



Presenting to Win: The Art of Telling Your Story, Updated and Expanded Edition

By Jerry Weissman

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Thirty million presentations will be given today. Millions will fail. Millions more will be received with yawns. A rare few will establish the most profound connection, in which presenter and audience understand each other perfectly...discover common ground... and, together, decide to act.

In this fully updated edition, Jerry Weissman, the world's #1 presentation consultant, shows how to connect with even the toughest, most high-level audiences...and move them to action! He teaches presenters of all kinds how to dump those PowerPoint templates once and for all and tell compelling stories that focus on what's in it for the audience.

Weissman's techniques have proven themselves with billions of dollars on the line. Thousands of his elite clients have already mastered them. Now it's your turn!

- **What you must do to tell your story**
Focus before Flow: identifying your real goals and message
- **The power of the WIIFY: What's In It For You**
Staying focused on what your audience really wants
- **Capture your audience in 90 seconds... and never let go!**
Opening Gambits and compelling linkages
- **Master the art of online Web conferencing**
Connecting with your invisible audience
- **From brainstorming through delivery**
Crafting the Power Presentation, one step at a time

Named by FORTUNE Magazine as a "Must-Read"

"Jerry Weissman makes the challenge of producing and delivering effective presentations delightfully simple. Read it and benefit!"

Tim Koogle, Founding CEO, Yahoo!

"A great read for all of us who have ever struggled with any aspect of our public speaking skills. Presenting to Win contains the same timeless techniques that helped me [18] years ago."

Jeff Raikes, former President, Microsoft Business Division, Microsoft Corporation, and CEO, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

"Jerry is The Man when it comes to making great pitches. If your pitch doesn't get a whole lot better after reading this book, something is wrong with you."

Guy Kawasaki, Managing Director and Chairman, Garage Technology Ventures, and bestselling author of The Art of the Start

"Presenting to Win is the shortest path to applause for any presenter. It will be your bible for the PowerPoint Age. It's loaded with easy actions and real examples that really work. I've used them. I know."

Scott Cook, Founder, Intuit

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Foreword to the Updated and Expanded Edition

In the five years since the publication of the first edition of *Presenting to Win*, I am proud to say that it has made a significant impact upon readers, selling more than 100,000 copies in 12 languages. By the same token, I am surprised to say that it has not had as great an impact upon the presentation trade. Despite the many gratifying emails, letters, and telephone calls from around the globe praising the book, and despite the continuing stream of clients that take the Power Presentations program upon which the book is based, I've discovered that most presenters, after reading the book or taking the program, nonetheless default to a practice counter to the main theory in its pages.

Simply put, that theory is stated in the subtitle: *The Art of Telling Your Story*. True to its promise, the book offers techniques about that classic art, but it does so for only two-thirds of its total pages. The other third is about graphic design in presentations, yet that aspect is not even mentioned on the cover. The imbalance is intentional.

The reason for this emphasis on the story, which includes sharp audience focus, clear structural flow, strong narrative linkages, persuasive added value, and even specific positive verbiage, is that the story is much more important than the graphics. No audience will react affirmatively to a presentation based on graphics alone. No decisions are made, no products sold, no partnerships forged, no projects approved, and no ships of state are launched based on a slide show. Witness the powerful speeches that move hearts and minds: State of the Union addresses, inaugurals, nominations, eulogies, sermons, commencements, keynotes, and even locker room pep talks. None of them uses slides.

Therefore, *what* presenters say and *how* they say it are of far greater importance than what they *show*. That is why the lion's share of this book is devoted to helping you tell your story, and why I have even written about the delivery of your story . . . your body language, your eye contact, and your voice . . . in a distinctly separate new book: *The Power Presenter: Technique, Style, and Strategy from America's Top Speaking Coach*.

Does this mean that I am recommending that you abandon all slides ye who enter the podium area? Not at all. Microsoft PowerPoint has become the medium of choice from grade school rooms to corporate boardrooms, and far be it from me to advise a sea change as radical as complete rejection. Graphics play several valuable roles: as illustration of key information, as reinforcement of messages, and as prompts for the presenter, so please leverage this powerful tool.

