

Training 101

READY, SET, SPEAK!

...Doug Malouf says in this month's lead "Training 101" article, not all speakers are trainers—but all stand-up trainers are speakers.

The best stand-up trainers are effective speakers. They know how to begin with a hook that grabs their audiences' attention. They know how to drive home their points in ways that listeners understand and remember. And they know how to avoid situations that less-effective speakers stumble into.

Malouf calls those situations the "seven deadly sins of speakers" and gives trainers some advice for going forth and sinning no more. Then Richard Lincoff follows up with some basic tips for building and sustaining your audience's interest and enthusiasm.

Speaking of audiences, Carolyn Dickson says you don't have to feel intimidated by that sea of expectant faces. Her sidebar describes a useful, liberating way of thinking about your audience and its expectations.

The Seven Deadly Sins of Speakers

By Doug Malouf, Dougmal Training Systems, First Floor, Cragmar Centre, Princes Highway, North Wollongong N.S.W. 2500 Australia. Phone 042-29-8244, fax 042-27-2545. International 61-42-29-8244, fax 61-42-27-2545.

Not all speakers are trainers, but all stand-up trainers are speakers. If you want to get rave reviews in your next training session, it's worth taking some time to review your public-speaking skills.

One of the problems with teaching the same subject—year after year, and time after time—is that you tend to

...say in your comfort zone. You use the same old phrases and the same, tired old visuals. In a way, trainers themselves are visuals. All the electronic toys available today can certainly make your material look good. But when it comes down to the wire, you're the one who has to sell the ideas.

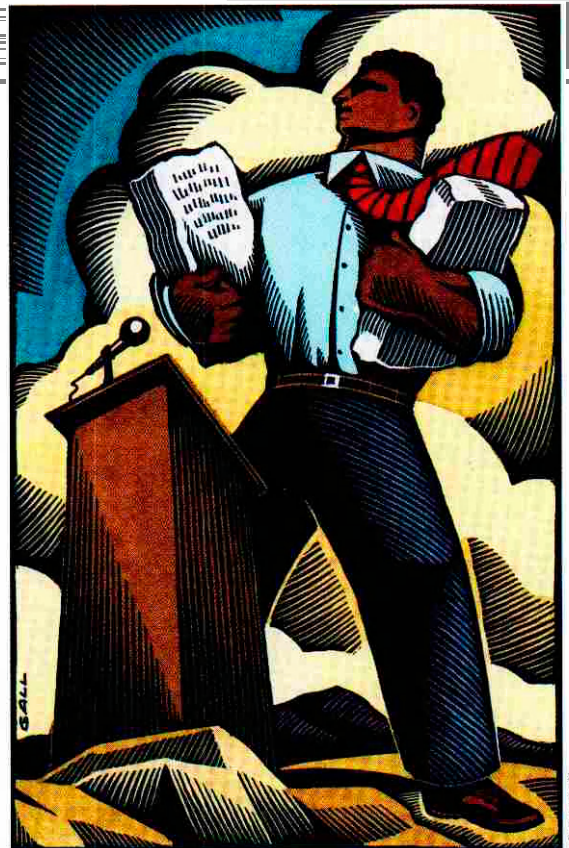
Trainers tend to make some consistent mistakes in trying to close that sale. I call these mistakes the "Seven Deadly Sins of Speaking."

1. Lack of enthusiasm. You have to feel enthusiastic about your material. You may have presented it a thousand times before, but this is the first time that this particular audience has seen you present it.

Be energetic, even if it means you have to become an actor. Cultivate the skills necessary to put across old material in a new, vibrant way, and constantly look for something new to add sparkle to your presentation. It will benefit you as much as it will your audience. And complement that enthusiastic delivery with solid-gold content.

If you're enthusiastic about your subject, it will come across in your talk. The audience members will be convinced that your subject is interesting and important. They'll "buy" your ideas.

