

10 reasons you must buy this book and avoid "death by slide-show"!

1. Most business audiences have a single objective: to get out of the room.
2. Most business presenters have a single objective: to sit down in the audience again.
3. Most corporate audiences can't remember, 24 hours later, what was presented, the title of the presentation or the presenter's name.
4. Like it or not, 55% of the persuasive power of a presentation is transmitted by the speaker's body language, 38% by the speaker's voice tone and only 7% by the content.
5. 75% of speaker-nerves disappear with correct rehearsal.
6. You can discover how to generate applause when you want it.
7. There is a simple model you can use which will create a terrific presentation for you every time.
8. Bullet points are not what slides are for, and using all capital letters makes long stretches of text very hard to read.
9. Reading words off slides (as most presenters do) puts your audience to sleep in about 30 seconds.
10. Good presenters are very rare. When you become a good presenter you can often negotiate better employment terms, a higher salary, and even get yourself promoted – I did... so can you!

OTHER TITLES IN THE SERIES



visit our website at:
www.marshallcavendish.com/genref

mc Marshall Cavendish
Business



PRESENTATION SKILLS FOR QUIVERING WRECKS Marshall Cavendish Business

For Review Only

BOB ETHERINGTON



PRESENTATION SKILLS

FOR QUIVERING WRECKS

For Review Only

PRESENTATION SKILLS
FOR QUIVERING WRECKS

For Review Only

PRESENTATION SKILLS FOR QUIVERING WRECKS

Bob Etherington

For Review Only

Copyright © 2006 Bob Etherington

Reprinted 2020

First published in 2006

This facsimile reprint edition (with new cover) published in 2018 by
Marshall Cavendish Business

An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International



All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Requests for permission should be addressed to the Publisher, Marshall Cavendish International (Asia) Private Limited, 1 New Industrial Road, Singapore 536196. Tel: (65) 6213 9300.

E-mail: genrefsales@sg.marshallcavendish.com

Website: www.marshallcavendish.com/genref

The publisher makes no representation or warranties with respect to the contents of this book, and specifically disclaims any implied warranties or merchantability or fitness for any particular purpose, and shall in no event be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damage, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

Other Marshall Cavendish Offices:

Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 99 White Plains Road, Tarrytown NY 10591-9001, USA • Marshall Cavendish International (Thailand) Co Ltd, 253 Asoke, 12th Flr, Sukhumvit 21 Road, Klongtoey Nua, Wattana, Bangkok 10110, Thailand • Marshall Cavendish (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd, Times Subang, Lot 46, Subang Hi-Tech Industrial Park, Batu Tiga, 40000 Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia.

Marshall Cavendish is a registered trademark of Times Publishing Limited

National Library Board Singapore Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Name(s): Etherington, Bob.

Title: Presentation skills for quivering wrecks / by Bob Etherington.

Description: Singapore : Marshall Cavendish Business, 2018. |

First published: 2006.

Identifier(s): OCN 1014491488 | ISBN 978-981-4794-70-1 (paperback)

Subject(s): LCSH: Business presentations. | Public speaking.

Classification: DDC 658.452--dc23

Cover design by Lorraine Aw

Printed in Singapore

Contents

Section 1	Introduction	1
Section 2	The art of “don’t worry” for the quivering wreck	17
Section 3	Prior preparation prevents pathetically poor performance	31
Section 4	The language of mime — almost	89
Section 5	I’m a big executive not “an actor” ... unfortunately you’re wrong	99
Section 6	Ah yes ... you probably can’t see that at the back	109
Section 7	It’ll be all right on the night	137
Section 8	Dealing with the “Clinically Difficult”	145

For Review Only

SECTION 1

There are always three speeches, for every one you actually gave. The one you prepared, the one you gave, and the one you wish you gave.

DALE CARNEGIE

Introduction

“Testing ... testing 1 ... 2 ...3 ... [*bomp! bomp!*] is this working? ... great ah! ... yes. ... Good-day reader ... can you hear me OK? ... Great ... yes ... I am going to talk to you today about the subject of business presentation ... stand-up “public speaking” in other words ... at conferences, conventions, meetings of various sizes, training workshops, and all that sort of thing.

I have done a lot of research in libraries, bookstores and on the Internet about this and nearly every other public speaking website, book, and course quotes the American version of the *Book of lists* on the subject. In that book it apparently lists public speaking as being the number one human Fear. ... Well I’ve looked and looked through the current UK version of the same book and have to say that I am not able to find that statistic. It may have been there once but it’s not there now. So everything is fine then!

There is nothing to worry about ... you can put this book back on the shelf and go and get your plane, or the rest of your shopping or whatever else you were planning. Presentations to colleagues, staff, customers, and business partners have turned the corner. Business speakers are now

fearless. They have, at last, discovered the secret of good, stand-up, communication. Their visual aids are clear and memorable. With their words they inspire, sell, motivate, and ..." [OK, *that's quite enough of that*—Editor]

Actually the truth about 95% of business presentations, all over the world, is that they are still very bad. And my own research shows, conclusively, that the following truths hold good for them:

1. Most audiences have a single objective: to get out of the room.
2. Most presenters have a single objective: to get off the platform.