All I ask . . . no, urge . . . you to do is to use PowerPoint properly, by applying the repertory of techniques provided in the other third of this book. The most essential of which is the overarching principle of relegating your graphics to a supporting role, making you, the presenter, the primary focus.

This seemingly simple plea for a shift of emphasis unfortunately has found very few converts. Presentations are still universally defined by and equated with the slides. This is standard operating procedure with every type of presentation, from IPO road shows to private financing, from product launches to industry conferences, from board meetings to sales pitches, and in every sector of business, from information technology to life sciences, from finance to manufacturing, from pharmaceuticals to real estate, and from media to consumer products. In my 20 years as a coach, I have worked in each of these situations, and have seen this focus on the slides repeated ad nauseam.

Why, then, this misguided imbalance? A brief peek back into history will explain.

Presentations originated as a form of communication back in the dark ages in the middle of the 20th century,

when small peer groups within companies gathered around a flip chart perched on a rickety easel to exchange ideas. In that setting, the flip chart became the center of attention as a large surface that all the participants could see and share; but it also served to document the ideas that could later be copied and distributed to others who did not attend the session. The flip chart was such a distinct improvement over the impermanence of a blackboard (and its later cousin, the whiteboard) that it quickly became the display medium of choice in business. In its earliest incarnation then, the sheets of the flip chart served two purposes: as a display *during* the meeting and as a record that could be duplicated and disseminated *after* the meeting. This duality can be described as the *Presentation-as-Document Syndrome*.

This first step in the young life of presentations landed squarely on the wrong foot. By combining the two functions, it formalized an essentially imprudent assumption: that both functions served both purposes when, in fact, they served neither; neither fish nor fowl. A display is *not* a document. A display is for *show* (during the presentation), and a document is for *tell* (after the presentation).

This original sin then proceeded to morph and mutate into its current state of worst practices, driven by successive generations of technological advances.

In the 1960s the medium of choice in the presentation trade had only evolved as far as the primitive overhead projector. That clunky machine, used to display transparent Mylar sheets, known as “foils,” stepped up from its humble origins in bowling alleys to take its place front and center in the conference rooms, board suites, and hotel meeting facilities of corporate America.

At root, however, the overhead projector was still just another manifestation of the Presentation-as-Document Syndrome. The document function of the foils became the connection to and the salvation of dispersed participants. Anyone who could not attend the live meeting took up what was to become the hue and cry of business: “Send me a copy of your foils.”

In the 1980s, the medium of choice advanced to 35mm slides, and the display took on a more professional look. Nevertheless, this new medium was still hampered by the duality factor, which by then had added new aspects to the document function, now implemented by paper prints of the slides. Documents were no longer merely handouts or “leave-behinds.” Their usage widened to include “send-aheads,” (before the presentation) speaker notes (crib sheets), validating evidence (exceedingly detailed data), or a manual (of biblical proportions) for consistency of messaging across the company’s scattered legions.

Having taken on the status of a business mantra, “Send me a copy of your foils” simply shifted to “Send me a copy of your slides.” (Except in some companies, such as Intel Corporation, where even today, although all presentations are done on computers, the employees persist in calling their slides “foils.”) Presenters, forced to straddle the functionality fence, generated slides that doubled as documents, heavily weighted toward text and numeric charts. The net effect was a glut of dense eye charts that assaulted the audience’s sensory intake. Visual aids became visual hindrances.

In the late 1980s, the PC overtook the carousel projector as the medium of choice for the display function, and the floppy diskette became the medium of distribution for the document function. By this time, however, the term “slides” had stuck. Before or after the meeting, it was still “Send me a copy of your slides.” The medium had evolved, but the message stayed the same.

