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About the Author

Allen Harrison successfully represented companies and good causes for many years.

Allen said, "My work has involved presenting in a wide variety of places and situations. I started with store demonstrations which helped me to learn how to connect with people quickly and to be confident in just about any situation."

"That has been invaluable in all the other presentations I have done since those early days."

Allen said, "I shared my experience and knowledge in this ebook to help my readers quickly improve their own ability to present their ideas or services to groups both large and small."

"I believe that improving your ability to connect and interact with all types of people is one of the most valuable skills which you can have."

"I will focus on business presentations in the ebook but will also show how they can be used in a other situations and for other reasons."

"Presentation skills are valuable to everyone that is in any kind of business, even if they do not do formal presentations like I have. I know many people that have become more successful than they thought they ever would be because learning to present their ideas and offers gave them more confidence and authority in their other interactions, whatever the situation.

They can use some of these techniques and tips to increase their self-confidence and their ability to put forward their ideas and suggestions to their employers and clients.

It's more important than ever to be able to communicate well in every part of our lives. The advice of an experienced presenter can help anyone become more confident and successful.

Introduction

I wrote this book to help you to be more confident about presenting yourself and your ideas in public.

Being able to make presentations is a handy and profitable skill whatever kind of business you're in.

But, there are many other times when we might have to speak in public, such as when we represent a community group we are a member of or at a social function such as a wedding.

These tips will also help anyone who just wants to be more confident in all of their social and business interactions.

Their improved ability to engage the people they are talking to could be very valuable for their career or personal goals.

Most people are as frightened of having to speak in public as they are about sitting in their dentist's chair.

I can't do anything about fear of the dentist's drill, but my tips will ease the fear and discomfort you felt in the past whenever you have to get your ideas across again.

I have included some suggestions for making presentations through the Internet as well as through the traditional face to face methods.

Allen Harrison

Stage Fright

Do you get huge butterflies flying in your stomach at the thought of standing up and speaking in public?

I can help you get control of them but not guarantee that you will ever be able to completely remove that fluttering feeling.



That’s not a problem. Most speakers admit they still feel a slight flutter before each presentation they give, even after years in the spotlight.

But, they accept it and then forget it.

They focus on their job which is helping the audience by delivering their information in the best way that they can.

You should adopt the Boy Scouts’ motto, “Be Prepared!”

When you have researched your topic and checked every detail, tailored your presentation to the needs and expectations of the particular audience, you will find those butterflies will be almost completely dormant.

You will still feel a slight buzz. That will help you to convey your message with enthusiasm and sincerity so you connect better to your audience.

Learning to Present

The best kind of training for improving any skill is doing it.

I recommend that you check out whatever opportunities are available in your area for training and getting some experience as a speaker.



There are many organizations, such as Toastmasters International and Jaycees, which have formal training for their members. The advantage of these groups is that you are speaking and learning together. Everyone goes through the system and everyone gets a supportive and

helpful audience along with useful feedback from the other members.

You can also learn by doing as an active member of a community group or through a free course at a community college or similar organization.

Many organizations and individuals offer professional coaching in public speaking too. This may seem expensive but can be a great investment if it improves your business opportunities.

And the cost is relatively small when you improve a skill which might continue to earn you good money for many years to come.

Watch and Learn

We often overlook a valuable resource which is easy to access and often costs little or nothing except some of our time.

Try to see many presenters at events, conferences, and public meetings in your local area, even when you don't have a great interest in the actual topic. You will just focus on their methods and techniques.

If we are very interested in the topic, we tend to just become part of the audience and may miss some important lessons.

You can learn from all the presenters you see. There are many sources on the Internet too.

Even the less effective presentations that you get to watch can help you recognize mistakes which they make so you avoid them in your own presentations.

Always give all presentations you see the same attention and respect which you want to get from your audiences. You know the pressures which they are probably dealing with.

Being attentive and responsive can help them and will give other people in the audience a good impression of you.

Your First Presentation

It has been many years since I gave my first formal presentation.

I had some nervousness. Everyone does.

It is unlikely that your job or your whole career will be dependent on doing it well.