The presenters dread them so much that they generally try and forget about them until the very last moment when the inevitable hits them. I was once on an plane at London Heathrow, about to depart with some colleagues to Athens for a major European sales conference. One of the other senior people and (reluctant) conference speakers was sitting across the aisle from me. He had a pad of paper on his knee. "That your presentation, Jim? How's it looking?" I asked. "Oh yes," he replied (nervous laugh) "But I haven't finished it yet ... I'll be fine!" By the time we had taxied to the start of the runway ready for take-off, I noticed that after the words, "Good morning everybody," at the top of the blank sheet, he had written the following: "It's been a busy year ..."

Three hours or so later, as we touched down in Athens, I looked again. The pad was still on his lap. The presentation had not advanced beyond, "It's been a busy year" His presentation the next day was a predictable, dreadful mess. But then so were the majority of the others.

I have discovered that most speakers, like my colleague Jim, try to forget the whole thing until the day before. The

4 PRESENTATION SKILLS FOR QUIVERING WRECKS

speaker, by then in a state of suppressed panic, not to mention blind terror, locates his slides on the laptop. He breezes through them, mumbling as he goes, the words he imagines he will say tomorrow. Somehow a vision of himself as Churchill forms in his mind; as if, during the night, he will be transformed into a brilliant orator. This mumbled read-through rehearsal, often only half completed, is usually abandoned as this vision becomes fully formed. This results in the usual, confident: “Ah stuff it ... I’ll run through it again in the morning” and that’s it.

Then comes the night.

As morning breaks, however, the metamorphosis into the fully formed quivering wreck is complete!

It will be all right on the night

The famous, often-articulated, words of countless exasperated directors of under-rehearsed, amateur theatrical performances are just those: “It will be all right on the night!” Except it never, never is. And, most corporate presenters behave in just such an amateur fashion with predictable results.

Yes, business people everywhere still dread their amateurish presentations. Subsequently the events that warrant them are usually a scandalous waste of time, money, and opportunity. Presentations are potentially very useful and extremely persuasive communication tools. But, when dabbled in by the untrained or untalented, they are generally devised and delivered appallingly badly. Despite all that, nobody, anywhere is doing much about it!

This is where I come in.

I am going to work with you and show you how to become a good presenter. Notice I didn't say a "brilliant" or "terrific" or "wonderful" presenter. Just becoming a "good" presenter is enough to change your business life in unimaginable ways.

So what? ... Why should I? ...

I'll tell you.

You are going to be shown a set of simple skills with which you can easily:

- become too valuable to keep in your present job at your present pay
- become the envy of your friends and colleagues
- be regularly invited to travel to exotic destinations in at least Business if not First Class
- frequently hear the sound of genuine applause from audiences who wish they could have heard more from you
- be singled out to assist influential people to deliver important messages
- be offered better pay terms and conditions to stay if you threaten to resign
- really annoy your competitors when you are speaking to potential customer audiences at the same event as they are
- enjoy yourself generally and not have to work too hard.

Good presenters are so rare that all those things *can easily* come your way *if* you do what I am about to show you. I didn't use superlatives like *brilliant* or *wonderful* to describe the level you need to aspire to. *Good* is quite enough, simply because 95% of business presenters are generally so bad.

Say to most people: "I'd like you to do a presentation at the big meeting next week" and you will generate in their

stomach the biggest fear-knot imaginable. Their legs will tremble ... their hearts will palpitate ... their palms will go clammy ... their voice will tremble ... their confidence and sense of well being will collapse ... they will become a total quivering wreck! If that's you too, it is quite normal. I can do a lot to eliminate much of your fear and in fact, the solution is so simple that you will find yourself saying: "If I'd known it was that easy I'd have done it years ago."

There are other things too, like presentation construction, audience analysis, body language, voice-tone, delivery, using notes, visual aids, handling questions, generating applause, dealing with difficult people, rehearsal and stage craft—they are all dealt with in this book. All these elements will quickly become as natural to you as they became to some of the great speakers of the 20th century like President John Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Nikita Krushchev, and Sir Winston Churchill. They all used the methods and techniques I am going to show you in these pages. Likewise in the 21st century, if you look around you, you will agree that the world's most successful people are turning out to be the good communicators—and you will soon be one of them.

Give people the impression you work harder than you do

Imagine for a moment what it would feel like to deliver a good presentation. Everyone else on the morning's agenda has done the usual: "Good morning everyone ... today I'm going to talk about ... drone ... drone ... [*Yawn ... yawn when can we get out of here?—25 tedious minutes pass—then, mercifully*] ... well I guess that's it ... so ... unless any of you have any ... er? ... well then ... No? ... er no? ... OK, I guess it's time for a break. Thanks ... yes."

Then suddenly ... and immediately after lunch, in the “graveyard slot,” when everyone in the audience is either exhausted by the terribleness of the morning or drugged by the lunchtime carbohydrates ... there’s ... YOU!

Original ... animated ... memorable ... audible ... clear visual aids ... provocative opening ... concise “call-to-action” summing up ... excellent “Q & A,” unexpectedly powerful conclusion. And to top it all what do we hear? Applause? Is that Applause? But nobody ever applauds our internal presentations! [*Little did they know you actually engineered that with your rhetoric too—more later!*]

Don’t you think the feeling you would experience would be unimaginable? A rare, unforgettable moment, in which everything appears to be going just right for you. Sure, it’s a lot to ask and it probably won’t happen every single time but as a recognized and upcoming “good” presenter, your work life will change dramatically for the better and for only a marginal amount of extra effort! Guaranteed!

