

Effective Presentation Techniques

Course Overview

by
Michael L. Piazza

The Foundation:

Conquering Fear: In his book “If You Want to Walk on Water, You’ve Got to Get Out of the Boat,” John Ortberg writes the following: “In surveys, fear of public speaking is consistently named as most peoples’ number one fear – even ahead of death. I never understood this, because early in life it became a source of joy to me.”

In my personal study, I have found this dichotomy to be an amazing attribute of human behavior. The Effective Presentation Techniques (EPT) course makes no attempt to solve this dilemma. In devising the course design, I presumed that all course participants have faced and conquered the fear of public speaking and are willing and able to make presentations. In fact, my experience dictates that overcoming this fear is merely 25% of the foundation needed for effective and successful presenting or instructing. Basically, it is a prerequisite, not an attribute, for effective presentations or instructing.

Intense Desire: The second layer of the foundation that lies on top of conquering this fear is a personal desire to present. ALL effective teachers, seminar instructors and presenters that I have known over the last four decades possessed an intense desire to get up and give it their best, receiving joy from their speaking, much like Mr. Ortberg. However, regardless of the level of intensity, this desire constitutes only the second 25% of the foundation needed for effective and successful presenting or instructing. So, if the overcoming of fear and the intense desire to present comprise only 50% of the foundation, what is the rest?

Techniques: We all have witnessed very motivated people struggling to lead a seminar. Or a seasoned and knowledgeable professional falter while trying to accomplish a conference presentation. Or a successful seminar leader stumbling through a luncheon speech to a large crowd. All of them have overcome their fear and are motivated, some even passionate about their presentation, but they just don’t quite make the mark.

Then, we watch someone who seems to effortlessly lead that seminar, or gracefully deliver that luncheon speech. What is the difference; what separates the two? EPT is based on the principle that at least (if not more than) 50% of successful and effective presentations are based in the knowledge and use of behavioral, environmental and perceptual techniques. Those techniques are the largest and strongest element in the foundation for achieving success and delivering an effective instructional session or other type of presentation.



Foundation for effective and successful presentations

Common Misunderstanding:

The most frequent misunderstanding of people wanting to present or instruct is the thought that their willingness (overcoming the fear) and their motivation (desire to present) are enough to carry

them to success. So they usually do not attend a comprehensive training or otherwise gain exposure to effective presentation techniques. They set out motivated but basically unarmed to meet the challenge they so wish to accomplish, and their result is only mediocre or sometimes less than mediocre. They can become discouraged, some to the point of giving up, simply because they lacked a solid foundation as stated above.

This same thinking is often evident in a different form in fairly experienced presenters. They have been running on sheer desire for a long time, but still do not make the mark they wish to achieve and do not progress or grow in effectiveness. To compensate, they simply add more desire or start using gimmicks or tricks to elicit responses from their attendees and to liven up their presentation. But, the added desire and the gimmicks do not overcome the lack of understanding or using effective techniques. Throwing a toy or prize to someone in a session that answers a question correctly is amusing, but has no impact on the effectiveness of the presenter/instructor. Their effort to use such a gimmick is generally sincere, but the outcome is unaffected. The only thing that will effectively grow their presentation is technique, not gimmick or increased desire.

For instance, I attended an awards banquet recently. The room was handsomely decorated, the stage well done; the award trophies were original art and were beautiful. However, there was no sound technician present and the result was almost tragic. The presenters were very seasoned and polished people (most were college teachers) totally committed to the mission of the organization. But all ended up virtually ineffective in making the awards because none of them had been trained in basic audio techniques, particularly in using microphones. With a simple session on mics, attenuation, feedback control and basic audio concepts, any one of them would have been able to make the needed adjustments to the audio system, thus making the 300-person event effective and more successful. The failure was simply due to the lack of understanding and use of environmental techniques, which could have easily been overcome. As a result, each presenter strained with intense desire in an attempt to overcome the mic/audio situation, only to accomplish a less than mediocre outcome. Sad, but true.