You may feel that you are not ready, but whoever gave you the opportunity has shown that they have confidence in your ability.

Also, the people you speak to are showing their genuine interest in what you have to say. No-one has an hour or more to waste listening to you or anyone else.

They won't give you that opportunity or invest their time unless they see some potential benefit for themselves.

You can reduce the pressure you may feel by focusing on giving your audience the best experience you can.

When you start thinking about them and what they need from you, your stress will reduce because you will not be focusing on yourself.

Feedback

Each time you do a presentation of any kind, you will get some idea of how well your efforts are received by the reaction from the people you speak to.

But, experienced presenters know that feedback is very valuable. Getting that feedback when the presentation has just finished is the best feedback of all.

I always offer a Feedback Form in the handout for each presentation. You can often get comments which are more revealing than you would get if you asked an audience member after the presentation for some direct verbal feedback.

I always include my contact email address in the handout. This is not my personal email address. But, I personally check it every day and reply to each email which I get there.

If they take the time to send a personal email to you, your audience members deserve a personal reply rather than one from someone that works for you. I believe this makes a stronger impression on them which may encourage them to look for further contact with you and the organization you represent.

You are also likely to get some replies which just try to sell you something. I ignore those.

I find the questions which the audience sends me are particularly valuable. From them, I will find any parts of my presentation which they don't understand.

It may be something which I have added or made some quick changes to at the last minute, without checking it carefully enough.

It's also a great way to see which points within particular topics are of most interest to them and where there is any strong disagreement.

Connecting with Your Audience

The most important part of any presentation is not the technology or the quality of the coffee, although both of those things will often be mentioned in the audience feedback to the organizers.



The degree which you connect with all the people in the room will be the main factor which decides how well your message is acted on by the audience.

A very noticeable trend at any recent presentation is that the audience is unwilling to keep listening to anything which does not connect strongly with them.

That's because of the trend for modern entertainment to cater to a short attention span by presenting something different every few minutes.

Every presenter has to be alert for changes in their audience's mood so they keep their attention and enthusiasm.

Remove all unnecessary comments from your talk.

If some material needs more time, use it when you answer questions at the end of your main presentation.

Don't talk more quickly to try to get a longer message out in a shorter time. Many people find it hard to fully understand fast talk and also many people have some level of hearing impairment because of exposure to loud music or other factors.

Keep your voice strong and project it to the various parts of the venue. Try to get time to test your voice in the actual venue before the official event starts.

Ask someone to move around to various parts of the room and let you know if they can easily hear you from each point.

You cannot entirely depend on your audio equipment. The addition of hundreds of people to a bare room will mean that some of the volume will be muffled to some extent by their presence.

You are being watched

The impression which you give when you are on stage doing your presentation is obviously important.

But, many people will also adjust the impression they take away of you by what they see and hear about you during the whole event.

When you are at an event where you do a presentation, you are being judged all the time.



How you react to the people you meet and deal with when you're not in the spotlight is just as important as what you say and do when you are.

If you are always the same positive and responsive person, people will be more comfortable with you and more receptive to what you say in your talk.

I know a couple that work on cruise ships doing presentations.

They only do a couple of sessions on each cruise. But, they earn their fee because they are interacting with the passengers for the whole voyage. On an enclosed area such as a ship, it can be hard to maintain a friendly attitude with everybody the whole time.

But, that's part of what they are paid for. Some other people just last one cruise.

Better Listening

You can't be a great presenter if you aren't also a great listener.

Everybody thinks that they are already very good listeners and conversationalists – after all, they've been doing it almost their whole lives!

But, most of us have not tried to improve the basic skill level we learned from our parents and the kids that we mixed with in our formative years.

We've just kept reinforcing the habits we picked up from those around us, including any mistakes, but it is fairly easy to improve our listening skills with a little time and concentration.

Even small changes can give you substantially better results in your personal and professional dealings with all sorts of people.

When someone is talking to you, give them your full attention. It is very easy to be distracted by other people, or even other conversations near you.

Sometimes, we lose focus on what the other person is saying because we start thinking about what we will say next or how we might get the conversation around to a topic we are more interested in.

