great and sometimes I even imagine myself 10 years after the presentation telling someone about this fantastic audience I had 10 years ago and how memorable the whole experience was. I imagine going home and telling everyone important in my life what a great time I had and how much I learned. I hear people telling me how much they benefited from the presentation and I hear them telling me all kinds of wonderful success stories about their own presentations as a result. This fantasy gives my brain a direction to align with. It helps when the focus is on providing great service and adding real value.

### **DREAM BIG - AIM HIGH**

Your average run of the mill business presentation is probably not going to provoke a standing ovation but what's the harm in playing with the idea in your head? It's fun to ham it up and get a bit wild. It doesn't mean you have to feel deflated if you don't realise it in the material world but it does help engage all your senses so your system can work towards that reality. This is basically mental and emotional exercise. Instead of rehearsing disaster scenarios, mentally rehearse uplifting ones. Dreaming big and aiming high works better than using your internal critic to pull you down. Get your coach on the job and be prepared to be uplifted!

Our brain is highly suggestible and will easily generate physical responses as a result of our imagination. We can cry in movies even when we know they are not real. Simply the thought of something can evoke a physical and emotional response. Remember our brain will focus on whatever we point it at, so focus on WHAT WORKS. The full power of our own minds has never been even remotely understood, we are still mysteries to ourselves, but more and more research suggests we have a far greater capacity than we can even imagine. Put simply, visualisation works!

## TWENTY- ONE

### STEP SEVEN - COOK IT

'Cooking it' is about **trust and having faith in yourself and your process of life**. It's about trusting your system to prepare for you unconsciously. First you consciously prepare - doing your homework on your preparation as best you can and then **letting it go** and surrendering your prep to your subconscious where it can cook for a while and become even more brilliant! This is another step we intuitively know about already. "I'll sleep on it" is a practical problem solving option for many people and describes what I mean by 'cooking'. It is the process by which we let go of conscious work on something and leave our unconscious to play with it. Cooking is where our best flashes of insight come from. I call it cooking because it's like having all the ingredients in a pot that needs to be left for a while to blend before it's at its best.

Have you ever temporarily forgotten someone's name or a phone number? When do you remember what it was? Often it's at some later time, when involved with something completely unrelated, when the answer pops into awareness like a champagne cork "out of the blue". Our unconscious mind has access to more resources than we are consciously aware of. Cooking our presentation allows infinite creativity ("the blue") to support us in creating the best possible outcome for everyone involved.

#### **AN EXAMPLE**

I remember being nervous about a luncheon presentation I was invited to do for a business-networking group some years ago. I was used to teaching but was

new to this kind of presentation so I was feeling out of my 'comfort zone'. It was certainly more of a 'sprint' presentation than the marathons I was used to at the time. Even so, I was looking forward to the chance to play in this domain and felt clear about what I was trying to achieve. I had prepared the bulk of the content and knew how I was planning to finish.

Basically I was pretty organised *except* for my opening. I didn't have a beginning I was happy with even as I drove to the presentation. My structured preparation time was over and the ball was rolling. I knew I needed to be focused on my 'state' rather than thinking about content - it was too late for that so I resigned myself to making a reasonably simple introduction with a view to getting straight into my material (which I rationalised would be an ok way to begin). The next moment I drove up behind a bus that had a sign on the back with a profoundly relevant quote on it. I can no longer recall what it was but it was there, the perfect opening, right in front of me in the middle of the traffic. Not only did I now have an opening quote, I had a great story about how I came to get it in the first place. The point is, when we truly let go, there is room for other support to come in. Serendipity, synchronicity, providence or fate, whatever you label it, there is a dynamic interplay happening in us and around us that we are all part of and which is beyond what we control as individuals and which, when accessed, provides us with unforeseen resources at the most opportune times. There is no need to seek proof of this dynamic or to understand how it works, just be glad it does, trust it, stay open, and you will find the support you need is there - every time.

