

1 Creating Your Own Style

*Being liked and trusted is about having charisma.
Having charisma comes from having a style.*

IS THIS YOU?

- I was taught to present in one way but it doesn't seem to work all the time. ● People don't always seem interested in what I am presenting.
- I find it difficult to stand still when I present. ● People in the audience start talking to each other, ignoring me completely. ● My boss keeps enquiring about progress but doesn't seem to be interested when I give a detailed presentation at team meetings.



- 1 COMMUNICATING AT THE RIGHT LEVEL
- 2 SELECTING THE RIGHT STYLE
- 3 USING EFFECTIVE BODY LANGUAGE
- 4 TAKING CONTROL

things that
really matter

Presentations are very powerful communication tools and can work to your advantage as well as disadvantage. The style with which you present has a great importance in the success of your presentation. The trick is to find the style that **suits your personality and fits the situation**. You will undoubtedly have to present in a multitude of situations. If your style is always formal, you may find it hard to reach your audience in an informal setting. Your style should reflect your personality as closely as possible. However, sometimes you need to employ certain techniques to adapt to the situation and deliver your message effectively. Actors, for example, don't always play parts that fully reflect their personalities, but they employ techniques to get the part right, adding a personal touch to it. You can therefore see personal characteristics of an actor in both the villain and the virtuous roles.

Employing certain techniques can help you give a suitable performance at the right occasion.

① COMMUNICATING AT THE RIGHT LEVEL

The way you talk is a major contributor to the style of your presentation. Although you should be yourself and talk as you normally do, you may tend to put on an artificial accent and behaviour when put under pressure. To be yourself under these conditions is easier said than done.

In order to reach the required degree of confidence and relaxation, it is necessary to train and prepare yourself before you face the audience. Once the training and rehearsals are completed, you feel more confident to think about what you want to say, as you do not have to worry about the way you say it.

The style with which you present largely depends on the way you normally talk. Some presenters talk as if they are reading from a newspaper, without any emphasis, pauses or body movements. This can grab the audience's attention for a very short period, after which their interest in the presentation will rapidly fade. Some presenters can be so monotonous that their audience find it difficult to stay awake. Going to the other extreme may not be suitable either. You need to find the level at which your audience would like you to communicate with them, then find the

right balance between the extremes and employ techniques which ensure that your audience maintains their interest, and takes in all the points you wish to put across.

Here are a few suggestions to help you gain and hold the interest of your audience.

Tell it like a story. Presenting your ideas in the same way that you would tell a story to a friend is very effective in gaining the audience's undivided attention and trust. It involves a great deal of enthusiasm and a structured flow of events leading to the conclusion. People enjoy listening to a story whether it is about the new stationery or the annual operating plan. No matter how boring or complicated the content of the presentation, it becomes more interesting if you adopt this method of delivery.

Speak with a moderate speed. If you talk too quickly, you may lose the listener. On the other hand, if you are telling your story at a slow pace, you will bore them to death. Moderation is the best option – it keeps the audience interested and looking forward to hearing what is coming next.

I have to present in a foreign language. I have a strong accent and I'm worried I might make a fool of myself.

Avoid an artificial accent. Do not worry too much about your accent. If you have a regional accent, or you are presenting in a foreign language, trying to change the way you talk adds to the things you have to think about when presenting, which may confuse you. There is nothing wrong with having an accent which is different from the one your audience has. Instead of trying to change your accent, concentrate on speaking clearly and with a moderate speed, to make sure that everyone understands and can follow what you're saying.

2 SELECTING THE RIGHT STYLE

There are two main presentation styles:

- formal
- informal.

Variations and combinations of both exist. Choose which to use according to the occasion.

I was asked to present at a conference, which I have never done before. Should I present in the same way I do with my colleagues?

In some situations, it is necessary to give a **formal talk** to a group of people. Occasions like sales meetings, public lectures, etc., require careful preparation and a formal style.

Again, there isn't one single right style for formal presentations. But there are some basic aspects of the presentation, to which personal variations can be added, and which can be used on different formal occasions.

- **Dressing appropriately.** It is important to be dressed formally and to the standard required by the occasion. A smart look could help boost your confidence, as well as the audience's confidence in you. This shows the audience that you respect them and have made the effort to dress appropriately.
- **Using the right language.** Using formal but simple language, with some funny remarks when appropriate, is one of the best ways to maintain your credibility and keep the audience interested. When faced with a formal situation, some people use over-elaborate and complicated words. Try to resist the temptation. You need to leave your audience with no room for misinterpretation.

- **Using cartoons or pictures on your slides.** Use your slides to tell some of the jokes. A formal slide is not necessarily one with words and complicated sentences. Funny sketches on your slides may be very effective in driving a point home, as well as entertaining the audience.
- **Introducing yourself and thanking the audience.** If there are people in the audience who don't know you, make sure you introduce yourself. You should also conclude by thanking everyone for being there and answering any questions if applicable.

