

IN THIS ARTICLE

*Personal-Life Issues and Work,
Speaking and Presentation Skills*

BEATING THE POST-PRESENTATION

BLUES

HAVE YOU BEEN SINGING THE BLUES?

*MANY SPEAKERS FEEL THEIR MOODS CLOUDING OVER
AFTER THEY RETURN FROM GIVING PRESENTATIONS. HERE
ARE SOME UP-TEMPO TIPS YOU CAN USE TO KEEP YOUR
SPIRITS SUNNY AND YOUR PERSPECTIVE IN TUNE.*

BY ANGELA V. WOODHULL

When Sonja M. returned home after a two-week speaking engagement, she was euphoric. It was her first tour as a representative of a

company that offers seminars on improving work habits. On the tour, Sonja had encountered reluctant trainees, a mix-up about a

Up-Tempo Tips for Trainers Who Travel

Here are some tips for preventing the post-presentation blues.

- ▶ Keep to your usual routine, diet, and exercise regimen while on the road.
- ▶ Stay healthy at home so that you'll be in top form when it's time to go on the road again.
- ▶ Make a buddy in the corporate home office to take care of logistics while you're traveling.
- ▶ Be realistic about approval. Don't expect 100 percent of your audiences to like you.

- ▶ Take a day off when you return home.
- ▶ Seek closure by reviewing the highs and lows, and by making a list of things to do differently.
- ▶ Accentuate the positives by recalling what went right and by saving your positive evaluations for a confidence boost when you need it.
- ▶ Learn how to stop rehashing a tour once you get home, so you can enjoy other activities.
- ▶ Form alliances and share experiences with other speakers.

presentation room, a microphone that wouldn't work, and an overhead projector that went kaput. Yet, she thought she spoke with poise, and the evaluations were superb. Overall, Sonja felt that her presentations had motivated people.

Then she received a letter forwarded by her company from a disgruntled participant who asked for his money back. He wrote that her presentation was disorganized and shallow, and that she was aloof.

Sonja was taken aback and began feeling mildly depressed. Perhaps she wasn't as wonderful as she had thought. Fighting jet lag, she decided to go to bed and hoped that she'd feel better in the morning. But the next day, she reread the letter and wondered how it might affect future bookings. She knew that she was one of 75 speakers employed by the company. And the company had let her know that she could be easily replaced.

Nevertheless, Sonja's company sent her on two more tours. After each one, she experienced the same feelings of despondency. The mild depression was becoming a pattern, lasting from two to five days each time.

Sonja was experiencing post-presentation blues, also called "dysthymia." The symptoms are confusion, low energy, despondency, and fatigue. Entertainers, athletes, and even the most positive motivational speakers experience it at one time or another. Experts say that the phenomenon can be brought on by such factors as jet lag; overstimulation; in-

somnia; and changes in climate, diet, or exercise. Sonja's case was exacerbated by a perceived lack of support from her employer.

What to do

Shae Graham Kosch, director of the behavioral medicine program at the University of Florida in Gainesville, recommends that sufferers try to identify the specific cause or causes of their dysthymia.

"It's not a true clinical depression," says Kosch. "Clinical depression persists for two weeks or more. Still, dysthymia can be acute and intense."

Kosch explains that when someone is performing, there is a surge of a biochemical adrenalin similar to caffeine. But the brain can produce only so much of the stimulant. Eventually, the person feels depleted and let down.

"When people perform, they're cranked up with energy," says Mark Gold, director of neuroscience at the Shands Research Hospital in Gainesville, Florida. "All the things that are stimulating—performing, checking the itinerary, flying to different cities—tend to exhaust the stores of neurotransmitters. Once the stimuli are removed, there is a neurochemical letdown." Gold says that soldiers experience a similar response in wartime. After a battle, they are mentally fatigued, and they need time for restoration.

Getting all geared up to perform isn't necessarily healthy, says Gold. "People do it because it's glamorous. They get the red-carpet treatment. But when the excitement is gone, they are

just ordinary people again. Their spouses may say, 'It's your turn to take out the garbage.'"

In fact, spouses left at home may resent their mates who have been away giving presentations and being stars, according to William Wood, professor of psychiatry at the University of South Florida in Tampa. And co-workers may think that a presenter has been having a ball while they've been doing the dirty work back in the office. The complaints can cause presenters to experience dysthymia.

