

Blue In The Face Rehearsals

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"Divest oneself of passivity" -- Martin Luther King

*Yes, that's right, rehearse until you are **blue** in the face.*

There is a reason our mothers always told us "practice makes perfect." Sometimes we'd rather not hear it, because it takes both time and effort.

But if you practice your material and learn the content, then during your presentation you will be able to solely concentrate on your audience. *After all you are only there for them.*

Once You Really Have a Speech Which Sounds Right A Key-Word Outline

I usually start by having written out my entire presentation and then saying it out loud both to myself and to others. Writing allows you to flesh out your ideas and organize them in a logical pattern following one of the styles alluded to in my article '*Preparing with Pizzazz.*'

From that beginning, and once it sounds and flows right you can then develop a full-sentence presentation outline. This is your cheat-sheet if you like, as you continue to learn the material.

In developing your outline:

- Underline key points and important words of each main point and sub-point in your planning outline. Only one key point with associated sub-points for approximately every thirty minutes of presentation.
- Use a highlighter or oblique strokes [//////] in order to build in your powerful p-a-u-s-e-s.
- Write out any direct quotes, source citations, or important statistics that you need to remember. Particularly important if there are likely to be potential legal or financial consequences from your presentation.

If you need to read material because of its complexity, length or potential consequences do it as you would in a conversation. Look down, digest a sentence or paragraph look up and delivery it to your audience, p-a-u-s-e, look down and repeat.

- I also write out in full my Powerful Opening and the Grande Finale. I look those two areas over right up until the last minute before I go on stage.

Once you have taken these steps you are ready to begin rehearsing your speech, timed, and delivered in an extemporaneous manner. The notes you have prepared will guide you, as you have your *conversation with your audience.*

Remember, the more you have practiced, the more time you will have to connect with your audience during the presentation. Read the body language and establish eye contact; respond to audience feedback and build audience rapport.

The Rehearsals Continue

You simply cannot rehearse too much. Learn the words and flow first, rehearse your speech aloud a few times before rehearsing in front of a mirror.

When you practice in front of a mirror, you will be able to evaluate your every move.

If you find yourself using the same gestures repeatedly, ask yourself, "What does this movement communicate?" If the answer is nervousness, then it is a gesture you should get rid of.

Use the mirror two or three times and then it is time to try it out on your friends. Be open to their initial feedback because eventually you want them to do a more formal evaluation of you.

Do you have a Power Presence?

Your image is everything; from your voice, appearance, walk, stance, body language (do you look like a winner?) your props, your acting style, use of humor, clothes and accessories. This results in your image, but more importantly the perception people have of you. Even before you open your mouth!

When you communicate with others it is not just the words you are sending you are also sending the message as to what kind of person you are. *You are the message! And without doubt you must convey that you are a winner. Success breeds Success.*

If you accept this premise, then some of your rehearsals should be with more than one person, and preferably at least once in the venue you will use.

Check your nonverbal communication:

Posture and Appearance.

Professionally dressed - perhaps one level above your audience.

Gestures - use gestures to accentuate a thought and animate your presentation.

Eye Contact - do you practice the 3-second rule? Look to your left for 3-seconds, establish eye contact, cast your eyes to the center of the room for 3-seconds, establish eye contact and then repeat for the right hand side of the room. By looking at your listeners it makes them feel important and lets them know that you want to share your message.

It also allows you to directly respond to the feedback that you receive as you give your talk.

Facial Expressions - your facial cues allow your listeners to interpret the meaning of your message. You can communicate your enthusiasm to your listeners and, by doing so, increase their interest. Likewise, a bored expression on your part is certain to bore your audience.

Developing a Power Voice

Just listen to commercials on the radio. The deeper a voice, the greater its believability. Pay attention to voices and notice:

Normal Voice Range occurs shortly after starting your talk

(assuming the voice is not too high or too low). This is the level others recognise you, as being you.

Pitch is the level (high/low) of your voice. A pleasing one is mixed, high at times, low at others.

Pace is the number of words per minute. We use 145 words per minute on average. The older you get, the slower the pace.

P-a-u-s-e-s are the breaks we build into our speeches, so the listener can think. But you must gain confidence in order to use pauses. That confidence comes through knowing your material.

Projection is the way we emphasise clarity and tone. If you lack confidence, the lack of projection will give it away. You will sound uncertain and that will be recognised instantly.

As soon as the voice rises above Normal Voice Range, the believability of the message diminishes. The minute it drops below the Norm, the believability of the message increases.

Get feedback during rehearsals on how your voice projects and practice to make it distinctive with clarity, pitch and pace.

Use a Tape Recorder

During your practice sessions, use a tape recorder to get a good idea of how you deliver your message. Listen closely to your voice. Are you speaking too quickly? What tone are you using? Are you stumbling over your words? Do you use too many fillers 'Um' or 'Ah?' Ask yourself: "Would I want to listen to this person? Would I find this delivery style interesting?"

Evaluation – the Moment of Truth

By now you will have received informal feedback during your rehearsals and so it is time to have a friend or colleague watch your entire presentation and provide honest feedback.

You need direct feedback on what you should be doing better: clarity of the message; presentation style and effectiveness of your visual aids. Also ask the person to jot down general comments as they watch your presentation. You can then review and discuss each point.

Use Your Visual Aids Or Multi Media At Least Once

You really want your presentation to flow, and if not overdone, using multimedia equipment can really impress an audience. It is important to rehearse with the equipment you will use.

After a few speaking-only rehearsals, you are familiar with what you will say and should not need to refer to your notes as much. Now is the time to rehearse with your projector, remote mouse, or whatever equipment you will be using. As much as possible, recreate the actual venue where you will be speaking.

This phase of rehearsal lets you focus on getting comfortable with your equipment and speaking while looking at your audience, instead of looking at your slides.

Practice your opening remarks, when you will have the lights turned up and down (if at all), how you will start and end the presentation and answer questions.

Before your actual presentation, be certain you are comfortable with both the equipment and your flow. Murphy's law - a few hours before your presentation, go to the room in which you will be presenting and ensure that all is working.

You only get caught out once!

Go To The Venue

Unless it is not practical you should practice on site -- where you will actually deliver your presentation. This will mean getting to the room early, setting up and doing one or two run-throughs.

Practice where you will stand and where your computer and projector will be placed.

Stand so your audience see you to the left of the screen. Their eyes can then easily move from you to the right to see what is on the screen. We are accustomed to moving from left to right because that is how we read.

Have Your Actual Presentation Videotaped and Evaluate it Afterwards

This is your debrief opportunity and is truly the tell-all and can really help you identify and improve upon your presenting skills:

- What types of gestures did you use during your presentation?
- Did you make eye contact with the audience?
- Where was your smile?
- P-a-u-s-e-s. Were there any?
- What did your visuals look like?
- Was there any audience reaction to your jokes or anecdotes?
- Did your stories resonate with your audience?
- Signature story - did it grip the emotions?
- Was there just one key message and was that message supported by sub-points?
- How strong was your Call to Action?

If you are serious about your personal presenting style and how to improve it, and even though you may dislike watching yourself on video I believe it to be a critical improvement tool. Slow down the video so you can clearly see facial expressions and gestures.

Lose The Fear - Get Out There And Speak With Power And Passion

You are the expert on the subject, you know your material, and you have done the rehearsals, so go out there and capture the hearts and minds of your audience through your powerful delivery.

After all, you are only there for them.