

What great presenters do when presenting to very senior managers

Extract from 'Presenting Yourself With Impact' By Gill Graves. (All names have been changed)

When talking to people about improving their presentation skills I often find that the barriers that stop them moving on and improving their skills are some of the beliefs they hold about themselves as communicators or presenters. Often they are holding on to a lot of limiting beliefs which, until challenged and replaced by more useful beliefs, will probably continue to sabotage their performance.

Recently I was coaching Diana, a senior manager at a large multinational. Whilst she knew she was a *very good* presenter she wanted to be an *excellent* presenter.

She felt she was very good at presenting material relating to her area of specialism and to audiences whom she felt comfortable with. However she was much less comfortable presenting to senior audiences on topics that she did not know very well - for example when she was presenting on behalf of her boss or another team member. She knew she would be increasingly called upon to do this in the future. It was clear from her language that she carried around a number of beliefs about hierarchies and people in senior positions.

During one coaching session we discussed some of the people she admired as presenters because they always appeared confident and self-assured. We called these people 'exemplars'.

These exemplars included a senior army officer who was used to briefing generals, a former colleague and female role model who was now a partner at a large management consultancy and a male colleague who, in Diana's words had a "100% natural approach" and had been trained by a non-hierarchical CEO.

At the end of the session she decided to embark on a modelling project, meeting up with some of these individuals and discovering from them how they did what they did. In particular Diana was curious about how they managed to present an aura of confidence and self assurance even when they were presenting material in which they were not considered to be an expert.

Two of the areas Diana explored with her exemplars were their beliefs about themselves as presenters and how they viewed their senior audiences. Diana summarised these and contrasted them with her own beliefs about herself and how she viewed her senior audiences. I have reproduced these beliefs below:

David

- They do not expect you to be weak in front of them. You are in your position for a reason.
- They will respect you if you handle **them**.
- They don't know what they don't know (85% won't know as much as you). 50% given confidently is better than 85% badly.

Andrea

- Adrenalin is positive.
- Flushing is natural.
- It's lonely at the top. Treat them as humans not positions.
- Respect them - They have done well - but don't be deferential.
- You are only there because they want to hear what you have to say.
- You know more than they do on this topic.

Denis

- It is an honour for **them** to meet me!
- They are a person ... not a position. Connect with them as people.
- They don't want to be put on a pedestal - they want to be treated naturally.

- **Then these were Diana's beliefs:**

- They are amazing as they are in **that** position.
- They know everything and are experts in everything.
- They view me as young and inexperienced.
- I don't deserve their time.

As Diana compared her beliefs about presenting to senior people with those of her exemplars she became acutely aware that her own beliefs were much more limiting.

She realised that if she presented to a board of directors believing, "I don't deserve their time", she would almost certainly be sabotaging her performance. It was unlikely that she would use all her skills and resources as a presenter to really sell her message. By contrast, borrowing Andrea's belief, "You are only there because they want to hear what you have to say" was so much more enabling and put her in a more positive space to call on all her resources as a presenter. That's the nice thing about beliefs - you can borrow them!

Food for thought?

If you like the tip please pass it on.

['Presenting Yourself With Impact' by Gill Graves is available from Amazon](#)

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