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How to Become an Authentic Speaker

Key ideas from the [Harvard Business Review](#) article By Nick Morgan

The Idea in Brief

You rehearsed your speech thoroughly--and mastered that all-important body language. But when you delivered the talk, you sensed little enthusiasm in your audience.

What's going on? You're probably coming across as artificial. The reason: When we rehearse specific body language elements, we use them incorrectly during the actual speech--slightly *after* speaking the associated words. Listeners feel something's wrong, because during natural conversation, body language emerges *before* the associated words.

To demonstrate your authenticity, don't rehearse your body language. Instead, imagine meeting four aims:

- Being open to your audience
- Connecting with your audience
- Being passionate about your topic
- Listening to your audience

When you rehearse this way, you'll genuinely experience these feelings when delivering your speech. Your body language will emerge at the right moment. And your listeners will know you're the real thing.

The Idea in Practice

Morgan recommends rehearsing your speeches with these four aims in mind:

Being Open to Your Audience

To rehearse being open, practice your speech by envisioning what it would be like to give your presentation to someone you're completely comfortable with. The person could be your spouse, a close friend, or your child. Notice especially what this feels like: This is the emotional state you want to be in when you deliver the speech.

This state leads to more natural body language, such as smiles and relaxed shoulders. And the behaviors in turn lead to more candid expression of your thoughts and feelings.

Connecting with Your Audience

As you practice your speech, think about wanting to engage with your listeners. Imagine that a young child you know well isn't heeding you. You want to capture--and keep--his attention however you can.

In such situations, you don't strategize; you simply do what feels natural and appropriate. For example, you increase the intensity or volume of your voice or move closer to your listener. During your actual speech, these behaviors will happen naturally and with the right timing.

Being Passionate About Your Topic

While rehearsing, ask yourself what in your topic you feel deeply about: What's at stake? What results do you want your presentation to produce? Focus not on what you want to say but on why you're giving the speech and how you feel about it. Let the underlying emotion come out in every word you deliver during rehearsal. You'll infuse the actual speech with some of that passion and come across as more human and engaging.

"Listening" to Your Audience

To practice fulfilling this aim, think about what your listeners will likely be feeling when you step up to begin your presentation. Are they excited about the future? Worried about bad news? As you practice, imagine watching them closely, looking for signs of their response to you.

During your presentation, you'll be more prepared to identify the emotions your listeners are sending to you via nonverbal means. And you'll be able to respond to them appropriately; for example, by picking up the pace, varying your language, asking an impromptu question, or even eliminating or changing parts of your talk.

Further Reading

Articles

The Kinesthetic Speaker: Putting Action into Words

Harvard Business Review

April 2001

by Nick Morgan

Author Nick Morgan says what's most often lacking in today's speeches and presentations is what he calls the "kinesthetic connection." Many good speakers connect aurally with their audiences, telling dramatic stories and effectively pacing their speeches to hold people's attention. Others connect visually, with a vivid film clip or a killer slide. Some people do both, but not many also connect kinesthetically. Morgan says the kinesthetic speaker feeds an audience's primal hunger to experience a presentation on a physical, as well as an intellectual, level. Through awareness of their

own physical presence--gestures, posture, movements--and through the effective use of the space in which they present, kinesthetic speakers can create potent nonverbal messages that reinforce their verbal ones. In this article, Morgan describes techniques for harnessing kinesthetic power and creating a sense of intimacy with an audience.

Managing Authenticity: The Paradox of Great Leadership

Harvard Business Review

December 2005

by Rob Goffee and Gareth Jones

Leaders often assume that authenticity is an innate quality--that a person is either genuine or not. In fact, the authors say, authenticity is largely defined by what other people see in you. As such, you can to a great extent control it. In this article, the authors explore the qualities of authentic leadership. To illustrate their points, they recount the experiences of some of the authentic leaders they have known and studied, including the BBC's Greg Dyke, Nestle's Peter Brabeck-Letmathe, and Marks & Spencer's Jean Tomlin. Establishing your authenticity as a leader is a two-part challenge. You consistently have to match your words and deeds; otherwise, followers will never accept you as authentic. To get people to follow you, though, you also have to get them to relate to you. This means presenting different faces to different audiences--a requirement that many people find hard to square with authenticity. But authenticity is not the product of manipulation. It accurately reflects aspects of the leader's inner self, so it can't be an act. Authentic leaders seem to know which personality traits they should reveal to whom, and when.

Book

Give Your Speech, Change the World: How to Move the Audience to Action

HBS Press

January 2005

by Nick Morgan

Studies show that audiences remember only 10% to 30% of speech or presentation content. Given those bleak statistics, why do we give speeches at all? We give them, says communications expert Nick Morgan, because they remain the most powerful way to connect with audiences. In this book, he offers a new, audience-centered approach to public speaking. Through entertaining and insightful examples, Morgan illustrates a three-part process--focusing on content development, rehearsal, and delivery--that enables readers of all experience levels to give passion-filled speeches that move audiences to action.

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About the Author

Nick Morgan (nick@publicwords.com) is the founder of Public Words, a communications coaching firm, and the author of "The Kinesthetic Speaker: Putting Action into Words" (HBR April 2001). His new book, *Trust Me: Four Steps to Authenticity and Charisma*, is scheduled for publication in December 2008 by Jossey-Bass.

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