Don't hide behind the lectern. Start off with a lively and encouraging tone and keep up the pace (especially at the start of your talk, when listeners are forming opinions about you). And employ all your presentation skills to



Chris Gail

The best presenters steer clear of these seven deadly sins.

convey your enthusiasm: an expressive voice, appropriate gestures, effective emphasis, and humor.

2. Distracting visuals, "verbals," and vocals. Learn to control any distracting habits you have that might affect the visual, verbal, and vocal aspects of your presentation. Visual is what the audience members see you do, verbal is what they hear you say, and vocal is how they hear you say it.

Ask a friend or colleague to tell you about any distracting habits you display while speaking—for instance, balancing on one foot; scratching your nose; taking off and putting on your glasses; or using "fillers" such as "uh," "um," and "you know." Once you pinpoint such problems, you can eliminate them, so that the visual, verbal, and vocal aspects of your presentation all work together and reinforce each other.

3. Material that is too technical. Skilled speakers monitor their audiences constantly to make sure listeners are taking in what is being said. But it's best to start troubleshooting before problems occur. If you're using a lot of technical material, the key

to helping audience members understand it is to start within their comfort zone and slowly move out. In other words, move from the known to the unknown.

Don't fall into the trap of assuming that because you're familiar with your terminology or techniques, the audience will be, too. Explain terminology and difficult concepts as you go along. Make liberal use of color, graphics, pictures, and anecdotes to help get the message across.

4. Failure to speak to time. This is just as big a sin when you're speaking to a small group of trainees as it is when you're giving a major presentation to a multitude.

If you run either overtime or under time, you can disrupt people's plans.

If you're under time, people may feel that they haven't got the full value they expected, or that you don't know enough about your subject. They'll feel shortchanged (unless you've committed another sin: being a bore—in which case they might well be delighted).

If you run overtime, attendees may have their breaks cut short, or other

speakers may have to shorten their presentations.

Either way, people are likely to be unhappy with you!

To make sure you run to time, use a watch or clock, rehearse your presentation beforehand, and have someone in the audience send you signals.

5. Poor preparation. Preparing for a training session involves more than writing a few notes. To deliver top value to your listeners, you need to make sure that your preparation includes the following:

- ▶ checking the suitability of your material for your audience (neither too complex nor too easy, and slanted appropriately)
- ▶ planning the content so that you know your material well enough to speak with confidence and enthusiasm from a few key words
- ▶ practicing your speech to check timing and delivery.

To make things easy for yourself, follow these three steps while putting together your presentation:

- ▶ **Brainstorm.** Make this a spontaneous idea session—jot down anything that comes into your mind.
- ▶ Reduce the material to a set of key words.
- ▶ Reinforce your key topics with personal stories, analogies, references to the audience's experiences, and visual aids.

6. Information overload. It's nice to be enthusiastic. But in our eagerness to tell our listeners everything we think might be of value, we sometimes overload them with information. Don't be seen as one of those presenters who simply pours information into the audience without pausing to see if there's an overflow.

Here's a handy formula to remember: For short-term memory, most adults have a capacity of five to nine pieces of information. Think of it in terms of filling a glass—if you pour in too much, some spills out. Where short-term memory is concerned, people can take in between five and nine pieces of new information before the first bit gets pushed out.

Knowing that, you should aim for the bottom of the scale—introduce only five or six new pieces of information in a session, and reinforce them in as many different ways as possible.

Audiences Are People Too

By Carolyn Dickson (with Paula DePasquale), excerpted from Speaking Magic, published in November 1995 by Oakhill Press, Cleveland, Ohio; 800/261-1014.

For many of us, just the word "audience" is intimidating. If you take a moment to think about what "audience" means to you, you might be surprised at the images that come to mind.

One of my clients noticed that for her the word audience brought to mind rows of black-robed, stern judges about to pronounce her guilty of some unnamed crime. Another imagined a more unruly group—coughing, shuffling, and whispering among themselves—while he desperately tried to win them over. Many speakers perceive the audience as a vast sea of empty faces.