To prevent the post-presentation blues, experts recommend several approaches.

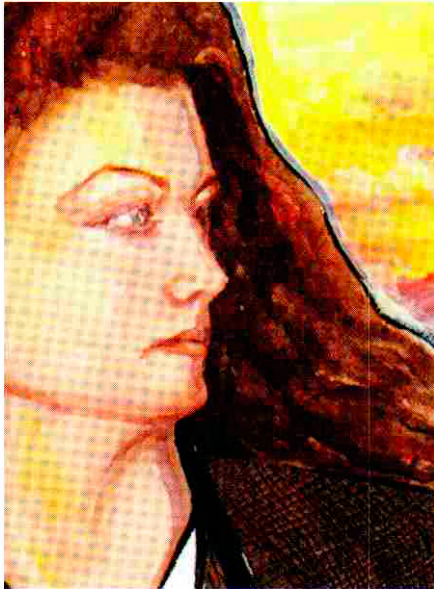
Train. The healthier you are before an extended tour, the less likely it is that you'll get depressed afterwards. Says Gold, "In effect, you're preparing for a marathon. Get plenty of exercise and sleep, eat a lot of carbohydrates, avoid fats, and stick to a regular routine. This will help lessen your recovery time."

Make contacts within the firm. Make sure you develop a good relationship with at least one person in the corporate office of the company that sets up your presentations. "Speakers shouldn't have to worry about such things as getting from the airport to the hotel and whether the workbooks arrived," says Gold. Someone at the corporate office should take care of the logistics and make sure to send presenters any positive, as well as negative, comments that come in.

Keep regular habits. It's not a good idea to go from eating cereal every morning at home to having a big buffet breakfast every day on the road, warns Wood. Stick to your regular routine as much as possible.

Exercise. While traveling, try to exercise at least 45 minutes a day if you can. Many hotels have swimming pools or exercise rooms. Or, just take a walk with a buddy and talk, recommends Kosch. As you walk, focus your attention on trees and buildings in the distance. A farsighted gaze is energizing.

Be realistic. Don't expect to receive 100 percent approval from everyone, cautions Michael Wade, a principal of Sanders and Wade Consulting in Phoenix, Arizona. Wade even suggests that audiences are getting "meaner" toward presenters because



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more training is mandated.

Sonja's company expected its speakers to receive two "excellents" for every "good" on their evaluations. That kind of pressure alone can lead to dysthymia and hinder performance.

"If 50 percent liked it and 50 percent thought it was OK, that's excellent. No matter how polished a performance is, there will always be criticism," says Wade.

Take time off. Wood says that even if you go back to work the day after you return from a tour, you should think of it as a day off. "You're in a transition period, so don't expect to get a lot accomplished the first day back."

Review. What were the high and low points? Think about what you'd do differently next time. Make a list. "Come home, put on relaxing clothes, and put closure on the trip," suggests Wood.

Accentuate the positives. "Talk about what went right. Your mood will follow your talk," says Kosch. "It's important to discuss the negative aspects. But it's also important to keep one's perspective. Write down everything that went right."

Maria Arapakis, author of *Softpower*, recommends saving positive evaluations. Says Arapakis:

"During the first years of my career as a speaker, I was extremely sensitive to the slightest criticism. I'd become terribly upset by even one negative evaluation in a stack of positive ones. Once, I let three bad evalua-

tions out of 400 good ones ruin an entire evening.

"That night, I decided to take my collection of 'warm, fuzzy' evaluations on my future travels. I'd reread them whenever I overreacted to criticism on the road. It worked like a charm. In minutes, I was able to restore a healthier, more realistic perspective."

Form allies. Leonard Felder, author of *Does Someone at Work Treat You Badly?* thinks that it's essential to share your experiences with other speakers. Felder says that it's possible that a co-worker not only shares your feelings, but also has the clout or experience to help.

Switch gears. Author and speaker Arthur Pell recommends that presenters on the road look forward to a favorite activity they can pursue when they return home.

Sonja didn't have an ideal supportive relationship with her company. And she couldn't please every member of her audience. But next time, she could offset those negatives by using the positive approaches recommended here to ward off those low-down, post-presentation blues. ■

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