

12 Easy Ways to Achieve Presence & Charisma



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1. True “Inspiration”: Breathing For Focus and Presence

In.spi.ra.tion

1. A breathing in, as of air into the lungs; inhaling. 2. An inspiring or being inspired mentally or emotionally. 3. An inspiring influence; any stimulus to creative thought or action (Webster’s New World Dictionary, Second College Edition).

Surprised to learn the first dictionary definition of “inspiration” has to do with breathing? Yet, how appropriate and how interesting that together, the definitions of this Latin word mean to take air in and then be stimulated into creativity!

Sufficient breath support not only focuses our concentration, but slows our heart rate, as it bathes our brain cells in thought-producing oxygen. And if there’s ever a time when we need a well-oxygenated brain to think on our feet, it’s during a presentation.

Get in the habit of “belly breathing” – breathing with the help of your diaphragm, rather than just the upper part of your lungs.

■ Here’s how:

- Stand at ease and place your dominant hand on your belly, i.e., at the place that goes in and out most noticeably when you breathe.
- Take relaxed, medium-deep breaths. Feel the bellows-like action going on down there?
- Breathe in = belly out.

When you get in the habit of belly breathing like this, you will be constantly giving yourself a full supply of nourishing, vital oxygen. You’ll automatically become more calm and focused.

2. How to Look and Sound Confident

Try this simple experiment: Stand and expel all the air from your lungs until they are completely empty. What did that action do to your posture?

You probably assumed a concave and “caved in” appearance, making you appear weak and irresolute. Now, slowly fill your lungs up to their full capacity. Did that straighten you up? Do you feel more capable, prepared and stronger? I guarantee that’s how your audience will perceive you. You just used breathing, posture and stance to change your level of credibility and authority with an audience.

The use of space like this, along with time, can affect your listeners’ perception of you as a public speaker.

Space. What the brief exercise above accomplishes, is to allow me to introduce the concept of controlling space. Most of us become wrapped up in our content and our nervousness when we speak in public. If we think about physical performance, it’s to reflect how uncomfortable we are in front of all these people.

Powerful speakers go far beyond this elementary awareness of nonverbal communication. They understand how greatly physical presence affects credibility and believability.

Speakers who “command space” in this way positively influence their listeners’ responses to them and their message. The more comfortable such speakers appear to be as they stand and move, the more likely audience members will identify with them.

Good speakers reach their level of comfort by occupying an appropriate amount of space. They strike a balance between diminishing their authority by folding in on themselves, and gesticulating wildly or pacing back and forth like a caged animal – what I call “the motivational speaker syndrome.”

To move naturally, commit your own physical sensations to your muscle-memory. Now recreate them at will as if you are in front of an audience.

Time. Just as we want to control how we occupy space, we must keep a firm grasp on time as an element in our presentation. On the most basic level, this means keeping to our agenda, so that we don’t lop off important parts of our talk because we are up against the clock.

12 EASY WAYS to Achieve Presence and Charisma

In your practice sessions, get to know what 5, 20 and 40 minutes feel like in a speaking situation. And keep in mind that time is extremely subjective to a speaker – stretching out like salt water taffy or compressing shockingly – while remaining basically objective to audiences.

Learn also how to pace your presentation. Confident speakers take the time they need to cover important points; nervous speakers fly through everything too fast.

Practice using pauses and silence. Listeners need permission to take a “mental breath” now and again. A pause in vocalization also alerts your listeners that a new and important point is coming up.

3. Tap into Your Natural Talents

Let's face it – for audiences, the message and the messenger are usually the same thing.

It's certainly the case in politics, isn't it? The same is true in a court trial. How many of us would want to be represented by a lawyer who seems to be wearing juror repellent?

You are the message your audience receives.

So be aware of the impressions you are broadcasting! You can increase your influence on audiences by maximizing the critical connection between you and your message.

The first and perhaps most important point to be understood is that you are a natural performer. We shape ourselves to meet the needs of the particular audience we're with at the moment. The "you" shopping in the supermarket, for instance, is a different person from the "you" on a first date, or the one explaining to your boss the reasons you deserve a raise.

By acknowledging that a speech situation is simply one of the many "performances" we give every day or our lives, we can embrace each such opportunity instead of fearing it.