## **LETTING GO**

Some people find it hard at the level of 'how to' let go as I am suggesting. The key is to interrupt the pattern of thinking that keeps you 'attached' to the

presentation. Go for a walk, go to the beach, engage in something completely different. Meditation is an excellent practice in this regard because it helps us slip beyond our conscious mind to a place of infinite creativity and stillness.

Another way of doing this is to consciously hand over your preparation to your inner coach and trust them to keep working on it while you go about your business. Anything else that will interrupt your conscious working of the material will help. Find what works for you.

**THE 'KEY' KEYS TO PREPARATION? Get crystal clear about your purpose.** Go for clarity of your desired outcome and visualise it frequently. Do your homework and trust your brain, body and the 'blue' to do the rest.

## TWENTY-TWO

### STEP EIGHT - PRACTISE AND EVALUATE

By practise I mean find audiences to present to. Take every opportunity you can to present and learn in this context. Regular evaluation will help you make rapid progress especially if you fully employ your inner coach, focus on what works and be flexible and willing to explore what could work even better. As you become more confident and committed to your audiences, you will feel better and better about presenting, and more likely to create the results you want. Seek out feedback from people that you know believe in you and want you to do your best.

#### DITCH THE CRITICS AND KEEP COACHING

Whatever else you do, allow no one to pull you down. If others laugh or undermine, if they do not share your enthusiasm, don't let them dampen yours. Keep the critics in your life to a minimum, **starting with you**, and use a coaching approach instead, then you will naturally keep improving just as you do when you learn to play tennis or the piano or anything else. Use the appropriate nutrients and the garden *will* grow and mature but you do need to keep an eye out for weeds that will take over if left to their own mischief.

Your ever-strengthening state will leave you looking forward to your next opportunity. When you are enjoying learning about something don't you keep looking forward to your next opportunity to practise? Practise in the presenting game means getting out and doing it. You can learn about the theory of riding a bicycle till you're blue in the face. In order to actually learn to ride you have to

ride - and risk falling off! (And you probably will at some stage but hey - does that stop us going for the freedom we have when we've mastered it?)

## **REHEARSAL VS UNDERSTANDING**

I am not big on recording myself or 'rehearsing' out loud as such. I find it easier to talk through the ideas I will be presenting with someone else for the purpose of understanding what I am talking about. For other people rehearsing performs the same function or at least just practising talking out loud about anything at all. It's amazing how quickly you will get used to it. The point is we need to feel comfortable that we understand what we are trying to get across. *We are the first person who needs to understand our message* before anyone else is going to. This is different to rehearsing for the purposes of remembering what to say, which has been a traditional approach. That is, I write my speech, memorise it and then 'perform it' - not necessarily the best idea if you want to be received as natural from a space of being 'present'.

## **AN EXAMPLE**

This was often the case when as a police officer I had occasion to present in a courtroom environment. Court can 'wobble' a layperson's state quite easily because of all the formality involved and the severity of the situation. What you say must be accurate or you are open to charges of perjury, misleading and the like. When it comes to giving evidence in court the police provide the prosecutor with what is called a 'brief of evidence'. This is a statement from the officer of the evidence they will offer. The prosecutor can then use the brief to draw out that information from the officer by asking questions.

Many officers were so afraid of public speaking they learned their briefs off by heart. They could remember verbatim what was written down so when the

prosecutor asked them what happened...they started at the top of the page in their head and worked their way down. This sounds very impressive when you are there until the prosecutor interrupts and asks a question for clarification. I have seen officers go blank at that point, bring themselves into the present to answer the question and then go to carry on and... BLANK. One officer I saw actually started right back at the beginning and had to repeat all his evidence in order to get to the points he still had to make. The whole situation became excruciatingly uncomfortable for everyone present. Can you imagine that young policeman ever arresting anyone again?