Our mental images have a powerful impact on our emotions. So if pictures like these are flashing through your mind, you'll end up

wanting to hide from your audience instead of trying to connect.

It helps to understand that audiences are people too. Your listeners are just a group of ordinary individuals who are motivated by the same personal and professional needs as you, and they're listening to you for one reason only—to have those needs met. So put yourself in their place—instead of trying to impress them, or worrying about your own fate.

For me, this realization occurred one evening in the midst of a dinner speech. I looked out into the audience, and in midsentence it hit me: "These people are thinking about themselves. They really don't care about me at all!"

It was a wonderfully liberating moment, as I finally understood that, since they weren't thinking about me, I didn't have to think about me, either. All I needed to do was speak directly and personally to their concerns.

7. Inappropriate pace. Delivering an effective speech is like driving a car. You need to speed up and slow down now and then, but mostly you move along at a steady pace.

Moving along at a steady pace does not mean you should be boring. Use variations in pace for effect—and remember, a pause to focus people's attention on you is a more effective way of getting them to listen than a rapid-fire delivery. If you deliver your words more quickly than people can take them in, then your message is being lost. Sixty to 70 words per minute is fast enough. If you're not sure how fast that is, practice with a tape recorder and actually count the number of words you speak.

Remember: the pace of your delivery should reinforce your message.

Well, there they are. Those are the seven deadly sins of speaking. The good news is that once you're aware of them, they're easy to avoid.

If you want to check your own performance, try this simple action plan: Every time you give a major presentation, make sure you have two colleagues or friends sitting at the back of the room. Ask them to check that you're not guilty of any of the deadly sins listed above—and to provide you with general feedback on your performance.

You'll be a much better speaker—and a much more effective trainer—for having made the effort.

(This article was adapted from Malouf's How To Create and Deliver a Dynamic Presentation, published in 1993 by ASTD Press. To order the book, call 703/683-8100. Use order code MAHT and priority code FMM; \$22 for ASTD members, \$25 for nonmembers.)

Seven Sins of Training Presenters

- ▶ lack of enthusiasm
- ▶ distracting habits
- ▶ material that's too technical
- ▶ poor timing
- ▶ poor preparation
- ▶ information overload
- ▶ bad pacing.

It's Show Time!

By Richard J. Lincoff, director of marketing services and management development for Calgon Vestal Laboratories, Box 147, St. Louis, MO 63166-0147; 314/535-1810.

Here you go again. It's another training session—another speech. After a great deal of preparation, you stand in front of live bodies and look out at the group. You recognize that attendees are (at best) neutral about being there, and (at worst) wish they could leave right now and go back to their jobs.

The lone speaker standing in the front of the room in the opening moment of a program can be racked with anxiety, fear, the need for acceptance, and downright nervousness.

Show time. At that moment, trainees are waiting for "show time." And they expect you, the trainer, to be the show. But it sometimes is difficult to figure out what to do to get them excited about your program—or at least, to get them interested in staying.

The following is a list of ideas for preparing and delivering training programs that reel audiences in, keep their attention, and spark their enthusiasm for learning. Choose what you will; reject what you don't want. Not all of the techniques will work for every trainer in every situation. But there might be something here that can help you in your next presentation.

Preparation. Preparing for a training program or a speech is like preparing for a sales call. The opening must gain the attendees' interest quickly and then must involve them in something that benefits them and leads them in a direction in which they want to go.

Look at your participants as customers; recognize that they've been overwhelmed by media that have acclimated them to being passive observers. Get them thinking, get them involved, and get them to understand your excitement about your message. You need to set in motion a kind of discovery process, and then to move listeners into the program. Otherwise, the only thing they'll be eager to learn is the time of the next scheduled break.

