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Effective speaking a critical step toward CEO office

By Ron Springer

Finishing first in your college class looks great on the resume, but one of the most important skills in maximizing career success is the ability to communicate effectively.



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business and create memorable moments for its clients. Contact him at 847-549-6200 or at rons@espritproductions.com.

Today's leaders in business, government, the not-for-profit world and even sports are learning how important effectively communicating is to their success and to their professional and personal brand identities.

In fact, just a few poorly chosen words can have dramatic impact, as witnessed by the pope's recent lecture sparking worldwide protests. But, in the business world, what typically happens is leaders give presentations that fail to capture the minds, hearts, imaginations and pocketbooks of their intended audiences, and little in their organizations change.

When you consider all of the critically important audiences that business leaders need to communicate with today—Wall Street analysts, Main Street consumers, community groups, boards of directors, stockholders, venture capitalists, strategic business partners, the media, bloggers, employees, etc.—the importance of their impact on these groups cannot be stressed enough.

Many great ideas never make it off the drawing board or successfully through the implementation process. Often, this is because the "inventors" couldn't find a way

to effectively communicate their ideas—to grab people's attention, convince them it would really work, convey what's in it for them or why they should even care.

Before the film "Inconvenient Truth" was released, there were volumes of evidence on global warming, but few people were listening. Since its release, it's hard to go through a day without hearing something about this topic. That's the power of effective communications, delivered by a well-rehearsed speaker, with powerful visuals, using the right media.

One of the best techniques you can use in preparing a presentation is to initially think about "the key message takeaway"—what you really want your audience to know when your presentation is finished. With those points in mind you can then develop the remainder of the presentation, the images, props and other visual support you'll need to help the audience fully understand your messages.

With this in mind, you can determine the most effective media to use as speaker support. Will it be best to use PowerPoint? Or is it a small group where you'll be working up information during the presentation which might lend itself to simple flip charts, chalk boards or overheads? Will you need high quality film or video production? Will you need to have live access to the Internet?

Helping presenters establish a true dialogue and emotional link with their audiences is essential. It can be done through the use of stories, examples, visuals, Q&A sessions, proper eye contact, body language, voice intonation and even strategic pauses. These can all be used to help someone connect with, persuade and motivate people.

The link between successful companies and leaders who are effective communicators is a trait of growing firms according to a study done by Watson Wyatt Worldwide. Many professional communicators actually feel that top executives are often judged first and foremost by their ability to communicate

effectively, and secondarily, on the content of their messages.

Although some people are born with an innate ability to communicate effectively, many of the techniques can be taught to those who need to work harder at getting their messages across.

It is also important to be able to communicate utilizing a wide-variety of platforms today. Presenters should work to become equally persuasive on the phone, one-on-one, in small and large groups and through written messages.

For people who are not natural speakers, speech coaching should be considered. Depending upon the individual it may just take a few hours of training or a few days with ongoing follow-up and evaluation. Some training today is even possible over the phone or by asking a coach to review a video of a presentation. Every speaker's needs are unique, so it's important to work with a speech coach who will customize the program to fit your needs, level of skill and your time availability.

When people achieve a level where they are conveying their information effectively and reaching their audiences on an emotional level, as well as an intellectual one, then they have reached a point where they are good—perhaps even great—presenters.

Quick Facts

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