# 10 Steps To Making A Powerful Presentation

**By**
**Ron Aldridge**

I am a professional theatre director, writer and actor with 30 years first-hand experience, both positive and negative, of professional performers under pressure. I help them deal with this pressure, I help them with the techniques they need to employ and I ensure the required mental disciplines are in place to maintain a high and consistent level of performance.

**Great speakers are great performers.**

By combining certain theatre principles and practises together with the Psychology of Performing, I have devised a 'Presentation Blueprint' - a 10-point checklist to making a powerful presentation.

## Step 1 – Purpose

This first step is vital. Absolute clarity of purpose is essential. Why are you standing up? What's your message? What are your values? What's your 'truth'?

The more specific and focused your message, the better it will be. The clearer your purpose is to you, the clearer it will be to your audience.

People will remember very little of what you say, but what they will never forget is the way you made them feel. If you know that when you've finished speaking your audience will be left with a feeling, you need to determine what you want them to feel, because if they feel like that then maybe they'll do what you want them to do.

Having knowledge of this potential outcome will help you to truly define your purpose.

## Step 2 – Content

Your content must be directly related to your purpose at all times.

Don't get sidetracked when developing or brainstorming your material, stay focused and maintain clarity.

Remember that when we communicate we are never just saying words. We are expressing thoughts and feelings. What you think determines what you feel – what you feel determines how you express yourself.

You need therefore to be very clear about what you think and feel – if these feelings are clear to you they'll also be clear to your audience.

Effective communicators are 'emotive' and 'involving' – ensure your material reflects this.

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Also ensure your material reflects your 'truth'. Your audience will always subconsciously recognise a lack of authenticity, and will respond accordingly.

That's why actors always look for the truth and the 'reality' of the character they are playing.

When developing your content, consider using the process of 'explanation'.

## Step 3 – Process Of 'Explanation'

This is a performing technique you can use when presenting and your content should reflect this process.

Don't think that you are making a speech or giving a presentation, think instead that you are 'explaining' your message to the audience.

This is a huge mental shift and will help to remove a level of performing pressure.

When you 'explain' something to someone you are solely concerned with making your message clear to that person – you want them to understand. If they understand clearly they can make an informed judgement or decision.

This helps to shift focus from yourself onto your audience.

For your message to be totally clear to your audience, first it must be totally clear to you.

Ensuring personal clarity will help with your purpose and content – there must be no doubt in the minds of your audience regarding your thoughts and feelings.

It can also be very helpful to use relevant terminology,….."let me explain…"

"let me make it clear to you….." "I need you to understand….." etc.

Use of these words help the audience to subconsciously focus on your message – they are actively seeking clarity from your explanation.

It helps here to understand your 'responsibility' to your audience.

It is not possible to make people like you, to make people agree with you, to make people buy your products or services, to make people respond to you in a positive manner or to know what someone is thinking. These are not your decisions. You will try your best to make these things happen, you care what others think of you, but there's nothing you can do to force positive responses. If there's nothing you can do about this then you can't take the responsibility for it. It's not your responsibility.

Your sole responsibility is to deliver your message as efficiently and as effectively as you can. That's it. What your audience does with that information is up to them.

You hope you will influence their thinking, but the decision isn't yours.

Part of delivering your message efficiently and effectively is to ensure your message is totally clear – don't leave them in any doubt.

Using the technique of 'explanation' will ensure you achieve this clarity.

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## Step 4 – Structure

When structuring your material try to think you are taking the audience on a 'journey'.

The human psyche loves a story or 'journey', and the more your material reflects this, the more satisfied and subconsciously comfortable the listener will be.

There are time-honoured narrative structures we experience most days – films, television dramas and comedies, stage plays, books, stories, TV commercials etc. that reinforce this subconscious comfort.

I write stage plays, and the quest for a satisfying technical structure is indeed a demanding one, but if pulled off it can, more than any other single factor, lead to success – "when to reveal this piece of information?", "when to reveal that?", "when to surprise?" etc. etc. It's always good to have the audience wondering what's going to happen next.

