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“I Can See You Naked”

**A New Revised Edition
of the
National Bestseller
on Making Fearless
Presentations**

by Ron Hoff

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“I need you.
You need me.”



No, that is not the whispered sentiment of a star-crossed lover. Nor is it part of a hurried conversation on the baseball field between pitcher and catcher.

It is the core of a relationship that should exist between presenter and audience.

It is important to any understanding of the dynamics of presentation because it suggests a partnership rather than a performance, a linkage rather than a confrontation, coming closer rather than pulling apart.

What we're talking about here is the heart of our headline: *needs*. No presentation should occur without them. Since they are so fundamental to the success of your next presentation, they deserve some thoughtful examination (and some graphics to stick in your mind):

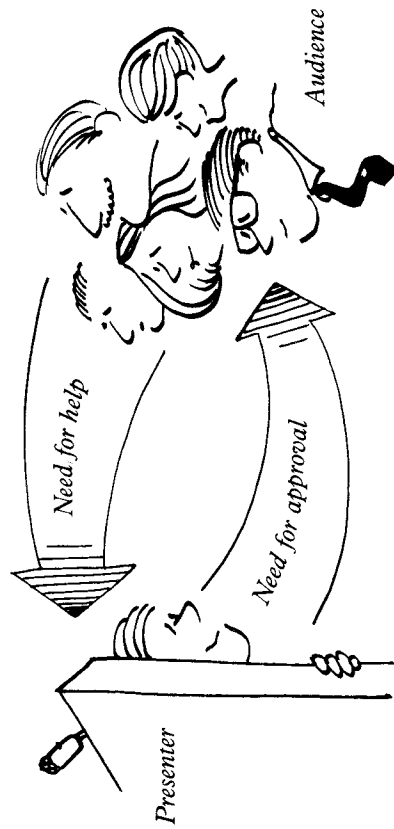


Every presentation begins in this way. The audience *needs* something—usually *help*. (Ask a seasoned salesman what he wants to get out of a presentation and invariably he will say, “Just give me *one* idea, that’s all I ask, something I can use tomorrow.”)

By coming to your presentation, by simply showing up, your audience is expressing a need for help, counsel, wisdom, inspiration—maybe even something that can change its life. Not its collective life—its personal, individual lives.

If truth be told, the audience arrives on the scene with the ardent hope that the presenter knows something that it does not.

Maybe the presenter has a secret, and is willing to share it with the audience. If not, the presenter may have a fresh way of looking at things—one that the audience can apply profitably. Perhaps tomorrow



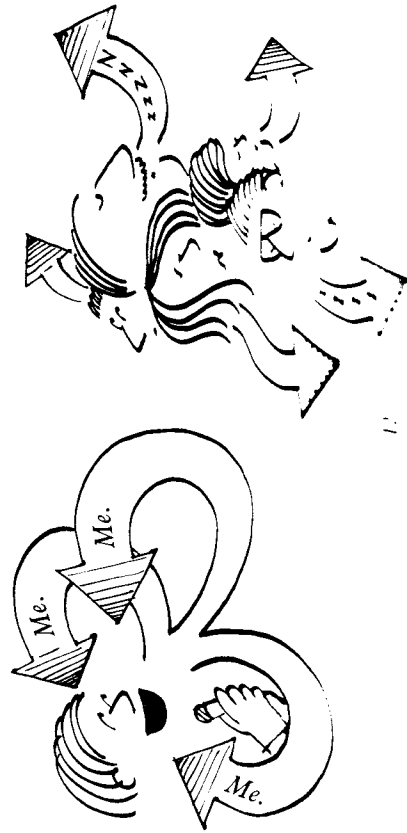
The presenter has needs, too, of course. *Many*. But nothing quite equals the presenter's need for *approval*. Only the audience can give it, but it can be rendered in many forms—from a simple vote (a raising of hands), to a signature on a document (such as a long-term contract), to an outburst of applause.

Without some indication of approval, response, endorsement, confirmation—*something!*—the presenter is lost at sea, adrift, seeking a signal.

This can be tough on the ego. (*No* response is, in many ways, worse than outright rejection.) But it can also leave the presenter without authorization to *do anything*.

How many meetings have you left with the uneasy feeling that nobody had an inkling of what to do next?

