

Awaken the Voice Within

By Mark Sincevich

The director of quality and training for a large organization was driving me back from lunch. She navigated through new construction and arteries of roads that hadn't existed six months before. The Virginia Technology corridor was booming as one office building after another became the nerve center for a new corporate headquarters or regional office. Once we glided into a parking space, my contact said, "the Vice President of Sales is here, I want you to meet him." I took a deep breath and headed for the bathroom. I wanted to make sure I didn't have any spinach stuck in between my teeth.

I wasn't exactly prepared and my heart began to race. I have long since dubbed this the 'just enough nervousness to keep me honest' syndrome. As I waited, my mind drifted to a National Geographic presentation on South America I had attended. After the slide show, the photographer unleashed at least 50 'ums' and 'you knows' while partially answering the audience's questions. I couldn't figure out his main points either. I was thinking that I didn't want to come across like that presenter. He might have been a great photographer, but the presentation lacked a certain presence and focus. The full power of his voice was hidden. Knowing how to handle an audience or an executive is integral to being an effective communicator. Here's what you need to do if you find yourself unexpectedly presenting to an audience or to an executive and want to immediately increase your presentation power. These techniques also apply if you have more time to prepare.

Set Expectations – Immediately set expectations up front. Ask how long you have to present and what the executive and audience would like to takeaway. Politely ask that all electronic devices be turned off and then deliver on your value.

Focus Your Message – Pick two or three key points that show your value proposition based on what the executive wants to hear and how long you have to present. Weave these points throughout your presentation for even greater reinforcement.

Be Congruent - The best compliment a speaker can get is one of congruency. Your believability will increase when you are the same person in front of an audience as you are in a small group or one-on-one. Executives don't want to listen to a speaker who 'pretends' to be somebody else. If you don't know, be honest and say that you will find out the answer later.

It's About Them - Skip the history of your company and why you are better than your competition. Since you are presenting to the executive, he has already accepted you in some way. Keep reminding yourself that it's always about them (the customer). Promote your value showing that you and your services are a match for their organization.

Anticipate Questions – Have a backup plan. If your organization was involved in the news, immediately address the issues. This prevents the executive from 'stewing' on this topic during your presentation and not listening to your message. Also, have a 'contingency

file' with you at all times before you walk into the presentation with articles, testimonials and other material. It shows the executive and the audience that you have anticipated many questions.

Remove Barriers - Make sure you remove the podium, chairs, and other clutter that are barriers to your communication. You want the executive to be focused on you and not get distracted. Move closer and keep your arms from crossing in front of your body. Having somewhat animated arms or leaving them at your sides will increase your passion.

Smile Warmly - Smiling will naturally draw your audience and the executive closer to you and to your position. It conveys warmth and understanding. Some presenters think too much and this becomes a frown or an expressionless face.

End with Action – Before the executive or the audience has a chance to leave, make sure that you ask the very important question, “Did I cover everything you wanted to hear.” Get the executive’s approval that you made effective use of the time allotted. Ask about the next steps and when they will be covered, then get out your calendar and enter the date.

After I met with the Vice President of Sales, I anticipated good news, but he threw me a curve ball. He said, “Why should we hire you instead of the competition?” I took a deep breath, paused, and said, "I understand your challenges, bring relevancy from other industries, and can deliver measurable value." A smile of recognition spread across his face. He scheduled a meeting with his purchasing department the following week. By practicing these techniques, a stronger and more confident voice will awaken within from the rubble of unfocused presentations, misused words, and unrehearsed programs. Your presentations will be more meaningful, get you invited back, and allow for a greater chance to add another perfect customer.

About Mark Sincevich

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