In 1990, Microsoft entered the arena with its release of the Windows version of PowerPoint, an aptly named software application that enabled presenters to make their business points with new and powerful graphics capabilities. Still, despite the continuing evolution of distribution technology from diskettes to CDs to Internet transmission, the business mantra persisted: “Send me a copy of your slides.” Pressured by the exigencies of business, beleaguered presenters continued to oblige the request by using the same presentation

for both display and distribution, both show *and* tell.

In the meantime, PowerPoint succeeded wildly. Within three years of its launch, it became the market leader, a position it enjoys to this day. Each succeeding generation added more and more features and functions, in the process expanding its installed base around the globe, and beyond business into the not-for-profit world, the government, the military, and even into schools.

Throughout it all, the vestigial legacy of the flip chart endured. The Presentation-as-Document Syndrome continued, and still continues to perpetuate its fowl/fish (pun intended) effect on victimized audiences, where neither version serves its intended purpose, and each version is severely compromised by the dual functionality.

If you need a document, create a document and use word processing software. If you need a presentation, create a presentation and use presentation software. Microsoft Office provides Word for documents and PowerPoint for presentations. While both products are bundled in the same suite, they are distinctly separate entities, and *never the twain shall meet*. Use the right tool for the right job.

Follow the correctly balanced role model you see on all television news broadcasts. The newscasters tell the story, while the professional graphics that flit by over their shoulders are simply headlines.

You are the storyteller, not your slides.

Preface

What's Past Is Prologue

My first experience with the power of the spoken word came on December 8, 1941, when, as a child, I joined my father and mother at the family Philco radio to hear President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, in the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbor, deliver his stirring Day of Infamy speech. I'll never forget how he concluded, his rich voice reverberating: "With confidence in our armed forces, with the unbounded determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph. So help us God." In that exhilarating moment, Roosevelt's potent words pierced through our dismay, lifted our spirits, and restored our confidence in our nation and in our future.

Later, I learned more about the ability of words to move people's minds in my graduate classes in the Speech and Drama Department at Stanford University, where I studied the works of the great Greek orators. Still later, in my work as a news and public affairs producer for CBS Television in New York, I witnessed the momentous impact of the words of great national leaders, from John F. Kennedy to Martin Luther King, Jr.

But I never fully realized the universal significance of communication until I left the broadcast medium and entered the world of business. The medium of choice in business is the presentation, and I soon discovered the force it can exert: A poor presentation can kill a deal, while a powerful one can make it soar. Early in my business career, I was privileged to work on the Initial Public Offering presentation, known as an IPO road show, for Cisco Systems, and saw, on its first day of trading after the road show, Cisco's valuation increase by over 40 million dollars.

The big *Aha!* for me was the realization that every communication is an IPO. Everyone communicates every day. You do. I do. Every time we do, we can either fail or succeed. My job is to help you succeed in your everyday communications, just as I helped the Cisco IPO, and as I've helped hundreds of corporations like

Microsoft and Intel, and thousands of clients who are executives or managers or salespeople just like you. My job is to help you persuade every audience, every time.

The very same principles that propelled Cisco's success reach all the way back to the classical concepts of Aristotle. Those same basics underlie Abraham Lincoln's towering rhetoric that healed a nation torn asunder by civil war. They underlie Sir Winston Churchill's inspiring orations and Franklin Roosevelt's assuring fireside chats that rallied their nations to the victorious defense of the free world. And they underlie Martin Luther King's rousing speeches that spearheaded the civil rights movement.

They also underlie your sales pitch, your presentation to a potential new customer, your bid for financing, your requisition for more resources, your petition for a promotion, your appeal for a raise, your call to action, and your own quest for the big Aha!

They are the principles that will empower you to present to win.

Introduction

The Wizard of Aaahs

Once upon a time, I was living and working at the opposite end of California from Silicon Valley, in Hollywood. I had spent the first half of my professional life in the world of show business, as a television producer for CBS, as a freelance screenwriter, and as a paperback novelist. I helped create news documentaries, feature films, dramas, and musicals. I had the opportunity to work with some of the most creative minds in the industry, from the legendary Mike Wallace on down. If you know anything about show business, you know that it's filled with peaks and valleys, and I had more than my share of valleys. But I met many interesting people and learned a lot, particularly about the art of telling a story in a clear, convincing manner.