In other words: There really is nothing unusual or momentous about speaking in public. We're always giving some kind of performance or other in our lives. Public speaking just gives us the opportunity to do it all with a bit more pizzazz!

4. Show Audiences Your Goodwill

Do you give your audiences the impression that you're speaking for their benefit?

That's what "goodwill" means for a presenter – and it's a quality that's absolutely essential for speaking success.

Yet how often have you seen speakers who appear to love to listen to themselves talk? The next time you attend a meeting or presentation, pay attention to whether the speaker is making an effort to be sure his or her audience is receiving critical information.

Does he or she make eye contact? Is the speaker seeing the nonverbal communication coming his or her way? Does that person stop their soliloquy from time to time to solicit input from others in the room or auditorium?

Just eye contact, for instance, can make an enormous difference: How can anyone even pretend to be concerned with the needs of an audience if the notes on a lectern are more important than the people in the seats?

It just makes sense: Audiences who think a speaker cares about them are infinitely more inclined to trust and get influenced by that presenter.

As a speaker, you must place your listeners front-and-center at all times. Look at people when you talk to them, and use facial expressions – exactly the way you would to a friend sitting across from you at Starbucks.

And pay attention to people's reactions. If they appear confused or uninterested, you may have to repeat a key item, state something a different way, or think up a metaphor to illustrate your point.

Here's a touchstone you can use when it comes to gauging your goodwill as a speaker: If you are truly and completely engaged with the needs of your listeners, you won't experience a single "How am I doing?" moment. You'll simply have more important things on your agenda.

5. Reveal Your True Self

One of the fascinating things about speaking in public is that it reveals so much about who we are as human beings. Even as an actor, I would have to work ferociously hard to hide my true nature when I talk to people about something that really matters to me.

And if I did, all of my focus and concentration would be directed inward instead of where it needs to be – on keeping my audience actively engaged with my critical message.

The problem with being this comfortable with self-exposure occurs when we perceive a speaking situation as something “different” and intimidating. That’s when we become nervous and afraid; and in response, we slip on our presentation masks or don our invisible protective armor.

In other words – we temporarily become someone we really aren’t. Audiences can sense that immediately. We need to throw away the mask, to let our true self come through for our sake and our listeners’. Hiding from who you really are is much harder work for you and your listeners.

6. Have a Dialogue With Your Listeners

A speech or presentation can easily seem like a one-way street: You send, your audience receives, and that's it.

Yet, that's not how a good presentation works. In a dynamic talk or speech, information passes back and forth continuously. It's true that most of that information is verbal on your part and nonverbal on the part of your audience. Still, every presentation involves give-and-take of information and sensory input. In that sense, every good speech is more dialogue than monologue. It stands to reason that we have to pay attention to the nonverbal communication that's coming our way as our audience's "speech."

Here's a good way to achieve a conversational dynamic in your speaking ability:

In your next conversation with someone on a topic that really interests you, pay attention to how you express yourself vocally and physically. Hear how lively and animated your voice becomes? Notice how you move and use gestures and facial expressions? What about the way your volume, pitch, tone and vocal quality change as you speak about your thoughts and feelings on this topic?

Now, consciously bring those aspects of your communication style into your practice sessions as a speaker or presenter. You may feel awkward at first, because you will be intentionally transferring speaking behavior from one situation to another. But don't worry about that. You're simply teaching yourself to be more like your natural speaking self, not less.

Next, ask a friend to sit in as a practice audience. Ask him or her to tell you whenever you don't sound like the real you. The real you is the one that's unique and interesting for audiences.

7. How to Get an Audience to Trust You

We have to be credible when we give a career-related presentation – that’s a given. And being credible means acting businesslike and hardheaded, with a cut-to-the-chase style that banishes all emotions, right?

Rubbish!

When was the last time you made a critical decision about your life based solely on reason, leaving emotions out of it? As human beings, we make life-changing decisions emotionally – from the gut. Only afterwards do we justify our choices with rational arguments.

You’ve heard about the “left brain/right brain” dichotomy, haven’t you? The left side of the brain is the seat of logic, language, and reasoning. In the right hemisphere reside spatial awareness, creativity, emotions and decision-making.

