**Blog #1 – All About U**

In this blog, I will be addressing some questions about my attitude towards and experiences with delivering presentations.

**What is your general attitude about giving presentations?**

Presentations are great. A well-crafted performance by an individual or group of cooperators delivering information on a topic to spread knowledge is a wonderful medium for conveying knowledge. A single presentation on any given subject can be adjusted slightly in the level of detail and jargon used in order to target the expected audience more effectively. This approach for delivering educational segments to large and diverse audiences is not only effective, but also efficient on larger scales, due to the ability of a good presentation to adapt to the listener.

This is all, however, circumstantial. Rolling back, I would like to add a caveat: Presentations are great *if the presenter understands what makes a good presentation*. Personally, I tend to associate informatic presentations with artistic outlets such as musicals and concerts. Why do I do this? I do this because I have asked myself this question:

*Aren’t musicals, concerts, ballets, etc. also presentations?*

I believe that most people would agree that they are. Like with any other type of presentation, being able to effectively deliver informatic presentations requires one to hone a particular set of skills. Just as a calligraphy artist must learn the form for holding a fountain pen, a speaker must also learn the form for ordering ideas and displaying meaningful visuals. Anybody can learn to do these things with practice, but I believe that – as it is with any form of art – not everybody has an affinity for giving good presentations. Some people can just do it naturally, and some will always find the practice difficult regardless of the effort invested. This leads into my answer to the next question:

**What do you like and dislike about giving presentations?**

There is nothing I dislike ***about*** giving presentations. I simply believe there is probably someone better for the responsibility. I do not believe the question is very good for capturing my perspective. I will try to make this clear by briefly going over my short history with presentations.

I do not believe myself to be a great presenter. For this reason alone, I do not like to give presentations. Regardless of this fact, I give presentations all of the time. I have been working as a dedicated software engineer for almost two years. Doing what I do, I must give presentations almost every day about technical issues, solutions, and progress. At first, this was very difficult for me. I used to be a very rigid and methodical person who believed there was one correct way to do everything, including presentations. If I did not know that one way, or something went wrong, I had trouble coping. I realized eventually that the people that I am talking to are just people like me. I do not need to give them a flashy presentation because frankly they do not care. This epiphany allowed me to cope with these presentations because I was able to consider it more of a one-way conversation that I could hold as casually as was acceptable in a professional environment.

Unfortunately, this has not solved all my presentation-giving woes. When I give a presentation in which my content AND delivery matters, I still have a very hard time, though not as hard as before. There remain some issues in presenting ability that I have yet to figure out how to rectify.

**What do you feel that you do well / not so well?**

It will be easier to explain why I still have issues with presentations if I first go over what areas of presentation delivery with which I have attained a workable degree of comfort. I mentioned that delivery-integral presentations, though still difficult, are personally easier than they used to be. What I am not is a nervous presenter. I think everybody gets a little bit nervous about irregular (not on a long-term repetitive schedule) presentations, including myself, but I am very capable of dealing with pressure internally. I attribute this to the many solo movements I had the responsibility of executing as a young musician. I am also a great gatherer of information for presentations. I am very good at collecting then reducing or expanding the scope of detail in a particular area of a presentation. This goes hand-in-hand with my last presentation affinity which is to profile my audience and draw attention as I see fit. I am constantly aware of what people with whom I interact are aware about me and what I am talking about. I can adjust technical detail to adapt a presentation, and I am confident in my ability to use visuals to add effect but also practice restraint in such use. I try not to make my PowerPoint transitions and animations too flashy, as the animation is not the focus of the presentation. I only see their value in assisting the audience with processing the presented information when timing is considered.