How do I know this? Because it happened to me. And because, as the lifestyle gurus say: “Success leaves clues.” I’m going to show you what I did (and still do) that takes me all over the world as a business presenter and for a lot of money and job satisfaction. I’m going to give you a lot more than “clues” too; I am going to show you exactly what to do to have a terrific life as a business presenter.

It doesn’t matter that your day-to-day professional specialty is accounts, admin, dentistry, sales, engineering, train driving, model-making, procurement, sailing, or oil exploration, or anything. The same techniques apply. I don’t care if you say to me, having read the book: “That’s all very well but it’s different in my organization; we have a set way of doing presentations.” Well I have to reply that you wouldn’t be reading this book if you didn’t think you had a presentation problem to solve.

I used to work for just such a large international company which felt it had to lay down a certain way for executives to conduct presentations. Every year they held a large international management conference. Each year it was in a different capital city. We presenters, “the usual suspects” every year, were all thoroughly schooled in what was wanted. My boss in particular would always take me to one side a month beforehand for a stiff talking to. “OK, we all know you can present well. But this time none of your usual stuff! OK? ... Just give them the facts. Tell them what’s going on; that’s all. No jokes. No “funnies.” No clever-ass visuals. Stick to the company slide format. Am I making myself clear? ... Am I? ... And show me the bullet slides you’re going to use and your full script in a couple of weeks before we go!”

So every year I would go away and prepare that presentation: Presentation “A” ... it was the presentation I was NOT going to deliver on the day. It was simply a decoy to keep him off my back. At the same time I would, in parallel, prepare Presentation “B” ... the one I was really going to deliver. It was not seen by the boss beforehand. It was a properly thought out and rehearsed communication vehicle.

It obeyed all the rules of professional rhetoric (which you will learn in this short volume). It hardly met the company format in any respect ... well, maybe the corporate logo on the opening title slide but that was it!

Every single time, when we got to the annual event this is what happened. I was always put on the agenda either last thing before lunch or immediately after lunch. As a well-known “good” presenter I had developed a “reputation” and no other speaker on the day ever wanted to follow directly after me. As I said before I wasn’t a “great” presenter, I was (and am) simply “good” and that was threatening enough for the others. Before me, there had always been the usual horrific list of unmemorable cloned presentations—bullet

points, raw clip art, monotones, mumbling—pure “Death by Powerpoint.” The 350-strong senior management global audience were already bored stiff and dying for the evening to come when they could have a bit of fun and socializing. Nobody could deny the awful, costly reality of it all. (By the way, 10 years ago in the mid 1990s, we used to budget an average \$5000 per head total cost for this annual jamboree; that worked out at \$1.75m—about 1 million pounds—per event. God knows what similar events are going on, right now, as you read this book and how much they are costing in today’s money!). Every single time, about 15 minutes before I was due to go on, my boss would take me to one side again and whisper: “This isn’t going well. We might as well not have bothered with the speeches ... just throw a big pile of beer cans into the middle of the room and let them all stand around and chat for three days ... that’s all they want. ... They’re all falling asleep, I don’t know why we do these plenary sessions. The MD’s furious! I hope you’ve got something up your sleeve to wake them all up!

I certainly did ... this year’s Presentation “B”—pretty well guaranteed to generate a standing ovation every time. Was I great? ... No, just “good.” And just being “good” was always more than enough. The trouble was, the next year it had always been forgotten and I received my usual threats and instructions a month before and I was forced to repeat the “A-B” ritual. My co-presenter colleagues towed the line and did their “same old, same old.” I didn’t. Ever.

So, despite all the warnings and repeated stiff talking to(s), I got to ride on Concorde a lot, traveled First Class with the MD to assist with presentations in the US, Asia, and Europe. Was pleaded with to extend a three-year work assignment in New York for another two years. Was paid special bonuses to keep me happy. Drove a company Jaguar. Enjoyed company paid-for holidays in South Africa, Hawaii, Singapore, Tokyo, and Hong Kong. Got shares in the company before it went

“public.” And all that sort of stuff and had a really good time. Tough eh? You can do it too ... just dare to change a little bit.

“But I’m a company man/woman! You’re preaching anarchy! ... It may have been OK for you but not everybody can do as he/she pleases! I’m putting this book back right now ...” [*just hold on a minute...please*].

I am sure your department or company has to persuade other people to get onboard various projects you’re involved with. These target audiences may be either internal or external people. Let’s say you’re involved with selling ideas, products or services at some time during the business year. In fact, 98% of corporate executives have to sell such things at some time in order to make progress. How many individuals do you have to talk to, to get a single idea through? How many individual managers do you have to convince to get a project enthusiastically supported and implemented by all? How many prospective customers do you have to talk to get a single new contract? The answer is *lots of them*.

Take that last one ... how many prospective customers do you have to see to get one new deal agreed? As a rough “rule of thumb” let us say you currently have to pursue four, in order to “close” one. Suppose I could show you a way to improve that ratio, and that for every four potential customers you pursued, you could successfully close on two from now on. How would that go down in your organization? A 100% improvement—all achieved in a lot less time. The way you can do it is to put on a rehearsed and well-delivered, *good presentation*.

