



The following is excerpted from *THE MILLION-DOLLAR TOOLBOX: A Blueprint for Transforming Your Life and Your Career with Powerful Communication Skills*.

The Coach Speaks: On Quick Connections

If you're looking for a few simple but effective ways to instantly connect with an audience, even a tough audience, try these.

- **Ask a couple of meaningful questions.** Don't make them difficult questions, of course. Questions literally get you into an active dialogue with your audience, even if you're simply asking a yes or no question that requires nothing more than raised hands or nods.

Even more effective in some situations are questions that require real answers from the audience. For example, at ESI we always begin by asking attendees what common traits they see in effective speakers. We begin a list on a blackboard or flip chart. This loosens people up every time. It gives us information about our audience, and begins to acquaint us with their personalities, too.

- **Know what you want.** Look at your audience, see them, realize they're real people and decide what you want from them. Do you want to surprise them, stir them, interest them, inspire them, make them change, amuse them, make a friend of them? Define your goal then go after it.
- **Use facts *and* feelings.** Individuals respond differently, learn differently and it is our job as communicators to meet them where they are, to communicate in a variety of ways. One of the broadest differences in our audience members is between those who learn from facts and those who learn from feelings. You can reach them both.

For example, when we want to impress upon ESI attendees the importance of passion for our subject, Ty often refers to a Bowling Green University study of teaching effectiveness, using statistics to illustrate that a higher percentage—90 percent, in fact—of students prefer teachers with passion over teachers who only know the facts. Then he illustrates that by talking about the high school biology teacher who put him to sleep everyday with her facts, contrasted with his fascination for the PBS programs hosted by Carl Sagan. Both covered the same topics. Only one set him on fire.

It's the same information, but delivered using a different method. Everybody in the room connects with either the statistics or the storytelling, the facts or the feelings. Use both and you'll discover you connect with everyone in the audience.

- **Look them in the eye.** Chapter Six in the *Million Dollar ToolBox* includes information on effective eye contact. Read it, learn it, and use it. Don't be afraid to look them in the eye.
- **Be vulnerable.** Do you remember the earlier discussion about the power of being vulnerable? We must learn to be private in public, to be open and trusting instead of guarded. That doesn't mean telling all about your escapades. It might mean demonstrating one of your points by telling the story of a time when you missed the boat entirely. It might even be as simple as pausing at powerful moments, allowing your emotions to show. It is the willingness not to be perfect. To laugh at yourself. To enjoy the moment.

But remember this: It never means telling them you're afraid or unprepared. That makes them nervous. So keep that one to yourself.

--Pat Boyd

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