

COMMUNICATION SKILLS: EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION

This is a brief summary of some communication fundamentals for speaking and making presentations to groups, clients or managers. These are not tricks or techniques that can be used superficially. They are basic principles that, when understood and genuinely applied, lay the ground for effective communication and interaction. The three principles described deal respectively with advance preparation, self-awareness, and actual execution.

1. BE PREPARED

It is assumed that you have gathered and understood the information you wish to present. The following steps will enrich your own understanding and increase your confidence in your presentation:

Know your audience

Understand and respect the perspectives, needs and expectations of your audience.

Contemplate

Take time to question your own assumptions, anticipate other questions or challenges that might arise, and consider alternate points of view.

Simplify

Mentally reduce the parts of your presentation to a simple "shape," with a beginning, middle and end.

2. BE YOURSELF

The main obstacles to good presentation are embarrassment and arrogance, and there is a natural tendency to drift toward one or the other when one is ill at ease. If this tendency is recognized, then embarrassment can become confidence and arrogance can become openness. An attitude of confident openness on the part of a speaker inspires the same in an audience and leads to positive interaction. Think "two-way process," not "one-way presentation."

Confidence

Trust yourself just as you are--you have your own integrity and style. If you experience anxiety, cultivate simple awareness of the immediate situation and a sense of curiosity.

Openness

Don't fake it, or try to be monolithic in order to prove you are right. If you don't know something, just say so without feeling apologetic. Create a hospitable space for others to think and speak.

3. COMMUNICATE

The four steps of the actual communication process are described here briefly, and elaborated in separate descriptions which draw on the work of several writers.

1. Express

Take your time and respect your own speech. (See *Six Points of Mindful Speech*).

2. Listen

Commit to really listening and understanding what others have to say. (See Covey's *Habit Five: Seek first to understand, then to be understood*).

3. Clarify

Ask questions, examine assumptions, and clarify meanings and definitions. (See Bethanis on the use of *bridging metaphor*).

4. Generate

Following the first three steps will create the space for natural synergy to arise, fostering participation and innovative thinking. (See Covey's *Habit Five: Synergize*).