Who Should Attend:

Attendees include anyone who has overcome the fear of presenting, possesses a desire to instruct or present, and wants to learn and use effective behavioral, environmental and perceptual techniques for successful presentations. It should be noted that the amount of time served in delivering presentations, or number of years as a teacher or instructor are not variables to be used in determining attendance. Time or repetition will not result in technique usage or development. Only study and application can. Seasoned teachers and presenters can gain a tremendous amount of techniques to add to their existing inventory of skills by attending EPT.

Each potential attendee's knowledge of and/or effective use of the course's covered techniques should be the only determining factor as to whether to attend or not. Even if the topics appear somewhat familiar, additional techniques or increased information on familiar techniques improves presentation and instructional quality, even for seasoned and experienced presenters or instructors. Or, for example, if one is a seasoned classroom teacher and wants to expand into leading professional development seminars, or if a seminar leader would like to transcend to effective conference presentations, the techniques covered aid in those and similar transitions.

I know this from my personal experience. I was a very successful accounting tutor and then extremely successful college accounting instructor; no fear of presenting and an intense desire to deliver. That experience and skill level got me the job as a staff Instructor for the IIA. However, I bungled through my first seminar session and failed at my second. I was ready to give up when I was mentored and given intense first hand lessons on group behavior, room environment and setup, and a myriad of participant and attendee perceptions. I was not aware of any of these items as a college instructor and soon found that they were fundamental and advanced techniques crucial for delivering an effective and successful seminar.

After learning and practicing these techniques, my effectiveness grew instantly and with great intensity. At one point I became one of the top three seminar instructors for the IIA and was ranked (depending on the person measuring) consistently as number one or number two. My experience and desire was dramatically transformed from an effective college instructor into a highly effective professional development seminar leader, simply by being armed with a cadre of effective presentation techniques. Those techniques have consistently improved my presentation skills through three decades of application. I still attend sessions or read about presenting techniques searching for increased awareness or new perspectives. One can never know it all, especially about human behavior and effective communications.

Outcomes:

All those who attend will accomplish a videotaped presentation at the outset of the course. Then, the concepts and applications are presented and applied in cases and exercises. The final session of the course is a second videotaped presentation where participants are encouraged to apply as much of the course ideas as possible. In every instance, there is a consistent and dramatically improved presentation given by all participants at the end of the course.

To further the experience, an optional one to one confidential session is offered with the instructor at the conclusion of the course. The instructor will review the video tape with the participant and give additional ideas and constructive advice for improving the participant's presentation skills and knowledge.

All participants leave with an improved confidence and a full bag of techniques that tremendously improve his/her ability to study a physical environment and make informed changes, effectively understand and affect motivation while maintaining an awareness of perceptual challenges in all forms of presentations.

Costs:

EPT is offered as an in-house or organizationally sponsored course by local chapters of professional associations. The inclusive total cost for the two day course is \$9,000 for fifteen (15) participants. A surcharge of \$500 per participant is charged for total participants above fifteen (15), with an absolute maximum of twenty (20) participants. This cost includes the following items:

- Fee for primary instructor (Michael Piazza)
- Fee for secondary instructor/video camera operator
- All travel and lodging expenses for both instructors including: airfare, hotel, meals, local transportation and related expenses
- Cost of shipping videotaping equipment
- Conversion of each participant's videotaped presentations into MPEG electronic format to be distributed individually via a DVD

The sponsoring organization will provide the meeting room that will effectively facilitate the course along with (but not limited to) the following items:

- Projector and screen for computer slide projection
- Two flipcharts with two extra pads, a roll of masking tape, 5 black, 5 blue, 5 green and 5 red markers (dry erase boards will not suffice because flipchart pages will be posted)
- A printed copy of the course materials workbook for each participant (PDF of all materials, cases, exercises, provided by PDA for printing locally)
- All refreshments and lunch items as desired