I think a fair amount of people would see someone with this skillset as well-equipped to deliver effective presentations. However, there I lack traits that allow event decent presenters to do so. I am not able to effectively design a presentation such that ideas seem well connected. This results in long awkward pauses as I page through the various talking points in my presentation. I have also witnessed this causing some incoherence in the audience’s digestion of the presentation and a disconnect between them and I about the presentation’s main purpose. Even with this, I think the most detrimental missing quality is my inability to improvise. One of the first real presentations that I ever gave was the final presentation for the freshman communications class. This presentation was a disaster for me. Before the presentation, I spent many hours preparing by memorizing my lines, and I was confident that I would be able to recite them. But when the time came, I could not, and I did not know what to do. I stood there dumfounded for probably 30 seconds. To this day, I am amazed that the professor passed me in that class. This was my first “presentation” mistake, and it taught me not to depend on memorizing my lines. Even still, I am not able to adapt to unexpected issues in my presentations. Just like then, I will get hung up. In those few instances where I have tried to improvise, I tended to say things that sound awkward and out of place. These are what I believe cause me not be an effective presenter. However, I have felt that there is a work-around.

**Are there certain types of presentations or types of presentation content you prefer over others?**

Certainly! I can quickly summarize such a presentation with two qualities:

* The audience does not know what to expect
* I am passionate about the topic

I believe that presenting about a topic that makes you passionate is beneficial for any presenter. I have more drive and understanding of what I am talking about and can better adjust to the audience and recover from errors in my presentation. On this topic, I would like to say that I do not like to give presentations about myself. One of my personality qualities, which I have been continuously developing in order to become a more approachable person, is that I do not like to brag about myself. I prefer to let my skills and actions speak for the kind of person I am and allow other people to form their own opinions. Forward presentations about my qualities directly contradict this, and as such I wish I did not have to do them. Generally, I do not feel passionate about showing off.

The other comfort for me is that the audience does not have any form of direction for the content of the presentation other than maybe a title. To circle back to my time as a musician, something that my mentors will always tell me is that the audience will usually not know when I make a mistake if I can recover and move on. This concept is only valid because the audience does not see the score, only the title and maybe the composer. When I give a presentation guided by PowerPoint slides, I feel obligated to talk about everything that the PowerPoint contains. Maybe I am running out of time and I want to speed up, or I get the feeling that I am losing the audience and do not want to go in depth on some more technical points. With just notes for myself, I can do this – the audience does not know what I have written for myself. With visuals, however, they see everything that I have planned. It may be irrational, but I do not feel good about including details and not elaborating on them. When the content of the presentation can not be inferred or expected, I feel that my presentations become much more fluid, natural, and palatable by the audience. In short, I prefer not to present with PowerPoint presentations.

**How did you prepare for P1?**

By the time I was due to present for this, I was already aware of what my qualities were as a presenter. I considered everything that I have laid out in this document and did my best to work within the requirements. This presentation was assigned with a very short notice. Luckily (or perhaps unfortunately), I have a presentation template that I created for giving presentations about myself at work. This template consists of some preconfigured themes, pictures, and transitions, and speeds up the assembly process for my presentation visuals and allows for more time to focus on organizing the content. Lamentably, this template did not perform well during the actual presentation. I had considered technical issues, but I was not prepared for the possibility that the machine giving my presentation would struggle to process animations. In retrospect, I believe my presentation would have been better without the transitions and animations solely for this reason.

As I went through the rest of the Friday on which the presentation was assigned, I made sure to stop around my way and check to see what I can use to supplement the presentation. I considered using the wireless mouse I use at the office as a clicker. I also went through the good clothes that my brother had me dry clean and made compromises on what I can wear to meet the business formal requirement. In the end, my choices were down to his oversized suit and matching slacks versus my perfectly-fitting but out-of-place tuxedo. I found online some cases where others had to make this decision, and the suggestion was unanimously to choose the oversized suit over the tuxedo.

Practicing the presentation was the last thing I did. I had a lot of engagements that weekend including a ballet recital, so I did not have a chance to practice with my workmates like we usually do. I ended up practicing on my wife and using her feedback to better highlight some flat talking points and keep note of others that were difficult to convey. Ultimately, I feel that my inability to adapt to technical issues were major impairments to my presentation. The lagging PowerPoint transitions were one thing that I could have managed myself, but I did not have control over the flow of the slides. The mouse that I wanted to use did not work, and Paige was not familiar enough with my presentation to know not to click again during the lag. I cannot blame her, as it was out of her hands and I believe this would have happened regardless of who volunteered to click for me. It was not all bad, though, and I think that, ignoring the disconnect between the slides and my speaking, as well as the awkward moments that arose therefrom, my presentation was decent.