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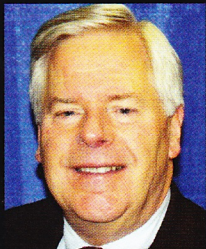
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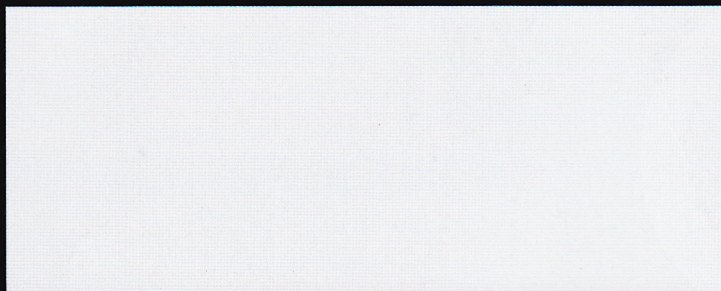
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Nobody's perfect

Your audience prefers a real person over perfection

BY MONICA WOFFORD, CSP

YOU HAVE ALL SEEN SPEAKERS WITH PERFECT GESTURES, PERFECT HAIR, AND PERFECT TIMING. You may have also worked with trainers who promise to teach you these gestures and presentation skills with finesse, poise, and near robotic precision.

Remember the saying, “nobody’s perfect”? If it is true for your audience, wouldn’t it also be true for you as a presenter? Yes!

Whether you are conducting a group presentation or report or just being a “normal” human being, your audience expects humanity and imperfections — not a flawless “Super Speaker.”

Successful presenters connect with their audience, with or without perfect gestures. They make mistakes, laugh at their imperfections, and even tell stories of blunders so the audience can connect with a real person, but more so the audience can see if this real person can do what he’s talking about, then maybe so can I.

Are you following me?

Perfection is unattainable and so are the actions of the “so-called” perfect Super Speaker. Choose to show your audience your humanity and they will follow you.

Three steps that will help put you in place to lead include:

1. Learning to laugh at yourself. No amount of preparedness will eliminate your ability to goof up. Spare wireless remote batteries will not keep you from tripping over the carpet. Go ahead trip, and then laugh. Blame it on how you just learned to walk yesterday

or a demonstration of what not to do, and laugh.

Follow your PowerPoint with precision and when your computer takes on a mind of its own, laugh. Build the mistake into your presentation as a learning point for dealing with the unexpected or handling negativity, but laugh instead of panic.

Mistakes happen and he who maintains a sense of humor, maintains control over the situation. Your audience will warm up to the fact you make mistakes, too. Laugh and they may even laugh with you.

Adults learn better when they are relaxed and laughing, even if for just a moment it happens to be directed toward you. They are also much more likely to listen when they feel you are one of them.

2. Being natural. Be natural and be you. Much like in leadership, you have to be you and lead you before you can lead others. In the case of speaking, you must be you and lead you on and off the stage before you can lead an audience.

Use the gestures you would use in a one-on-one conversation. Exercise



your own speaking and movement style, as opposed to some other speaker you saw at another presentation. The audience can tell when you are emulating someone rather than just being yourself and being comfortable in your own skin and style.

Talk to individuals with your eyes and face. You would never look at someone’s forehead or imagine them naked if you were just chatting casually — well, most wouldn’t, anyhow. Now, if the tension of a large audience forces the naturalness right out of you, however, find a way to get comfortable.

Know your environment before you

PERSONALGROWTH

speaking. Listen to your favorite song or cackle like a chicken on stage before anyone arrives — whatever it takes. When your audience can sense you are just being you, they are much more likely to take your advice and believe the wisdom you are sharing.

3. Using connectors. Skilled speakers pause almost as much as they speak — so pause. No, I mean really pause, for an entire breath or two. Then, take the

audience with you as you survey the entire room in silence.

A pause works best after a point or a question to your audience. Make a point and then pause. The audience will connect with you in the time allowed to absorb your point or in being able to form an answer.

You can also connect with the meet and greet before a session. Take the time to meet your audience. Talk to them and shake their hand — that

touch alone will create a greater connection. By meeting people, you may also increase your comfort level.

Connectors bring you closer to the audience you are about to address. What better way to become comfortable than to realize you are speaking among acquaintances who know you as another flawed human being willing to share part of themselves.

Many speakers attempt to wear a Super Speaker costume when they try to be perfect, but all the audience truly wants is to feel as if they can do what you are proposing, showing, or teaching them to do.

When your audience can sense you are just being you, they are much more likely to take your advice and believe the wisdom you are sharing.

If they feel you are the only one who can actually achieve this skill, behavior, or task because you appear to be perfect, then you are missing the mark on what speaking and presenting is all about.

People want knowledge, skills, beliefs, and new ways to achieve the dreams, health, or feeling they long for, but they also want it from someone who can say, “Hey, I make mistakes just like you do, and look, I was able to do this.”

After all, Super Speaker may be able to leap tall audiences in a single bound, but do you want to leap over the heads of your audience? Or, would you rather connect with their hearts and minds? ☺



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