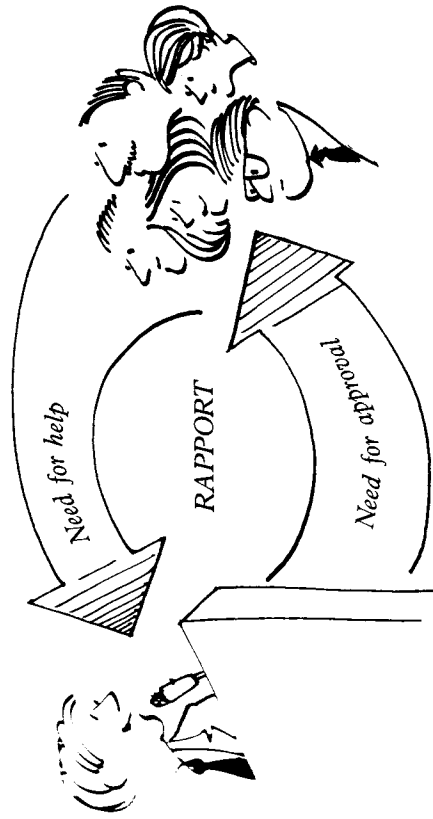
This may not be the fault of the audience alone. Maybe the first link in our circuit was never made. Maybe the audience was there, registering a need, but the presenter did what thousands of presenters do: *talked about himself, or herself*. The audience withdrew, sensing that its need was being ignored. Here's what happens:



Nothing happens. The area between audience and presenter remains a void. *No needs are met*. No help is offered. No approval is given. Everybody goes home. Another useless meeting. The audience says, "Boy, was that a dreary meeting." The presenter says, "That audience was dead." The *fulfillment* of needs is essential.

Let's assume we've got our circuit going. The circulation in our circle of needs is flowing smoothly. There are no gaps, no hitches.

Gradually, a gratifying sense of *rapport* begins to fill the room. The distance between audience and presenter seems less.



The prognosis for this presentation looks very good indeed.

There are few things in life that can match the exhilaration of a meeting, where everything is going well.

But, before the euphoria carries us blissfully away, is there nothing else? No other overriding need?

There is. However, it applies to *brilliant* presentations only. So, if you are simply striving for brilliance rather than insisting on it—consider the following "need" as an intriguing possibility and nothing more. If brilliance is *necessary* to you, listen up.

In every *brilliant* presentation, there is what Spalding Gray—the noted writer, actor, and monologist—calls "the perfect moment." He refers to it in his presentation of "Swimming to Cambodia"—a mono-

logue which enjoyed great success at Lincoln Center in New York and, later, as a film. It's worth thinking about.

"The perfect moment" is a burst of incandescence that ignites the entire presentation and gives it an everlasting impression on the audience's memory.

"Swimming to Cambodia" demonstrated its own "perfect moment"—as performed by Mr. Gray—when he described his experience of swimming in the towering surf of the Indian Ocean.

Joe Froschl, an advertising agency executive in New York City, has his own language for this moment of enlightenment. He calls it "a flash of insight that gives us a reason to believe."

Fred Lemont, an experienced marketing consultant and exceptional presenter, calls it a dramatic point in a presentation "which everybody can rally 'round."

"A perfect moment" can be crafted into your presentation and rehearsed to perfection—or it may occur suddenly as an idea erupts in a shower of sparks.

"A perfect moment":

A young business executive named Richard Foody stands before us. He wears a dark blue suit and white shirt. He is nervous. He fluffs some words. He is going to tell us about skiing, but he is starting his presentation in the same way that he might approach a steep, downhill slope. *Very, very carefully.* He is telling us, rather matter-of-factly, that you need certain things before you can start to ski. Gloves. He slips them on. A ski cap. He pulls one over his ears. A number (skiing is like everything else—you have to have a number!).

He hangs the cardboard number around his neck (his coat has been discarded; his tie, loosened). Suddenly, he looks very different. A strangeness has set in—call it "a perfect moment," or at least the start of one. He crouches down, his eyes glistening, and describes the breathless anticipation of "pushing off." His body sways as he speeds down the slope. He's really into it—into his "moment"—carrying us with him. Then, astonishingly, *he falls down.* His feet fly out from under him, and he's down—in a heap. Right in front of us! He looks around, struggles to his feet, chuckles self-consciously. He starts talking to us again, like a stream of consciousness, words coming faster and much easier than before. He realizes, he has almost completed

his fearsome run down the slope—and *he's home, free!* Well, almost free. What's a little spill when you're out to conquer a mountain—and, most important, your own fears of it? He looks totally different now—confident, elated, in control. He rips off his number and holds it high over his head. There is a kind of radiant jubilation about him. "Just grab your number," he shouts, "*and go.*"

Later, it dawned on me that he wasn't just talking about skiing, he was talking about "taking a chance"—doing something different—making a commitment to life. And, shortly thereafter, he moved on to a much bigger job with a different company.

