PRESENTING | SPEAKING | TRAINING | SKILLS

Overcoming Fear of Public Speaking

Tell Stories to Connect With Your Audience

by **Randy Gage**

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According to surveys, for many people, fear of public speaking almost equals their fear of death. You would think hard-charging CEOs would be different, but unfortunately that's not the case. So how does a nervous executive or entrepreneur get better at speaking?

Recently I conducted a one-day "Marketing War College" in the U.K. That event came 48 hours after I conducted a four-day, 17-hour-a-day program for professional speakers in L.A.

The speakers program included a number of "showcases" I critiqued along with Steve Siebold. In these, a volunteer comes on stage and delivers a short section of his or her speech. We then critique for them how they can better connect with the audience and get their message across.

If there was one theme we came back to over and over, it was "tell a story – make a point" (which of course, was the mantra of the legendary Bill Gove.)

Simply assaulting your audience with facts, statistics and information will never create a bond. If you do that, you are simply a human computer, downloading data at a much faster rate than the average person can process.

Give a speech on the “11 Steps to Success” and quiz the audience 30 minutes later. You’ll be lucky if they can name one or two. But tell them a story about something that happened to you that illustrates a point – and they’ll often remember the story (and thus the point) five years later.

> **The speakers who are extraordinary communicators never download facts – they have a conversation with the audience. They become campfire storytellers.**

At the Marketing War College, I coached attendees on their copywriting skills. We worked together on crafting compelling, gut-wrenching stories that would capture the emotion of the situation for the prospect.

Contrary to popular belief, elite copywriters and world-class speakers share many more similarities than they do differences. At their ultimate level they both speak to the soul of the recipients.

One of the insights I wanted the speakers to get was that they must bring more than their message to the audience. Their message must be heartfelt, in the moment, and spoken directly with their audience. Yet there still is an element of show business – a necessary element if they are to “get over the lights,” and share their message in a way the audience hears it, connects with it, and actually resonates it. You can’t do this with facts and figures, but you can do this with stories. And when you do it right – the recipient will not hear the story, or read the story – they will experience it!

I got to practice this personally immediately after the speakers program. This time I was the speaker as I shared my *“Shattering Your Self-Limiting Beliefs”* keynote to a typically stoic audience outside of London.

The British “stiff upper lip” is not a myth. Speaking to a U.K. audience, you’ll notice a definite reduction in facial expression, laughter and interactions. There were times in the talk that I wondered if I was really getting through. Yet when I finished, a long line of people lined up to shake my hand, look in my eyes, and tell me how moving and life-

changing my message had been. It took almost an hour to speak to them all. And all the time I was thinking, “If it meant this much to you, couldn’t you have told your face?” I thought I was dying, but my message had been getting through.

The idiom and accents between us were quite different – not to mention some of the audience members were from Scotland, Ireland, France and Italy – yet the message of my stories transcended all.

So what’s the marketing lesson for you?

> **Tell a story. Make a point. Make the story your point. The medium may change but the end result must not. Whether you’re speaking to an audience of 5000, or writing your next sales letter, blog post or website, you must reach each person, one at a time.**

Even if your mail piece or e-zine is going to 250,000 people, they are going to read it one person at a time. The more stories you tell that the prospect will relate to, the more likely he or she is to continue reading and get your message. Your overriding responsibility is to connect with your audience on a soul-to-soul level.

My name is **Randy Gage** and I believe.

I believe you were born to be rich, people are meant to be inspired, and conventions should rock.

I believe a blog can change the world and a speech can change a life.

I believe safe is the new risky, boring is criminal, and pitchers should hit.

Call me a philosopher, a Jedi Knight or the millionaire messiah, just don't call me late for dinner. I like hot cars, warm beaches and cold Dr. Pepper.

Quiet confidence and loud ideas are sexy. When I'm not prowling the podium or locked in my lonely writer's garret, you'll find me playing 3rd base for a softball team somewhere.

I believe in my work, because I believe in you.

R.G.

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Prosperity Expert Randy Gage rose from a jail cell as a teen to become a self-made multi-millionaire. Along the way, he overcame addictions, getting shot, and near bankruptcy to go on to inspire millions around the world. Randy is the author of eight books on success, which have been translated into more than 25 languages. Connect with Randy at
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