

NAKED PRESENTATIONS

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Contents from this summary article can be found at the Presentation Zen website.



Thoughts & Tips on Presenting Naked

More info at presentationzen.com

By Garr Reynolds

The act of getting naked and soaking in the bath with others is a means of communication. In Japanese it's called *Hadaka no tsukiai* (Communication in the nude). With *Hadaka no tsukiai*, to soak with others in your in-group is to freely expose everything and communicate the "naked truth." Naked, we are all the same regardless of rank. In theory at least, this kind of "exposure" leads to better, more honest communication.

This got me thinking: What if we thought of designing and delivering business presentations in a

way that was more "naked" as well? A way that was simpler, fresher — perhaps even a bit cheeky — and far more satisfying to both presenter and audience. That is, in a way that was freer. Free from worry. Free from anxiety over what other people will think. Free from self-doubt. Free from tricks and gimmicks and the pressure to pull those off. Free from hiding behind anything (including slides) and the fear of possible exposure that accompanies such hiding. Remove all encumbrances, be in the moment, naked...and connect. Being naked involves stripping away all that is unnecessary to get at the essence of your message.

The Naked Presenter

The naked presenter approaches the presentation task embracing the ideas of simplicity, clarity, honesty, integrity, and passion. She presents with a certain freshness. The ideas may or may not be radical, earth shattering, or new. But there is a "newness" and freshness to her approach and to her content. And if she uses Powerpoint, her slides fit well with her talk and are harmonious with her message. The slides are in synch, and are simple and beautifully designed, yet never steal the show or rise above serving a strong but simple supportive role.

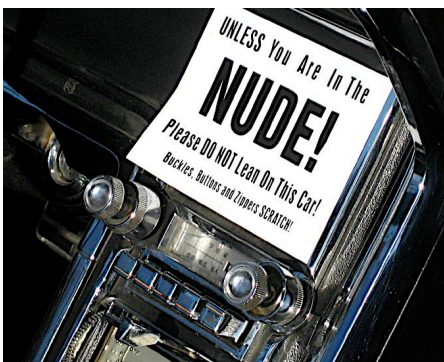
Why are we afraid to go naked? It's not easy, but your audience will thank you.

Why are we afraid to be naked? Presenting naked is hard to do. But it wasn't always this way. When we were younger and we performed "show and tell" at the front of the class in elementary school, we were honest and engaged — sometimes our candor even made the children laugh and the teacher blush. But it was real. We told great stories...and we were only six. Now we are experienced and mature, we have advanced degrees and deep knowledge in important fields...and we are boring.

One reason we are so dull as adult presenters is because we are overly cautious. We are afraid. We want it all to be so safe and perfect, so we over think it and put up a great many barriers. Or we retreat, however unconsciously, and play it safe by hiding behind a stack of bulleted lists in a darken room in a style void of emotion. After all, no one ever got fired for just stating the facts, right?

Tips for presenting Naked

- Be present in the moment. Right here right now. Do not be occupied with thoughts of the future, of thoughts concerning what the results of your presentation might lead to. When you are with your audience, all that matters is that moment.
- Don't try to impress. Instead try to, share, help, inspire, teach, inform, guide, persuade, motivate... or make the world a little bit better.



Next time, to be different — to separate yourself from the crowd — try presenting naked. Tips on presenting naked are

- Keep the lights on. Find a compromise between a bright screen and enough room light for you to be seen. Do not hide in the dark — the audience came to see you as well as hear you.
- Forget the podium. Move away from obstacles that are between you and the audience.
- Use a small remote allowing you to have the freedom to move around the room/stage as you like.
- Don't attempt to hide. What's the point? Do not be evasive intellectually or physically.
- Do not become attached to your software — if your computer crashes, screw it...the show must go on immediately, not after you have rebooted. Stuff happens, move on. Your message is far greater than the technology helping you.
- Keep it simple. All of it. Simple goals, clear messages, and moderation in length.
- Are you just a bit cheeky? Then that should show in your presentations too.

“Becoming an Excellent Presenter is as tough as becoming a great baseball pitcher. THIS IS IMPORTANT.... and Presentation Excellence is never accidental! (Work your buns off!).”

Tom Peters

listed below. This is not an exhaustive list, but these are a few things to keep in mind when trying to present naked.

- Let your personality shine through. Why hide one of your biggest differentiators?
- Be credible.
- Do not use "corporate-speak" — speak like a human being. You can not be naked if you say something like "best practices" or "empowering a new paradigm."
- Think of your audience as being active participants not passive listeners ("Passive listener" = oxymoron?).

Be comfortable with yourself being "naked." It takes practice and it takes confidence. The confidence comes with practice. Audiences hate arrogance and cockiness, but they love confidence...if it is genuine.