But, if we lose the thread of what the other person is talking about, we could lose any opportunity to continue the conversation.

Body Language

“Body Language” is a system of interpreting people’s intentions and mood from various factors related to their posture and reactions which are not under their direct control.

Some people put great confidence in their ability to read other people’s body language.



It can be useful. It may give you some indication of their level of interest in the current topic and how they feel about you, but it’s not always a really dependable indicator. There can be a variety of reasons why people display a

certain posture or react to you in a particular way.

If someone has their arms folded, it may indicate they are defensive or even slightly hostile to you, but it might also just mean that they are feeling cold.

My belief is that the most important signals we can give are the most basic ones.

If you look as if you carry the weight of the world on your shoulders alone, you will probably be mostly left alone. The only people that will gravitate toward you will be those who recognize that you are as depressed, and probably as depressing as they are.

You will always get a better response if:

- ✓ You show interest in what is going on around you.
- ✓ You exhibit confidence and enthusiasm.
- ✓ You focus on what someone tells you.
- ✓ You make the effort necessary to remember their name and information and carry your side of the conversation.

If anyone wants to argue, don't encourage them. When a discussion becomes an argument, everyone loses and nothing good will come from it.

Negative Feedback

These are some suggestions about how you might deal with negative comments.

If you are in the middle of your presentation, ask them to meet you as soon as possible afterwards, so that the event can stick to its schedule and ensure that other people are not inconvenienced.

When you are face-to-face with the person, remain calm and listen carefully to their complaint or question.

Thank them for giving you a chance to discuss it with them.

Say what you believe to be the core of the problem and ask if you have understood what they said correctly?

Getting to where you understand their concerns is essential before you can do anything to reduce their negativity or suggest any possible solution.

Offer whatever help you can to clear away any difficulty. If you have to refer them to someone else, make the call yourself and then introduce your colleague to the person who complained.

Put a note in your diary to follow up with them to ensure that the problem is resolved.

Also, find out if there is anything which you can do to ensure that they don't suffer any ongoing unhappiness about the matter.

Don't Apologize

One of the most common errors of inexperienced presenters is to apologize for their lack of experience or for delays in starting the presentation.

This is well-meant but could reduce the audience's connection to you and what you say. When people are focused on what benefits they can get from your presentation, they have no interest in the problems you had getting to the venue or gathering the information you offer them. If you put their focus on that, you reduce the impact of your whole presentation.

If you don't mention the side-issues, they probably won't notice anything and will stay focused on your message.

If they do notice some small problems, they will not be very concerned – that's your problem unless it interferes with them in some major way.

If there is a major problem, you will have to mention it, but don't apologize unless it was your responsibility.

If it was something which is beyond your control, just acknowledge the situation. Don't make any comments about it unless you are asked to by the organizers.

Never make any negative or possibly humorous comments. They might offend someone else who is involved in the function.

The organizers of most events will have one person that will be your contact throughout the event.

You will get any instructions about how to deal with unexpected incidents or emergencies from them before the event starts.

Technology is just a Tool!

Almost every week, some new device is launched which is guaranteed to make presentations much easier and more effective.

For those of us that started with whiteboards, and an overhead projector and a lapel microphone, it has been a fast and sometimes frustrating trip through the quickly developing technology of the last few years.

But, the new tools are not the most important part of ensuring that you make a good presentation.

The responsibility is still squarely on you!



The effectiveness of any presentation will never depend on impressing your audience with the best array of up-to-the-minute hardware unless that's the reason for the event.

Your audience want the latest and best information and advice to help them improve their lives and businesses. They want you to focus on them and fulfilling their needs.

To maintain your own credibility, you must be able to handle the technology which you use. If you do presentations

with unfamiliar equipment, as happens when the hosting organization requires every presenter to use the equipment which is in place at the venue, set aside some time before the event starts.

Check the gear they provide. If necessary, find someone to give you a quick but thorough run-through of the controls and capabilities.

I have my own microphone, laser pointer etc., with me, even if it is just a back-up for what the organization will have available. Always ensure that you have new spare batteries for all your equipment.

