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Perfect Delays

By Judy Jernudd

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"Winning communicators don't strive for perfection, they strive for connection."

Cheers and elation bubbled throughout the room after our presentation skills workshop. Five executives from various professions had successfully made stellar leaps in enhancing their communication skills.

One woman, Paula (not her real name), in particular, made transformations before our eyes. At the beginning of the workshop she seemed to be the least likely to make propelling progress. After receiving high marks and praise from her fellow classmates I congratulated her on her exceptional work.

Tears began to well up in her eyes as she slowly responded, "I thought I would be perfect after today." Pause. When questioned as to what she meant, she said, "I wasn't perfect, I need to be perfect before I can give my big presentation in three weeks." After more inquiry, I learned that her parents had always demanded perfection from her. As an adult, she repeats her family history by demanding perfection from herself

I encouraged her to review her video-taped exercises with focus on her progress. "Enjoy your success today," I exclaimed. "Concentrate on what you did right, not on what wasn't perfect." My message to her applies to each of us: "You can work on improving your presentation skills, your message and your performance skills. However, if you are striving for perfection you might as well quit right now. You are placing paralyzing pressure on yourself." I offered to her that I have yet to meet the perfect communicator including myself or any of our associates.

Former Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton are famous for their communication skills. They are the most "perfect" communicators our world has experienced in recent history. Even these superstar communicators make mistakes as evidenced by the Presidential Bloopers videotapes!

Answer these five "yes or no" questions. Go with your first reaction.

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1. Do you have anxiety about giving a speech or presentation?
2. Would you rather pass on the opportunity to make a speech?
3. Do you prefer to stay in the background?
4. Are you uncomfortable in front of large groups of people?
5. Would you like to gain communication confidence?

If you answered "yes" to one of these questions read on!

Tip One: Let's get to the major one first. Anxiety. If you feel anxious about giving a speech or making a presentation you're not alone. The majority of people we coach experience similar feelings. Starting with the CEO right through the ranks of most organizations, many people experience jitters. I continue

to be amazed at how many senior level executives, who can command thousand of employees, turn icy-white-knuckled at the thought of giving a speech or stepping in front of a television camera.

What about the stars who make their living in front of audiences? This one might surprise you: Bob Hope was celebrating his 86th birthday when I had the opportunity to interview him. "Did you ever get nervous or anxious before stepping on stage or in front of a TV camera," I asked? "Oh, honey, the day I don't have some anxiety, I don't want to do it anymore." You see, a professional uses their anxiety as part of the "adrenaline rush" or "edge" in their performance skills. You can turn yours into a plus or your anxiety will be a minus in your presentation skills. Think of it as your assistant rather than your detractor.

Tip two: When pressed to answer why people feel fear about a presentation, the majority answer "I don't want to make a fool of myself or look stupid." If this is one of your concerns, you can take control with preparation. Know what you want to say. Organize your thoughts and your message. Prepare yourself just the way a professional speaker gets ready to present. This method may not eliminate all of your fears, but it will help you get over some of your "stage fright." Your confidence level will lift-off when you know that you are prepared.

Tip three: Attitude. We are not referring only to a positive attitude. We are helping you be aware of how much your attitude will reflect in your presentation. Do you wish you were anywhere else? Or are you excited to be there? Whatever you are feeling will be apparent to your audience. Think of it this way, if you are asked to give a speech or presentation, someone considers you to be an expert or that you have something of value to say. Think of yourself as an authority or a conduit of information. Change your attitude from "I don't want to be here" to "I'm glad to be here with you to share some material that will be helpful." You'll be surprised how this one skill can make a difference.

Tip four: About your audience. If you think of an audience collectively you add another pressure. "I'm okay presenting to two or three people, but with anything above a small group, I freeze." We hear this concern often. Whether you are talking to one person or one thousand focus as though you were speaking to one person only. Concentrate on getting your message across to an individual not a group.

Tip five: "What if I make a mistake?" This question comes up in almost every workshop. What is the worst that can happen? People generally have a hard time with an answer. When you make a mistake,

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and we all do, move on. How you handle a mistake is how your audience will react. If you show fear and let your nervousness show you will make your audience uncomfortable. If humor comes naturally to you have fun with it. Or simply say, "let me start over again," correct it and continue. More than once people say their mistake was often the highlight of the presentation because it made them more human to the audience.

These five tips will help you gain confidence, control and connection with your audience of one or one thousand. I encourage you to practice them until they become comfortable for you.

Oh, remember Paula who wanted to be perfect? A few weeks after our presentation workshop Paula called to tell us about her big presentation. "Don't keep us in suspense, how did it go?" "Well, I wasn't perfect and I was successful. We got the contract and it is one of the company's biggest accounts!" What would have happened if Paula had delayed until she was perfect?

We can all benefit from Paula's lesson. Perfect delays can stop you from being successful in your career and perhaps, even in your personal life. Don't delay; start implementing your presentation and

communication skills today. Striving for perfection is not the goal, connecting with people is what makes a winning communicator.

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Judy Jernudd is a leader in coaching programs for the development of personal and group presentation skills. Her firm, Prime Performance, has produced outstanding results for corporate executives, entrepreneurs and professionals. You can reach Judy at (310) 306-6999 or at <http://www.PrimePerformance.com>.

Depression and Procrastination: Twins In the Job Search

By Marilyn J. Tellez, M.A.

Let me examine these two mental states. My definition of procrastination is that a person delays and delays actions that are required by a job or actions necessary to accomplish something in every day life.

Depression is a mental state that "almost freezes" a person into no action at all.

While procrastination can be overcome by a change of behavior and attitude, depression has its core issues of lassitude, feelings of hopelessness, anger and of giving up.

What do the two have in common? I think that procrastination is often a temporary trait, but depression is something that will take lots of time and energy to overcome. Both lead to a lack of action.

It is action, however, that has to take place for a job seeker to have success. Observing personal

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procrastination takes time to overcome. Overcoming depression, if it is long-term may take the intervention of either a professional and or drugs.

Both mental places have the effect of "dampening down" the actions of the job seeker. Elimination of both of these negative states of mind, has to take place for a job seeker to be minimally effective.

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