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## **Crafting Your Delivery Skills**

By Jim Endicott, Owner/Manager of Distinction

When things are slow in the office I often find myself retreating to my home workshop. I'm a weekend woodworker and I've found my shop to be a place of reasonable quite (with the exception of an occasional power tool) mixed with the clear focus required to keep from losing a finger in the table saw. To also remind me why I'm there, a phrase coined by John Gray, author of *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus*, hangs prominently above my workbench carved into a maple board. It simply says, "The Cave." My wife understands completely. For guys, this kind of place is not only necessary in our lives but has a bit of a sacred quality.



I'm currently working on an armoire for my brother and his wife. That's French for a tall cabinet with way too many corners to sand and doors that take an eternity to make. I'm getting down to the staining and finishing phase, which is always the hardest for me. It takes a degree of detail orientation that just doesn't come naturally but the motivation of not destroying something that's taken 40-hours to get to this point, slows me down enough to consider each brush stroke with all the concentration of a World Series pitcher. There are few lessons for presenters I've gleaned from my many hours over a router table and orbital sander. Here are a few.

### **I know where all the flaws are**

With all the precision of a lumberjack with perfectionist qualities, I am painfully aware of mitered corners that don't perfectly align. The places where another 10-minutes with the sander would have created a glassy smooth surface. And the tiny nail hole that did not get adequately filled. As presenters, we are often aware of where we fall short. Perhaps we've seen a "showroom" quality presentation delivered and ours seem to pale in comparison. But what makes this current project for my brother special is that it has a lot of me in it. I could have bought it somewhere but didn't. The small flaws become a by-product of my personal involvement and to be honest, they won't ever see the flaws. We need to put a lot more of ourselves into our presentations and be less concerned with trying to be a showroom quality presenter. The fact is, our audiences are more than willing to overlook the flaws when they have a genuine respect for us and the information we bring them. That doesn't mean we draw attention to our imperfections or pretend they don't exist, we simply concentrate on the higher objective of effectively communicating the very best we can and with a meaningful message. If you're in the habit of apologizing for your flaws, stop now.

### **Having the right tool is important, knowing how to use it is essential**

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In my early woodworking days my arsenal of power tools was pretty limited. The workarounds and woodcutting gymnastics I went through to make a particular cut or corner was often unrewarded. As presenters, we would like to believe that the tools we employ are relatively unimportant in the pure art of personal communication and there is some truth to that. Where it becomes painfully obvious to our audiences that things aren't working for us often has more to do with using a presentation tool badly, not that fact that we're using one in the first place. PowerPoint in the hands of one person may convey all the sensory impressions of a small town carnival with effects and meaningless text while in the hands of another, it becomes an elegantly crafted communication tool with just the right mix of text, graphics and perhaps a blank screen or two for when visual support is not required at all. Same tool-dramatically different results depending on the author.

### **Tuning up my skills with the help of a better craftsman**

I've come to the conclusion that I can only go so far with my skills. Once I have the knack of creating raised paneled doors and tightly mitered corners, I need to stretch myself a bit farther with the help of someone more seasoned in the shop than myself. Presenters can become very complacent over time. It's very easy to view the art of crafting and delivering a presentation as an ad hoc business process that gets whatever time we have left over from the more important things. As one management consultant once put it, "There is no single set of skills that is a more consistent predictor of managerial success than the ability to present well and negotiate effectively." That says it all. How are you tuning up your skill set or have you settled into a comfortable sufficiency while your competitors continue to improve? There are resources for becoming a better presenter and for creating much better presentations. These days, there's no prize for being average so don't get lazy.

### **Let the wood show through**

I could never understand how someone could paint over a beautiful oak piece of furniture with white enamel paint or cover up a gorgeous hard wood floor with carpet. I suppose the answer lies in how much value we place on the natural beauty. If we were building something that was simply utilitarian, perhaps we would use a pine or other inexpensive wood and pay little attention to making fancy dovetail corners. If you put on a thick enough coat of paint, it will cover a multitude of flaws. The sad thing is presenters are often guilty of creating a particleboard presentation for clearly an "oak opportunity." When the stakes are high and the presentation venue is important is not the time to skimp on the "materials." You will know you did, and far worse, so will your partners or customers. Invest in the skills to craft a better presentation or in the training for those who do. I'm not talking about just knowing where to look in PowerPoint menus. I'm talking about real presentation-specific message and design skill enhancement. I'm talking about learning how to wrap a presentation neatly around your audience and tie it all up in a bow. If you have the budget, have someone create a professional one for you and learn from what they did. Whatever the case, at some point we must embrace the fact that we don't and can't know it all and that there is a clear ROI related to getting better at this critical communication process.

Good presentations and delivery is not about an abundance of testosterone (or estrogen). An overconfidence or cocky attitude in the workshop just means that sooner or later I will need to learn how to scratch my nose with the palm of my hand. We can ill-afford to be careless presenters either. The loss may not be quantifiable in terms of flesh and blood but you can bet that there will be a 'dollars and cents' impact on you and your organization.

*Learn more about [Jim Endicott and Distinction](#) in our Contributors section.*

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