It is exactly the way we do the primary marketing for our own London-based training business. We advertise an “open” presentation during which we present what we can do to help people and companies achieve their own business

goals. There is often a waiting list for these presentations. Some people come back for a second boost every couple of years. And what's more, these quarterly events are not free. Delegates happily pay about over £100 (US\$150 plus) per seat to attend a three-hour seminar. Their individual objectives are clearly to obtain some up-to-date techniques to help them sell their own products and services. Their desires are met because we make sure that they get these in abundance during the three hours. Meanwhile the corporate objective for our company in delivering these presentations, is to sell the audience what more we can do, on a tailored basis, for individual organizations.

Every time we give one of these open presentations we can guarantee to convert far more prospective clients into full long term clients—and in a very short space of time, shorter than any other way I can think of.

Once you put on a presentation you are setting yourself apart from your competitors. They always go the easy way ... not because they're stupid but because they're lazy. They carry on with the one-on-one phone calls, face-to-face persuading, emails, and hard-copy letters. By presenting "live" to a large group you differentiate your own offering from all your competitors and generate a feeling of professional competence in the audience. Good presenters are treated with awe.

Save time! (Actually you can't. You can only spend it)

Another great thing about putting on a good presentation is the time it saves! I don't know about you but I have a good few other things I'd like to be doing with my time everyday rather than chasing business opportunities. When I have the chance to sell my business services to a large complex

For Review Only

12 PRESENTATION SKILLS FOR QUIVERING WRECKS

account there always seem to be at least four people involved with the decision. I've even developed a little formula to tell me whether the time I will probably spend on it will make winning the business worth the effort. But one great time-cutter is finding an excuse to invite all the decision makers to a single presentation.

If you see all the decision makers individually, you will most often find that they call you a few days later with more questions. Answering these often means another trip to see the person in order to resolve the further queries. Another great chunk of unsavable time used up. On the other hand when they are all in the room together for your presentation, the psychological dynamics of the group often results in all the necessary questions coming out together. Everybody learns the concerns and needs of the other decision makers. And very often, during the "Q&A," you will find you hear very little argument and the people who are already on your side will strongly support your proposition.

Tip: If you ask for and are granted permission to deliver a presentation and this gives your customer the idea to get some of your competitors in too, make sure you secure the last slot on the day. A good presentation is not only rare but it makes the whole of your project a big-deal and if you want them to remember you particularly well, go on last. On Broadway they always have the hit tune toward the end of the show—as they say: "Leave them singing your song."

It is often the case that a company or department that believes it has a superior product or idea, loses out, in a competitive environment, not because they actually have a poor product but because they are outsold by the other side. The fact is we humans tend to make most of our "buying"

decisions based on emotional drivers, which are then justified in the human brain with facts. Extremely intelligent, well-educated people argue this point with me for hours and tell me point blank that they are much too wise and sophisticated to be bamboozled with a presentation behind which there is very little substance; they just want the facts. Well here's a "fact" for you: all the current research confirms that business audiences start losing concentration in a "facts only" presentation within about 30 seconds of the start! This is not about bamboozling, it is about using the way the audience brain works—every audience brain.

A good presenter knows that the contagion of enthusiasm is transmitted by a lot more than the facts alone. If you are ever surprised that you have lost a deal and then told it was "because of the price," be suspicious. Be very suspicious. "Too expensive" is the easy objection. More often than not, it was because the way you presented your proposition was perceived as boring, samey, sloppy, disorganized, unrehearsed, monotone, and did not address the thinking of this audience. A good presenter always anticipates that every person in the audience is asking the one huge, unspoken question: "What's in this for me?" And as a good presenter you need to answer that question. If you don't, it will affect the perceived quality of your delivery because (like it or not) it will be seen as a precise reflection of the professionalism of your organization or department.

One of my clients, a senior director in a large European oil company, told me that he despairs of getting some of his very bright geologists to understand this. He asks how these PhDs and BSc educated people can expect to win international business when they turn up to present their ideas to potential customers dressed in a sweater, jeans, and Doc Martin boots. Then try to deliver their message by reading off Powerpoint slides with their hands in their pockets. It is NOT just your facts it's the way you deliver them that makes the winning difference.

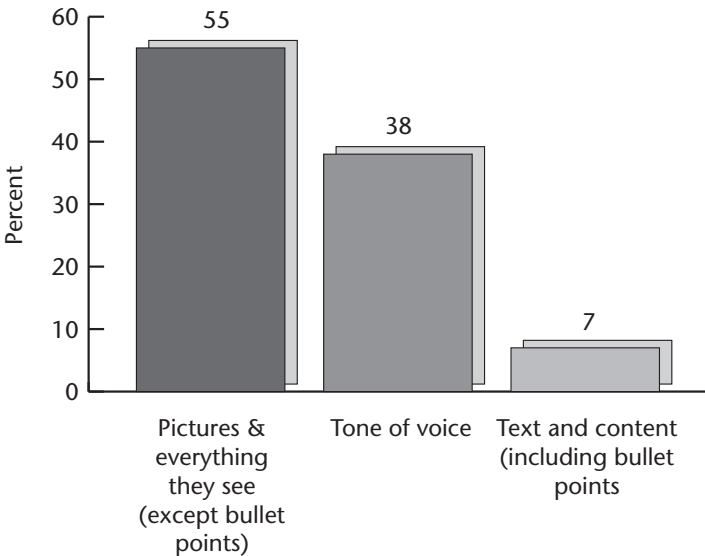
14 PRESENTATION SKILLS FOR QUIVERING WRECKS

Most quivering wrecks still don't know that a man called Professor Albert Mehrabian carried out some investigative research several years ago, to find out which factors most influence an audience during a presentation. The results were startling. They showed that most of what an audience remembers are things they have seen. The next important factor is the tone of voice used by the presenter and least influential factor is the actual content of the presentation.

