

PRESENTING YOURSELF

There are four basic skills essential to making effective presentations.

Your most valuable visual aid is yourself. Successful presenters research their audiences, presentation locations and the culture of their environment. It is vital that you look and sound like someone worth listening too and knows what you're talking about. Actions do speak louder than words! Your best message can be drowned out by appearances that distract or confuse the audience.

POSTURE

Posture is the foundation of your presenting style. Regardless of whether you are standing, sitting or 'leaning' on a stool, there are some basic posture techniques that will enhance your appearance and ability to make effective and credible presentations. Your upper torso needs to be upright and as fully extended as possible to allow your lungs maximum capacity for air. Your feet need to be level, flat and secure on the floor to prevent swaying or wiggling legs. Hands are most effective six inches from the body, above the waist and below the forehead. Clothing should be comfortable and loose enough to avoid pinching or chaffing, but tailored.

GESTURES

A majority of all communicated messages are non-verbal. Research has shown that non-verbal gestures (facial) constitute more than 50% of a first impression after 2 minutes of conversation. Hand gestures will enable you to add visual emphasis to your most powerful words, burn up anxious energy and increase the audience's attention to and retention of your message. Lecterns, pointers, markers and remote controls inhibit your gestures and reduce the impact of the most powerful communication tool that you have. They should be used sparingly and only when essential. Power Point animations, assistants and automated slide projectors will help free the power of your gestures.

VOICE

Effective speakers can increase their credibility with a well controlled voice. Remember you may be nervous but they don't have to know you are. Proper posture and good gestures add quality and effectiveness to your voice. Controlling the speed, volume and pitch of your voice will enable you to highlight key messages, restore attention and aid audience retention. Distractions can be overcome by a raised volume, sorrow can be felt with a somber tone and joy can be made infectious with a happy voice.

EYE CONTACT

Every culture has specific expectations about eye contact. Successful presenters must know and observe those expectations. Generally American audiences expect to be "looked in the eye." Visually scanning audiences gives presenters additional information about participant's level of acceptance on an ongoing basis. This feedback can be crucial to a successful presentation.