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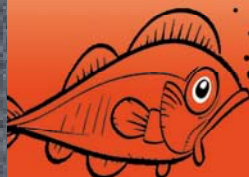
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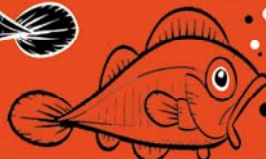
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SPEAKING VOLUMES

TRANSFORM YOUR BUSINESS THROUGH EFFECTIVE
COMMUNICATION

Nicole Bachmann

Part of the
BOOKS MEAN BUSINESS

series for business
owners and directors

Speaking Volumes

**transform your business
through effective communication**

Speaking Volumes: Transform your business through effective communication

©Nicole Bachmann.

ISBN: 978-1-906316-28-0

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Published in 2009 by Word4Word, Evesham, UK.
www.w4wdp.com.

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1. Introduction

“ The difference between
the RIGHT WORD and the
ALMOST RIGHT WORD is the
difference between lightning
and a lightning bug. ”
Mark Twain



People do business with people they know, like and trust. Does this sound familiar? I thought so. It's probably the way you like to do business, too. The question is, what makes us want to know, like and trust people?

Think about your five favourite people you do business with. What do you like about them? What have they got in common? What are the differences between them? How do they compare to your five least favourite people to do business with?

Now think about the people you've met that are liked by most people you know. What attracts people to them? How do they get on with everyone and why does everyone seem to have good things to say about them? What sets them apart?

Very often it is their ability to communicate well with very different kinds of people on different levels and somehow to speak everybody else's language.

Also, they are able to motivate themselves and others. They inspire people. They get what they want in negotiations. They are good at facilitating diverse people into teams. They know how to listen and what to listen for. They always seem to ask the right questions. They present themselves well and are able to foster other people's ideas and development.

Where do they get that from? Some of them are born with those communication skills – but they are in the minority. Most of them have spent considerable time and effort acquiring and practising those skills.

The aim of this book is to look at these skills and increase awareness of them so you can recognise the masters when you come across them and learn from them.

However, we should probably start with a health warning.

While this book will give you insights and food for thought on the different business communications skills, it should be considered as a first step to becoming more aware of these skills and the need to use them in our business lives every single day. It should be seen as an encouragement to further reading and maybe attending some courses that will allow you to further explore, improve and master those skills.

This book can neither provide a complete picture nor an intensive learning course. This would simply be impossible within the scope of the pages available here. Furthermore, we will focus on practical advice that works, rather than on motivational or similar theories underlying the study of the skills in question.

Now the boundaries are set, let us start the process of discovering the skills that lie at the bottom of most business communication.

2. Motivating yourself

“ When he took time to
help the man up the mountain,
lo, **HE SCALED IT HIMSELF.** ”
Tibetan Proverb



Motivation is a very important – even vital – part of business life.

However, it can prove very elusive and, while most people agree on its importance in the work place, quite a few find it not so easy to give and achieve. Some people even consider it an art.

How can we acquire a talent for motivating ourselves and others? And, even more importantly, how can we ensure that once gained, we sustain our motivation? First, ask yourself the question: What motivates you? Is it success (whatever that means to you)? Your job? Getting promoted? Paying your bills? Recognition? Love? Security? Money? Making a difference? Something else?

The answer will probably be different for every one of us, not withstanding a slight overlap in some areas. Fundamentally what motivates us is personal to each of us.

Interestingly, just knowing and acknowledging this fact – that we are all motivated by different things – is the first important step towards our path as a motivator of ourselves and others.

George Bernard Shaw said: 'Do not do unto others as you would have them do unto you – their tastes might be different.' This is a very true statement, which will help us later when we talk about motivating others.

Before we can motivate others, however, we need to be motivated ourselves. When were you last inspired by the office grump? Or your boring neighbour who only ever complains about everything?

Have you ever asked yourself the question: 'Am I the office grump?' Or, perish the thought, the boring neighbour? I can hear you protest disgustedly at the suggestion that you even have to ask yourself that question because, obviously, you're not! But is that true? Do you ever listen to yourself speak? Are you aware of the language you use with others? With yourself?

If you are, that's fantastic, and you probably know a lot of what we're looking at here. If you're not, there is good news coming up. It doesn't matter that you've never thought about these things – now is the perfect time to start.

Motivating yourself is about attitude, choice and awareness – awareness that you need to choose your attitude to yourself and the world around you fresh every day. You can be in control of your own attitude, even if you can't always be in control of the situation. You can stop trying to control what's outside your sphere of influence, and instead start exercising control within that sphere.

