

# Introduction

**T**hink about the last presentation you attended...

Was it fascinating? Engaging? Highly informative?

How much of it do you remember?

The average presentation is boring and easy to forget. Boring, because fear causes presenters to limit their natural expressiveness and seek refuge in mediocrity. Easy to forget, because presentations are usually designed and delivered in a fashion that ignores the most fundamental organ of human communication: the brain.

The human brain is the most magnificent instrument in the world, more complex and powerful than the greatest supercomputers. Yet, ninety-five percent of what we know about the brain has only been discovered in the last ten years.<sup>1</sup> We are just learning how to apply this knowledge to improving human memory, learning and communication.

We have discovered that our brains have evolved over millions of years to help us learn and effectively communicate with one another. And we know that every healthy baby is born with a tremendous capacity for vibrant and expressive communication. All too often, however, that natural capacity is stifled by a schooling process that encourages an exaggerated fear of making mistakes.

Freedom from fear and a practical understanding of the workings of the brain are essential ingredients for high performance presentations.

*Present Yourself!* goes right to the heart of these two issues.

In the chapters that follow, you'll learn about the brain's complexity and potential as the center of all communication and, thus, the key to presentation skills. We will consider the popular notion of left-brain/right-brain and its implications for giving well-organized, creative presentations.

You will be introduced to Mind Mapping—a revolutionary alternative to outlining, that gives you access to your brain's unlimited potential for creativity. This technique will help you generate ideas for your presentations faster and with greater flexibility. It will enhance your ability to organize and remember your material while encouraging more spontaneity and originality in your delivery.

You will also learn a number of simple, effective strategies for rehearsing and mastering your material, including how to program your brain for success every time you present by using positive visualization.

In addition to learning about the practical workings of your own brain, you will also gain major insights into the workings of the brains of your audience. We'll focus on how to think about them and anticipate their needs. This is simple common sense, the importance of which can't be overemphasized.

You will be given eight specific keys to making the content and timing of a presentation 'brain-friendly', and therefore engaging and unforgettable. You'll learn how to create a brain-nourishing environment, considering everything from lighting and ventilation to your appearance and audio-visual aids, and how each of these elements can have a profound effect on your audience's ability to understand and retain what you say.

Understanding your brain and the brains of your audience will build your confidence and make you a better speaker. Yet, in order to be a superior presenter—the best you can be—you must also learn to recognize and transform the energy of fear. Fear is a universal phenomenon experienced by every speaker. According to a recent poll, public

speaking is the number one fear of almost half the population!<sup>2</sup> Nearly everyone has experienced feelings of nervousness, stiffness and uncertainty while addressing a group. Fear often causes people to focus on *surviving* their presentations with a minimum of risk. As a result, they deliver unimaginative and mechanistic speeches, paralyzing their natural self-expression and anesthetizing their audiences.

This book is based on the ideas that everyone is capable of doing much more than merely surviving a presentation and that speaking to a group can be a scintillating, enjoyable and fulfilling experience.

*Present Yourself!* deals with the issue of fear head on. You will gain an understanding of the subtle mechanisms of fear, so that you can control your reaction to it before it interferes with your performance. You will learn how to take the energy that fear provides and turn it to your advantage. I will introduce you to powerful methods for developing fear-free, articulate body language, including a consideration of some of the trade secrets of the theatrical profession, all of which will greatly enhance the impact of every presentation you give.

The entire book is devoted to showing you how to enjoy being yourself in front of a group; how to make the most of all your abilities and natural expressiveness.

It is a common belief that people are either inherently comfortable and effective in front of groups or they're not. *Present Yourself!* is based on the conviction, born out of years of experience, that everyone is capable of learning how to give a *superior* presentation.

*You already have every basic tool you need to become a superior presenter.* This book is designed to help you make the most of those tools. You don't need to try to be something you are not. You don't need to be afraid. . . . You don't need to be slick. . . . You need only apply some simple, common sense and start presenting what you have to give—honestly, intelligently, sensitively and powerfully.

This is what *Present Yourself!* is all about.

In short, you'll see that becoming a better presenter is something that you have every capability of doing right now—if you are willing to take on the challenge of allowing yourself to do so.

Through my Washington, D.C.-based company, *High Performance Learning*, I've led seminars for people from all walks of life, from senior executives and other employees of IBM, DuPont, General Motors, AT&T and many other corporations, to the U.S. Army, the National Guard, school systems, government offices, police departments and hospitals. They have ranged from beginners or presentation-phobics to experienced trainers and top-level professional speakers.

The richest experience I have in my work is watching people—whatever their level—discover how enjoyable it is to stand in front of a group without fear, pretense or unnecessary effort and give the very best of themselves to an audience.

And then to hear them say, "Why didn't anyone ever tell me that this could be so much fun?"

As you read this book, I wish this joy to you.

Michael J. Gelb  
Washington, D.C.  
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