




Life Is a Presentation: *Take Off Your Mask* BY GARRETT J. SULLIVAN



A few years ago, a very large military project went out to bid. A friend of mine was a high-ranking officer for the job and he described the difference between two well-known contractors who came in for the interview. He said the first contractor was very aggressive and exuded a cocky attitude as if to say, “We know we’re your low bid. We’ve completed many similar jobs. We’re your contractor. Case closed.”

In contrast, the second contractor came in with a low-key, friendly attitude as well as a sense of passion for the project. The presentation was well-honed and professional.

After both presentations, the members of the judging panel turned to one another and said, “It’s a no-brainer.” They unanimously agreed to hire the second contractor.

Like it or not, life is a presentation. You’re constantly placed in situations where you need to provide presentations, either formally or informally. Your ability to provide a compelling presentation, along with well-researched, accurate information, will often determine whether you win or lose a bid.

A key to making successful presentations is the art of taking off your mask. How do you accomplish this? Below are three proven strategies.

Be Passionate. Don’t be afraid to tell your audience why you’re passionate about a project. Remember, your prospective client has his or her heart, mind and money at stake. When you’re passionate, they realize they’ve found someone who cares about their project as much as they do.

When you speak with passion, you don’t need your notes. Frankly, your audience doesn’t want you to use them anyway. They want to hear from you, not your

PowerPoint. While slides can be helpful, too many presenters use them as a crutch. Just ask yourself this simple question: How many read-as-you-go slide presentations have you tuned out? I guarantee that your audience is doing the same.

To use slides effectively, use a single word, picture or chart that conveys a specific thought graphically. Short videos (never more than a minute in length) that tie in directly to your subject matter can also be effective.

Be Steady. Everyone has pre-meeting jitters—and they can help add pep to your talk—but don’t let them take over. Remember that your audience already knows you’re qualified for the job. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have made it this far. In addition to doing their due diligence by hearing you personally, they’re trying to determine who you really are. After all, they’re going to be working closely with you for a year or more.

Speak to your audience as you would to your friends at a party. Tell them about this great new idea. Trust and believe in yourself (without being cocky, like the first contractor I mentioned above). Ultimately, the job is about your client and not about you. If you’re passionate about the project and demonstrate that you understand and respect it, they’ll be far more inclined to select you.

Be Ready. People often will spend 95 percent of their time preparing their content and only 5 percent rehearsing. Don’t fall into this trap. As a rule, every hour of presenting requires three hours of rehearsing. The only way to be comfortable and spontaneous, and to go beyond your material, is to have it completely

memorized. It’s impossible to over rehearse.

Leave the audience with two or three takeaways. During your presentation, you only need to think about these major points. Your preparation will not stop you from being afraid, but it will set you free during your performance.

As you prepare for your next big presentation, remember to take off your mask. These three strategies will help you do that, and to then deliver a professional, friendly, well-honed presentation. At the end of the day—once you’ve left the room and the judges are talking among themselves—you’ll stand a much better chance of landing the job. **BI**

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