

— Eliot M. Shapiro

## Communication—

# How to Present with Confidence

### Consider this scenario:

You're one of three finalists vying for a major project. The other firms are just as capable as yours—their pricing, talent, and experience are very similar. Now it's time to make one final presentation to the decision makers assembled in the client's executive boardroom.

From the buyer's standpoint, they can't go wrong. Whoever they select will get the job done right, on time and within budget.

If this is the case, how do they decide? It's easy to respond with "the cheapest," "the most experienced" or "the one with the best looking team!" But when everything is equal (at least in the client's mind), who is most likely to win the business? The answer, in many cases, is the firm whose presenters display the most confidence, the one that inspires the highest level of trust, and the group that makes them think, "I like these folks."

Trustworthiness, confidence and likeability—all are key success factors when delivering your information during

presentations, meetings, and interviews. But what does it LOOK like to be confident? What does it SOUND like to be trustworthy? Most speakers know how they'd like to be perceived, yet they don't come across that way under pressure.

Unfortunately, tendencies happen—we've all got 'em, and people are watching. If you're unaware of your own physical and verbal tendencies, they may hold you back in these tough situations. It's time to expose these tendencies, and share some time-tested ways to minimize or eliminate them altogether.

First, a warning—these tips may sound easy, but putting them into practice feels very different than you'd think. During our workshops and coaching sessions, we videotape our clients as they experiment with these skills so they can see the difference for themselves. We'll even tell them, "We don't care how you feel!" As harsh as that sounds, it's liberating. The video allows one to see how these skills actually look compared to how they feel.

Read on to explore tendencies—both physical and verbal—that create the wrong perception, and discover how to overcome them with effort and practice.

### Physical Tendencies:

- **Eye Contact:** Most speakers know this is important, but the phrase itself is problematic. Instead, think about "eye CONNECT." You want to connect with listeners, making each person feel as if this speaker is talking to ME. Instead of glancing at someone and moving away, look at each person for a complete thought. Thinking through your mental script, the thought is over when you come to a punctuation mark, usually a comma or period. Using this method, you'll never deliver more than one sentence per person before moving on (and you'll avoid the "creepy factor"—making people uncomfortable with too much eye contact.)
- **Gestures:** Even when you feel comfortable in front of a group, your hands may convey a different message. Fidgeting with your fingers and clasping your hands are both potential signs of nervousness. Most of us gesture when we're not thinking about it, but we hold back when we're the center of attention.



— Eliot M. Shapiro, Co-founder and Principal of EMS Communications, is an experienced training facilitator and presentation coach with a passion for public speaking and teaching. For 20+ years, he has helped individuals and teams realize their own potential, sharing his enthusiasm with thousands of people. He lives by the same philosophy he encourages in his clients: you don't always have to act serious to be taken seriously.

Since 1998, EMS Communications has been on a mission to "rid the world of boring presentations, one speaker at a time!" We accomplish this by helping individuals and teams improve their leadership, presentation and communication skills. Our services include private executive coaching, customized corporate workshops and open-to-the-public presentation skills seminars.

Learn more at [www.PresentationTrainers.com](http://www.PresentationTrainers.com).

# to Win the Job!

The next time you're in casual conversation, observe the gestures you use naturally, and force yourself to gesture the same way when you're under pressure.


- **Movement:** Moving around can be good during presentations, as long as it's intentional. Distracting movement (pacing, swaying, etc.) comes from excess energy, and can create the perception that you're uncomfortable. Make your movement PURPOSEFUL by walking to another side of the room, or coming forward to make an important point. Once you get there, plant your feet and stand straight. By doing this, any excess energy will be channeled into gestures and volume.
- **Facial Expression:** Too many speakers try to look serious in order to be taken seriously. The result, unfortunately, is they end up looking angry or disinterested. It's critical to convey what you're feeling, so experiment with smiling, raising your eyebrows, or scrunching up your face. Be serious when it's appropriate, but be expressive when delivering a positive message.
- **Energy:** Most people prefer listening to an energetic speaker rather than one who puts them to sleep. Presenters who use vocal variety are much more likely to connect on an emotional level with listeners. Many speakers want to convey energy, but under pressure, they end up using a monotone voice that sounds boring and disinterested. Whether you're delivering a serious message with conviction, or trying to get the audience excited with enthusiasm, it's important to feel as if you're overdoing the energy in order to get it right.

## Verbal Tendencies:

- **Speaking Pace/Pausing:** Are you a fast talker? Slow? Somewhere in the middle? Your pace is only an issue if it's at one of the extreme ends of the spectrum—most of us fall somewhere in the middle. Rather than slowing down or speeding up, PAUSING provides a double benefit, allowing your listeners to process what you said, and giving you time to consider what to say next. With critical information, pauses make your words sound that much more emphatic. To really make an impact, though, overdo the pauses—when you think you've paused long enough, add another second or two.
- **Non-words:** Instead of pausing, most speakers fill the void with sound. Non-words are noises (uh, um) or actual words (you know, like, so...) that we use without even realizing it. This habit has a negative impact—people may become so distracted that they count the number of non-words you use, or they may think, "This speaker is completely unprepared." Preparation certainly helps, but awareness is also critical. With our

clients, we use the "snapping game," snapping our fingers for every non-word. Once they realize their pattern, the goal is to PAUSE before the "um" comes out, inserting an actual word instead. Try the snapping game with your colleagues and family—it generates immediate results.

- **Overuse of Qualifiers:** Many speakers use language that makes them sound tentative instead of confident. Phrases such as "we think," "this might" or "it could" can give the impression that you're wishy-washy. Though qualifiers are sometimes appropriate, they get in the way when making recommendations or when you're trying to be direct. Experiment with stronger language ("we know," "this will," "we're confident") and you'll notice the difference.
- **Trailing Off:** Many people trail off when they speak, making it difficult to hear their last few words. This happens because the speaker is thinking about their next thought before this one is finished. Since this is usually critical information, make sure it's heard. A great way to overcome this distraction is to imagine you're speaking like Regis Philbin, who always gets LOUDER and the end of THOUGHTS. ("Is that your final ANSWER?")
- **Upspeaking:** Similar to trailing off, upspeaking is the tendency to use run-on sentences, making statements sound like questions. Listen to pre-teens speak these days and you'll hear it right away. ("Today? In school? This kid got in trouble? Because she didn't do her homework?") Unfortunately, it's happening in the business world too, causing confident speakers to sound tentative. To overcome upspeak, imagine that each statement you make is emphatic and direct.

So, what would you rather say as you walk out of that final presentation—"I felt good" or "We got the business"? Trying something new usually feels awkward, but if it enhances your projection of confidence and conviction, then the way you FEEL shouldn't matter. And with practice, these new skills can quickly become natural. 

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