Tips for Popular Programs

Here are some tips which will be useful for using technology correctly as an effective support for you and the information you share with your audiences.

Microsoft PowerPoint®

This is probably the most commonly used presentation software of all.

It can be very effective but it is often used badly, so that the effect is less than it could have been and the presentation may be a disaster. It's not usually the fault of the program.

A common mistake which damages the connection the presenter is trying to get with their audience is that **they read the text from the slides**.

If you want the audience to focus on what you say, keep the text on the slides to a minimum. It should only give an overview of the information you want to share.

If they get the most important information from what you say, they will focus on you. The points on the slides will just be a useful accessory to help reinforce their recall of the information.

All pictures and other material should be relevant to the topic.

All the material must be arranged so that the audience can get the message easily. When you set up a slide or other picture, make their eyes follow the path which you want them to.

Do not include your Powerpoint (or Keynote, if you're using a Mac) slides in the handout. If they are brief as suggested, they won't stand alone without your presentation.

Apple iPad®

This is probably the most effective device currently for sharing your information with prospective customers or colleagues.

There are many small apps (dedicated purpose computer programs) which can help your presentations to groups where the other people have their own iPad®.

I expect that new developments will continue to improve the tools which we can access, but this device and its later models are likely to have a good customer base for a couple of years.

Humor seems Easy

The saying, “The shortest distance between any two people is a smile!” is worth keeping in mind when you are preparing a presentation.

But, using jokes to relax and amuse your audience needs careful thought and preparation. A good joke will form or strengthen a connection between you and your audience, but there are some other important factors to keep in mind.

Is the joke appropriate to the topic and the audience? Just dropping in a joke because it’s funny will not help make the people remember or act on your message. If it’s not interesting to the majority, they will be harder to engage during the rest of your talk.

Keep it short. You will probably have a set time limit and the joke must have enough impact to be worth the time it takes to tell.

Be nice. It is a common technique for speakers and comedians to make themselves the butt of their jokes. They get the laugh and don’t risk offending anyone by putting any other person or group in a negative light. If you do offend one person, you will probably upset many others because of your lack of forethought.

Stick to what suits your personality. We all know jokes we think are very funny. But, some of them don’t fit with the image our audience might have of us, so they won’t be effective as part of our presentation.

Don’t use other people’s material. It is okay when you have their permission but you won’t get much credit for it unless you give your presentation something unique to make it memorable.

Using material which you’ve seen in movies or on TV is likely to lessen the effect you get. The audience will probably have seen the material before as well. They will measure your delivery of the joke against the professional you borrowed it from.

Make it memorable. If you can find a joke which emphasizes some important point in your presentation or makes it easy for the audience to

remember your message or your name, then put some effort into preparing it well and use it whenever you can.

Practice. Practice is very important, but it will not make your presentation perfect. That will only come when you have used the same joke or story many times in front of real audiences.

When a joke flops. Just move on to the next part of your presentation. Any attempt to explain it will just emphasize that it was not clear (or just not funny) in the first place.

Timing. This is not how long the joke takes to tell. It is the art of matching the presentation of your joke to get the best effect. A pause, just before the funny line can be very effective.

Watch the professionals to see how they do it. Jack Benny was acclaimed of his pause. George Burns said that he used a cigar to give a reason for pausing.

Your family and friends will know when to laugh at your jokes. You will only find what works best for you through presenting to people you don't know that well.

Dealing with Questions

Ask for questions and comments to be kept for the end of the presentation. That helps to maintain the flow of your presentation and makes it easier for everyone to understand and remember the points you make.

Make sure that you repeat questions that may not have been clearly heard by all members of the audience. It’s quite common for presenters to answer a question, unaware that some did not hear it.



Mention to the audience that you are happy to answer any questions which you don’t get time to answer during the presentation if they put them in the feedback form you include in your handout.

If you need a few seconds to think of the most appropriate answer, repeat the question back to the person that asked it, but in your own words.

It’s a good idea to set a time limit for the question and answer section or it could upset the schedule for that session.

When you finish the question and answer section, finish with your strongest point, compliment them and give them your call to action.