- Never decorate your messages or your supporting visuals. Decoration is veneer. Think design, but never decoration. Design is soul deep, decoration is "Happy Birthday" placed atop a sponge cake.
- Think in terms of what makes a good meal and good design. Think balance, harmony, variety, great satisfying content.

Notes from the “Naked Presenter” talk

Organization & Preparation Tips

PowerPoint is not a bad tool. In fact, if presenters just avoid a few of the most common PowerPoint pitfalls, their presentations will greatly improve. Below, many of the items discussed in the presentation are highlighted in brief.

(1) Start with the end in mind. Before you even open up PowerPoint, sit down and really think about the day of your presentation. What is the real purpose of your talk? What does the audience expect? In your opinion, what are the most important parts of your topic for the audience to take away from your, say, 50-minute presentation? Remember, even if you've been asked to share information, rarely is the mere transfer of information a satisfactory objective from the point of view of the audience. After all, the audience could always just read your book (or article, handout, etc.) if information transfer were the only purpose of the meeting, seminar, or formal presentation.

(2) Plan in “analog mode.” That is, rather than diving right into PowerPoint (or Keynote), the best presenters often scratch out their ideas and objectives with a pen and paper. Personally, I use a large whiteboard in my office to sketch out my ideas (when I was at Apple, I had one entire wall turned into a whiteboard!). The whiteboard works for me as I feel uninhibited and free to be creative. I can also step back (literally) from what I have sketched out and imagine how it might flow logically when PowerPoint is added later. Also, as I write down key points and assemble an outline and structure, I can draw quick ideas for visuals such as charts or photos that will later appear in the PowerPoint. Though you may be using digital technology when you deliver your presentation, the act of speaking and connecting to an audience — to persuade, sell, or inform — is very much analog.

(3) Good presentations include stories. The best presenters illustrate their points with the use of stories, most often personal ones. The easiest way to explain complicated ideas is through examples or by sharing a story that underscores the point. Stories are easy to remember for your audience. If you want your audience to remember your content, then find a way to make it relevant and memorable to them. You should try to come up with good, short, interesting stories or examples to support your major points.

(4) It's all about our audience. There are three components involved in a presentation: the audience, you, and the medium (in our case, PowerPoint). The goal is to create a kind of harmony among the three. But above all, the presentation is for the benefit of the audience. However, boring an audience with bullet point after bullet point is of little benefit to them. Which brings us to point number five, perhaps the most important of all

(5) Reduce the text on your slides to an absolute minimum. The best slides may have no text at all. This may sound insane given the dependency of text slides today, but the best Power-

Point slides will be virtually meaningless without the narration (that is you). Remember, the slides are supposed to support/supplement the narration of the speaker, not make the speaker superfluous. Yes, it is true that many people often say something like this: “Sorry I missed your presentation, Steve. I hear it was great. Can you just send me your PowerPoint slides?” Well, you could. But if they are good slides, they may be of little use without *you*.

(6) Do not read the text word for word off the slide. Audiences can read, so why do presenters insist on reading long lines of text from slides? Also, it is very difficult — if not impossible — to read a slide and listen to someone talk at the same time. So again, why all the text on slides these days? One reason may be that it is convenient for the speaker when organizing the presentation to write out his/her thoughts one bullet point at a time. But as Yale professor and visual communications specialist, Edward Tufte points out in a September *Wired* Magazine article “...convenience for the speaker can be punishing to both content and audience.” Speakers also may be thinking that their wordy slides will make for better handouts, a common “handout” technique. However, the confining, horizontal orientation of a slide (one slide after another) makes for difficult writing and reading. Which brings us to the next point below.

(7) Written documents (research papers, handouts, executive summaries, etc.) are for the expanded details. Audiences will be much better served receiving a detailed, written handout as a takeaway from the presentation, rather than a mere copy of your PowerPoint slides. If you have a detailed handout or publication for the audience to be passed out after your talk, you need not feel compelled to fill your PowerPoint slides with a great deal of text.

Remember: (1) your slides should contain only a minimum of information; (2) your slide notes, which only you see, will contain far more data; and (3) your handout will have still far more data and detail.

Slide (PowerPoint) Tips

(1) Keep it simple. PowerPoint was designed as a convenient way to display graphical information that would support the speaker and supplement the presentation. The slides themselves were never meant to be the “star of the show.” People came to hear *you* and be moved or informed (or both) by you and *your message*. Don't let your message and your ability to tell a story get derailed by slides that are unnecessarily complicated, busy, or full of what Edward Tufte calls “chart junk.” Nothing in your slide should be superfluous, ever. Your slides should have plenty of “white space” or “negative space.” Do not feel compelled to fill empty areas on your slide with your logo or other unnecessary graphics or text boxes that do not contribute to better understanding. The less clutter you have on your slide, the more powerful your visual message will become.