Informal presentations range from a progress meeting with your project team, to a two-minute talk with your boss. At such occasions most people in the audience know you. Some traditional presentation techniques – the ones we have drummed into our heads on training courses – may not apply to informal situations. For instance, there is no need to introduce yourself at the beginning to your immediate colleagues. You can afford to experiment with a few jokes as your colleagues are a friendlier audience. In such situations, remember the following:

- Address your audience as you would **normally** on a one-to-one basis.
- Be **brief** and **to the point** without getting too comfortable and forgetting about the time.
 - the chances are that you know quite a lot about these people so use **examples** to which they can relate.
 - Don't hesitate to make your presentation interactive if

- Turn it into a conversation and invite contributions.
- When appropriate, ask the experts in the audience to **confirm** your theories or assumptions. Use that to gain their support.

Occasionally your manager or a senior colleague will ask you the classic question: 'how are things going?' This is an opportunity for you to give a **one-minute presentation** without visual aids. This obviously requires a very informal style. However, be very brief, concise and to the point. If you feel that the boss is too busy and you need more time to explain your point, book a slot with him or her to discuss matters further.

③ USING EFFECTIVE BODY LANGUAGE

When you look at people in the street, it is amazing how much you can tell about them by simply observing their **body language**.

Usually people form an impression about you within the first five minutes of meeting face-to-face. When presenting an hour is, in most cases, the maximum time you have to keep or change that impression.

Your body language has a lot to do with that impression. People described as 'charismatic' are those who are liked for no apparent reason. These people tend to be noticed as they enter a room. This is mainly achieved by the way they do and say things.

When presenting, your body language should reflect a confident, truthful and trustworthy personality, with a good sense of humour. It helps you convince people more. Following are some indicators on how to use your body language effectively.

Using your hands

- Use your hands to invite the audience to accept your point by having your palms upwards.
- Keep your palms open and your fingers together when moving your hands, release your fingers into a natural position if your hand is simply hanging on the side.
- Avoid closing your hand firmly as this can be interpreted as aggressive.
- Avoid rubbing your hands as this is a sign of nervousness.
- Use a pointer to keep one of your hands busy, but don't fiddle with it.
- Pointing with one finger at the audience can be interpreted as a warning sign. If this is not the intention, avoid doing it.
- Co-ordinate your hand movements with your words.

Using facial expressions and eye contact

- Use your eyebrows to articulate your feelings. When they point up, like when asking a question, you are inviting people to accept your suggestion. When frowning, coupled with the appropriate hand movement, you help people focus on a point with you.
- Move your head around and look people in the eye. Do not focus on one person only.

- Look at people even if they are not looking at you. People tend to look at your visual aids projected behind you for most of the time. Sometimes they might take their eyes off them and expect to see you talking to them and not looking at the piece of paper in front of you.

Controlling your movement

- Restrict your movements to the necessary ones. Some nervous presenters tend to take a few steps back every time they look up at the audience, then move forward when they look at their notes or the overhead projector (OHP).
- Face the audience, not the board behind you. If you are using any kind of projection equipment, especially an OHP, it is very important not to keep looking back at the projected image. This makes you look nervous and irritates the audience.

④ TAKING CONTROL

By applying the techniques discussed earlier in this chapter, you leave little reason for the audience to be irritated or annoyed. Now take a further step and try to **keep them interested in your presentation** without giving you trouble. To do that, they must feel relaxed and on top of what is being said. If you are in **control**, you can achieve that easily.

It is more about controlling yourself than the audience. Once you are in full control of your actions and nerves, you can feel more comfortable in interacting with your audience. The following points will help you achieve that.

- **Show your interest** in the subject. If you're not interested why should they be?

- Define the structure of your presentation, and don't deviate too much and too often.
- Involve the audience by asking specific questions and guiding them to the answers shortly afterwards.
- Be confident.

One of the best ways to feel confident and less nervous is to practise. Practice boosts your confidence and helps you stay in control.

Like a sports game, the more time and effort you spend practising, the better you become.

Tips on how you can rehearse effectively

- Choose a topic that you feel passionately about and prepare a five-minute presentation on it.
- Stand in front of a mirror and present to yourself.
- Repeat this several times, each time observing a different aspect of your style.
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- Try to change any habits which contradict the rules of the game described in this chapter.
- Experiment with the various techniques and find out which ones suit the occasion you are pretending to be in.
- Try to film yourself with a video camera if one is available.
- Replay the film and observe yourself. This will help you find your mistakes and correct them.
- Get a friend to watch you and give you constructive criticism.
- Do not give up easily; it takes time to change old habits.



MAKING WHAT MATTERS WORK FOR YOU

✓ Communicate at the right level with people. Deliver your presentation in the same way that you would tell a story to a friend and moderate your speed.

✓ Select the right style for the occasion. Decide whether the situation warrants a formal or informal style.

✓ Use your body language to make people feel at ease and gain their trust.

✓ Be in control of the situation. Don't let your nerves make you drift and lose your audience.