"Perfect moments" may sound a bit weird, but they are very easy to identify. They tend to engulf audiences in a sudden awareness that something unusual has happened. They communicate on a higher level of involvement. And they often conclude in a feeling of emotional closeness between presenter and audience—as if they had shared some kind of transcendent experience.

The vital reminder

It's pleasant to think about the "perfect moments" of your life. It's fun to think about capturing one for your next presentation. But it's *vital* to remember what presentation is all about: *It's about meeting needs.* It's about completing the circle that revolves around rapport. It's the honest realization and resulting reward of "I need you. You need me."

Sometimes, during those crucial first ninety seconds, you can get things moving your way by asking your audience to help you. Casually. Almost offhandedly.

If you're presenting in a small meeting room—perhaps in a not-so-new hotel conference room—where the audio/visual equipment is a bit antiquated and you never really know what's going to happen next ("Pardon me," the waiter asks, "but is this the meeting that ordered the plum danish and decaf?"), an audience really *can* serve as a kind of volunteer support system.

It's a little tricky, though, so it's best to know what you can ask your audience to do with some reasonable expectation of success and, on the other hand, what can cause confusion, consternation, and delay.

1. *When you ask your audience to get involved with the lighting, you're courting disaster.* "Could somebody please hit the light switch back there. I've got a few transparencies to show up here." Suddenly the room is plunged into inky darkness and the speaker can't find his notes, his slides, the projector, the audience, anything. "No, no, can you bring up the dimmers?" It turns out there are no dimmers. "What about the sidelights, the wall lights?" The well-meaning guy sitting back by the light panel starts throwing switches with reckless abandon. Lights flash on and off in blinding combinations. The chair deliers blink. Spotlights appear from out of nowhere. It's like a Light Show at Atlantic City. The overall effect is not without dazzlement, but it can be rudely disruptive.

The answer is for *you* to have all the lights set exactly where you want them for the showing of your slides. There is a midpoint of illumination where you can see your audience, they can see you, and the slides are clear and bright on the screen. This is a point which the poor devil sitting back by the light panel is unlikely to discover perhaps in his lifetime.

Unexpected Darkness—A True Story: The most unnerving experience of my speaking career involved the lights in a cavernous auditorium in Dallas, Texas. I had started my presentation on a vast platform that seemed more like a mesa high above the audience. There were only a few hundred hearty souls in an arena that must have seated ten thousand. But I could see them and they could see me—the lighting was just fine. The presentation began. After about three minutes, every light in the auditorium began to dim. It was eerie, like a very slow power failure. As we all descended into darkness, a spotlight of ferocious intensity suddenly attached itself to me. I looked for my audience and saw only blackness beyond the blinding whiteness of

the spotlight. Was anybody there? I couldn't see a single solitary person. It was like being alone in an aircraft hangar. But I labored on, good-solider and all that. When the normal lights returned, there were the people—just as I had left them—but I had the strangest feeling about them. *I felt that I hadn't talked to them at all.*

There's a moral to this story: don't let unexpected darkness disconnect you from your audience. If that ever happens to you, throw the light back up." That's what I should have done.

When you ask questions that relate to the comfort and convenience of your audience, you'd better have the answers. When you start out by asking your audience, "Is it too cold for you in here?" or "How's the ventilation?"—you're showing your concern. *Good.* Audience is like that. They're people, after all, and they like the idea that you're watching out for them—responsible, in a way, for their well-being. They're already appreciative. But you'd better have a pretty good idea of where to find the building engineer or the superintendent should you receive a rousing chorus of complaints.

I've heard presenters ask, "Is that music in the next room too loud for you?" without having the foggiest idea of what to do about it. Ask the hotel manager or meeting manager to intercede—you may not get it. An argument with the presenter in the next room is one thing you don't really need.)

When you say, yes, but don't bring up problems that you don't know how to remedy. It's strange, but drawing attention to an unfixable problem will only make it more distracting.

Ask your audience about things that are directly within your control. Remind your audience about things that are directly within your control. Here's a suggestion for the first ninety minutes of your presentation that's a far better icebreaker than telling them—and it will use up much less time:

■ Can everybody see this chart from where you're sitting? Can everybody see the back of the room? . . . What if I move this easel forward a few feet? Is that better?"

Important Note: Of course you checked out the meeting room before the audience arrived. You've made your decisions on where you want your props and audio/visual gear. What you're doing now is making some slight adjustments to, ostensibly, accommodate your audience. However, you're also accomplishing some other things that are every bit as important:

You're showing that you're not paralyzed by your own rigid thinking. You're flexible. Nothing is set in stone.

