

Up Close and Personal

The ability to translate presentation skills from the more formal *stand-up* environment to the informal, one-to-one setting is a requirement for the effective communicator. The three key areas to consider involve: *Seating*, *Scanning*, and *Socializing*.

SEATING

When you choose to stand and deliver information in a *conference room* or *U-shape* setup, the dynamics of those seated can affect the delivery of your message. Two-thirds of your audience faces *one another*. This presents a challenge, since people's ability to see one another cause distraction. Classroom and theatre-style setups limit such distraction, since everyone in the audience faces *front*.

From the presenter's perspective, there are three seating areas to consider: **Power**, **Input** and **Observer**, arranged, respectively, *opposite*, *left & right*.

- *Opposite*. These are the **power** seats. Those who sit diagonally opposite the presenter assume power whenever they make comments or interact in some way. Since these seats *mirror* the presenter, there is an implied power given to those occupying these seats. In a persuasive situation, these are the seats you would prefer your clients or key decision-makers to take during the meeting.
- *Left*. These are the **input** seats. Generally closer to the front and to the left of the presenter, those sitting in the input seats have an unobstructed view of the presenter. They tend to interact when prompted and usually provide support information or offer a consensus to a motion. The client's subordinate decision-makers or support staff can occupy these seats. If there are no additional client representatives, then use these seats for any members of your support staff who are *not* presenting at the meeting.
- *Right*. These are the **observer** seats. To the right of the presenter, the seats along the side, from front to back, these are the most difficult seats to enjoy the presentation. People usually have to shift their chairs on angles or lean over just to make eye contact with the presenter. Use some of these seats for your own team, since they are most familiar with each presentation and need not see every action. The *observer* seats allow the opportunity to glance at others during the presentation to notice key reactions, interest level, etc., without distracting the presenter.

In a small, informal meeting where *no one is standing* to deliver information, the seating positions can also be used effectively. For example, around a conference room table, avoid *center-seating*. This happens when the facilitator or leader of the meeting takes a position at the head of the table while others sit to the right and left. Instead, have the person leading the meeting sit at one of the *corners* or at such an angle to the group to appear toward one side of the table.

By shifting the balance to one side, you gain a wider perspective of the entire group. In addition, any props such as documents or other items will be easier to angle for view when you have balance to one side.

For one-to-one meetings, avoid the head-on collisions where you are directly opposite the other person. The goal is to avoid having your shoulders parallel to the other person and angling your chair is the easiest way to do this. Try angles, such as the corner of a table, or even use angles of height where you could be leaning on the edge of a desk (half-standing) while the other person is seated next to you.

SCANNING

In any communication, timing is critical and the eyes of the receiver can offer you clues to your delivery. By scanning the eye movement of a person when attempting to make a point you may help to solidify your position. The easiest approach is to *probe for a timeline*. By asking a question involving reflection or past experience, you can observe which direction the eyes travel as the person recalls the experience. For most people, that direction will be up and to their right.

Whatever the direction, it represents "the past" on the person's timeline and indicates *experience*. When a question prompts a thought-provoking glance in the opposite direction, the person indicates *anticipation* or possible application in the future. This may be a better time to close the deal, so to speak.

The eyes give other hints, as well. If the person is staring directly at you and not shifting their eyes at all, there's a good chance that they are *not* listening. They are giving you the courtesy of direct eye contact, but they are probably drifting away in their thoughts. Break the eye contact with them and they will be attentive again.

Finally, you can maintain more control by making *less* eye contact. Since eye contact is critical in face-to-face meetings, your limitation of eye contact forces others to find your eyes. This effort actually increases the attention span and keeps others involved in your discussion. Playing "hard-to-get" with eye contact can be quite effective. Just be careful not to appear as though you are *avoiding* eye contact.

SOCIALIZING

Don't underestimate the power of a coffee break! A tremendous amount of business is transacted in social situations. Whether it is lunch, dinner, a cocktail hour or golf outing, the positions you take can make a difference. Body angles and gestures will be your most effective communication tools. If you establish a 45-degree angle to a person as you socialize, you can make important points by squaring your shoulders and facing the person directly.

Hand gestures work well. *Reaching out* (extending the arm, opening the hand) when referencing someone is important, and *hanging* a gesture (keeping it still) when making a point is effective, even at meals. You can maintain control of small groups of people with correctly timed gestures and body angles, especially in social gatherings where face-to-face communication is not supported by visual aids.

In addition to body positions and hand gestures, one of the best communication skills for social events is storytelling. Whether the reference is fact or fiction, comedy or tragedy the ability to use stories to augment a discussion is very useful. Be sure to establish a sense of time, place and condition for your story. The more specific you are in the "exposition" portion of the narration the easier it is for your audience to remain attentive. Good storytellers are always remembered.

The more you practice your one-to-one skills, the easier it will be for you to maintain those skills in more formal presentation settings. If you keep playing the angles or *rest positions* you gain more chances to square off and use *power positions*. This activity coupled with stories, analogies, examples and an interesting topic will yield powerful results for all those up close and personal situations.

NOTE: The information in this handout supports the MediaNet lecture "Up Close & Personal."

Additional support for this and other topics can be found in several publications including:

- *Special Edition Using Microsoft PowerPoint 2007* by Patrice-Ann Rutledge and Tom Mucciolo (Copyright 2006, QUE, Pearson Publishing, MediaNet, Inc.).
- *Purpose, Movement, Color* by Tom and Rich Mucciolo (Copyright 1994, 1999, MediaNet, Inc.)
- *Mechanics-Basic Skills* CD (Copyright 2002, MediaNet, Inc.) an interactive delivery skills tutorial
- *Media-Design Skills* CD (Copyright 2004, MediaNet, Inc.), an interactive design tutorial.
- *Teaching Effectiveness* research study, published April, 2008, available on our website.

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