It also helps wherever possible to indicate the progress of the 'journey', both in the introduction and during the delivery. This again helps with the listeners comfort and satisfaction. Time-honoured maxim – tell them what you are going to do, tell them what you're doing while you're doing it, tell them what you've done.

Using the process of 'explanation' will help with the clarity and progression of your message – "what's the clearest way to deliver this information?"

## Step 5 – Confirm Your Truth

Ensure again your message is your 'truth'. Audiences will detect a lack of authenticity, albeit subconsciously, and will not respond in a positive manner.

If your message is your 'truth', then your delivery will reflect your 'truth'.

There are four main 'means of expression' we use to communicate with others.

The words we use; The voice we use; Facial expression; Body-language.

All of these four means give off messages, both consciously and subconsciously, verbally and non-verbally, to the audience, and it is essential these four means give off the same message. They must be congruent. Lack of congruency can lead to doubt, confusion, mistrust and disbelief in the listener.

Quite often we hear someone using the right words in the right voice, but for some reason, we're not sure, we'd like more time to think about it, we decide not to go ahead. Without doubt this is because all the messages received were not congruent.

Over 60% of all human communication is non-verbal. We've developed these skills from infancy, we're subconsciously expert at detecting lack of authenticity.

These skills never leave us. We may not be aware of them, we may not understand, but they are subconsciously ever-present and are a significant part of our decision-making. All we want is for someone to tell us the truth. It doesn't matter what the truth is, if it's the truth we can deal with it and process it accordingly.

It is very difficult to consistently 'cover-up' and manipulate body-language.

The only way to be sure of authenticity is to speak your 'truth'.

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## Step 6 – Rehearsal

Preparation is everything. In the theatre, in my opinion, this is the most important part of the whole performing process.

Performing is the reproducing of what you've rehearsed. The more you rehearse, the more you build 'inner' security. 'Inner' security sustains us.

During the development of your material you will hopefully have determined your thoughts and feelings on the subject. The rehearsal process is now where you practise expressing these thoughts and feelings.

Actors learn lines, but create thoughts. That's the actor's skill – the creation of a 'thought-journey'. At all times you must know what you are thinking. The thought determines the feeling, the feeling determines the means of expression.

The creating of a 'thought-journey' means that even if you forget a particular word, because you know your thoughts, you can find an alternative – you can 'ad-lib'.

This ad-lib however, comes from a solid foundation.

There are two professional performing techniques you can employ when communicating that will help with the level of your performing impact.

Speaking in a Major Key, and Externalising Emotion.

### Speaking in a Major Key

Although I'm talking about speaking I'm using a musical term. This is because there is a 'musicality' everywhere, and is reflected in everyday language – 'in rhythm', 'in tune', 'harmony', 'timing', 'on-song', 'off-beat', 'in-sync', etc.

There is a natural rhythm in life and if we can communicate that rhythm, even when it's not obviously musical, these patterns will be favourably received by the listener.

Heroes always speak in a Major Key – villains always in a Minor Key. Quite often we know someone is the villain before we know they're the villain.

The Major Key translates as, up, positive, forward, inspirational, sign of leadership.

The word for you to focus on is, positive. Even when saying something negative, use a positive voice. Listen to newsreaders – they always speak in a Major Key, it's always positive.

To help maintain positivity try to avoid using a falling or downward inflection. The falling inflection at the end of a sentence signifies finality, conclusion, no room for discussion. It is important when speaking to keep channels of communication open, even if you're not asking a question the listener should feel 'involved' in the process.

Either go straight through the end of the line, or use a rising inflection. Either of these will subconsciously indicate to the listeners that you are 'involving' them.

By combining this performing technique with the technique of 'explanation', you will now be very clear and very positive. Now combine these two techniques with the process of 'externalising emotion'.

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### Externalising Emotion

Now that you know exactly what you're thinking and feeling, this performing technique will ensure that you express these feelings effectively.