Then, in 1987, I had a conversation with an old friend, Ben Rosen, one of the top venture capitalists in the high-technology world who was then Chairman of the Board of Compaq Computer Corporation. It was a conversation that changed my life.

Ben and I had met at Stanford University, where he was studying for his Master's degree in electrical engineering and I for mine in speech and drama. The engineer and the artist met only because we happened to be competing for the affections of the same girl. Our interest in the girl quickly faded, but our friendship did not. Ben followed my subsequent career in television and was well aware of my interest in the art of communication. As Compaq's Chairman, he was also aware of an issue facing the great computer company: Its CEO, a talented executive named Rod Canion, had never developed a comfortable and effective style for public presentations.

Ben called to offer me a challenge: "Rod has worked on his weakness as a presenter," he explained. "He's even been coached by some of the experts in the field. But it hasn't quite taken hold. Would you be interested in flying out to Houston to teach Rod what you know about communication?"

I was intrigued, but a little reluctant. After all, I didn't know much about the world of business. But Ben closed the deal with an unusual offer: "Compaq has just come out with a line of hot new laptop computers. I've seen that clunker you're still using." (I'd just laboriously drafted my second novel on Compaq's huge old "luggable" computer and had been coveting the sleek, new, expensive Compaq machines.) "Suppose we swap you one of our new laptops for your services?" he asked. I agreed on the spot.

I met with Canion at his Houston office, and Ben sat in on our session, watching as I taught Rod the basics of communicating a story with clarity and effectiveness. An hour into the program, we took a break, and Ben buttonholed me at the vending machine in the lounge. He was fascinated by what he'd seen. "Jerry," Ben said, with a snap of his fingers, "There's an enormous business opportunity here! I spend all day listening to presentations by CEOs who want me to invest in their businesses. You wouldn't believe how complex and dry most of them are. You ought to move up to Silicon Valley and teach these people some of your storytelling skills. God knows they need your help!"

Naturally I was flattered. But I thought of myself as a television professional, not as a business consultant. "I don't know anything about Silicon Valley or the computer business!" I protested.

Ben pressed me. "That doesn't matter," he insisted. "I'll be able to introduce you to clients; I can show you how to run the business; I'll help in many ways."

Still I demurred, "It's not a good idea to do business with friends." Ben shook his head and dropped the matter, for the moment.

Like all successful people, Ben is successful because he is persistent, and he persisted with me. He talked about the idea, on and off, for six more months, but I was still hesitant. Finally, at Ben's insistence, I agreed to make a pilot trip to Silicon Valley to meet some of his associates. One of them was Andrea Cunningham, a woman who had parlayed her experience as public relations counsel to Steve Jobs at Apple Computer into her own successful national public relations agency, Citigate Cunningham, Inc.

When I got to Andy's office, she was in a fretful state over a presentation she was scheduled to make at a major technology conference. I took a quick look at a very rough outline she had prepared and suggested a simple reordering of her concepts into a more logical sequence. Then I skimmed through the high points of the new outline for her. Andy's frown gave way to a smile, and she said, "You're going to do very well here!"

My reluctance gradually melted away. I agreed to Ben's business proposition, and Power Presentations was born.

The Mission-Critical Presentation

In the first year of my startup, Ben, true to his word, introduced me to many influential people; primary among them were his venture capital colleagues, or VCs, as they are known in the trade. One of them was one of the most powerful men in Silicon Valley, Don Valentine. A founding partner of Sequoia Capital, one of the premier venture capital firms, Don had been one of the original investors in Apple Computer, Atari, Oracle, and Electronic Arts. Don granted me a courtesy interview, listened patiently as I described my services to him, and then said, "We have a company that's about to go public, and we think it'll do fairly well. It has a very esoteric technology that will be difficult to explain to investors. We're planning on pricing the offering in the \$13.50 to \$15.50 range, but if the IPO road show presentation is any good, we can probably increase that share price by a couple of bucks. I'm going to introduce you to the CEO and ask him to have you help him with his presentation."

