



Search

[Home](#) >> [Courses](#) >> [Delivery](#) >> Delivery Skills

Delivery Principles to Shape Your Audience's Perception

By Jim Endicott, Owner/Manager of Distinction

In a recent press release from President Bush, he indicated that he wanted to get away from formal press conferences and put the question and answer times with the media in more of a casual chat format. For those of you who are old enough to remember the President Reagan era (1981 - 1987), he used a similar approach to masterfully orchestrate a change in how America perceived the one who occupied the highest office in the land. In any such observation, there are undoubtedly those who would question his politics and whether the economy actually "trickles" up or down, but what most people would not debate was former President Reagan's ability to connect with his audiences in a personal way. When other presidents had been accustomed to addressing the nation like a college dean would address a group of underclassman, Reagan seemed to sit down with us in our living rooms and bridge the gap to the American people like few had ever done before. It seemed to help the difficult things he had to communicate go down a little easier. It's no surprise that President Bush now wants to try to tap into that same flavor of communication. He clearly understands the current necessity to build bridges and reunite a nation.



Learn what good presenters need to understand about shaping audiences perceptions. Our effectiveness and impact hang on these simple principles and yet they're rarely taught in the most prestigious MBA schools across America.

To create change in an audience, we first must learn how to come along side them

One of the most significant books written in the 80's took a dramatic departure from traditional management style when it coined the acronym, MBWA. The concept of Management By Walking Around entered public consciousness following the 1982 publication of the book "In Search for Excellence," authored by Tom Peters and Robert H. Waterman, Jr.

It wasn't complex. Simply put, they understood the value in coming along side the worker - observing, talking and understanding them as a way of creating change. As presenters we need to first come along side our audiences before we can lead them into new concepts and ideas. We do this in several ways. First, we do our homework. That means "coming along side" our audiences by pre-presentation phone interviews, talking to employees/customers regarding your presentation topic and gaining their insight and understanding their expectations. We then use that information to not only shape our message but also we demonstrate our knowledge of them during the presentation. "For some time, many of you in

this room have expressed frustration at the rate of change. It's been a frustrating time for me as well. I've struggled with how to find a balance in creating stability in a changing business climate." Here's how I prefaced a presentation to InfoComm attendees. "Before creating today's presentation today I asked a number of you what was important for you to understand better about the presentation design process. I heard you say that seeing case studies of how others addressed their design challenges was important so in today's presentation I've done just that. I've experienced the same frustration you having in working with a CEO who struggles with." After we come along side our audiences, we demonstrate our understanding of them by empathizing with their issues, we can then move into topics related to altering their belief systems. This approach is at the essence of being a strong and credible consultant in any industry and is at the core of the psychology of influence.

Leverage the power of personal stories

Presenters today are always looking for clever ways of getting into their presentations and engaging their audiences. For that reason they buy books like: *A Thousand Clever Quotations*, *A Hundred Funny Jokes*, or *Dozens of Great Stories*. There's only one problem. Clever quotations still need to be relevant to your topic. Jokes are hard for many to tell well and they still need to be connected to your presentation message somehow. Great stories of others are still others stories. The very best presentation stories are those that draw on your own experiences. You will always be most passionate about your own experiences and audiences will always respond better to those things most personal to you.

Former President Reagan was a masterful storyteller. In his speeches he often related an experience he had growing up, a conversation with a normal citizen, or a how a program touched another human being. He gave those programs flesh and blood and that's how any of our experiences drive home our presentation messages with our audiences. They're remembered long after the content of our bullet slides fade in their memory. Make sure your stories tie into the topic and you will find your way into the hearts and minds of your audiences.

Be conversational in your delivery

It's a fact; presentations that are read are boring. Sermons that are simply read put audiences (congregations) to sleep. A monotone regurgitation of details and bullets sends an audience looking for an exit. Those presidents who mastered the use of the tele-prompter and who could deliver their speeches like their thoughts were just coming to them, seemed much more intimate and personal with us. It's critical that we become comfortable enough with our presentation content that we deliver them conversationally. That means several critical things.

- Our eyes can now remain on our audiences longer when we're not simply reading from a prepared script.
- Our content seems much less canned and more personal
- Pacing can then be varied so we don't slip into one continuous tone delivery style.
- We can think more about what our bodies are communicating from a posture, movement and audience proximity perspective.

I'm not sure where you're at in your delivery skills. For most of us, we want to get better at

this whole presentation delivery process but our fears tend to drive us away from the one thing that can be our best teacher - experience. I suppose we could bring a portable fireplace to each presentation. After all it worked for Ronald Reagan because it gave us a warm fuzzy feeling but I'm guessing that local fire codes would frown on the approach. Besides, many presentations aren't about warm fuzzy topics but they still need to hook up with our audiences whether they're a Board of Directors or a potential major account. Maybe you get a little tense in front of small groups but we could take a lesson or two from those who've had to capture the hearts and minds of an audience of 200 million.

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[Back](#)

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