Did you notice just now that decisions and emotions are located in the same part of the brain? Why then would it make any sense to remove all emotional input when we’re trying to persuade an audience?

Remember: Audience members want to be influenced by you; so most of your listeners will not be actively resistant to your message. But for true influence to occur, an audience must believe in your honesty and trustworthiness. And that of course is an emotional response.

However professional we need our presentation to be – whether we’re discussing sales figures, a scientific hypothesis, policy issues or any other topic – we need to include an emotional component so that we reach the hearts as well as the minds of our audience members.

A speech is a presentation from a person or persons to other human beings. And that means that emotions will be part of the mix. If nothing else, your passion will intrigue your audience and generate respect for you as the presenter, while adding interest to your topic in listeners’ minds.

8. Do This to Make a Lasting Impression

What is it about a dynamic speaker that grabs our attention and compels our interest?

Well, for one thing, such speakers possess authority. We may or may not recognize them as experts before the occasion of their speech. But once they begin to talk, there's something about the way they stand and move, isn't there?

In a word, they exhibit confidence. And critically, they do so in terms of physicality.

I believe that most speakers are confident in their message. They strongly believe they have the knowledge and ability to get that message across. The issue with presenters who need a greater level of authority isn't knowledge or commitment, then. It's finding a way to "broadcast" that level of passion – to externalize what they're thinking and feeling.

Externalizing our deep commitment to our message, and our interest in speaking on this topic, really comes down to one thing: Using nonverbal communication effectively. Audience members aren't mind readers. They can't intuit our expertise, our passion for our topic, or our concern that they understand our message. We have to show them these things.

How can you do that?

Think about how you occupy space: Do you "take" the space that's allotted to you as a speaker, or do you try to minimize your physical presence?

If posture is a problem for you, imagine that there's a string tied to the top of your head that goes upward into infinity. Someone up there is tugging gently and steadily on the line, straightening you up in a slow continuous process.

When it comes to movement, use gestures that are inclusive rather than exclusive – an open hand offered to a questioner rather than a pointed finger, for example.

And don't be afraid to come out from behind the lectern if you need to do so. You are allowed to use the empty space on the stage or podium! If you assume a confident and authoritative pose, you'll actually feel more credible and professional, and your audience will see the difference immediately.

9. What Is Your Body Saying? – Using Nonverbal Communication

Nonverbal communication means everything you communicate to your audience apart from the words you say. Your content is a critical part of your message, of course. But studies have shown that what you look and sound like as you're delivering information plays a central role in the message that's received by your listeners.

In research conducted at the University of California at Los Angeles, communications expert Albert Mehrabian found that 93 percent of message reception comes from nonverbal communication over verbal content. A huge proportion of your effectiveness as a presenter depends upon your appearance, movement and vocal presentation.

A classic example of this dynamic is the first debate of the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon presidential contest – the first televised debate in history. Nixon at that point in the campaign was ahead in the polls. But how he appeared on television in that first debate hurt his candidacy considerably.

Viewers had no idea that Richard Nixon had the flu that day. What they saw was a man with a hastily applied make-up job who was sweating profusely in the harsh studio lights, and generally looking ill at ease in the new medium of television.

Across from Nixon was the tanned, athletic-looking Jack Kennedy, who not only gave the impression of youthful vigor, but also intuitively seemed to understand how to use the cameras to his advantage.

Interestingly, post-debate polls showed that among voters who listened to the debate on radio, Nixon was judged the winner. But the nonverbal message that millions of television viewers received was that Nixon was not up to the sheer physical demands of the American presidency.

Spend less time on the content of your presentation and more time on how you hold yourself, move and sound as you speak. Some excellent tools to help you in this pursuit are: a mirror, friends and colleagues, and more important, a video camera.

With their help, you'll begin to see and hear yourself as others do. That's a crucial step in knowing how to marshal nonverbal communication to your success and profit.

10. Speaking With Credibility and Authority

Let's face it: There are times when you want to come across as warm and friendly in presentations. Then there are other occasions when you need to project a bedrock image of credibility and authority.