You're involving them in a nice way. You've hardly started and already they're participating, making a meaningful contribution

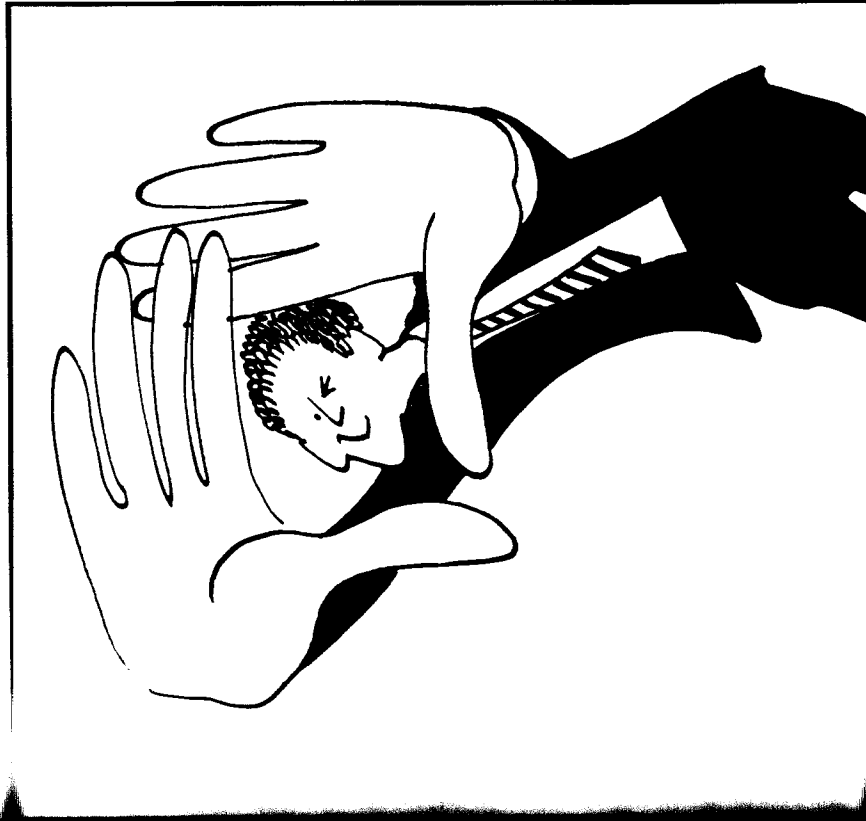
to *your* presentation. That's gratifying for them, and genuinely helpful to you.

The key point: demonstrate your concern authoritatively, not tentatively. You're not worried or fretful about the lights, the mike, the props. You don't want to give that impression. You're starting up a dialogue. You're getting a relationship underway. And just maybe you're also alleviating a bit of your own nervousness.

All that, within the first ninety seconds!

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"Who's going to be Stanley Kubrick?"



Show me a person who says, "I never feel the slightest bit nervous when I get up to present," and I will show you a person who is not to be trusted.

That person, no matter how reputable, is *lying*.

Here's the truth of it: some of the world's most famous presenters have freely admitted to nervousness and stage fright—Sir Lawrence Olivier, Helen Hayes, Maureen Stapleton, Luciano Pavarotti, Willard Scott—and many more. You are not alone.

If you're *alive*, your nervous system is going to be going full throttle, or close to it, when you get up to present yourself.

Being nervous is being alive—so how can it be all bad? It's not.

Contrary to popular belief, nervousness is *good* for you and your presentation—that is, up to a certain point which I have dubbed the Crossover Point.

So, let's explore the *good* side of nervousness.

Positive nervousness activates the adrenaline supply. It makes the eyes shine. It puts an edge on what you're presenting. It generates a respectful attention within your audience (after all, nervousness proves that you think your audience is worth being nervous about). It creates an atmosphere that has a bit of drama in it.

Those are all decent virtues—not to be minimized by hardliners who view nervousness as some kind of paralyzing ogre.

But now we're approaching the Crossover Point. To see it more clearly, settle into this church pew with me on a recent Sunday morning in New York City.

Quiet please, the service is under way. It's a full house and things are moving along smoothly. The scripture has been read. The offering has been collected. The ushers move down the aisles, their collection plates heaped with wads of cash and little white envelopes.

As the ushers gather at the front of the church, a woman in her mid-fifties climbs the stairs to the altar.

She looks solemn, heavily laden—though she is carrying only a small piece of crumpled paper. She stations herself behind the altar, looking first right and then left as if she were sizing up a dangerous intersection. There is no joy in her manner. Her spirits show no sign of heavenly levitation.