Let's face it, we all find ourselves in situations we can't change or do anything about. How often have you raged or complained about such a situation? How often have you focused your energy on feeling sorry for yourself and blamed others or a higher power for what is happening to you? Life is not always the way we want it to be and we can rant and rave about it, bang our head against walls, and blame everything and everyone around us – but does it make you feel any better? Has the situation improved? Hmm, thought not...

So what's the better thought? What could you do that would make a difference? In any situation you find yourself, you always have a choice: you can accept it or you can change it. You doubt that. And even if it were true, it doesn't seem like much of a choice, does it?

Why do we think that? Mainly because very often we are not aware of what is going on in the way we communicate with ourselves. We are not aware that, while we spend a lot of time thinking we are frustrated with the situation, we are actually frustrated with the way the situation makes us feel. We feel out of control and put upon. We have not got what we wanted.

Leonardo Da Vinci said: 'If you can't do what you want, you better want what you can.'

It sounds glib, I know, but suspend judging this comment for a moment and look at the opportunity it presents. If you can manage to focus on what you can control, rather than spending a lot of energy trying to control what you can't, how much more effective would that be?

If you walk along an icy road and see a five-ton truck slide towards you, obviously out of control, would you stay where you are and try to hold up the truck or would you get out of its way as fast as you can? What's interesting is that in an awful lot of life and business situations, small and large, we do the equivalent of trying to hold up the truck.

You've been made redundant. Most of us would agree that this is not a good situation to be in. But do you have any way of changing that situation?

What would happen if you gave yourself permission to accept it, as it is outside of your control, feel good about having recognised that there is nothing you can do to change the situation, and then focus on what is the best thing you can do with the consequences? I would like to hazard a guess that it would get you out of your motivational dip a whole lot faster.

This choice you can make in any situation. If you can't change the situation, you can always change your attitude towards it. You can choose to accept it and recognise that this is a valid choice – even a good choice – to make and give yourself credit for having made it. Then ask yourself the question: What can I learn from this? What opportunities might this lead to? How can I make the best out of this?

You might find it hard to do this at the beginning. It is a new way of looking at things; we're not familiar with it. It feels uncomfortable and because of that it's easy to dismiss it. But what have you got to lose by trying it?

Suspend judging it and give it a try. Recognise that it feels uncomfortable, because it's new. The good news is, that every time we step out of our comfort zone, and stay there long enough for it to catch up with us, our comfort zone expands.

Remember the first time you went for a job interview? Terrifying, wasn't it? Once you've done a few, you feel more comfortable, because you know what to expect. Yes, you're probably still nervous, but not terrified.

Or the first time your boss called you into his office? Did you feel a knot in your stomach, because you didn't know whether this was going to be it? He'd caught on to you and was going to tell you 'you're fired'? After a few conversations with him, it becomes a normal part of your job and you feel fine about it. You're comfortable with it.

The reward of practising something we are uncomfortable with is that it becomes easier. We can even create a good habit out of it, which we eventually get used to and do unconsciously. That's when motivating yourself becomes easier and when choosing your attitude and making the right choice becomes a habit, rather than something you have to practice every day – and probably several times a day.

Now we've got you thinking about motivating yourself, let's look at what changes when you are required to

Remember:

- You need to choose your attitude to yourself and the world around you fresh everyday;
- Stop focusing on blame and focus on what you can control. Think about how to make the best of the situation;
- Recognise that this may be uncomfortable because it is new behaviour. But the more you practise it, the more familiar it will become; and
- Motivating yourself becomes easier – you can even create a good habit out of it.

3. Motivating others

“ You cannot **TEACH** a person anything, you can only **HELP** them find it for themselves. ”
Galileo Galilei



“ Do not unto others as you would have them do unto you – their tastes might be different. ”

George Bernard Shaw

The answer to motivating other people is not ‘treat them like you want to be treated’. The question that interests us, therefore, is how should you treat them?

To get there, let us ask ourselves how we like to be treated, as we have already established that we need to be motivated ourselves to motivate others, and also that each person knows best what motivates them.

If your friend who loves football keeps taking you to football matches, even though you prefer watching tennis and have told them so, how does that make you feel? Do you like it? How much do you appreciate the effort they put in to get these tickets?

Now let’s presume they went out of their way to get tickets for Wimbledon. How do you feel now?

What has changed?

By treating you the way **you** like to be treated, they have achieved double appreciation: for the effort they made and for the fact that they chose something that you like. The secret of motivating people lurks in finding out what motivates them and then delivering it back.

What do you need to do to find out? You need to ask them the right questions and then listen to their answers. This sounds simple, doesn't it? Isn't that what we do every day, all day, anyway? Some of us do, and some of us don't. And even for most of us who do, the results might vary.