The idea here is to keep 'open'. Indicate that you are not trying to hide anything by keeping an open face. A lot is spoken about having open body-language, but an open face is equally important. Don't frown, keep your eyebrows up, whatever you're saying. This openness makes it easier for your audience to subconsciously monitor this obvious clarity. Frowning indicates you are 'internalising' your emotion, openness indicates 'externalising'.

During theatre rehearsals it is very common to hear a director ask an actor to 'pick up the note' of the other actor's speech pattern. It denotes togetherness and empathy.

This process happens to you daily. Say 'good morning' to someone in a dull way, you'll get a dull reply. Say it in a bright way, you'll get a bright reply. They are 'picking up your note'.

When speaking in front of others, your audience are not verbally picking up your note, but as listeners they will certainly be involved in your emotional expression, albeit subconsciously.

Having an open face also allows you to be confrontational without being aggressive.

By combining the three techniques you will now be delivering a very clear message in a very positive way, and also letting your audience know exactly what you are feeling at all times.

This combination leads to rich, emotive and involving communication.

Also consider when rehearsing, the issue of pace. Rehearse at the pace you wish to perform at. The most common fault is to talk too quickly – (you are subconsciously trying to get out while the going is good) – but this can lead to confusion within your audience. They need a little time to assimilate your words. Talking too slowly can also be a problem, your audience could lose interest. Care must be taken.

Pausing for too long is not helpful either. Think of the pause as a musical interlude – timing is vital. Pause for too long or too little and you could lose your rhythm.

I cannot stress enough the importance of proper rehearsal. You cannot be over-prepared, but you can easily be under-prepared.

By the end of a rehearsal process you should feel equipped to do the job. Of course there are still hurdles to get over, but your 'inner' security will sustain you.

The level of your 'inner' security is in direct relation to your endeavours in rehearsal.

## Step 7 – Waiting To Perform

You will be nervous, you should expect to be nervous – it is a natural by-product of the performing process.

The idea here is not to try and get rid of these feelings, but to 'control' them. You need to start at a point of control to ensure that these feelings do not inhibit your performance.

Nerves are caused by having unused adrenaline in your body. Once you start, the adrenaline will 'kick-in', and you shouldn't be nervous any more.

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The reason adrenaline is produced in your body is because you subconsciously asked for help. Whenever you feel doubt, worry, anxiety, concern or danger, the message goes to the brain, and the brain gets the body to produce a chemical that will help you cope with your fear. The chemical is adrenaline. Adrenaline is designed to help you stay alert and highly focused. It ensures you concentrate solely on the problem in hand and not at this point focus on anything else. Adrenaline will ensure you are able to do this. It is there to help you. Your nerves are there to help you.

You mentally help to control these feelings by developing positive expectations. 'Know' it will be all right once you start. 'Know' you are equipped to do the job.

Don't allow negativity to dominate your thoughts. Constantly hit the negative with a positive by reminding yourself of your knowledge of your subject and your preparation, and reminding yourself that you are not nervous, you are just temporarily chemically imbalanced. (I have tried saying this to actors on a first night, and you can imagine the response.)

You physically help to control these feelings by employing shallow breathing, not deep breathing. Imagine that you are very gently blowing out an imaginary candle.

This helps to calm you and ensures you start at a point of control.

Achieving this control is not easy. Actors can be terrified on first nights, and they've been going through this process regularly for years. But they 'know' it will be all right once they start. And on nearly every occasion it is.

## Step 8 – Start Of Performance

I call the start of a performance, 'the vital first minute'.

A number of things are happening now, all at the same time.

From the audience's point of view, the first thing that happens is an intake of information. 'Does the speaker seem nervous? Don't like that tie. He seems confident. I like her dress' etc. As members of an audience we automatically do this, and no self-respecting theatre director will start the play immediately by bombarding the audience with dialogue that needs full attention. The audience must be allowed the time to take in the new information in front of them. The way you do this is by telling them information they probably already know – who you are, who you work for, your job, why you're there etc. They don't need to fully concentrate on this, they can happily focus on the new information. This immediately gives the audience a degree of subconscious satisfaction.