Silence. Then, her voice—small and constricted—tumbles out upon the congregation. She is nervous, obviously, but the words

forming sacred platitudes—and the audience is attentive, even nodding a bit, nodding in appreciation of the woman's valor. Suddenly, there's a problem. The words aren't coming out right. There are awkward gaps. Meanings fall apart.

I see a car running out of gasoline, the woman's voice is chugging to a standstill. Her throat has become so constricted by nervousness that she is running out of breath.

The congregation shifts uneasily; the minister looks up from his pulpit.

We have arrived at the Crossover Point. The audience no longer regards the presenter's nervousness as an energizing life sign but, instead, sees it as a darkening cloud. The nervousness of the presenter has become so worrisome to the audience that it has, in fact, made *the audience nervous*.

Back to the woman at the altar.

The stops. Is she finished? Apparently. The minister moves forward, reaching for her elbow, whispering a few consoling words to her. After her gently, he escorts her down the steps and back to her seat in the congregation.

The lady is pale, shaken, but she doesn't realize what she has done for us. She has taken us to the Crossover Point and shown us what can happen when nervousness creeps over the line, causing us to approach the presenter that it spreads to the audience.

There are some astonishingly simple things the church member could have done, and you can do before your next presentation: Louis Brandeis, the famed trial lawyer, has nailed the culprit quite emphatically. He says, "A speaker's nervousness or distress is the most commonable disease in the world."

The Reverend Jesse Jackson makes the same point, a tad less dramatically. "I've learned that nervous speakers make people nervous."

Now, don't fight it. You don't get anywhere by waging war against nervousness. It'll wear you down. You *accept* it as a positive influence. At the very least, it prevents you from being flat. Then, like you Ray Leonard, you "finesse" your way along—with a lot of technique and no small amount of self-assurance. Keep it positive and joyful. You can *ease* your way through it a lot more effectively by hammering and pounding.

Second, take a brisk walk. While everybody else is loading up on punch and crumb cake, take a five minute walk. That should get you around the block. If you haven't got five minutes, walk around

the hallways outside of your meeting room. Walking before presenting gets your whole body loosened up (it is *guaranteed* to prevent knees from shaking during crucial presentations). Walking burns off excess nervousness (it is also good for hypertension). It gets you moving forward physically and mentally. It projects you into your presentation in a nonviolent, nonstressed way. You walk in with a glow.

Third, don't sit there with your legs crossed. One of them is liable to go to sleep. It happens frequently. Presenters often get up to speak and find that they sort of lunge forward, one leg functioning and the other floundering. If you're the next presenter, put both feet on the floor and lean forward. Wiggle your toes. It's okay. No one will know what you're doing and you'll have solid proof that both feet are fully awake and ready to go.

Fourth, while you're sitting there waiting to present, let your arms dangle at your sides. Make believe that your fingers and arms are supported by the carpet. If you can't feel the carpet, just let your arms hang there—detached. Feel the tension draining out of them and onto the carpet. Remember: you're not fighting anything. You're just letting it drift away.

Fifth, while your arms are dangling there, twirl your wrists, so that your fingers shake loosely. Athletes do this all the time, usually while waiting on the sidelines, just before entering a game. You're shaking the stress out of them—not violently, gently. Coaxing them to ease off, not badgering them. You'll find that all of these sly, little exercises increase the circulation—the blood supply—and anything that improves circulation reduces stress.

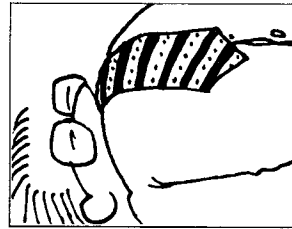
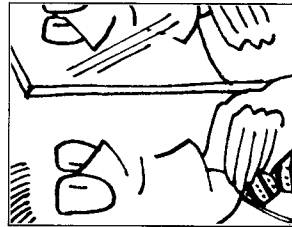
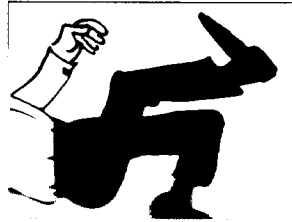
Sixth, pretend that you're wearing an overcoat and you can feel it resting on your shoulders. Shoulders "hunch up" when you're cold or nervous. And when your shoulders are tight, the rest of your body feels tense. The gentle pressure of an imagined overcoat will relax your shoulders and encourage the rest of you to do the same.

Seventh, wobble your jaw back and forth three or four times. If you hear your bones grinding, you're probably tense—and the exercise will help you open your mouth. This, to a presenter, is akin to helping a professional quarterback throw the football. Nothing is worse than presenters who suffer from the "tight jaw syndrome." They appear, from time to time, on the "MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour."