This is the danger of rehearsing verbatim. Not only is it not real, you can end up sounding like a robot - we all know reading aloud is quite different to conversational speech. Even when we try and sound conversational in a speech, if we are 'reading' it in our heads it will still sound like we are reading aloud because in a way we are. When you trust yourself to be present, and you actually *want to share* the knowledge you have prepared and have notes to jog you if you need them, the whole experience is so much easier and infinitely more enjoyable.

## **WRAP UP**

You now know the basics of preparing that have worked for me and thousands of others that help us feel more secure in ourselves and organised in our thinking. This information will help build your confidence because you will be clear of the purpose for your presentation. Take your time and familiarise yourself with this preparation offering and modify it to suit your needs. Remember it will work as well for written presentations as spoken ones. There is no one right way to prepare so you guessed it....find what works for *you*.

## WHAT'S IMPORTANT IN PART THREE?

- Think about what your audience's needs are and do your best to meet them
- Framing creates relevance, emotional safety, meaning and common understanding
- Reframing is an excellent self-help tool and can be used to empower others
- Be clear about your state and attitudes for best results
- Understanding the outcome of your presentation helps clarify the purpose for you and your audience
- Allow your creative juice to flow using brainstorming and maps to choose your content
- Keep exploring your own style and be flexible to meet your audience where *they* are
- Mapping your presentation will help you feel secure you know where you are going
- Your mind is a powerful resource so use it to visualise where you want to end up
- Practice and evaluation help you make rapid progress
- Take full responsibility for the results you get - and keep letting them teach you to be even more effective

## **TWENTY-THREE**

### **WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

And now our journey really begins. We have done our 'book learning' now and no doubt life (as usual) will provide the exams to go with it. That's when the fun really starts, and I mean that so sincerely. Taking a self-development approach to presentation skills is definitely the challenging option as I suggested right back at the beginning. Everything you have read and the exercises you have done are designed to support you in feeling empowered as a person who makes presentations. It is now up to you what you do with the information and understanding you have. If you choose to take on the material presented here you will find your awareness and skills growing rapidly. You might notice this has been happening already. This awareness will continue to provoke your own learning and crafting of presentations and enhance your overall effectiveness and satisfaction. With your internal coach engaged you will find you are capable of so much more than you thought possible.

No book will teach you as well as experience can though. There will no doubt be times you make glorious mistakes and hopefully plenty of others where you experience the satisfaction of knowing you have done the job well. All experiences can add to our learning - if we allow them to. As one of my wise teachers once told me "It isn't our growing that hurts, it's our resistance to it!". Your attitude towards taking responsibility for your own life long learning will have a huge impact on how you feel and what you do with the results you create in every presentation. My encouragement of course is to focus on 'what works' and keep doing it. Remind yourself of the principles we have discussed and

continue to develop your relationship with your internal coach - the generous part of you that feels only joy in your happiness. Every experience will be different and a wonderful opportunity to practise honing your skills. Awareness has inherent organising power of its own. Self-coaching, framing and the 8-step preparation plan are the main 'skills' to focus on developing. The other information and principles simply need a little attention whenever you remember. Your own system will take care of their integration into your being. Plant healthy seeds in fertile soil, add water and sunlight and those seeds will grow all by themselves, all you must do is keep them safe from that which might harm them - so it is with us.

I remind you again of what I said in Chapter One....

- **Presenting is not a mystery - we are the mystery.** When you are curious, you inquire. When you inquire, you get answers. You are the biggest mystery of all and to remain open to yourself and your potential will serve you better than any other strategy I am aware of. Follow your inner whistle. Trust your intuitive responses, they do not make mistakes. We are all a part of a bigger mystery called life. Technology will not evolve us on its' own. We must be willing to look *inside* for solutions. **Willingness** is what will lead to miracles.
- **When I am willing to be a learner I make the fastest progress.** Learning is exponential. The more we learn, the more we *can* learn *and* the easier it gets. Traditional forms of teaching have sometimes disempowered us as learners. To progress you may need to retrain yourself mentally and emotionally as a learner. You can support yourself by being willing to accept 'Everyone is doing the best they can with the

resources they have'. This principle includes you. Be forgiving and compassionate towards yourself and treat yourself with the greatest respect. You deserve nothing less. Be patient with your process. With commitment and patience your progress will be sound and lasting - and you can continue learning as long as you choose to.

