



What I Teach Some of America's Most Successful Executives

From Chapter 8, *Speaking Secrets of the Masters*, by Ty Boyd

I've been asked many times, "What are the most important and essential ingredients to making a successful presentation?" The answer to this question is very important, for the correct answer to the question is also a key to unlocking the door of success. In exploring the answer, we'll be discussing the most important leadership skill, the most important selling skill; in truth, one of the greatest success skills there is.

For about 25 years now, I have been a professional presenter. I've presented programs on five continents, and my audiences have included over a million people. For better than 13 of those 25 years, I've conducted a two-and-one-half day presentations skills course called the Excellence in Speaking Institute® (ESI). Participants have come from every walk of life, every station and experience level—men and women, from every state in the union, every province of Canada, and several foreign countries.

They are young, old, experienced, inexperienced, successful, and unproven. And what we've learned is this: almost without exception, those who decide to really work on their presentation skills can become dramatically more effective! Those who participate in the ESI course learn to harness their enthusiasm to the skills they can develop or currently have. They focus like a laser, and they become very successful. If you are willing to stretch, to grow, to risk some short-term discomfort in employing heretofore-undeveloped speaking tools, you too can heighten the impact of your presentations.

To set the record straight, let me declare that speaking skills are a critically important component of leadership and selling. I believe an even more important success skill is the ability to listen. In my view, it is much tougher to learn to be a really good listener than it is to improve your presentation skills. So here's my first advice to you if you want to become a better presenter: work on your listening skills. Listening well will help you to gain communications mastery.

How do we learn to gain presentation mastery? "We learn by internalizing information and by actively using it. This requires risking, challenging our own comfort level, and trusting the source. It also means not giving up, doing something again and again. It has been said that the number one fear of professionals in America is the fear of speaking, of presenting. This causes the non-professional speaker sometimes to approach speaking with a "not to lose" attitude rather than playing to win. So, I want you to read this chapter with an open mind. You won't be able to employ all the ideas at once. That would be impossible. Try a new twist or two each time you present. If your new practices don't work perfectly for you at first, don't be

discouraged. Don't stop. Keep on. I've been at this for 25 years, and I continue to learn new uses of the tools of presenting. Just be aware that you have a whole tool chest filled with wonderfully expressive instruments. Don't fear using them.

You probably won't use those instruments like a pro at first. You can't expect to be a major leaguer your first time at bat, but keep on. You can become a superlative presenter if you are willing to practice. That's the way every great athlete reaches his or her potential. Speaking requires the same pursuit. It's called mastery. Now, Ty's Ten Top Tips on building a powerful presentation:

- **Ty's Tip One:** Have "fire in your belly". The most important ingredient in successful communication is energy. Speak with conviction. Choose topics about which you are passionate. If you will have fire in your belly for your subject, success is almost guaranteed. That fire can be expressed in many ways. Some speakers have highly charged styles, but some of the most energetic people I have ever met seldom speak above a whisper. You can see the energy in their eyes, in their body movement. You can feel it in the impact of their words. You can sense that fire in their total presentation.
- **Ty's Tip Two:** Have focus. Don't ramble. Build your presentation around three or four well-defined points. Support those main points with both facts and feelings. The first tells the latter sells! Learn to use a tight outline and lean verbiage. This makes for clear understanding. Don't ramble around the platform while you are presenting. By rambling, I mean purposeless wandering. Many people ill advisedly walk, wander, and pace as they speak. What they are attempting to do is to dissipate their own extra energy. This dilutes the focus of the messenger and wears out the audience at the same time. Here's a better way: center yourself. Stand with your weight equally distributed on two feet. Speak directly to the audience. Stand tall. Make your point. You certainly are encouraged to walk if there is a reason to move. We are not looking for a statue; but, on the other hand, neither are we looking for a rolling river. So focus on your content and on its presentation with laser-like aim. In opening, you'll want to capture the audience's attention with a "grabber opener" such as a startling fact, a powerful question, a joke, a quote, etc. Speak in specifics, but many successful speakers learn to do so as a storyteller. I'm often asked why so many preachers, teachers, authors, and speakers come from the South. My answer is that I believe it's the result of the South's storyteller culture. The message must be clearly outlined and thought out, but it's the messenger's presentation skills that make it powerful.

Dr. Albert Morabian's research tells us that seven percent of our message is the verbiage we use, 38 percent the way we use those words, and 55 percent is the unspoken elements of the communication. So, the words are critically important, but it's clearly the presentation mastery of the messenger that makes a speech effective.

