

Knock Their Socks Off!

by Mark Matteson

Everyone is always glad to see me, some when I arrive and others when I leave. There is a woman at my favorite Starbucks who can't stand me. Mind you, she has never come out and said it, but I can tell. The French say the truth is in the nuances. It's in her facial expression, body language, and non-verbal attitude. Her words are always polite, so no one can criticize her for that. I don't go there as often anymore. We all move toward pleasure and away from pain.

Over the last year, I noticed I have been receiving a lot more standing ovations after my presentations, four out of five now. I also receive many more e-mails and hand-written notes. It's very validating. So I asked myself on a flight from Dallas in my journal, Why? Here is what I came up with. I hope it helps you with your next presentation. In fact, I hope it helps you to knock their socks off!

Dress the Part

We get one chance to make a great first impression. Find out what the audience will be wearing and dress just a little nicer. If by chance you overdress, you can always take off your tie, roll up your sleeves, or remove your jacket. I have been doing a lot of that lately. I will say to my audience, "Enough of the formalities, let's get to work!" as I remove my sport coat. After reading a script, recent Academy Award winner Jeff Bridges goes out and buys the clothes his character will wear and uses them for a month before filming. Robert De Niro does the same thing. Clothes matter.

Be Grateful

I am humbled and honored to have the opportunity to speak to any audience. I do it every week, sometimes several times a week. What a life! I used to get in trouble for talking in school, and now I get paid for it. God bless America! It's the ultimate act of faith, a sacred trust. They chose me; I GET to be there. It's a privilege and a joy. Oh yes, remember to SMILE and thank the audience, as well as the sponsor by name for allowing you to be there. "Thanks for letting me play in your sandbox," I say with a Cheshire-Cat grin. Gratitude is contagious.

Tell Stories

I begin with my second-best story and end with my best one. If you can somehow connect the stories you tell and "call back" to an earlier one, even better. First-person stories are powerful. Mine fall into two categories, Warnings or Examples. A warning is a time when you messed up. You dropped the ball, you sliced in the woods, you fell on your face. You get the idea. Each of us has lots of those. They will make you more human, authentic, and believable. My other favorite category is examples, especially third-person examples. For instance, an exemplar in that industry who has done what your audience wants to do. Who are they? Where are they? What makes them unique and successful? Begin collecting stories. I have thousands that I have gathered over the years. If you can tell one that has a twist at the end, better still.

Forget PowerPoint

I visited with my friend, Charlie, recently. He is one of the best in his industry. His company never participated in the recession. He is a voracious reader of books and trade magazines. He also attends lots of conferences and seminars. He told me he can't stand it when a speaker puts a slide up behind him and proceeds to read the words aloud. PowerPoint is a crutch. My last ten presentations were done without PowerPoint. It has forced me to trust my instincts and knowledge. Learn your material. Practice and memorize it, only to abandon it. The great actor, Anthony Hopkins, reads every script 250 times before he ever steps in front of the camera. "Clarice..."

Use the Right Kind of Humor

I have intensely studied great speakers since 1986: CEOs, politicians, actors, pastors, keynote speakers, and comedians. What I observed is the very best presenters employ two types of humor, Self-Effacing and Improvisation. Self-effacing humor makes ME the punch line. I begin with, "You probably noticed I am tall, five feet nineteen and a half inches...vertically gifted, follicly challenged. I go to the barber and he says, 'Trim the ears?' He means inside!" What is it about you that you can poke fun of? Why is this strategy effective? It makes the audience feel safe. If I pick on me, you don't get to. If you have seen the one-man play, *Defending the Caveman*, (the longest running one-man show on Broadway), you know that women have dragged their husbands or boyfriends by the thousands to see it over the last ten years. Why? HE pokes fun of MEN!

Improvisation is a little more challenging to learn. It has taken me about five years to become comfortable with it. It's both a science and an art. Read my e-book, *Helpful Hints for H.E.A.L.I.N.G. the Heart and Soul*, to learn more about improv. It's worth the read. Better yet, read *Improv Wisdom* by Patricia Madson.