Eighth, try that trusty old standby—deep breathing. All you have to remember is this: your breath goes in, your stomach goes out. Inhale, stomach out. (You should feel it against your belt, if you've got one on.) Exhale, stomach in. Do it for two minutes. It ventilates the body. Before you try this exercise, it helps to have a well-ventilated room.

Create Your Own Anti-Nervousness Routine

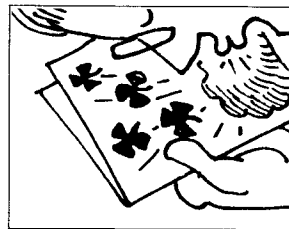
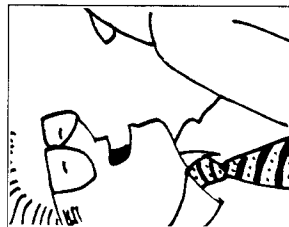
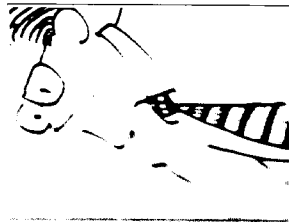
(Here's one that works. Feel free to use it—before every presentation.)



1. *Take a five minute walk.* I should relax, but your blood goes to your head.

2. *Check yourself out.* Everything intact? Do you look as good as you can reasonably look?

3. *Deep breathing exercises.* Do the same number every time . . . no more, no less.



4. *Ask yourself, "What's my business today?"* Should be one simple sentence always related to the audience. If not, not.

5. *Say something to somebody.* Do your vocal chords work? Great! Can you smile? Terrific! There's less and less for you to worry about.

6. *Take care of superstition.* Glance at your good luck charm. It should be something that makes you feel good—like a St. Patrick's Day card that always brings you luck.

Who could? Always do the same routine. Exactly the same. That's the secret.

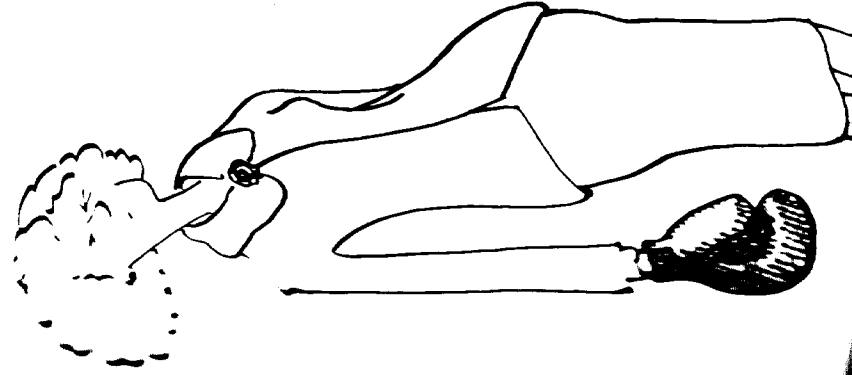
Ninth, say "Let go." It's a suggestion to yourself, not an order. Tell your brain, your muscles, your nerves, your arterial system to ease off and let go. "Let go" will do more to diffuse negative nervousness than any other combination of words in the English language. And nobody can make them work for you as well as you can.

Tenth, don't be self-conscious about having a warm-up routine—such as the one on the preceding page or any combination of suggestions from page 53 on. Athletes warm up. Opera singers vocalize. Dancers cavort about. Presenters, on the other hand, seem to do a lot of standing around before they perform. Why is that? Could it be that speakers don't think of themselves as doing anything (how much practice does it take to stand behind a podium?), and therefore feel a little silly doing warm-up exercises? Actually, presentation is enormously demanding on the vocal chords, the nervous system, bodily coordination, and the circulatory system. If those things aren't working, if they're not warmed up and ready to support you, you can be tense, awkward, dreadfully uncomfortable, and thick in the brain. The exercises we've described in this chapter aren't going to make people think you've lost your marbles—chances are, they won't even notice. And if they do, so what? Everybody exercises these days. It's a sign of self-pride and professionalism. Besides, I've never heard a single program chairman say, "Oh my, don't invite that speaker. He does funny little exercises before he begins." Have your own warm-up routine. You'll speak better, feel better, and get more applause.

Maybe the woman who lost her voice in New York City will get wind of this book and try some warm-up exercises before she bleats her next offering. If she does, I hope I'm part of her audience. Her voice will fill the chapel and all of those present, heavenly and otherwise, will be mightily pleased.

