

Click with Your Audience in a Remote Control Society

by Pamela Ziemann

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Your audience is more discerning than they were a year ago. So many things are calling for their attention they have to make judgment calls on the matters they can eliminate. At home they're using their remote controls to click off DVDs, VCRs, receivers, and cable boxes. It just takes them a split second. What's to say they won't click us off, if only in their minds the minute they lose interest? As presenters we must find a way to engage them and keep them tuned in. It can be a daunting task when people have so much on their minds. It's been said that people do business with the people they know, like and trust. The same is true for getting people to listen and act on your presentation. Let's look at all three components, starting with trust.

People have been bombarded with advertisements making them keenly aware of manipulation. Any kind of "shtick" or gimmick that used to draw people in is now turning them off. A razzle-dazzle power point display simply isn't enough to keep people engaged. The recent business scandals are fresh in everyone's minds making meaningful, hype-free content more essential than ever. If your presentation has been referred to as a "dog and pony show," it's not a compliment. This phrase actually means a glitzy show lacking content. It's best left for a small time circus, not your time pressured audience who's grown weary of tricks.

Congruency is another factor developing trust. I once saw a politician say to the crowd, "My goal is to bring us all together." While he voiced it his hands pushed away from his body. It wasn't congruent and my level of trust for him began to slip. Words may indicate one thing but if it isn't what you truly believe you body will scream out loud and clear your underlying thoughts. Yes, they are subtle messages but don't think your audience doesn't notice them. They do.

It could be as simple as an audience member asking the presenter if he has time for a question. The presenter impatiently looks down at his watch while saying a polite... "Sure!" You know what they really mean. Most of the time they don't even see what time it is. It's just a way for them to hint to you, "I really don't have time but I don't know how to tell you." People believe body language. Make sure it's congruent with your words. It may seem like a trivial concern in our fast paced society, but any incongruence can be the seed of audience apprehension. You want to keep them focused on your content, not wondering about mixed messages.

Another way to build trust is through clarity. Are we crystal clear with our intentions? Do we tell them from the beginning why we're there and what we hope to gain by making the presentation? Is our intention to persuade, inform or

inspire? Once we have clarified our intention, the audience can relax into listening to the content. Without taking the time to get perfectly clear on our intention, the lack of clarity will be reflected in the rest of the talk. If you can't write your perfectly clear intention on the back of a business card, you've got a ways to go.

You're speaking because you are the expert. As the expert you'll need to bring a well-balanced perspective. Acknowledge the concerns that may be in the minds of the audience. An overly optimistic one-way approach can be met with hesitation. People will be reassured when they know you've considered more than one angle. This style of addressing concerns while staying strongly grounded in your recommendation adds to the atmosphere of trust. When you bring authenticity, congruency, clarity and multidimensional thinking into your presentation you set the stage for the highest level of trust.

The next element in engaging your audience is allowing people to know you. Stay with me. I'm not asking you to go overboard in the touchy feely arena! As audience members most of us can remember what it's like to listen to speakers who say way too much about themselves and their personal lives. But how well do you really feel you know someone who is just rattling off facts and figures? Their intelligence level may be very high but remember, "People do business with people they know, like and trust." Sharing something about who you are and how you relate to them will draw them into your presentation.

Recently, I heard a CEO share a camping experience and how it related to what he learned about business. He became a fellow human being rather than the person who dictated the company's mission statement. It was much easier for his audience to relate to him. Dare to share one of your own stories and how it relates to your subject matter. Then watch your audience open up and work with you rather than against you.

OK, we've talked about building trust and allowing people to know you. Now how do you get them to like you? Many presenters are overly concerned with receiving acceptance and approval from the audience. In striving too hard to be liked just the opposite can happen. Distracting habits can creep into the best-dressed executive's presentation without them even knowing it. Anything that takes away from your natural presence such as a forced smile, jingling change in the pocket, lack of eye contact, talking too fast with no "white space" or any of the other habits must be addressed. With the assistance of a professional coach you can eliminate these unproductive habits. Increase your likability by being yourself. The more relaxed you are the more they can relax and open up to your ideas. But keep in mind: you want to be your best self, not a self that goes on automatic with habits of the past.

A good presentation can win people's trust and motivate them to act. One hour in front of a group can be the difference between people working with you or

against you. Keep them tuned in and engaged by being the kind of presenter they know, like and trust. Subtle changes in your presenting style are well worth the time and attention. Your speaking speaks for itself.

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