

# Practice Doesn't Make Perfect

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We've all heard the old adage, "Practice makes perfect." Practice doesn't make perfect; it makes permanent! It can reinforce bad or wrong habits. Getting to the next level in your communication skills depends on knowing what you are doing well and what you doing that is distracting. Feedback is critical.

## Feedback from Colleagues

In order for feedback from a colleague to be meaningful, your co-worker has to know what kind of feedback you want. Are you asking for feedback on your content, your delivery, your visuals or your engagement with your audience? The mistake many presenters make is to ask for feedback **after** their presentation. **Ahead** of your presentation define the kind of feedback you want. That way, the person can take notes as you speak. The more specific you are, the more meaningful your feedback will be. If you simply say, "Tell me how I did," your observer is likely to default to saying, "Good job." If you say, "Please count the number of ums and ahs you hear because I want to see if I have made progress in that area," your colleague will be able to offer you good insights.

The co-worker also has to be willing to be honest. Some people find it difficult to give honest feedback, thinking that your feelings might be hurt. For example, I never ask my husband how an outfit looks since he will always say, "Fine." If I ask my daughter, she will tell me the truth. Be sure to select a person who will help you to grow.

Two by Two Feedback is always an efficient way to request feedback. With Two by Two Feedback, the person jots down two things that worked well, for example, with your visuals, and two things you might consider doing differently.

## Self-Feedback:

Because of the abundance of technologies, smart phones, iPads, Notebooks and movie cameras, it is easier to do self-assessments. All we have to do is turn them on, press record and review. Even if you can only audio tape yourself, you will learn a lot about how you explain a concept, how often you pause, the number of filler words you have and whether you sound friendly, confident or sincere.

Most of us can find a million things wrong with how we present, but we are seldom aware of what we are doing well. As you review your recordings, be sure to notice those things that work well. You would not be in the position you are in if you weren't an adequate communicator. In stressful times, knowing our strengths builds confidence.

Obviously, any communicator can improve. Knowing what to improve is important. Put what you do under a microscope or magnifying glass. Ask yourself these questions:

- Is there a strong structure to my content? Would others say my content was well organized?
- Do I have a solid opening and a strong close?
- Have I limited the number of key points? Would my listeners be able to repeat my ideas?
- Do I have transitional statements between my points?
- Is my content memorable or boring?
- Do I make an emotional connection?
- What stories, examples or analogies have I used to make points stand out?
- Do visuals have pictures and icons?

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- Are visuals speaker notes?
- Is the number of visuals appropriate?
- Have I geared my visuals to my audience?
- Do slides have titles? Do they make one point or multiple points?
- Is there too much animation?
- Am I standing or sitting up straight?
- Am I shifting or moving with purpose?
- Do I sustain eye contact with one person at a time?
- Is my pace too fast?
- Do I pause often?
- Do I sound friendly, sincere, and confident?
- Do I have a monotone?
- Are there sentences I start but don't finish?
- Do I have more than 10 non-words or filler words?
- Do I say the same thing more than once? Are there redundancies?
- Are gestures meaningful or redundant?
- Do gestures come from the shoulder, wrist or elbow?
- Do I look, act and sound like a subject matter expert?

Practice is, of course, important to changing behavior. Be sure when you practice, you know exactly what to practice and how to improve. Being an effective communicator is a journey. It takes time and effort.

**Question:** *Think about your presentations. Do you have impact? Do you practice? What are the best ways you have found to improve? We're interested in your reaction to this article. Click here – to comment on this article, share your concerns or ask questions. Judy will respond to all questions.*

*Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their presentation and telephone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. When you have to have impact, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, [www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com](http://www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com).*