The company was Cisco Systems. The CEO was John Morgridge. I helped John develop the presentation that explained the company's complex networking technology. The message got through to the investors. On the day Cisco went public, its stock opened at \$18 a share and closed its first day of trading at \$22 a share (a then-unheard-of price jump). Cisco quickly became the darling of the investment community and the media. In an interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Don Valentine, speaking in his role as Chairman of

Cisco's board, "attributed 'at least \$2 to \$3' of the increase to Weissman's coaching. John Morgridge, president of Cisco, is somewhat less generous. He gives Weissman 'at least an eighth of a point'—12 1/2 cents per share."

That was more than 500 IPO road shows ago. Among those others, I coached the IPO road shows of corporate luminaries such as Intuit and Yahoo!. During that same time, I also helped another 500 firms, both public and prepublic, to grow their businesses.

Following the IPO, Cisco continued to call on me for their nuts-and-bolts presentations, ranging from *prezos* (as they are called inside Cisco) in their briefing centers given to small groups of potential new customers, to *prezos* in their annual NetWorkers conferences given to massive assemblages of end users. Cisco's then-Vice President of Corporate Marketing, Cate Muther, required that every product manager take my program. At the time, she said, "Jerry's methods of presentation are now part of our culture; they help prepare our managers for industry leadership." Today Cisco and many other high-technology companies continue to enlist my help in coaching their senior executives to communicate persuasively. The business press has called me everything from the man who "knows how to talk to money" (*Fast Company*) to "The Wizard of Aaahs" (*Forbes*).

The IPO road show is probably the most mission-critical presentation any businessperson will ever make. Succeeding in an IPO road show is the ultimate example of winning over the toughest crowd. The investors are both demanding and knowledgeable, the stakes are high, and a swing of one dollar in the share price of an offering translates into millions of dollars. But if you extend the logic a bit further, every crowd you encounter in business can be your toughest crowd, and every presentation you ever give is mission-critical. Every presentation is a stepping-stone on the path to ultimate success. If any one presentation fails, there may be no tomorrow. You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

- *You never get a second chance to make a first impression.*

Therefore, in my work with my clients, I treat every presentation as if it were as mission-critical as an IPO road show. I use this approach whether I am working to develop a private financing pitch, a product launch, a keynote speech, a panel appearance, an analysts' call, a shareholders' meeting, or a budget approval presentation. You can extend my array with your own presentation situations, be they external or internal, be they for an important contract, a major alliance, or a big sale.

Every business presentation has one common goal: the all-important art of persuasion . . . an art with literally dozens of applications for which *everyone* in business must be prepared. Persuasion is the classic challenge of sounding the clarion call to action, of getting your target audience to the experience known as *Aha!*

- *Persuasion is the classic challenge of sounding the clarion call to action, of getting your target audience to the experience known as Aha!*

In a cartoon, *Aha!* would be represented by the image of a light bulb clicking on above your audience's heads. It's that satisfying moment of understanding and agreement that occurs when an idea from one person's mind has been successfully communicated into another's. This process is a mystery as old as language itself and almost as profound as love; the ability of humans, using only words and symbols, to understand one another and find common ground in an idea, a plan, a dream.

Maybe you've enjoyed moments like this in your past experiences as a presenter, speaker, salesperson, or communicator . . . moments when you saw the light bulb go on, as eyes made contact, smiles spread, and heads nodded. *Aha!* is the moment when you know your audience is ready to march to your beat.

I've written this book to share the persuasive techniques and tools that I provide to my clients. You can use them in your business on a daily basis. The presentation principles my clients have used to attract their billions of investor dollars can work for you, too.