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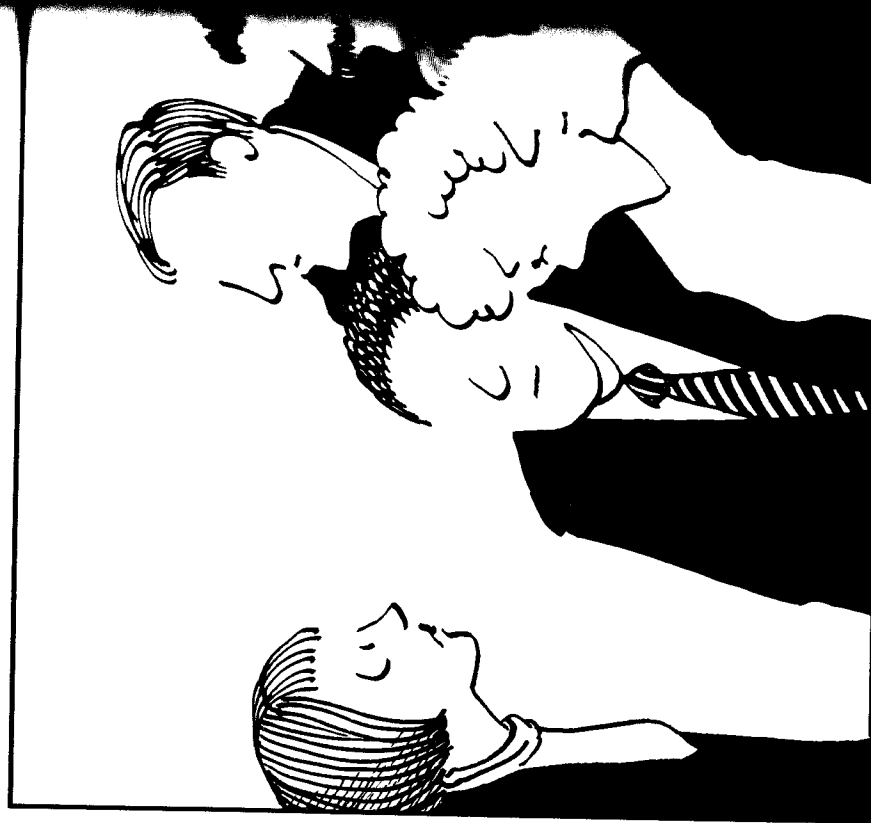
Sometimes, the best offense is to let your guard down.



22

"I'm speaking to
what I see in your eyes."

—Mike Vance



If you've ever tried to have a conversation with a cab driver while you're in the back seat and he (or she) is weaving through heavy traffic, you know how difficult, but it makes a dramatic point about eye contact. *It is virtually impossible to talk to the rear of a person's head. A cab driver's conversation has little hope of survival without some degree of contact. A cabbie talking to a rearview mirror is a miserable presentation technique.*

Cab drivers have taught us something else about eye contact. Without it, it's impossible to tell if anybody is *listening*. In a very real sense, listening isn't done with the ears, it's done with the eyes. ("Want to know if a person is listening to your words of love? Look at his eyes.")

And as the eyes "listen," they *respond*—sending back more signals than you could stuff into a mainframe computer. Perhaps that is Mike Vance—a superb professional speaker—says, "I'm speaking to what I see in your eyes."

He means, "I'm talking directly to the most sensitive and pervasive channel of communication in the human system—and I'm doing so I go." That takes lots of experience but it is a skill that you can learn to achieve.

Why all this attention to the eyes?

The answer may sound melodramatic (but it's true): the eyes transmit a living presence that is indescribably powerful, and no one in the world can transmit it with the same impact of a live situation. You may be looking at Dan Rather. But is he looking at *you* (are you *there*)? Live eyes are "the windows of the soul." Doctors look them to gauge your health. Lovers stare into them to share deepest feelings. Hypnotists use them to cast us under a spell. *Remember to try to outstare each other in order to express their hatred.*

Are we aware?

The whole subject of eye contact and presentation may boil down to this small diver of truth:

If you're *not* going to use eye contact in your presentation, you might as well Federal Express your message to the meeting.

Eye contact, if you are *not* employing it effectively, can do more harm to your presentation skills than any other single improve-

ment you can make. Vocal cords may carry your message, but it's the eyes that hold your audience.

Since eye contact is so necessary to holding attention, let's spend a few moments answering the questions that seem to crop up most often:

1. *How do you do eye contact? What's the secret?* The secret is in the "equal time." It's not a matter of "three seconds per person" or "two seconds per person" or any preordained length of equal time.