(2) Avoid using Microsoft templates. Most of the templates included in PowerPoint have already been seen by your audience countless times (and besides, the templates are not all that great to begin with). You can make your own background templates which will be more tailored to your needs. (Note: This advice is for users with older versions of PowerPoint. PowerPoint 2007 themes are generally quite nice).

(3) Avoid using PowerPoint Clip Art or other cartoonish line art. Again, if it is included in the software, your audience has seen it a million times before. It may have been interesting in 1992, but today the inclusion of such clip art often undermines the professionalism of the presenter. There are exceptions, of course, and not all PowerPoint art is dreadful, but use carefully and judiciously.

Simplicity is the ultimate sophistication.

Leonardo da Vinci

(4) Use high-quality graphics including photographs. You can take your own high-quality photographs with your digital camera, purchase professional stock photography, or use the plethora of high-quality images available on line (be cautious of copyright issues, however). Never simply stretch a small, low resolution photo to make it fit your layout — doing so will degrade the resolution even further.

(5) Use object builds and slide transitions judiciously. Object builds (also called animations), such as bullet points, should **not** be animated on every slide. Some animation is a good thing, but stick to the most subtle and professional (similar to what you might see on the evening TV news broadcast).

(6) Synchronize your speaking with the builds and transitions. In other words, show the next item (new slide or new build) at the same time you begin talking about it. This requires practice, but it takes only a short time to get the hang of it. Watch the evening news on TV and you'll notice that bullet points and graphics appear at the same time or just after the reporter speaks on the particular item.

(7) Use video and audio when appropriate. You can use video clips within PowerPoint without ever leaving the application or turning on a VCR. Using a video clip not only will illustrate your point better, it will also serve as a change of pace thereby increasing the interest of your audience. You can use audio clips (such as interviews) as well. Something to avoid, however, is cheesy sound effects that are included in PowerPoint (such as the sound of a horn or applause when transitioning slides). The use of superfluous sound effects attached to animations is a sure way to lose credibility with your audience.

(8) Limit your ideas to one main idea per slide. If you have a complicated slide with lots of different data, it may be better to break it up into 2-3 different slides (assuming no side-by-side comparisons are needed).

Delivery Tips

(1) Move away from the podium — connect with your audience. If at all possible get closer to your audience by moving away from or in front of the podium.

(2) Remember the “B” key. If you press the “B” key while your PowerPoint slide is showing, the screen will go blank. This is useful if you need to digress or move off the topic presented on the slide. By having the slide blank, all the attention can now be placed back on you. When you are ready to move on, just press the “B” key again and the image reappears. (The “.” key does the same thing).

(3) Use a remote-control device to advance your slides and builds. A handheld remote will allow you to move away from the podium. This is an absolute must. (<http://www.keyspan.com/products/>).

(4) Make good eye contact. Try looking at individuals rather than scanning the group. Since you are using a computer, you never need to look at the screen behind you — just glance down at the computer screen briefly. One sure way to lose an audience is to turn your back on them.

(5) Take it slowly. When we are nervous we tend to talk too fast. Get a videotape of one of your presentations to see how you did — you may be surprised at the pace of your talk.

(6) Keep the lights on. If you are speaking in a meeting room or a classroom, the temptation is to turn the lights off so that the slides look better. But go for a compromise between a bright screen image and ambient room lighting. Turning the lights off — besides inducing sleep — puts all the focus on the screen. The audience should be looking at you more than the screen. Today's projectors are bright enough to allow you to keep many of the lights on. If you are presenting to a small group, then you can connect your computer to a large TV (via the s-video line-in). With a TV screen, you can keep all or most of the lights on.

“Making the simple complicated is commonplace; making the complicated simple, awesomely simple, that's creativity.”

Charles Mingus

Suggested Readings

Communication

Beyond Bullet Points:

by Cliff Atkinson
Microsoft press

Why Business People Speak Like Idiots : A Bullfighter's Guide

by Brian Fugere, Chelsea Hardaway,
Jon Warshawsky
Free Press

Presenting to Win: The Art of Telling Your Story

by Jerry Weissman
FT Press

Presentations That Get Results: 14 Reasons Yours May Not

by Marian K. Woodall
Professional Business Communications

Design/Visual Communication

Going Visual: Using Images to Enhance Productivity, Decision-Making & Profits

by Alexis Gerard, Bob Goldstein
John Wiley & Sons

Multimedia Learning

by Richard Mayer
Cambridge University Press

The Elements of Graphic Design

by Alexander White
Allworth Press

7 Essentials of Graphic Design

by Allison Goodman
HowDesignBooks

ZEN

The Zen of Creativity : Cultivating Your Artistic Life

by JOHN DAIDO LOORI
Ballantine Books

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Follow Garr's frequently updated weblog on presentation design at: www.presentationzen.com

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