The Art of Telling Your Story

Don Valentine of Sequoia Capital, the legendary venture capitalist who introduced me to Cisco, sits through thousands of presentations every year, most of them made by shrewd entrepreneurs in search of funding for their new business concepts. Don is continually shocked by the failure of most of these presentations to communicate effectively and persuasively.

He once summed it up to me this way: "Jerry, the problem is that nobody knows how to tell a story. And what's worse, nobody *knows* that they don't know how to tell a story!"

- *The overwhelming majority of business presentations merely serve to convey data, not to persuade.*

This problem is multiplied and compounded 30 million times a day, a figure which, according to recent estimates, is how many PowerPoint presentations are made every business day. Presentation audiences, from the Midas-like Don Valentines to overbooked executives sitting through run-of-the-mill staff meetings, are constantly and relentlessly besieged with torrents of excessive words and slides.

Why? Why wouldn't every presenter, seeking that clarion call to action, be, as the U.S. Army urges, all that he or she can be? The reason is that the overwhelming majority of business presentations merely serve to convey data, not to persuade.

When I moved from the world of television to the world of business, I saw immediately that the problem in those massive transmissions of information down one-way streets to passive audiences was not at all communication . . . with the emphasis on the *co-* . . . they were one-way streets that ground to a halt at a dead end.

In the television medium, ideas and images are also broadcast in one direction over the air, cable, or satellite, but there is a return loop, a feedback, an interaction that comes barreling back at the broadcaster in the form of ratings, critics, sponsors, letters, telephone calls, emails, and sometimes even regulatory legislation.

In the Medium that Marshall McLuhan analyzed in his classic book, *The Medium is the Message* (yes, that's correct, he called it "Message"), when the message is not clear, and when the audience's satisfaction is not manifest, the foregone conclusion is sudden death: The television series is canceled.

In business, when the point is not crystal clear, and when the benefit to the audience is not vividly evident, the investment is declined, the sale is not made, the approval is not granted; the presentation fails.

In the Power Presentations programs and in this book, you'll find the media sensibility applied to the business community . . . a set of prescriptive techniques and services that will enable presenters like you to achieve their clarion call to action with their audiences, to get them to *Aha!*

A New Approach to Presentations

The techniques you'll be learning in these pages are a blend of new and old concepts from a broad array of disciplines.

When creating television public affairs programs, I had to wade through hours of archival and new film footage and reels of videotape, rifle through massive reports, sort through stacks of interviews, and boil it all down to a clear 28-minute-and-40-second program that would capture . . . and hold . . . the audience's attention. I've netted these story-development methods into a simple set of techniques and forms for businesspeople like you. Most professional writers use these same techniques to tap into natural creative processes that every human being possesses.

In television, I worked in multimillion-dollar control rooms equipped with electronic character generators, vast color palettes, chroma key insertion, and computer-driven on-screen animation. Most of these capabilities are now readily available in Microsoft's PowerPoint software, installed in over 250 million computers. Unfortunately, as anyone who has seen a recent business presentation can attest, most presenters apply these powerful functions with all the subtlety of an MTV video. Instead, they should be following Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's surgically appropriate advice: *Less Is More*. You'll find a simple set of guidelines to help you apply Mies' principle to create visual support for your presentations, to help you design your numeric and text charts so that, rather than overwhelm, confuse, and distract your audience, they enhance and clarify your persuasive message.

In television, I directed both film and video cameras and then spliced and arranged their output into a compelling story. In doing so, I employed the professional practices of cinematography and editing to tell a story and create an impact on the audience. I've translated these sophisticated methodologies into a simple set of continuity techniques . . . that you can readily implement with PowerPoint . . . to help you tell your story.

I've also drawn many of my communication and persuasion techniques from classical sources, such as the writings of Aristotle. (Please don't let the word "classical" intimidate you. A wise person once defined a classic simply as something that endures because it works. You'll rediscover the truth of that definition in these pages.) In ancient times, rhetoric was considered the greatest of the liberal arts; what the philosophers of old called rhetoric is, in fact, what we refer to today as great storytelling. As you read, you'll come to see the relevance of Aristotle's concepts to all the types of stories you need to tell in business . . . storytelling that will persuade your audience to respond to your call to action.

