

# THE EXCEPTIONAL PRESENTER

A PROVEN FORMULA TO **OPEN UP!** AND OWN THE ROOM

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# CHAPTER ONE

# THE EXCEPTIONAL PRESENTER

BECOMING AN EXCEPTIONAL PRESENTER seems to be a Herculean task. There's a lot to remember. Say this. Move that. Speak up. Look at the audience. Don't fidget. You leave the meeting wondering, "Did I connect? Was I clear? Was that guy sleeping, or was he praying for my presentation to end?"

There are a lot of "experts" out there who will give you all the answers. Type into a leading Internet search engine the words "public speaking," and you'll get 84,300,000 listings. It can be overwhelming. After a while it all seems to sound the same.

The formula you are about to learn will take the mystery and the misery out of presenting. We will break down the art of presenting into a series of skills. Then you will learn a systematic approach to mastering each skill.

Some may argue that when it comes to presentation skills, “You either have it or you don’t.” Based on my two decades as a presentation coach, I respectfully and wholeheartedly disagree with that statement. I’ve worked with far too many people who have dramatically improved their presentation effectiveness.

Can anyone become an exceptional presenter? My answer is “Yes” for the vast majority of people who have a desire to improve, a formula to guide their progress and a willingness to develop the skills that comprise the “it” in “You either have *it* or you don’t.”

The objectives of this book are straightforward and achievable:

1. Provide a proven formula that will enable you to communicate at an exceptional level, in any venue, to any audience.
2. Share practice methods that help you develop skills that will not fail under pressure.
3. Serve as your personal diary to document your improvement.

Look up the word “exceptional” in a thesaurus. Synonyms include: superior, outstanding, excellent, extraordinary and wonderful. Antonyms include: average, ordinary, run-of-the-mill, commonplace and mundane.

Notice that the synonyms did not include: perfect, flawless, unblemished or error-free.

Have you attended any presentations lately? How many of those presentations would you describe as: “superior,” “outstanding,” “excellent,” “extraordinary” or “wonderful”? How many would you describe as: “average,” “ordinary,” “run-of-the-mill,” “commonplace” or “mundane”? What descriptive words do people use to describe your presentations?

No two people are exactly the same when it comes to presentation style, comfort level or expertise. Every presenter and every presentation is unique. *The Exceptional Presenter* is not designed

to wrestle you into a pre-selected style. It is intended to complement and enhance your existing style and help you attain the cascade of benefits that come from developing exceptional presentation skills.

The benefits will affect every aspect of your life. Your presentation skill level will affect your income and career track. It will affect your personal relationships and your ability to lead and persuade others. It will affect what job you land and what reputation you build.

Becoming an exceptional presenter is NOT a Herculean task. In fact, it's not a task at all. It is a journey that I believe you will find to be enjoyable, energizing and rewarding.

## WHAT MAKES A PRESENTER EXCEPTIONAL?

Write down the names of two exceptional presenters, living or deceased. Select a media personality, an athlete, a politician, a professor or perhaps a business or religious leader.

What characteristics make them exceptional? List four characteristics or traits for each person.

Exceptional presenter #1: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristics: \_\_\_\_\_

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Exceptional presenter #2: \_\_\_\_\_

Characteristics: \_\_\_\_\_

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In the last twenty years I've asked more than 10,000 workshop participants to fill out the form you just filled out. The results open the door to understanding what makes people stand out as presenters. The results have enabled me to develop a formula that turns average presenters into exceptional presenters.

Our next step is to discover what it means to OPEN UP! and Own the Room.

## **OPEN UP!**

OPEN UP! is an acronym representing the six characteristics shared by exceptional presenters. The secret is not just knowing the characteristics, but understanding how to incorporate them into your presentation style.

*The Exceptional Presenter is:*

### **Organized**

Exceptional presenters take charge! They look poised and polished. They sound prepared. You get the sense that they are not there to waste time. Their goal is not to overwhelm, but to inform, persuade, influence, entertain or enlighten. Their message is well structured and clearly defined.

### **Passionate**

Exceptional presenters exude enthusiasm and conviction. If the presenter doesn't look and sound passionate about his or her topic, why would anyone else be passionate about it? Exceptional presenters speak from the heart and leave no doubt as to where they stand. Their energy is persuasive and contagious.



## Engaging

Exceptional presenters do everything in their power to engage each audience member. They build rapport quickly and involve the audience early and often. If you want their respect, you must first connect.

## Natural

An exceptional presenter's style is natural. Their delivery has a conversational feel. Natural presenters make it look easy. They appear comfortable with any audience. A presenter who appears natural appears confident.

*As an Exceptional Presenter, you must:*

## Understand Your Audience

Exceptional presenters learn as much as they can about their audience before presenting to them. The more they know about the audience, the easier it will be to connect and engage.

## Practice

Those who practice improve. Those who don't, don't. Exceptional skills must become second nature.

Practice is the most important part of the improvement process. If your delivery skills are second nature, they will not fail under pressure.

There are hundreds of opportunities every day to practice the skills in this book. The only thing you need is the desire to practice. Most people never practice. If they do, it's on their way to present a proposal, interview for a job, deliver a keynote presentation or sell

an idea to their boss. The time to practice is not in “live,” win-or-lose situations. The time to practice is during your normal daily routines, when habits can be formed and mistakes are not costly.