By telling them information they already know, this is also information you already know. You know who you are and why you're there. You don't need to look at your notes, you can look at your audience with confidence, allowing them to look at you.

While you are looking at them and hopefully giving a positive first impression, the adrenaline will be 'kicking-in' and helping you to feel better.

This all takes between 20 and 45 seconds, by which time you should now be getting into your stride.

The idea now is to try and achieve, or try and get as close as you can to, what I would perceive to be 'the ideal performing state'.

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### The Ideal Performing State

There are two factors involved in the ideal performing state.

1) Before you start you will be nervous, but once you start, the adrenaline will kick-in and you shouldn't be nervous any more.

2) Before you start it is all about you, but once you start it's not about you any more, it's now about your audience and your material.

When you are performing you should not be thinking about yourself. If you think of yourself you are therefore conscious of yourself, you are therefore self-conscious. If you are at all self-conscious, in one way or another it will show, and is likely to be detected subconsciously by your audience.

Once the adrenaline has kicked-in, once you have allowed the audience to take in their required information, now you must ensure you shift the focus away from yourself and onto your audience. It is now about them, not about you.

This should all be achieved in 'the vital first minute'.

You are now on your way.

## Step 9 – During Performance

The idea now is to reproduce what you've rehearsed.

Your focus should now be on your material and your audience, not on yourself.

Maintain discipline, maintain concentration.

You now have adrenaline coursing through your veins to help you. You are alert and in a state of heightened awareness, you are presenting a slightly heightened version of yourself, and you can 'sense' all that is happening around you.

This heightened performing 'state' can at times be very powerful and euphoric, enabling you to be positive, emotive and in total control of the situation.

You will however, only experience this level of 'heightened control' if you 'allow' the process to happen by constantly reminding yourself that you are performing for your audience. You are not performing for yourself.

The performing technique of 'explanation' will help you to focus on your audience.

Every audience is different, but one thing I can guarantee is that not everyone in the audience is of the same mind, and not everyone is in the same mood. Actors sometimes are guilty of saying, 'what a terrible audience tonight'. Maybe the difference is in the level of performance.

Remember your 'responsibility' to the audience and stay focused.

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## Step 10 – If Things Go Wrong

It would take too long to tell you of all the things that have gone wrong in my 30 years of theatre involvement, but suffice to say, in the words of the Great Wise Prophet, ….. "All things must pass."

If things do go wrong, don't pretend it hasn't happened. Be open and positive as you deal with the problem. If you're OK about it, then your audience will be OK about it. In fact, it could well be the only thing about your performance they remember.

Try, if you can, not to think of yourself in these moments, try thinking of relaxing your audience.

Re-establish discipline as soon as you can, re-focus, and move forward.

Reflect when the performance is over, not during.

And remember, it's not the end of the world, it could happen to anyone, and your audience will know this.

## About Ron Aldridge

Ron Aldridge is a professional theatre director, writer and actor and also a qualified business trainer. He combines his various theatre activities with successfully helping business people to speak and present effectively to audiences of all sizes. As well as his popular group workshops, Ron also works on a one-to-one basis with clients and delivers in-house, company training programmes.

He is an experienced speaker with a selection of entertaining, anecdotal and motivational speaking topics that are regularly used for conference days, business meetings and events. He is also a partner in the Talking Heads programme, coaching participants to write a concise 2-minute script and perform it effectively in front of camera to produce a professional and compelling promotional video.

See more at www.ron-aldridge.co.uk and http://talkingheads.localsourcing.co.uk

Ron's workshop, training and speaking activities are managed by Jane Heaton at Jane Heaton Associates. If you are interested in working with Ron or inviting him to speak at your event, please contact Jane on 01386 701944 or jane.heaton@janeheatonassociates.com.

Details of Ron's public speaking skills workshops can also be seen and booked at http://www.janeheatonassociates.com/Speakingskills.aspx

**If you know anyone who may also benefit from this report, please feel free to pass it on.**

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