It all depends on how you listen and whether you are asking the right questions, in the right way. It might, therefore, pay off to investigate these two areas and look at how we can improve our questions and our listening skills.

4. Effective questioning

“ The **QUALITY** of your **QUESTIONS** determines the **QUALITY** of your **RESULTS**. ”
Anon



What is a question?

It can be:

- A request for information;
- A way of drilling deeper;
- A way to get to know other people's thoughts;
- A way to establish the status in a situation; and
- Even a way to build rapport...

All of the above are true and, underlying all that, and more fundamentally, a question is **an invitation to communicate**. If we bear that in mind, it will change the way we ask questions.

As most people know, there are open and closed questions. Within open questions we can differentiate by various other parameters, such as clarification, investigation, probing, drilling down into an issue, impact, encouragement and so on.

Closed questions request to be answered with yes or no. Open questions require a certain amount of elaboration, and cannot be answered by a mere yes or no. Open questions start with the words 'what', 'how', 'where', 'when', 'who', 'which'. If you're thinking we're missing 'why' – then bear with us, as there is a reason for that. So far so obvious.

If we see a question as an invitation to communicate, we can therefore decide what sort of communication we want to have with other people.

Closed questions are important, as without them we would never get closure.

Would you like to go out for dinner tonight? Do you think this proposal is of interest to you? Can you get this done within two days? If we want to elicit a commitment from someone, we need to use closed questions otherwise we never know whether the commitment is there or not.

However, if we want to encourage open thinking, and exchange of information, thoughts and feelings, then open questions are much more effective. Very often we want to encourage someone to tell us more, but inadvertently phrase it with a closed question.

For instance if we've been out to see a movie or play with a friend, we are usually interested in discussing it afterwards, so we ask: 'Did you like the film/play?' Whereas what we actually mean is: 'What did you think about the film/play?'

The first is a closed question, which will stop the person's thinking process, focusing it on a yes/no decision. The second question opens the person's mind and allows them to come up with a more meaningful answer and their own opinion, emotions and thoughts.

You can get more information with a series of closed questions, but the danger is that the other person will feel interrogated, which can make them feel threatened and lead them to close, rather than open up. Whenever we want to stimulate discussion, expression of thinking and feeling or get to know more about a person, open questions are the key.

The easiest way to practice asking truly open questions is to become aware of the questions we ask and try to rephrase as many of them as we can into questions beginning with either 'what' or 'how'. These two openers are brilliant because they put people at ease, are neutral and do not imply any judgment.

This leads us back to 'why' and the problem it can pose. It very often comes across as judgemental to people. Compare: 'Why did you do it that way?' with 'What led you to decide on that course of action?'

The first could easily be mistaken for a criticism on having chosen the 'wrong' way of doing something. The second comes across as much more neutral and exploring.

The tone of voice you use to ask 'why?' decides whether it is an open or a closed question. For 'why' to be an open question, the tone needs to be exploratory rather than assertive – a distinction that is made easier by experience. This is why it's better to steer clear of 'why' when you first start practising open questions.

A 'what' or 'how' question, because it is non-judgemental, encourages the person to relax and look into themselves to find what they really think, rather than having to come up with a 'right' answer.

Once you master the skill of asking open questions, you will find how much easier communication with people around you becomes. You will also find it easier to find out what they really think about something. However, there is another ingredient you need to be really successful at communicating well with people. What is the most important thing to do after you have asked a question?

You have to be silent and listen to the answer.

'I knew that', I hear you say, or 'How obvious is that!' Yes, it is obvious and we all know it, but the question is: Are we doing it?

Or are we too busy thinking about the next question?
And if we are doing that, who are we listening to?

Think about the last three conversations you had with people:

- How much can you still remember of each conversation?
- What did you learn about the person in that conversation?
- How aware are you of what they really want and what really concerns them?

5. The skill of listening

“ To **LISTEN WELL** is as powerful a means of influence as to **TALK WELL**, and is as **ESSENTIAL** to all true conversation. ”
Chinese Proverb



Listening is a very interesting skill. Mastering it can make our private and business lives much easier and more successful. However, very few of us are taught how to do it well.

Let's start by looking at the different components of listening:

1) Hearing: the physical aspect

Our ability to absorb sound is dependent on nature and to a certain extent our own actions – if we spend too much time in very loud and noisy environments that ability can be affected.

2) Interpretation: trying to 'make sense'

This is our ability to convert the sound we hear into meaning via use of our brain. This is influenced by a variety of factors, including language, culture, our own experiences (eg the patterns we learn from observing others when we grow up, how we are listened to), etc.