The ratios are:

- Visual impact 55%
- Tone of voice 38%
- Text and Content 7%

It's not that the content isn't important, of course it is. But if you fail to get the visual side of it (body language and



The way audiences remember presentation content

pictures) right and then compound that failure by not sounding right, then the content doesn't matter at all.

One final point before we burst into the book. About three or four times a week our training business is presented with CVs from aspiring trainers who would like to get on the team. When I call them they all tell me they are great trainers. But when I ask them about their presentation skills, particularly stand up presentations to potential clients, they go quiet. One said to me a few weeks ago: "Mr Etherington I don't think you heard me. I'm a trainer not a presenter!" That's when the application—as with all other similar conversations—gets summarily terminated. There is no shortage of trainers in my market, just like there's no shortage of "product" in most markets. The great, global shortage is of people who can successfully communicate and present ideas. Yet most companies are doing very little to rectify the problem.

It's as simple as this: If you or your company keep doing your presentations the same way that you've always done them, the same problems will recur. As the saying goes:

If you always do what you've always done,
You'll always get what you've always got.

Still with me?

You may have got this far into the introduction and be saying to yourself something along the lines of: "This book is no good for me at all! I **am** a quivering wreck! No don't laugh ... I **really** am a quivering wreck! I am a heaving ball of jelly when it comes to standing up in front of an audience. That's me. Awful. Can't do it. Will never be able to. I'm awful. Nobody's as awful as me."

So allow me to relate a story I heard 20 years ago in a radio broadcast about Parliament and the House of Commons in

London. The speaker was a successful middle-aged man who was recalling his very early days as a Member of Parliament. The particular topic of the program was the first occasion, as a young man, on which he was due to make a speech on the floor of the House; his so-called maiden speech.

The tradition is, for a maiden speech in the House of Commons, that the Member of Parliament is not allowed to read it! He or she has to deliver it cold. The young MP was sure he had all his facts in order but was a total bag of nerves. He had only five minutes to speak in the particular debate but could neither eat nor sleep for days before. He was losing weight. He could think of nothing else. He imagined over and over again failing disastrously. He imagined the laughter and hoots of derision when he messed up. He would mess up. He knew he would mess up.

On the day he sat nervously in his place next to an old hand who had been an MP for years. When he was finally called to speak he prepared to stand and as he did so felt a restraining hand on his arm; it was the old hand. "Enjoy yourself son," the kindly voice whispered into the maiden speaker's ear, "Nobody's expecting much!"

"Nobody's expecting much" should be your mantra too. If it's true, and it is, that all business audiences are expecting the usual rubbish, you have nothing to be petrified about. You are either going to meet their expectations by being awful or surprise them (if you apply what's in this book) by being good. It is a simple choice. You are choosing, from now on to be a "good" presenter and enjoy the huge rewards it will bring you.

SECTION 2

When the imagination and will power are in conflict, are antagonistic, it is always the imagination which wins, without any exception.

EMIL COUÉ – 19TH CENTURY PSYCHOLOGIST

The art of “don’t worry” for the quivering wreck

I was a copying machine salesman in the early 1970s. I had been an engineer but it bored me. I wanted glamor, a company car, an expense account, and an easy life on the road. Actually it was tough. My first sales territory was about one square mile of dilapidated South London. My various managers would often tell me on tough days: “Don’t worry, be happy!” or “Don’t be so negative! Think positive.” When I heard these great motivational mantras I had an overwhelming desire to thump them. “What?” I always thought, “‘Be positive?’ I’ve earned this depression and I’m damn well going to have it!”

First of all telling somebody *not* to do something (“Ah! ... don’t worry about the presentation so much!”) as a way of getting them to stop doing something is a complete waste of time because neither your brain nor mine can hold a negative thought. Motivational speakers regularly illustrate this point by telling a corporate audience: “Don’t think of pink giraffes” (It’s the example they *all* use for some reason) Then they say: “What are you all thinking about?” and the reply comes back, “Pink giraffes! Ha ... ha ... ha!”

A common example of this phenomenon is when parents see their daughter, between about four to eight years of age, dressed in her best new party dress at a family party. The child has "grown up" enough to go up to the table where the drinks are and get a glass of orange juice. The filled glass is lifted carefully down from the table and is being carefully carried back to their seat. Everything is going well so far—great concentration; tongue out to make sure nothing goes wrong; taking careful steps; no rushing; it is all going swimmingly well so far; no accidents; no sign of an upcoming problem. Then comes the mistake ... not committed by the child ... but by the adult! "Don't spill it!"

Now, I told you earlier that the human brain can't hold a negative thought. The child's brain doesn't hold on to the *Don't*... it only hears the **spill it!**. So what do you think the child, who is dressed in her best dress, associates with accidental spillage (which incidentally hadn't even been on their mental menu up to this point)? Yes you've got it—parental anger and trouble of all sorts too terrible to envisage. The anticipation of this terrible event generates a little picture of upcoming fearful consequences ... and when we're afraid we tremble, we quiver and what do you think happens to the orange juice when the quivering begins? Correct: spillage!