A word or two about practice. A secret of the great presenters is first in knowing the material, then concentrated practice of its delivery. Too often, you and I have had experience in "winging it"-just making a presentation off the tops of our heads. We may think, "Boy, this is the way to do it. I am at my best when I 'wing it'." Hold on!

Let me ask you a question. Would you bet on a performer who only winged his or her performance - a golfer, a baseball player, or a singer? A tennis player, a salesperson, or a leader? No. I don't know any great presenters who don't also rehearse and practice. The great George Burns is reported to have said, "I did essentially the same act on stage for 23 years." Twenty-three years. "But," George Burns continued, "I never once did my act on

stage without first having practiced it in my room.” So, the clear message to you is not to “wing it.” Focus your presentation. Then practice, practice, and practice.

- **Ty's Tip Three:** Good speakers perform. You are performing at this very moment as you read this chapter. I am performing at this very moment as I write. There is a clear difference between acting and performing. Acting is when you play the part of someone else, say, Julius Caesar or Madame Curie. You use your own skills to portray that person.

Performing is using those same tools to play you. We have deep toolboxes. And because we're always performing, I suggest that we should perform at our best. Make that performance powerful. Put your whole self into the presentation. If the performance suffers, the content is of little value.

Use illustrations. The listener is hungry for pictures. Use color. Don't be bland, black and white. Use color! Be exciting!

You'll want to be sure you limit the use of pictures and slides to a supporting role, however. Don't become just a voice for a group of colorful pictures and other visuals. There is an art to using computer graphics, slides, flip charts, and support documents. Make them support your performance. Always practice with them before you actually speak. Their skillful use will enhance your performance.

- **Ty's Tip Four:** Use color. Voice color. Body color. Energy color. Use vocal variety in order to avoid a black and white, bland, monotonous presentation. We must fight many forms of monotony. Present with high energy only, and our presentations become monotonous. If we use low energy all the time that, too, becomes monotonous. If we pause at predictable times, we become monotonous. Obviously, what we do not want is monotony. We want the antithesis of monotony, which is a colorful presentation. Create vocal variety!

Learn to whisper and to shout. Speed up and slow down. Pause; pause some more. Get high notes and low notes. Use your entire vocal scale.

In broadcast (which is where I started at age 15), I learned that the broadcast medium itself would somehow eliminate about 30 percent of your voice color. So, broadcasters are taught to be nearly excessive in their vocal color. By the time it's heard, it is less colorful. Well, the speaking platform can do the same. The telephone, too! So, learn to use more color than you have used before.

Use your entire vocal scale. Think of your voice as a fine violin, an oboe, or a clarinet. It doesn't have to be deep and bass-like or sultry and sexy to be great. It can be a beautiful violin or flute. You can create tones that are alive and colorful. You'll have to work on that. A practice point: read from a newspaper or magazine out loud 10 or 15 minutes at a time, several times a week.

Stretch your vocal scale. This will help you to increase the color of your voice. By the way, your friends will probably not notice that you are changing the color of your voice, but they will discover you have become more effective. You may even feel very phony and uncomfortable using more vocal color on your first try, but trust me. Do it. Add color.

- **Ty's Tip Five:** Learn to use your eyes. Our eyes are our second most powerful tools of communication. If your belly's on fire for your subject, your eyes will tell the story. Let me put you in a strange land. You don't know the language. They don't know yours. You know how to articulate the story powerfully, but if they can't understand your words, your message is lost unless your eyes and body tell the story. Make no mistake about this: Eye-to-eye contact with your audience is powerful! The eyes really are "the windows of the soul." As you speak, make eye contact with one person, and then finish your sentence or thought. Let your eyes linger. Then, look at another person. Make your contact one to three seconds. Talk to one person at a time. This is so much more effective than sweeping the masses casually or looking over their heads. This practice alone will make you far more personal, more intimate, and more effective as a presenter. You will connect.

Here's another tip: if you look at a large audience collectively, that sea of faces can really frighten you. But, if you will look at those faces one at a time, you will see them as just plain people who are interested in you and want to connect with you.

- **Ty's Tip Six:** Use your face. The greatest bank account we have in human relations is absolutely free. It's a smile. Add your smile to penetrating eyes and expressive brows. With your eyes on fire and an intensely interesting face, you'll capture the attention of even the most calloused person.