Becoming the Best

I do not claim to be in the top league of presenters. These are some suggestions based on my study of the best speakers I have seen.

We get the best reaction when we focus on answering the questions which our audience is most keenly interested in.

This probably seems obvious?

But, think of how many people focus on telling their audience how wonderful the speaker or the company they represent is.

The audience could care less. They will only get interested when you connect what you offer to what they need.

They are not interested in the mechanics of your presentation. If you drop your notes or drop your laser pointer, you detract from the whole effect.

You should practice until all this is like second nature.

Visualization

I used to think that visualization was not likely to help me. I wasn't sure it was worth even trying until I learned that many top sports stars were using it consistently. It works best for me when I am relaxed and somewhere that I am not likely to be interrupted.

I form a mental movie of me going through a significant part of the presentation I have been preparing.



I stop when I finish the presentation. Then, I will probably wait a few minutes and do it again. I don't imagine anything which might occur after I finish my presentation. That way, the actions I need to take are clearly fixed in my subconscious, then I can focus on the audience when I am actually presenting,

as the steps are almost automatic.

Final Preparation

I suggest that you finish your preparation the day before your presentation.

If you plan to do some last minute preparation on the day of the event, it is likely that some other demand will be made on your very limited time.

If I’m traveling somewhere for the event, everything is packed the day before I travel. The night before the event, I check everything I will take, then I do my final review. This includes a few practice runs through the talk.

When I pack it away, I am comfortable about presenting it. That lets me get a good night’s sleep. I don’t review it on the day because I’ve got it all inside my mind. I can concentrate on dealing with the travel, meeting the organizers and then settling into the hotel.

I will possibly also meet some of the attendees. I can interact with them which can help when they see me at the event. I don’t think they would get as good an impression if I was trying to review my notes.

If the venue is available and does not have a different event in progress, I will ask for permission from the hotel to walk though it and check the facilities and equipment.

Review Each Event

Postmortems can bring success closer. If you don't review and learn, you just repeat the same mistakes. I believe that doing a review after each event is essential.



Your review will help to ensure that you don't repeat any significant errors and help you to get the most benefit from the feedback which you got.

It can be more difficult if you leave it until you have got feedback responses from

attendees. Your recall will probably be a little blurred then as you have started concentrating on other events and future possibilities.

When they arrive, usually up to a week after the event, you will find it interesting to compare the comments you made during your own review with those in the feedback from the attendees.

Sometimes, you will get official feedback from the organizers. You will only know how others feel about your presentation by whether they rebook you or refer other organizers to you.

If you don't get called back the following year, that may not be a reflection on you. Some want different presenters each time; some have deals with particular presenters. There are many other factors which may affect their decisions.

Connecting with Your Audience

The main factor in getting attention and action from your audience is the strength of your connection to the people in your audience.

Some ways to get a good rapport is to keep yourself focused on those aspects of your subject which are most important to your audience.

Some presenters say too much about themselves or their company at the start. It’s better to keep your introduction brief, less than a minute and then grab their attention by referring to what they will gain from listening to your presentation.

Many presenters make a point of casually meeting some of the attendees before the event officially starts. Some will greet them as they enter the venue.

Always be enthusiastic – it’s contagious in a good way. But, don’t *act* happy – be happy and show you feel that you are among friends.

Keep the information on your slides (if you use them) brief.

Some would be put off if there is a lot to read. While they are reading, they cannot also be focused on what you are saying.

Don’t give the most important information on your slides. That should come from you. Most people recommend that slides should have just a few words. That allows the text to be large enough for almost everyone to easily read it. If you have pictures or charts, ensure that the details are clear enough to be easily read from the back of the venue by most people. Relate your information closely to their needs and goals.

Have something major to finish your presentation. Don’t fire your best shot at the start. But, make sure that your first comment grabs their attention and include a hook that refers to something important later in your presentation.

Although you may not be able to see individuals, move your eyes around the whole room.

People will notice if you seem to favor one section of the room or keep your attention fixed straight ahead. You may feel tense at your first few events but letting that feeling reach your audience will ruin your connection with them.