Telling someone, anyone (even yourself) *not* to do something is a great way of reinforcing the very bad behavior you're trying to avoid. So if you ever indulge in a little bit of talking to yourself to bolster courage for your next presentation ("Come on **me** pull yourself together! You don't want to make a fool of yourself!") you are setting yourself up for a disaster. So let us make sure in future it is a conversation that has the desired effect!

“Every day in every way I am getting better and better!” ... I am really ... I think ... or am I?!

At the beginning of the 20th century a French pharmacist called Émile Coué started the whole positive thinking thing going. He introduced a method of psychotherapy based on a regular daily affirmation. Followers of his method were required, at regular times during the day, to repeat to themselves: “Every day in every way I am getting better and better.” This constant repetition was supposed to engender in the subject an increasing feeling of confidence and self-esteem. It certainly worked for quite a few people but the reason it worked so well for them, yet hardly had any effect on others, wasn’t understood for several more years.

It was half a century later that they discovered that the people for whom the method worked well could immediately imagine themselves getting better and better. The process of imagining was doing a lot more than the words themselves. In fact, the more vividly the person could imagine the improvement and could imagine what they would be doing and how they would be acting when the improvement came about, the better it worked.

In addition, the more senses the person could use, to experience this *imagined future*, the better it worked. The dominant sense was always sight, followed by sound, followed by smell. Now although I use this method myself I, personally, cannot imagine the “smell” of success but if you can, it looks like you’re going to do even better with this than me. I can *see* with my, so-called mind’s eye (some days better than others) and I can *hear* voices, sounds, applause etc. in my imagination. I can even *feel* an imagined touch but smell it? ... No. However this method really works, even if you are only able to implement it in a less than perfect way. So now I am going to show you how to do it too.

This is beyond simple “positive thinking”

Instead of focusing on what you don't want to happen “*I don't want to make a mess of this,*” you need to make your self-talk a lot more positive. So even if you don't believe it yet, I want you to say these words: “I am going to be really great at this next presentation.” (But here's the powerful part), you now need to shut your eyes and imagine yourself on the platform in front of the audience and see, in your mind's-eye everybody cheering and feel yourself being very pleased.

Hang on ... hang on just a minute ... I already know it ... you're saying “What a load of rubbish!” and beginning to skip this bit—but will you join me in a quick experiment *please... please?* I want to prove to you right now how powerful this self-talk combined with visualization really is.

Brain proof exercise for skeptics

I use this little instant-proof, live-demonstration-in-your-own-home, example in just about all my training seminars and if you've attended a course of mine or read any of my other written material you'll probably know it already but bear with me. OK, stand up and if you're right handed raise your right arm straight out in front of you with your index finger extended pointing like a sign-post straight ahead. If you're left handed do the same with your left arm and hand. Now, right handed person, keeping your feet firmly planted on the floor and your arm out-stretched swing your torso to the right and see how far round you can twist and note an object you can point to that shows how far round you got. Then come back. Left-handed people do the same but you swing round to the left. Then come back to the starting point.

Now stay standing and shut your eyes. I want you now to imagine (don't move at all) just imagine, in your mind's-eye, swinging around again. But this time, in your imagination, reach the same object you stopped at last time but find yourself able to twist further round this "imagined" time ... much further ... 4in ... 8in ... 12in ... 16in ... effortlessly. Note how far you imagined you got to this time. Then in your mind's-eye come back to your starting point and open your eyes.

Now, arm up, finger pointing do it again. Really swing your body round again this time ... and what happened? How far did you manage to swing this time? Were you surprised to find that, along with over 80% of people who do this, the second time you *really* did it, you could, effortlessly, swing much further than the first time?

But nothing physical has changed. You didn't suddenly develop the qualities of a circus contortionist or top gymnast. All you did was put a different picture in your head. You put that picture there, just once, half a minute ago. You didn't believe it necessarily but your brain was completely fooled by the picture you chose, into believing that you could ... so you did.

You see, the human brain is startlingly naïve. It does not know the difference between real and imagined events! If you tell it something is so and it is a physical possibility that it could be so, it sets about getting you to do it. By the way, you cannot break the laws of physics and for example, fly by flapping your arms, or breathe underwater, or levitate or any other daft stuff so "don't even go there."

Yes, if you say so: you're a quivering wreck

If you tell your brain over and over that, when it comes to business presenting you're a quivering wreck and you can

imagine (pictures in your head) failing disastrously next time, your brain will unfailingly give you the result you want. You are what you tell yourself you are and, amazingly, other people accept you for the value you appear to be placing on yourself.

Yes, if you say so: you're a fearless presenter

Now ... knowing the little you have already proved to yourself, it is time to give you a very practical set of instructions to make you think like a good presenter. These instructions are based on modern sports psychology. I often hear top-of-their-game professional golfers and tennis players talk about their need to see, in their mind's-eye, the ball going into the hole or over the net before the game.

Similarly in the world of business—the PhD who taught me to negotiate, had studied for years the part played by experience and training in becoming a top negotiator—but in the end had concluded that the negotiators who succeeded most often were those who had clearly imagined each success beforehand.

Believe it or not, this imaginary picturing is deadly serious stuff.

