

LeaderPerfect Newsletter
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Fired Up Presentations

by Dr. Mike Armour

I spent the afternoon coaching a corporate executive who has a critically important presentation to make this week. Hanging in the balance are millions of dollars.

As I left that meeting, I began thinking about how many of us have critical presentations every week. Perhaps not the multi-million dollar kind. But critical presentations, nonetheless.

Some may be one-on-one. Others to a dozen people around a conference table. Still others to perhaps hundreds of people in a classroom, banquet hall, or convention center.

Stoking Anxiety

When you face a presentation of critical importance, what do you do with your last few minutes before it's time to start? When I asked my client that question this afternoon, I got an answer that is typical for many of us — particularly if our audience will be free to press us with questions.

"Well," he said, "in those last few minutes I run through the presentation in my mind and wonder if I've missed something that might come up during the question and answer period."

"And when you're doing that," I asked, "what happens to your energy level and emotions? What type of emotions fire off inside of you?"

He reflected a minute, visually placed himself in that moment, and smiled. "Well, mostly my energy level goes down and my nervousness and anxiety go up."

"And is that a good thing?" I responded. "Is your presentation more effective, more powerful because you've ratcheted up your nervousness and anxiety and lowered your energy level?"

He chuckled and shook his head "no."

So we spent the remainder of our time equipping him with a better strategy for launching into his presentation.

Getting To Excitement

"What's something you're really excited about, really passionate about?" I queried. With only a moment's pause he identified one of his hobbies.

"Can you think of a time when you were particularly excited about something you did with that hobby?" I continued.

"Oh, yes!" he responded.

"Good," I said. "Now I want you to step back inside that moment. I want you to see what you were seeing and hear what you were hearing and feel what you were feeling when you felt particularly excited."

Almost immediately his shoulders squared up, his eyes came alive, a great smile came across his face, and he leaned forward in his chair. As soon as I could see he was fully into the experience, I went on. "Notice what you're feeling inside," I said. "Would you like to take that kind of excitement and enthusiasm into your presentation this week?"

"You betcha," he shot back.

"Well guess what," I smiled, "you've just discovered how easy it is to do." Then, for the next few minutes, I coached him on how to use the moments just before the presentation to go back and relive this same experience that had excited him so much.

"Get inside the experience, just like you did today," I explained. "Step into it and get these wonderful feelings running. Then, when you move into your presentation, you'll be running excitement and enthusiasm, not anxiety and worry."

Positive Inner States

I would offer the advice to every presenter, even if the presentation is nothing more than getting the family to buy into your ideas for a summer vacation. Put more emphasis on creating a positive, creative, resourceful inner state than on last-minute fretting about whether you've got your content down pat.

You see, this man had the content nailed. I had looked over his notes. I had pressed him on possible objections that might be raised to his proposals, and he had already crafted a thirty-second answer to each of them.

To say the least, he was thoroughly prepared. To go into his presentation fretting about possibly missed details would be an exercise in pointlessness. So, why has he always done it?

Primarily for the same reason that the rest of us are prone to do it. We assume that the power of our presentation is totally dependent on our content and logic.

The fact is, content and logic must be adequate to bear up under careful examination. But our greatest impact usually comes from bringing positive, outwardly-oriented energy to bear on the presentation.

No More Energy Drains

When we spend the last few minutes before a presentation analyzing what we are going to say — his traditional way of approaching those moments — we do three things, none of them helpful.

First, we stoke our worries and anxieties, as I've already noted.

Second, by going into our analytical mode, we narrow our emotional field. We distance ourselves from our emotions, except for the worry and anxiety we are creating with the analysis. (After all, the purpose of analysis is to get emotion out of the picture and look solely at the facts.)

Third, we redirect the orientation of our attention inwardly. We focus on what's going on inside our mind rather than attuning ourselves to our surroundings and hearers. Then, with negative emotions running and with our focus heavily inward, we step up to the plate to make our presentation.

Can your audience feel our nervousness and flat energy? Absolutely!! Just like they'll feel your excitement and enthusiasm when you spend those final moments before the presentation reliving an experience that will fire off your most positive, creative, and resourceful inner state.

So do your homework in advance. Get the facts straight. Then, when it's "showtime," spend those final moments of preparation "firing things up" emotionally, arming yourselves with an arsenal of positive emotions that will carry the day.

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