

Leadership & presentations



A very good consultant friend of mine, Steve Dillingham, often says, “presentations are all about leadership”, to which I invariably retorque, “but leadership is not just about presentations”

However, presentations, in the largest sense of the term, are clearly the “public window” of leadership; no matter how much you empower, show empathy, facilitate decision making, coach and encourage, it’s when you are “up in front of others” that the spotlight, and the judgements, are on you.

If you are nothing but perfect, people will shoot you down; you get your facts wrong, people shoot you down, you get carried away emotionally, people shoot you down, your posture is seen as aggressive or demeaning, people shoot you down, you take the high ground, people shoot you down, you roll your sleeves up, you get shot down.

Leadership is about “standing up and being counted”, but as soon as you stand up the snipers are out!

I have helped a number of leaders to prepare their speeches and the preparation invariably starts off with them saying something like, “I want to say this, that and the other”; which is difficult to knock – leadership is a lot about vision, mission and purpose and I am always pleased when working with someone for whom where they want to go is clear.

However, very few seem to focus on what the public wants or needs to hear; what are the concerns they want answering, what are their doubts about the journey, what do they need to have clarified, what will ensure their “buy in” – without this a speech becomes very quickly, talking to people, rather than talking with people

I’ve been involved in events where “the leader” has scheduled a one-hour inspirational speech to kick-off a large event, outlining what he or she sees as the brave new world and the sacrifices needed to get there; often with lots of singing and dancing PowerPoint – complicated graphics, morphing images, encrusted videos and the like.

Warren Bennis, famously said, “*A leader is not only the messenger, he is the message*”, when talking to others; the team, the board of directors, the public don’t become a messenger who forgot the message. Looking down at your notes occasionally or at your PowerPoint slides is ok, but not every two minutes – “be” your presentation, don’t “give” your presentation.

It is clearly difficult (although, not impossible) to ask your public what are their concerns, their fears and their doubts; however, you can sound out the troops beforehand and build answers into your speech – “you may be wondering if there are going to be any lay-offs? I can assure that there will be no lay-offs”. “You may be asking yourself; do we have the resources to achieve our ambitions? No, not completely but we will find them”.

In general others expect at least four things when listening to a speech:

Information: they want to be informed or learn something new about the situation; they will probably want some graphs, traffic lights and the like, used sparingly and given slowly.

Entertained: no, not the stand-up leader telling jokes and

witty one-liners. They will want to hear pertinent anecdotes, metaphors, stories and references that they can relate to.

Passion: they will want someone who is not just “going through the motions” of giving “yet another presentation”. They will want some enthusiasm, some spontaneity, maybe some compassion, they will want to feel a connection – even when there is distance.

Meaning: what you say needs to hit them in their beliefs and values; they will want to see that you are in it for more than just yourself, that you are there for something “beyond yourself” and, maybe, even “beyond them”.

To achieve this, you need to mobilise and unify your Head, Heart, Body & Soul; showing that you are knowledgeable, exuding empathy, look the part and that you are in it for something bigger than yourself.

Leadership is like a lot of things; to be good at it, you need to practice. Speaking and presenting was difficult in the world of face-to-face of interactions and in today’s screen-to-screen world it has become critical.

If you would like to work on your leadership or the leadership of those around you, do not hesitate to contact me at boblarcher@boblarcher.com

You may also like to take a look at <http://www.screen-leadership.com/> to get some ideas as to how you can develop your Screen Reputation