Learn to visualize being a brilliant presenter

The thought process which is concerned with seeing yourself in your mind's-eye performing at your optimum level is known as visualization (what a surprise!). The most important aspect of this is "mental practice." Mental practice involves going over and over in your head some important

event and combining it with as many senses as you can, especially mental imagery. Professional sports people of all types use it to keep their minds focused on critical competitions, tournaments, and potential record breaking opportunities, and away from inner tension, rivalries, possible failure, and accidents. It works just as well in any area of your life when you want to raise yourself up to your maximum potential.

Professional mental practice techniques can be internally or externally focused. When you focus externally you imagine being in an audience watching yourself perform. When you focus internally, as described previously, you place yourself in the imagined event and become the performer rather than the audience. When you start practicing this technique you can choose either focus method. What follows is a guide for those who want to do it externally. So you will be in the audience.

Professional mental practice can build a total feeling of invincibility, change your attitude and boost your confidence.

External mental practice

The best and probably the most effective mental practice technique is called "top performance mental practice." To start with, sports people compile a list of the attributes they associate with top performance in their own particular field. Top performance for a professional golfer, for instance, would probably include perfect swing, accurate putting, terrific concentration as well as total mental focus, self-confident attitude and a feeling of being totally ready to play.

For you, the upcoming effective presenter, it would doubtless include upright and confident body language, a sincere authoritative and powerful voice, a terrific mastery of your

subject, a self-confident attitude and feeling of being totally "rehearsed" and ready to go.

Now you need to compose a very detailed imaginary picture in your head. Think back to a moment in your own history when you actually, despite all your prior misgivings, did well at a presentation or meeting. If you really (really) can't recall such an occasion make it up ... invent how you think such a presentation would have been! I repeat the point I made earlier in this book: *your subconscious mind does not know the difference between real and imagined events*. So go ahead ... imagine something terrific! The visualization process requires reflecting on this real or imagined top performance, particularly the characteristics and behaviors which make it your best performance.

Detailed instructions

Step 1: **You need to relax.** Get yourself into a comfortable position either lying down or sitting in an easy chair. Breathe in deeply and slowly over three seconds, breathe out over three seconds. Keep doing this for one minute until you're relaxed. (*Now don't give up already!! Just before the 2004 Olympics in Athens, I watched, on TV, a Russian gymnastic coach get a young aspiring female athlete to go through this precise set of instructions, in order to perform, 30 minutes later, a qualifying routine she had been failing at!*)

Step 2: **You need to visualize.** In your mind's-eye, imagine you are in front of a large cinema screen. On to the screen I want you to project a film of yourself standing in front of a business audience delivering a brilliant presentation. You're actually in the audience watching a clone of yourself perform; an out-of-body experience! Now think, as you watch "you" perform, just how did you feel before you stood up to deliver this brilliant oration? What self-talk was going on in

your head? Remember, if you can, the feeling of confidence—real or imagined—that you had.

See yourself as clearly as you can in this upright, confident, and strong state. Focus as much as you can on every aspect of your being: the look of you, what you were feeling, the smells, what you could see, how you had decided to stand, how your heart was beating, your facial expression ... everything that contributed to your top performance. Feel these sensations becoming branded on your mind so that you can bring them back whenever you want to. By doing this you will be able to describe all the things that have in the past contributed to a feeling of “King of the world” confidence.

Now make the screen blank, and let another scene appear on the screen. The movie is no longer historical. You are now projecting forward to an upcoming speaking event—one which hasn’t happened yet. You are going to be a key speaker at this future event. Once again tap in to those same feelings and sensations you recalled from the real or imagined event from your past. The one in which you performed perfectly, strongly, confidently! Know for sure that everything will once again work wonderfully for you in the future event as it did in the past. You feel confident, in control, a complete dominant personality.

As you continue to watch the future movie see yourself up there on the platform in a state of complete concentration. You’re alert, totally in the present. This state you can see is giving you everything you want: audience reaction ... smooth delivery ... commanding voice ... genuine laughter ... applause. Identify each vital outcome that you desire from your presentation. See each of those outcomes actually happening in your imagination. See each of your own desirable characteristics actually happening in front of you.

Step 3: You need to reinforce regularly. We human beings learn by doing things over and over again. So repeat

this mental exercise at least once every day. I do mine first thing in the morning and last thing at night. (*What, you still do it!?*) Of course. You see, the secrets to success are all around us all the time. It's just that 95% of the human race is too lazy to spot them or do anything about them.

Success leaves clues. So I copy what other very successful people do. They practice over and over again. It's in all the books and autobiographies they write. Sportsmen and women especially—they mentally rehearse constantly. When they get lazy about it they find they start to lose. In some recent academic research into what makes lucky business people "lucky" it was revealed that nearly all of them admit to setting some time aside every day just to imagine, think, contemplate or meditate. So I do too. I imagine myself regularly, sharply, clearly, where I want to be. And it certainly works ... even when I think it's not working! I don't understand it, I just do it because it works even when my visualization is not as clear as I would like it to be on some days.

"If I don't practice for one day, I know it. If I don't practice for two days the critics know it. If I don't practice for three days the audience know it"

PADEREWSKI THE FAMOUS RUSSIAN CONCERT PIANIST

Internal mental practice

The second technique of mental practice is internally focused. Instead of watching yourself on a movie screen, this time get inside your own head. Look out of your eyes. Hear with your own ears. Let your own hands feel the wooden edge of the imaginary podium or table. You are the performer looking out over the imaginary audience. Feel the carpet beneath your feet. Hear the applause for you. See the senior people or clients looking up to you and nodding in

agreement. Feel yourself looking straight back at them and holding their gaze. Feel yourself smiling. Hear an imagined question from an audience member and hear your clear, measured answer.