- **Inner freedom comes from self-acceptance.** When we feel free we have no need for a fear response to dominate our 'state'. Inner freedom is empowering. Whatever this life holds for us we are all in it together. Inner freedom is an ongoing choice that evolves from being willing to see ourselves as 'part of' instead of 'separate from'. Choose love instead of fear and tolerance instead of judgement. You are a precious gift. Your contribution is important and so is the contribution of everyone else.
- **Self-criticism is the biggest hurdle.** Effective coaching really does work. Use criticism for 'fixing things' and keep it away from people, especially you. Develop your relationship with the part of you who believes unequivocally in you. Trust that part of you and watch how fast you grow. Be the best student you can be for your coach and you both win, and so do your audiences.
- **We all do our best to survive.** We all do things at times that in hindsight we wish we had done differently. That's part of life and part of how we learn. Know that you and others do the best you can with what you have available at the time. That includes emotional resources as well as practical ones. Make peace with your past. Forgive yourself and others their mistakes. When we are not run by our past we can live in the present moment. The here and now is where the action is. In the present

we can make the best use of what is happening now instead of being trapped by conditioning which no longer serves us. Support yourself with guidance from professionals who can enable you to work with any unresolved matters you are unable to tackle effectively on your own. You do not need to walk alone. I see the game as *gently* composting our past while *gently* ending to our futures.

- **Confidence evolves from the inside out.** Your confidence will evolve as you treat yourself well and accept you are never alone in your endeavours. Belief in yourself and your contribution underpins self-confidence. Trust and faith in your intent and in 'who you are' underpins self-confidence. Knowing you are part of something far greater than yourself as an individual can empower you to add your flavour to the collective without reservation and without attachment to what is done with it. Find what your heart desires and choose it with all your might and you can afford to feel confident you are fulfilling your unique part in the scheme of things.
- **Practice makes progress.** Be bold. Being with any audience is a privilege. Honour the opportunity and trust yourself to do the best you can. Look honestly at your results and be flexible in your thinking and behaviour so your best becomes more and more effective. Every presenting opportunity is an opportunity to learn and grow and contribute who you are to the collective. Actively seek out feedback from people who want you to 'win'. Respectfully stay clear of those who would seek to undermine you or bring you down. Allow yourself to be excited about your own life journey; it is an ongoing unfolding miracle.

Our lives are our stage. Take on your roles with enthusiasm and play your part the best you can. Rest assured there are many others just like you who want to find more empowering ways of being in the world of presenting. We set the tone. We make the difference, every single one of us. It is up to us if we want to experience life as a presenter differently. If any of what you have read here resonates, run with it and see where it leads. We are all like mystery parcels just waiting to be unwrapped. There are many, many layers to us that seem to be revealed only when we are ready and willing to see them.

## **YOU CAN SPEAK CLEARLY NOW**

The pain has gone as soon as you say so. Think about it, the essence of humanity is a wondrous thing. Dare to express your own unique version of that. I choose to believe in the positive potential of humanity - can you?

My very best to yours,  
Amanda Fleming

**PS** I welcome any and all feedback regarding your experience of this book and the results it brings you. If you have questions or ideas that will enhance future editions, feel free to email me via our web site at [www.amandafleming.co.nz](http://www.amandafleming.co.nz)

**The End...**

**and**

**The Beginning...**

**PPS** If you enjoyed this book you might enjoy Amanda's second book '**ACTIVATE YOUR HUMAN SUPERPOWERS – a path to your potential**', available as an ebook on Amazon or in paperback from our website.