Other methods are based on established knowledge, as well as recent discoveries about the human mind. These scientific findings that detail how *all* brains and eyes absorb information relate directly to how *every* audience reacts to *any* data input.

This combination of traditional and advanced techniques for communication and persuasion will provide what I'm confident you'll find to be a unique and effective system that will help you present to win.

You'll notice that I give frequent and significant emphasis to the word "story," which is intentional. In this book, as in my programs and seminars, the focus is first and foremost on helping you define the elements of your story and the story of your business. The traditional presentation skills . . . body language, gestures, voice production, eye contact, and answering questions from the audience . . . are also important. They are so important that I've covered those subjects in detail in two separate books: *The Power Presenter*, which shows you how to develop your delivery skills, and *In the Line of Fire*, which shows you how to handle tough questions. But in this book, the main focus is on defining your story.

Many clients, when first meeting me, say, "Oh, I don't need any help with my story. Just show me what to do with my hands while I speak. And just show me how to keep myself from saying 'Ummm.'" I tell them that I will address those factors, but only after we've organized their story. There are two very good reasons for this.

First, there are no quick fixes; it takes a considerable amount of time and effort to develop a natural delivery style, unique and yet comfortable to each and every person. (You will, however, find a checklist for the physical presentation environment in Appendix A, “Tools of the Trade.”)

Second, and more important, *getting your story straight* is the critical factor in making your presentation powerful. In fact, when your story is right, it serves as a foundation for your delivery skills. The reverse is never true. You may be the most polished speaker on Earth, but if your story isn’t sharply focused, your message will fail.

- *When your story is right, it serves as a foundation for your delivery skills. The reverse is never true.*

Let me share an illustrative anecdote:

In 1991, I got a phone call from the public relations people at Microsoft, regular clients of mine. “We have a young executive here named Jeff Raikes,” they explained. “He’s scheduled to make a presentation about a new product of ours, and we wonder if you could help him prepare. It’s called Windows for Pen Computers, the newest member of the Windows family of products.”

“Fine,” I replied, “Let’s book a three-day program for Jeff.”

There was a slight pause on the other end of the line. “Well, we’re very pressed for time. Jeff has only one day. But it’s really important that his delivery skills get polished. He’s very smart and knows his stuff, but he just isn’t comfortable. Can you make a difference in one day’s time?”

“I’ll try,” I said.

What happened next is revealing. As requested, I spent one day with Jeff. But we had *no* time to work on Jeff’s voice or body language. Instead, we used our time to develop a cohesive focus of Windows for Pen Computing: about what this remarkable new software product was designed to do, about the markets Microsoft hoped to serve with it, the history behind its development, the benefits it offered computer users. In short, we created the *story* Jeff had to tell.

I helped Jeff make some decisions about his story: which elements were most relevant and compelling to his audience; which technical details were necessary; and, equally important, which ones were superfluous. Then I helped Jeff organize his presentation so that the key ideas would flow naturally from beginning to end. By the end of the day, we’d worked through the entire story. Jeff was not only in command of the material, but also comfortable about delivering it.

The results? Jeff’s presentation went over phenomenally well. Afterward, the public relations people at Microsoft, who knew I’d coached Jeff, praised me for the job I’d done on his delivery skills, though in fact we’d never discussed those at all. *Simply getting the story right helped to transform a hesitant and uncertain speaker into a dynamic and confident one.* Jeff Raikes went on to rise through the ranks to become the president of Microsoft’s Business Division and one of the company’s most prominent and effective spokesmen. After 27 years, Jeff left to head the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Bill Gates’ charitable organization. One of Jeff’s last projects at Microsoft was the Tablet PC, the evolved 21st-century version of the technology that began as Windows for Pen Computing.