Some presenters I know who often have to speak to relatively cynical or even potentially cynical audiences (for me these are often company sales conventions) take this whole idea one stage further and imagine the audience as if they were stark naked or wearing paper party hats and so on. Another associate of mine is a very relaxed Richard Branson style of dresser. He is quite intimidated by an audience in formal business attire: dark suit and tie. So he imagines them in faded, scruffy, worn jeans. You can do that too or maybe make them very thin or hugely fat. Or see them all as kids in highchairs. My personal favorite is to see them all with long trunks, sticking-out ears and “false moustache and glasses” sets. You can visualize them anyway you like.

The thing you will find is that once you have placed them in this context it is never possible to feel the same way about them again. Fear is a total imaginary imposter itself. Remember that fear itself is spelt F.E.A.R. and stands for **F**ictitious **E**vents **A**ppearing **R**eal. Try it if you don't believe me. Try to feel exactly the same about talking to ludicrous people with trunks and big ears as you would about fear-some dark suited business executives. You just can't.

As with any new skill it will take you a while to practice and get comfortable doing all these things. It won't always go beautifully when you HAVE practiced for a while. But persistence, easily the most important factor in this, will pay off for you. A few years ago, at the age of 44, I learned to fly. Each lesson was, unbeknown to my instructor, going to be my last. I was that petrified; yes a total quivering wreck! Yet even though I couldn't feel it working I still did my regular visualizing. I always said to myself, very negatively and against ALL

my principles: "One more lesson ... then I'll tell him it's not for me." Yet each week I found I was doing more and more of the flying without instruction. Then I started to rationalize it ... "OK I can fly straight and level now, but turning, that's another matter" ... then a couple of weeks later: "OK I can fly straight, turn, climb, descend, but I'll never be able to learn to talk on the radio! And as for learning Morse code, recovering from spiral dives and stalls, and navigation, not to mention my 'first solo' ... FORGET it." And so it went on *but I persisted with the internal mental practice*. I constantly imagined myself as a brilliant Red Arrows style pilot. In my mind I was looking out of the window, talking on the radio. Recovering from stalls like a natural. Four weeks later I flew my first solo. Four months later I got my license. Now I can't stop flying! Don't give up on the mental practice!

Summary

The principle goal of mental practice is to give you high-level, consistent performance in whatever area you have chosen. You must practice the technique at least once every day for 30 days initially and if you're serious (*you ARE serious aren't you?*) should get started in the next 72 hours. Psychologists tell us that with any new project if we don't move from thought to action in the next three days, then it is 80% likely that we will never start.

When choosing whether to use internal mental practice or external mental practice I recommend you alternate each day. But do it each day. It really doesn't matter whether you think it is working or not, it works for everyone who does it. Don't discuss it with highly intellectual people or close friends who, I have found will often dismiss it on the basis that, "if it was that easy everybody would do it." Well "everybody" doesn't do it but the few who do (like me) find that mental practice works every time.

This is very powerful stuff for quivering wrecks with a deep desire to transform themselves. If you're still on the fence and not sure whether you can be bothered with it take the following quick check right now:

- 1.** Write down all the benefits of NOT taking this action.
- 2.** Write down all the benefits of taking the action.
- 3.** Write down the COSTS of not acting.*
- 4.** Write down the COSTS of acting.
- 5.** Keep going. Don't stop until the benefits of taking action outweigh the benefits for NOT taking action by 10 to 100 times and the costs for NOT taking action outweigh the costs for taking action by 10 to 100 times

The growing psychological science built on mental practice and visualizing is called Neuro Linguistic Programming or "NLP." For the past 15 years there have been a growing number of books and courses available for those who desire to study and apply the methods in more depth. You can do an Internet search on "NLP" and you will find pages of hits. This book, on the other hand, is specifically about presentation skills so we won't be going into much more depth on the subject. Suffice it to say you can use the little we have discussed here to rapidly transform you outlook from quivering wreck to requested orator.

So now forward to what we need to discuss: the actual compilation and delivery of a brilliant presentation. For that simply turn the page.

*For step 3, you can consider the costs of not doing this mental rehearsal in these areas:

spiritual, social, intellectual, financial, physical, emotional.

About the Author

Bob Etherington has been developing his reputation for sales success since the 1970s, in a career that has spanned many global markets.

Having begun his career in 1970 with Rank Xerox in London, he was quickly headhunted by Grand Metropolitan Hotels and then became a Money Broker in the City. He joined Reuters, the international news and financial information leader in the 1980s, and became a main Board Director for Transaction Services in 1990, moving to New York in 1994 to take control of their major accounts strategy for US banks. Reuters' international sales to these banks grew rapidly and, as a result, Bob was appointed to organise professional sales training for the entire company.

In 2000, Bob left Reuters and became co-founder of SpokenWord Ltd., the UK-based sales training company. He resigned as Managing Director of SpokenWord Ltd. in 2008.

Bob now lives between his homes in London and Kent and is currently working on a variety of business, theatre and charity projects. He can be contacted at robertetherington@yahoo.co.uk or via the website www.bobetheringtongroup.com.