Your face is really like a television set. People are accustomed to watching a lot of action on that television screen. People will watch your face with more interest if there is color and energy in the picture. People will watch a television longer than they'll watch a radio. Your face can create entertaining excitement that enhances your presentation.

- **Ty's Tip Seven:** Use the rest of your body parts, too! After your eyes and face comes the other important carrier of the message: your body. Add the power of your body by standing tall, by using gestures. As a practice point in our Excellence in Speaking Institute®, we suggest that when rehearsing, the participants overemphasize key areas: overemphasize gestures, overemphasize pauses, overemphasize energy, overemphasize facial expressions, etc.

We explain that you won't make your actual presentation with that much boldness, but you will have expanded your comfort zone and will actually be using more of your tools. Make bold rather than timid gestures, and broad as well as subtle movement. Great stage performers have learned their bodies, faces, and eyes are essential to telling the whole story most effectively.

- **Ty's Tip Eight:** Maintain physical balance. Earlier we talked about centering your power. A great part of centering is related to balance. There's a subtle difference in the respect awarded those who stand tall with their weight equally balanced on both feet. You lose none of your warmth and appeal by standing tall. You gain stature and a sense of power. Earlier I said it's okay to walk, but to do so with a purpose.

Don't wander aimlessly, pacing and creating a cadence of movement. This becomes monotonous. It wears down your audience, rendering you far less effective. The audience will not award you as much respect and trust if you wander. Stand still. Don't pace. Move when there is a purpose in doing so. Stand tall. Speak with authority.

- **Ty's Tip Nine:** Involve your audience. Be sensitive to the audience's needs. If there are 10 people in your audience, there are 10 different sets of needs. If possible, get to know your audience before you speak. I do everything I can to arrive early in order to meet members of the audience. I learn their individual interests and weave them into my presentation. This makes the message so much more personal. And it also provides a measure of comfort for the presenter as well. Remember; balance your emphasis on content and relationships, facts and feelings. You must strive to answer the multiple needs of an audience. You cannot be all things to all people, but you can create a balance of information, entertainment, and involvement for your audience.
- **Ty's Tip Ten (*and the most important rule of all*):** Practice, practice, practice! Never take a speaking engagement lightly. If you are to do your best, you must practice and practice and practice. It's not only what you say, but also how you say it. "Winging it" is a very common trap, one that many presenters fall into. They say, "I am best when I don't practice." The danger of this is sometimes a winger does do a great job. So she may then assume that she is most effective without practice. You must not let this mistake happen to you. It's a guarantee of failure or at the most, mediocrity. Ask Michael Jordan how many hours he practiced for every minute on the court. Ask golfer Jack Nicolas. Ask Mia Hamm, the great UNC All American soccer stars. Ask a star salesperson. Ask Barbara Jordan, Billy Graham, Lee Iacocca, Patricia Fripp, Zig Ziglar, Naomi Rhode. The greats practice. No exceptions!

Sometimes our greatest presentations or our greatest opportunities to close the sale are done in a question-and-answer period. Conclusion: when a question-and-answer period is appropriate, rehearse answering key questions just as diligently as you rehearse your talk. This is particularly true if there is the possibility of controversy or really tough questions. Politicians know this. Industry leaders know it. Identify the four or five toughest questions that might be asked. Then prepare a rehearsed answer for each of those. Don't wait to practice on your audience. Practice long before the actual performance.

And finally, a couple of odds and ends:

- Stimulants do not make you sharper. They are, at best, treacherous friends. No alcohol before speaking, ever.
- Off-color material and four-letter words are hardly ever necessary. They will offend someone in every audience. Don't resort to cheap laughs, uneasy applause. The price is too great.

Well, there you have it, quick and simple - ten powerful tips on how to make a powerful presentation to any size group, from two to two thousand. The skills are essentially the same, only the dynamics change with the size of the audience and the setting. Now, all that remains for you to do is to use these tools in your next presentation. Adjust. Try them again. Have trusted advisors view your efforts. Listen to their feedback. Practice. Practice. Practice.

To gain additional skills, consider joining a Toastmasters organization. Look for source books on making presentations and speeches in your library or your bookstore. Decide that you are going to double your effectiveness by fine-tuning your own presentation skills. Learning to be a better presenter and a better speaker is a money skill. You will be personally rewarded for your efforts.

There are few satisfactions that equal the feeling of having made an exciting and effective presentation. I wish you many! You can do it!

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