The lesson: All the vocal dynamics and animated body language in the world can’t improve a confusing story, while a clear and concise story can give a presenter the clarity of mind to present with poise.

- *A clear and concise story can give a presenter the clarity of mind to present with poise.*

The Psychological Sell

I've described the classic art of persuasion as getting your audience to *Aha!* To be truly effective, however, one *Aha!* is not enough. The Power Presentation is a continuous series of end-to-end *Aha!*'s.

Making presentations is very much like massage therapy. The good massage therapist never takes his or her hands off your body. In the same way, the good presenter never lets go of the audience's minds. The good presenter grabs their minds at the beginning of the presentation; navigates them through all the various parts, themes, and ideas, *never letting go*; and then deposits them at the call to action.

- *The good presenter grabs their minds at the beginning of the presentation; navigates them through all the various parts, themes, and ideas, never letting go; and then deposits them at the call to action.*

Notice the verbs in this analogy describing the work of a skilled presenter: *grab*, *navigate*, and *deposit*. All three can be reduced to a least-common-denominator verb: *manage*. People are the deciding factor in business decisions, and management is the number-one factor in investment decisions. The good presenter is one who effectively *manages* the minds of the audience. Therefore, the subliminal perception of the effective presentation is *Effective Management*.

Of course, no one is ever going to conclude explicitly that a good presenter is an effective manager, a skilled executive, an excellent director, or a superb CEO. That's a bit of a stretch. But the converse proves the point. Unconsciously, the audience makes assumptions. If they are subjected to a presentation whose point is unclear, they will be resistant to responding to the call to action.

Influential investors from Warren Buffett to Peter Lynch subscribe to the commonly held principle of investing only in businesses they understand.

When your story is not clear, when it's fragmented or overly complex, the audience has to work hard to make sense of it. Eventually, this hard work begins to produce first resistance, then irritation, and then loss of confidence.

A book by Steve Krug about Web design has little to do with developing your story, but its title states our point succinctly: *Don't Make Me Think*.

The effective presenter makes it easy for the audience to grasp ideas without having to work. The effective presentation story leads the audience to an irrefutable conclusion. The journey gives the audience a psychological comfort level that makes it easy for them to say "yes" to whatever the presenter is proposing. Presenting, therefore, is essentially selling.

Of course, one can never minimize the importance of having solid factual evidence that validates your business premise. A well-honed presentation is no substitute for a well-conceived business plan, just as a commanding speaking style is no substitute for personal integrity. You must have the steak as well as the sizzle. Yet when two companies or two individuals of equal strength are competing, the winner is likely to be the one who tells the story more persuasively.

In the end, the most subtle impact of a clear and compelling presentation is perhaps the most powerful effect of all: The person who is able to tell an effective business story is perceived as being in command, and deserves the confidence of others. When you are in command of your story, you are in command of the room. Your audience will follow where you lead, and so will money, influence, power, and success.

- *The person who is able to tell an effective business story is perceived as being in command, and deserves*

the confidence of others.

This is the core message and value of this book to you, no matter what role or level in business you currently occupy. Perhaps one day you'll go public with a company of your own, and then I hope the techniques you'll learn here will help you make millions of dollars. Before that happens, however, you'll have to get past many mission-critical hurdles, because *every* business decision turns on your ability to tell your story. So please use the same persuasive techniques you'll find in these pages in those scores of other stepping-stones along the way.

To help you master them, you'll see how Cisco persuaded investors to provide billions in capital to support a technology so esoteric that, even today, few people really understand it. You'll see how Yahoo! capitalized on the emerging fascination with the Internet by transforming an irreverent brand image into a meaningful investment presentation. You'll also see how Luminous Networks, a telecommunications startup company, was able to raise \$80 million in private capital during one of the steepest market declines in history. I helped create Power Presentations for each of these companies. I hope to do the same for you.

This book is about presentations, yes. But it's about much more than that. It's about psychology, about storytelling, about getting every audience to respond to your call to action. It's about presenting to win.

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