Throughout this book I will highlight daily practice opportunities. You will be surprised at how convenient and how easy practicing can be.

## **OWN THE ROOM**

Own the room is a term describing an actor who is so completely into character that he walks on stage with total confidence. He owns the room.

Owning the room is what will happen for you once you have developed an OPEN communication style. You will present with total confidence and maintain the highest level of professionalism, even in the most challenging circumstances. You will hold yourself accountable for the success or failure of your presentations. And you will do whatever it takes to ensure that your audience understands and remembers your message.

Chapters Four through Nine will show you in detail how to OPEN UP! and Own the Room.

## **Exceptional Presentation Skills Win Elections**

Whether you agreed or disagreed with him, President Bill Clinton was and still is an excellent example of where exceptional presentation skills can take your career. Ask his 1992 and 1996 opponents, George H. Bush and Bob Dole, if presentation skills played a role in the outcome of those two Presidential elections. Both Bush and Dole were highly intelligent, both were World War II veterans and both were scandal free. They each brought vast experience to their campaigns. But despite their credentials, neither could match the presentation skills of William Jefferson Clinton.

From the first question of his first presidential debate, Bill Clinton “owned the room.” When the first question was directed his way, candidate Clinton walked toward the lady who had asked the question. He squared his shoulders to her. He looked her straight in the eye and asked her to repeat her name. Then he answered her question. He was connecting from the opening bell.

In the days following presidential debates, I will survey participants in my workshops to find out how much they remembered from the debate. Typically they don’t remember much. They’ll remember a one-liner or a gaffe. They’ll remember questions related to a topic near and dear to their hearts (the environment, education, nuclear arms, Social Security). But despite the fact that they remembered little of what was said, they always have an opinion as to who won. “He carried himself like a president.” “He was unflappable.” “He connected with me.” “He seemed more knowledgeable.”

The first televised debate took place in 1960 between candidates Richard Nixon and John Kennedy. The polls following the debate were telling. The majority of people who listened to the debate on the radio thought Nixon had won. The majority of those who watched the debate on TV thought Kennedy had won.

Kennedy looked sharp. He looked fresh. His presence was charismatic. Richard Nixon, on the other hand, had not shaved prior to the debate. His five o’clock shadow caused him to appear tired and a bit haggard. In a video taken prior to the debate Nixon could be heard saying, “Guess I should have shaved.” That was the understatement of the evening.

Nixon also decided not to use make-up because he overheard Kennedy refusing make-up. He did not know that Kennedy had been made up earlier in the evening.

Flash to the 1992 debate between President George H. Bush, Bill Clinton and Ross Perot. During the town hall debate President

Bush glanced at his watch several times. Years later in an interview with Jim Lehrer, President Bush admitted that glancing at his watch reinforced a mistaken general perception that his heart wasn't 100% into the campaign.

In the first Election 2000 debate it was Al Gore's behavior that damaged his effectiveness. He sighed loudly when he disagreed with then Governor George W. Bush. He interrupted and rolled his eyes repeatedly. His behavior overshadowed anything he had to say about domestic or foreign issues.

The highlight of John Kerry's 2004 run for the White House and the worst performance of the Bush campaign happened the night of the first Presidential debate.

The normally mechanical Kerry appeared relaxed and conversational. His posture at the lectern was commanding. He seemed well prepared. He looked and sounded like someone who could be President.

President Bush leaned on his lectern throughout the debate. Leaning on the lectern had become a campaign stump speech habit for the President, and it carried into the debate. It made him appear tired and a bit uninterested.

Frequent facial expressions suggested that President Bush was agitated or frustrated with his opponent, yet the President did not verbally counter punch. Excessive filler, "ums" and "uhs," combined with the overuse of certain phrases led to the impression that the President was armed with twelve minutes of information for a ninety-minute debate. The President's six to eight point poll lead disappeared.

A much more prepared, passionate and commanding President Bush showed up for debates two and three. He was able to regain his momentum and win the election.

## Two Lessons from Election 2004:

1. Every presentation counts! Every handshake, every interview, every appearance, every debate and every one-on-one encounter represents an opportunity to make a favorable impression while driving home a message. Don't allow yourself to miss a single opportunity. It has meant the difference between becoming The President of the United States and becoming a retired ex-politician.
2. Never let your competition back in the game by allowing yourself to present/communicate at a level that is less than exceptional.

>> Delivering an exceptional presentation will not guarantee a win every time. But you should never lose because your presentation was less than exceptional.

## **Excerpt from Chapter 7**

**New illustrations clearly demonstrate gestures and posture dos and don'ts.**

## 7. Get to Your Feet

>> We're more persuasive on our feet  
than in our seat.

Own the Room is about being in control of what happens during your presentation. Getting to your feet enables you to take charge and control the flow of information. It allows you to change the dynamics of the room, create energy and assume a more commanding posture.

A study at the University of Minnesota concluded that if we stand up and present our information using some kind of visual aid, we are 43% more likely to persuade the listener.

What makes us more persuasive when we stand?

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When a presenter stands up,  
people tend to look up.