Increase Your Level of Energy and Enthusiasm

I made a conscious effort this past year to ramp up my energy and enthusiasm during my seminars and keynotes. I get out from behind the podium and walk into the audience. I engage people with questions, ask for volunteers, and engage in role-playing (using improv). We have fun. Who said a keynote speech or seminar is supposed to be a dull, boring, monotone hour? Lighten up! Go to YouTube and type in "Charlie 'Tremendous' Jones" and get ready to see a master entertainer. He was the ultimate exemplar of enthusiasm I miss him; he left too soon.

The Power of Three

Offer up ideas that will make a difference. Later this month, I will be speaking at the Texas A&M International University Athletics Banquet. My one-hour talk will have three things that I want them to remember. Duke University recently won the Men's NCAA Basketball Championship. There were three things they (barely) did better than Butler: defense, free throws, and rebounds. In sales, we need to become good at three things: Asking Open-Ended Questions, Dominating the Listening, and Offering a Choice of Yeses (three options that will solve your clients challenges).

Tailor your message to the audience. Do your homework. Speak to them in terms of THEIR interests. Provide them with substance and ideas that will make a difference in their personal or professional life. Keep it simple. The way I see it, a great presentation has three parts.

Change Your Voice, Change Your Life

Dr. Morton Cooper wrote a book entitled *Change Your Voice, Change Your Life*. I read it five times and it did (change my life)! Using your natural voice matters. He will show you how to get in touch with YOUR natural voice in just a few minutes. I have found that audiences respond if I vary my volume, pace, intonation, tempo, and rhythm. When I want to make a point, I lower my voice. When I want to engage the audience during a story, I use a different voice. I have developed several voices and use them at different times during a story. I will call back to a particular voice later. When I say, “My wife says I’m too nosy. At least that is what she keeps writing in her journal!”, I use a mock feminine voice.

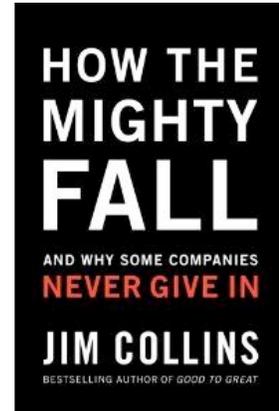
Love Your Audience, Love Your Work

I say aloud a dozen times a day, “I love my audience. I am the luckiest guy in Edmonds. It’s a joy to speak for a living!” Before I present, I walk out into the audience and introduce myself. I ask questions smile because I am genuinely glad to meet them. They are my customers! When they buy my CDs and books afterward, I say, “Thanks for being my customer!” Fall in love with your job, your career, your life! Be thankful. It beats the heck out of the alternative. Life is short. Enjoy the journey, the best is yet to come.

Book of the Month

How the Mighty Fall by Jim Collins

Jim started out by writing an article about why certain companies he had profiled in his seminal work, *Good to Great*, had gone by the wayside. In this masterpiece, he profiles the five steps to decline and explains in fascinating detail why some simply went away and others, like Nordstrom, were able to bounce back and reclaim greatness.



My favorite story from the book is about Winston Churchill. In 1940, Lady Astor was his arch-enemy in Parliament. While she was giving a Russian leader a tour, he asked about Churchill. “Churchill,” she replied, “He’s finished.”

At that point he was finished, or so it seemed. Most people underestimated his resolve, his courage, and his ability to bounce back from adversity. By 1942, England turned to Sir Winston yet one more time to help them defeat Hitler. His attitude is best summed up in the commencement speech he gave at his alma mater, Harrow.

“Never give in; never, never, never, never!” he said smashing his cane against the floor. “Never yield in any way, great or small, large or petty, except to convictions of honor and good sense. Never yield to force and the apparently overwhelming might of the enemy.”

That was his speech. When he sat down, they gave him a standing ovation. It was 1941. **Never give up.**