The Difference Between Preparing and Rehearsing

by Cathy C. Bonczek

"How do I make time to rehearse to converse?"

There's a difference between knowing what you want to say (preparation) and being able to deliver the message in an engaging and memorable manner (rehearsal). Preparation is about content. Rehearsal is about delivery, being able to be conversational.

I see this all the time. My clients will have an upcoming presentation or meeting, it could be an Annual Meeting segment, a fundraising conversation or an introduction of the firm to a prospect. Depending on their experience, they may say to themselves,"I don't need to rehearse this, I know this topic better than anyone." Alternatively, they may say, "I need to nail this presentation and say everything perfectly so I'd better start making slides and a deck right away."

Invariably, when a deck is called for, the creation of the slides (usually done by committee and then reviewed by compliance) takes on a life of its own. Sometimes the final editor has the least amount of time to spend on the slides and often will weigh in hours before the presentation with a tweak, a chart change, a heading amendment.

I've seen decks with page numbers that don't go in sequence because of last-minute editing. I know of instances where a presenter leads up to a big message and then realizes that the page underscoring the message was eliminated in a round of previous edits (sometimes intentionally, sometimes by accident).

With all this focus on a deck, there is little time left for a true rehearsal: the kind of rehearsal where the presenter says the entire message out loud, checks the dynamic of the message and the delivery, makes choices on how to articulate the heart of the message, eliminates the extra words and unnecessary details, and eventually, understands the story, the impact statement and the emotional underpinning so well that they can deliver it without too many notes. Additionally, they can figure out what needs to be emphasized, where a pause will add power to a concept and when they should be looking directly in the eyes of their Decision Maker.

Without a full rehearsal, you can deliver a message, say many accurate words and even have a great meeting. But with a proper rehearsal (dare I say even multiple rehearsals) you can start to build an emotional connection to what you are saying and why people should care about it, and trust you. You can bring the passion in, or the curiosity, or the commitment. These are the elements that make communication so compelling and stories memorable.

So the next time you find yourself endlessly preparing for a presentation or a meeting, stop and ask yourself, "How do I make time to rehearse to converse?"

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