

4. In the spotlight

The presentation has been written out, the slides have been made. Now for the presenting!

Delivering a monologue is something quite different from having a conversation. In a conversation you get an immediate response: people nod, they answer, and you respond to that in turn. A monologue in front of a group is another matter. The group behaves as a group and will not feel called upon to keep looking at you and nodding with interest. Because of this reaction, which in a conversation would suggest complete disinterest, novice presenters sometimes get the idea that what they are doing is uninteresting and that the audience is 'against' them. Think of the well-known example of a man drowning in a pond. This man has a far greater chance of being rescued if there is only one person nearby. That person is addressed by the man in need and jumps into the water. If a whole group stands watching, a group effect occurs. No one is addressed personally, and there is a good chance that whoever jumps into the water first will be too late to save the man.

Be prepared for a group to react differently from an individual.

A monologue does not mean that you will not make contact with the audience. Many people have a tendency to protect themselves from the group. They do this by clinging anxiously to a lectern, hiding behind a written text and slides read out loud, or shielding themselves with folded arms.

That is no way to make contact. You only make contact if you show yourself! If all goes well, you have a substantive story with your own involvement (and, if possible, passion) woven into it. You have made supporting slides, not slides to hide behind. The content is ready. Now you still have to show it (through yourself) in the way you present.

You may have written out the story you are going to tell, but you are not going to read it out. You are going to tell it from memory. Fluently, with facial expression, gestures and an expressive voice. In your hands you hold at most a small card with key words and the remote for the PowerPoint. You are standing in the spotlight. You show why you are there and what you stand for. You are going to shine. You are going to connect with the audience. You are going to make sure they feel involved in your story.

From memory, more or less naked in the spotlight, nowhere to hide: that can never go well! Michel and Bas start to panic slightly. There is no need. A presentation that is read out simply doesn't work anyway. Hardly any eye contact is made with the audience, so the audience isn't drawn into the presentation. The audience sees nothing of the presenter, the presenter's face will show no expression and they will make no gestures. On top of that, reading aloud is often done very monotonously.

posture

Plenty of practice will make speaking from memory flow naturally. When you speak from memory it is far easier to connect with the audience. Make plenty of eye contact with the audience, look around the room. If you find looking around difficult, pick out a few people spread across the room before you start and look at them, so that you do look around. Do not fix on one person for too long. (No longer than about 4 seconds.) Make sure you stand upright, with your legs slightly apart. Hold your hands in front of you as if you were holding a tennis ball (or the small card!), or by your sides. Speak with expression in your voice and vary your pitch and volume. Speak clearly, articulate deliberately and speak up. After practising for a while, your talk will come more and more naturally, and your facial expressions and hand gestures will follow of their own accord. It can all be a little larger than you would normally do in a conversation, as you are standing at a greater distance. Here too the rule applies: do not do anything you would not feel comfortable with. Michel, who is known as the man with a heart for his people, does not need to give a flashy, commercial presentation at all. What matters is that the audience still recognises Michel. He has to shine, but as himself!

Carlijn does not yet know her audience. She too has to try to let herself shine. Ideally, the audience gets to know her a little during the presentation, so that afterwards they have an idea of who Carlijn is and what Carlijn wants to achieve. After all, people prefer to do business with people they know.

Q&A session

After the presentation there is usually room for questions from the audience. Take your time over this. It often takes a while for the first question to come, and a presenter who is rushing off will get few questions. Do not be afraid of questions. Look at the person asking the question while they ask it. Summarise the question for the room and check with the questioner that you have put it correctly. Give your answer while making eye contact with the whole room again. Never become defensive; stay open, courteous and professional. Do not make it personal, even if you are being attacked personally. The group will take your side if you remain professional. If you do not know something, it is not the end of the world. Summarise the question so that you are sure you have understood it correctly. Then do not beat about the bush: be honest that you do not know the answer, but arrange, if appropriate, how you can come back to the question.

After the question round you can properly close. Thank the audience and point out where any handouts can be picked up.

Exercises: In the spotlight

1. Stand in front of the mirror, introduce yourself and do your elevator pitch. If possible: record yourself. On video and/or audio. Watch and listen to yourself. Evaluate how you stand and sound. Where are your arms? How is your eye contact with yourself in the mirror? How is your expression? How does your voice sound?
2. An exercise to shed your embarrassment. Ask a few friends or family members for help (more than two). Have them each name an animal, a strikingly well-known Dutch person or a fairy-tale character. It is your task to act that out as well as you can, with sound. Of course it feels odd to imitate a tortoise, but you get used to it and, more importantly, it pays off. This is how you get used to performing in front of an audience and to using your body and voice.
3. A voice exercise. Read a children's story out loud, standing up. Use the following voices:
 - Posh squared
 - Street urchin
 - A Surinamese accent
 - A Drenthe accent
 - Frans Bauer
 - Miss Ant
 - Miss Piggie
 - Like a king
 - A trading-floor lad
 - A witch
4. Search [YouTube](#) at presentations by well-known Americans and at presentations by children. Americans can teach you a great deal about professionalism in presenting. Sometimes all they lack is credibility and authenticity. The videos of children can inspire you towards authenticity. Tips: King, Clinton, Bush, Oprah. Look at what they do, what they say, how they say it (example, story, anecdote, use of statistics, figures of speech?), how they use their voice, how they look at the audience, how they use their body.
5. Practise your presentation standing up, out loud and from start to finish. Practise together with the use of PowerPoint. Always finish the presentation completely, even if something went wrong along the way (otherwise you get the effect that the beginning of the presentation goes much better because it has been practised more often). While practising, make a card with the key words you need. Remember: presenting naturally is a matter of a great deal of practice! Keep going.

6. Now record your entire presentation. Watch yourself critically. How are you standing, are you looking properly at the (not actually present) audience, what about your facial expressions, your use of voice, your posture, your use of PowerPoint? Does the content of your presentation come across clearly? Is it simple? Is there a clear structure?
7. Ask a few friends or family members for help. Ask them whether they will listen to your presentation on two evenings, and ask them beforehand whether they are willing to give honest (constructive) criticism. On the first evening, you deliver the presentation as you have prepared it. Afterwards, ask everyone what they thought of it and note down the responses. Do actually do this. Then ask specific questions: What was the most important thing I wanted to say? How was my use of voice? How was the build-up of tension? What did you think was best? What did you think was worst? How were my visual aids? How was my body language, in my face and gestures? Did you feel involved in my story? Look at the evaluations again the next morning and see what you can improve. The following day you present again to the same group of people. Compare the responses: did it go better, worse or the same?
8. Practise until you know the presentation inside out. This reduces the nerves on the day itself.