Achieving that second goal – a high level of perceived professionalism – is what I'd like to discuss in this tip. If you're senior enough or your reputation precedes you, attaining that degree of credibility is usually easy. But what about these common situations:

- You're young
- You're speaking to listeners who are more senior than you are
- You're the first representative of your company these listeners have ever seen
- You're female in an industry historically populated by men

In these circumstances and similar situations, you're apt to lack confidence in the role you've been assigned to play.

The world of the theater offers an easy and remarkably effective exercise to help you: imagine that you are a tree.

Seriously, the reason I want you to picture yourself as a tree has to do with the very important concept of "grounding." You imagine that just like a 100-year-old oak or maple, you have roots that go deep and wide into the earth. Like that tree, you are firm, secure and unshakeable as you stand tall and proud.

Now, what do you think an audience member sees when he or she contemplates you as a speaker? A figure of standing and substance: A strong and steadfast presenter. If an opponent happens to send a lightning bolt your way in the question-and-answer period, you'll be strong enough to take the blast and still be standing when the smoke clears.

When you plant yourself firmly in front of others, the self-image that's elicited in your own mind is that of a confident and prepared speaker. From that thought emerge other physical expressions of your confidence. It's a self-regulating cycle that continually gives you what we might call "strength of character" as a presenter.

11. How to Make Yourself a Powerful Speaker

It's a lot easier to make yourself a powerful speaker than you might imagine. And power – in terms of the dynamism of your platforms skills – matters greatly in the world of business speeches and presentations.

You may be the world's foremost authority on your subject. Yet the inescapable fact concerning presentations is that you will be measured as much on your performance as your knowledge or expertise.

In plain terms, your audiences will equate your message with you. That's a good thing. Otherwise, you could send out a blast e-mail of your speech, and no one would have to show up – including you.

From today on, think in terms of the “speaking version” of you – a performance persona that's the essence of you talking about your subject area. That's the person your audiences will find interesting.

Here are three areas of speech performance to keep in mind in this regard:

Competence. Advertise your competence in everything you say and do. When you trust yourself and what you are saying, your audience will trust you. That's the first step that allows them to invest you with presence and authority.

Rapport. Find a way to identify with your audience's values and experiences, and externalize the connection by what you say. Most listeners resist speakers whose background or known views are noticeably different from their own. Wherever you can, show that you and your listeners share common ground. Create an atmosphere in your presentation that fosters persuasion and believability.

Delivery. Every audience arrives with preconceptions about a speaker. These may have nothing to do with you personally, but are tied to the topic, organization, or viewpoint that you represent.

You need to show that you are able to “deliver” on the implied promise that your presentation has created, i.e., that it will be worth spending the time and effort to listen to. That's what delivery means in this respect. When you give your speech dynamically and with conviction, you'll be “delivering” the goods!

12. Your Best Visual Aid Is You!

Remember Bill Clinton?

Whether you favor Che Guevara T-shirts or quote William F. Buckley at cocktail parties, you'll probably agree that William Jefferson Clinton was and is a charismatic public speaker.

What made President Clinton so good at the lectern? Certainly, he was smooth. And he displayed an extraordinary sense of ease, coupled with firm control. Not many speakers, after all, could deliver a nationally televised address from memory while a TelePrompTer relentlessly rolled out the wrong speech! Perhaps Clinton's chief attribute as a speaker, however, was the pure enjoyment he displayed to audiences. The body language, the easy stance and gestures, the frequent smiles, and the sheer joy of performing. All of these things declared that this was a man who lived for these moments in his professional life.

Bill Clinton, then, is an excellent example of an important phenomenon in public speaking, one that most speakers aren't aware of: You yourself are always your best visual aid.

Think about it for a moment: You are the one visual component of your speech that's always on stage front and center. You are a visual that doesn't just sit there, but walks and talks and argues convincingly – the one that shares the beliefs of audience members and speaks to them from common ground. You're also the only visual that can adapt as need be, thinking on your feet and changing your presentation in response to audience input.

All very powerful stuff.

Spend the time you think is necessary to put together the visual components of your presentation. These elements are still excellent forms of evidence. Learn the techniques of working with your visual aids, and practice going through your PowerPoint show.

But before you do all that – give some serious thought to how you'll look and move in front of your audience as you make your compelling arguments. The visual element of your speech that is "you," is a hugely important persuader. Find ways to make it work to your advantage.



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