What's in it for them? As soon as trainees arrive and are seated, begin by telling them the outcomes they will receive through attending the course. Sell them on how they will be able to do their work better, think more clearly, and accomplish their responsibilities more productively after the training.

Introducing.... You don't always have to go around the room so that each person can introduce himself or herself to every other person. That wastes time. And with bigger groups it can become an excruciatingly dull process, with each person just waiting for her or his own turn to talk.

Instead, use exercises early on that place people in small groups. In small groups, participants can introduce themselves to each other; later, they can introduce themselves to the rest of the group.

If you prefer to use full-classroom introductions, one trick that works is to ask people to interview each other so that they can introduce each other to the class.

Oh no—a test! Try an interactive test at the beginning of the program, with participants answering questions by raising their hands rather than by filling out a form. This immediately gets people involved and focused on you, the trainer, instead of on filling out an instrument.

Keep track of people's answers, but don't tell the group the correct answers until after you go through all the questions. That creates some competition, as well as anticipation as to who answered correctly.

You can also have teams of two or three people take a test together, as a group. Coming up with group answers requires people to talk to each other.

Color your world. Always have visuals for your opening. Make sure the visuals are exciting, interesting, and colorful. Most black-and-white graphics just don't create the excitement that the skillful use of color can add.

When selecting visuals for the opening of your program, consider making slides from still photographs from old movies or from other recognizable or humorous scenes, if appropriate to your topic. (But be sure you're not violating any copyright protections.)

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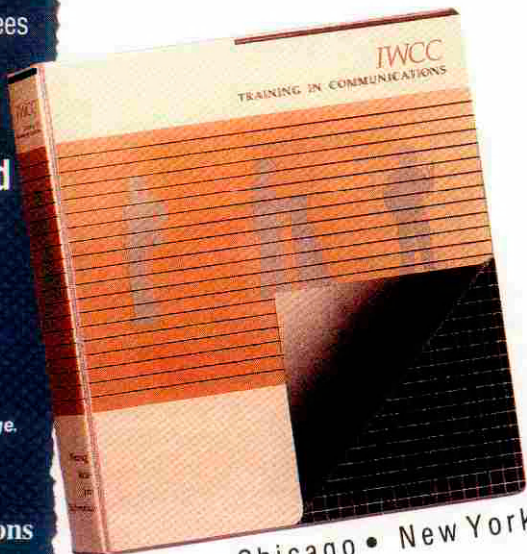
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Training 101

Build stories around the action portrayed in the images, to tie the visuals to your program and its objectives. Old, black-and-white movies work especially well to illustrate some points.

Involve your audience early. Case studies work especially well for bringing a group immediately into the content of the training.

Start your program by talking briefly about what you plan to do; then distribute case studies that require small-group discussion. The more controversial the case studies, the better. And be sure they are appropriate to the trainees' work environment.

Or start your program by asking questions of the audience. Make sure you know the names of some people in the group, and address the first few questions to them personally. That questioning process alerts audience members that you may be calling on them to speak, without waiting for them to raise their hands.

Alternate that approach with asking for volunteers, and the audience will continue to pay attention.

Create familiarity. Especially if you are speaking to a large group, interactivity may be difficult. So prepare for it ahead of time by getting the names of people in the audience who have done important things relating to your program. Then use those names near the beginning of your presentation to illustrate the topics that you will be talking about.

As Rudyard Kipling said, "Don't lose the common touch." Let people know that you are human. Share your excitement. Let them know what you expect them to walk away with. Tell them that they—not you—will develop the answers. You are there to help, not to lecture.

It is true that interest in a training program builds throughout the session; a strong program can overcome a weak opening. But why make your task more difficult? With creativity, energy, and some innovative planning, you can start a program that will play more like "show time" than "doze time."

"Training 101" is edited by **Catherine Petrini**. Send your short articles for consideration to "Training 101," Training & Development, 1640 King Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313-2043.