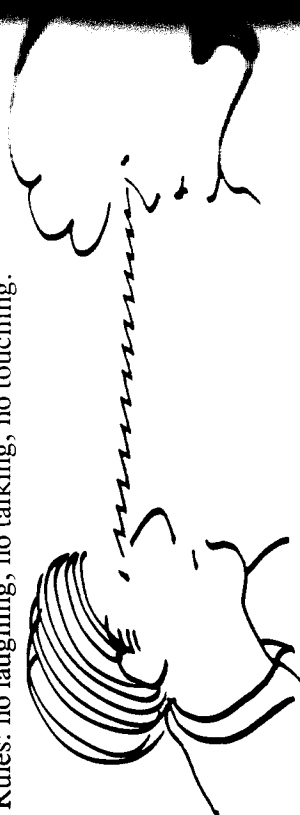
Eye contact is a matter of punctuation. It's the registration of an idea, a phrase, maybe even a single word, during a continuous linking-up of the eyes.

If you're getting a negative response, eyes averted, head turned away, maybe you want to concentrate on this person for a few more thoughts, or phrases, or words—perhaps *something* will strike home. (It is *not* an insult if a person is hesitant to look you in the eye. You don't relinquish their eyes easily—especially to strangers.)

If the eye contact is strong and solid, and the facial language favorable, you move on—staying with each person as long as your instincts (and your eyes) tell you. You linger long enough to assure acknowledgment by the person you're talking to. A bond, a link, is created in those few seconds and you both know that a highly personal exchange has occurred—and that, implicit in the dialogue, the message that "you'll be back." The eyes say it all, talking back and forth, an exchange unique to "live" presentation.

Eye contact is doled out by words and thoughts, and measured by body language. But, somewhere near the unfathomable core of there is a bonding that is deeply alive and unique to the eyes.

Idea: To feel the depth and power of the eyes, and *smell* little eye contact training, try this exercise tonight. Find a friend (lover) and stare into her (his) eyes for *two* uninterrupted minutes. Rules: no laughing, no talking, no touching.



The two minute continuous current: Can you do it?

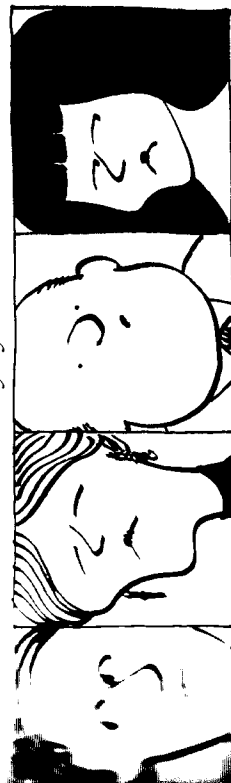
What prevents eye contact? What are some of the most prevalent

- If you're standing in a pool of light, reading notes or a script, the audience is bathed in blackness, you're not going to see any but alone make contact. Louis Nizer, the great trial lawyer, is prominent on this point. In his book, *Reflections Without Mirrors*, he the firm rule is: a speech should be delivered without a single the speaker looking at his audience in the eye and timing his every to match its immediate comprehension." So, Mr. Vance and that are saying the same thing here, only Mr. Nizer will not that a single note."

- If you're just too far away from your audience to see them if you're isolated—eye contact is going to be difficult.

- "Cocktail Party Eyes" is the presenter's worst affliction. It is shared from all the cocktail parties you've ever attended. There are many of "Cocktail Party Eyes," many of which are shared by others when speaking to audiences. Here are a few different

"Cocktail Party Eyes"



"Frankly, I don't come here often. These aren't my kind of people."

"Where am I? Is this Toledo?"

"Is he going to the bar again?"

Presenters with "Cocktail Party Eyes" never look directly at audience. They look around them, over them, even *through* them a lot of self-consciousness in the presenter with "Cocktail Eyes," but there's very little eye contact.

"How do I maintain eye contact when I'm really trying to connect on my presentation?" Speaking and eye contact aren't two separate things. With a little experience, you find that one becomes a the other. That's really what Mike Vance was saying when he "speaking to what I see in your eyes." It requires confidence in knowledge and a reasonable degree of self-esteem. You've got

to believe in your ability to help others. As in all aspects of presentation, *preparation* is key. If you're not quite sure of your material, your eye contact will be tentative. Have complete command of your material, and your confidence will come right through your eyes.



One other little point that could be important: Think twice before you hand out papers for your audience to study—or give them other inducements to break eye contact. They may get so engrossed in the papers that they never come back to you. And, no matter what they say, people can't read and listen to you at the same time. Eye contact is so valuable. Be wary about giving it away.

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Spend a day with your voice.