Just remember that they always want you to succeed. That way, they get the entertainment and information which they came for.

Keep Their Attention

Each audience is different, so you need to stay focused on the signals which you get from them through your whole presentation.

Storytelling is a proven method to help them understand and keep them focused on what you say and show them.

Start by helping them to build a mental image which relates the information you share closely to their business or personal experience. They don't usually need to know about your buildings or your board.

Unless it is an audience with the necessary technical knowledge to appreciate it, don't spend time on the technical details. Keep it simple and direct.

If you are promoting a product or a cause, share some examples which they can check out about how it helps people like them or that they can relate to.

Keep it believable. Many people are turned off when the presenter makes promises which are “too good to be believable” in their experience. That can be okay if you give them endorsements which can be verified.

Always practice your presentation to the point where you don't have to think about the mechanics of it. Talk at a steady rate which is easy to follow.

This helps people keep up with the new information which you are giving them.

Pause from time to time. Take a drink of water to make a natural break.

If you keep talking continuously, you and your audience will become tired. They will be less attentive to you, and your message will not be taken in as well.

Web Presentations

The Internet has produced many ways which we can use our ability to deliver a message to people and encourage them to act on it.

They range from recorded videos which can be available on a particular web site to be viewed on individual computers, to webinars where people connect to a particular site where one or more people make a presentation at a specified time.

The audience may be scattered around the whole world. Their connection may be made to the site through the Internet or a telephone.

The presenters can record the presentation and then provide it to the people who took part. They may also decide to sell copies of the recording if the topic has a wide audience.

This sort of set-up is also popular for connecting different parts of an organization around the world to share information or discuss developments within their company or their industry.

This is done at much lower cost than if some representatives from the various sections were brought together for a physical conference.

This also means that more people from each area can be part of the online conference, either for the whole time or just for that period which involves their particular area of interest.

Most physical events are recorded now and some of those recordings are sold to people that could not attend or provided to the participants as part of their registration or for an extra fee.

The equipment for producing or taking part in podcasts and webinars is getting less expensive and more powerful all the time.

Some information about available services is included at the end of this ebook.

Keep Yourself Ready

Being a presenter can be a great way to earn a living or to promote your talents or your business, but your continued success is dependent on you being ready and able to perform whenever the opportunity is available.

It is very important that you keep yourself well and fit.

When a lot of your time is spent traveling, living in hotels and perhaps moving through a range of climates frequently, you need to be as careful as possible to maintain yourself.

If you can't fulfill a booking, you may lose much more than your fee for that presentation. Your reputation for reliability would suffer and you could lose more bookings in the future as well.

If you want to keep getting better bookings and other opportunities, you need to have a full check-up regularly and start an exercise program if you aren't already on one.

When you plan a trip, build in some breaks which can be used to refresh yourself or to take care of anything which you only become aware of after you set up your itinerary.

It's vital to arrange some family time and make sure that your family gets some benefits for them if you are traveling and working away from home a lot.

Demonstrations

Many presentations involve demonstrations of one kind or another.

These are a great way to involve the audience but they are also sometimes a source of problems.

If you have to demonstrate something on your computer, try to have a computer which has not got other programs running or other files open except those concerned with the demonstration.

Those other programs and files use some of the computer’s resources and some, like email, can interrupt the presentation at awkward times.

If possible, put a video of you doing the demonstration on the computer or on a USB stick which you can plug in and run if the live demonstration fails in some way.

Don’t try to recover a demonstration if problems show up when you are presenting. That wastes time and destroys the impression you have made with the audience up to that point.

If you make a mistake, that just shows you are human. Don’t show any excitement.

Be professional and continue with the next part of your presentation unless you have a video or some other way to show the demonstration.

More Tips for Better Results

Be original, natural and honest: I don't think any of us can be entirely original. We all must learn from those who have done similar work in the centuries past.

But, they are good standards to aspire to. If we use material of other people, we should get their permission first and acknowledge their contribution to our presentation.

People don't just want ideas. They have little value in themselves. You need to show your audience how to use those ideas to fix their problems or improve their lives – or both.

Don't over-promise. Try to deliver more than they expect.

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