Knowing that our interpretation of all we hear is influenced by, and therefore filtered through, a variety of factors means that what we hear might not necessarily be what was meant by the other person. This can help us in the next part of the process.

- 3) Evaluation:** weighing up information and deciding how to use it

Once we have interpreted the information that the sounds we hear are conveying, we need to decide what to do with it. Being aware of the filters mentioned in the point above allows us to decide whether we might need to clarify that what we have understood is actually what the person speaking meant to express. This will influence our reaction.

- 4) Reaction:** giving the speaker feedback on what you have understood.

A vital part of listening is ensuring that what we have understood matches what the other person has tried to communicate. Giving the speaker a reaction and feedback on what we think they meant allows the communication to be clearer and easier. If we are able to suspend judgement until we know whether our interpretation of what was said is congruent with what the other person wanted to say, we can keep misunderstandings to a minimum.

The other insight that helps us to get better at listening is being aware that there are different levels of listening.

1) Level 1 – Internal listening

This is where most of us spend most of our time. We are listening to what is being said with the **focus** being on **ourselves**. What does this mean for me? What impact does this have on me? This is an important part of organising our daily lives and reaching decisions on mundane matters. However, it is important to remember that what is mundane to you might be important to someone else.

2) Level 2 – Focused listening

Here the **focus switches** from us to **the other person**. We start to listen for the meaning of something.

We listen not only to what is said, but also **how** it is said. Tone of voice is more important for communicating things than the words that convey it. We also listen between the lines to what is not said – often the clue to what is really going on for someone lies there.

This form of listening allows us to understand a person and their issues, agenda, or situation. It allows communication to take place that will serve both sides and, if both people are doing it, will give us a deeper understanding of each other.

When we listen in a focused way, we stop being concerned about the next question we want to ask, as it's not about us anymore. It's about the other person.

3) Level 3 – Intuitive listening

In this form of **360 degree listening** we use all our senses, including our 6th sense, to understand what someone is trying to convey to us. We are still focused on the other person, but in a much more profound way. We are tuning into them, which allows us to see them as they really are.

For most people intuitive listening is quite a stretch at the beginning, but even being aware of the existence of this level will bring you one step closer to it. Nevertheless, we have probably all had an experience of listening at this level, for example when we were in a 'bubble' with a loved one, everything else around disappeared, and we felt we really 'got' each other.

The main skill of listening lies in being able to 'upgrade' the majority of our listening to level 2. The more we focus on the person we are communicating with, the more we are able to find out and understand what is going on for them. What do they want out of a situation

/ conversation / negotiation? What is their challenge / issue / problem, or their opportunity / objective / goal?

Only when we understand that, will we be able to investigate what the potential of the relationship with this person/group of people is. Knowing that allows us to make an informed decision on whether this relationship is of interest to all parties.

Focused listening can save us costly (financial and spiritual) mistakes and release us to spend our energy, time and resources on relationships that move us forward. Consequently, we inspire and motivate each other and take responsibility for our own and each other's motivation. We stop blaming and start asking: 'What's the better thought?', 'How can we resolve this in a constructive way?' or 'How can we move this forward to our mutual benefit?'

These thoughts lead us neatly to another important business communication skill: negotiating win-wins.

6. Negotiating win-wins

“ In business you don't get what you **DESERVE**, you get what you **NEGOTIATE**. ”
Anon



In an advert for a negotiation skills course I once read the phrase: 'In business you don't get what you deserve, you get what you negotiate.' No source of the quote was given, and I haven't found one since. However, I still find it a very good thought to bear in mind in all business dealings.

For me, it highlights a couple of things:

A) Business is always personal but should not always be taken personally. Sometimes a decision is motivated by interests that are greater than one person, which can mean that to that one person they do not seem 'fair'. If that person is you, you stand to gain a lot more if you can put that feeling of disappointment to one side, and enter negotiation without bringing it into the room.

B) In the large majority of business situations there is room for negotiation, which is an empowering thought once you get comfortable with your own skills in this area.

How can we get comfortable with negotiation? Much the same way as we learned to ride a bicycle – focus on what you want to achieve and keep practising, learning from your mistakes and successes on the way.

We start negotiating the minute we become aware that we want something. In the early stages of our lives, we did this for food, drink, shelter or being cleaned up. A baby screaming is 'negotiating' its need for attention the only way it knows how. We can even consider it a win-win, as parents have an emotional need for a healthy and happy baby, which they achieve by reacting to the screaming.

The more conscious we become of ourselves as a separate person, the more varied our motivation for negotiation becomes. Apart from negotiating towards desired outcomes or away from undesired consequences, we might start to negotiate for status, to practice, for the fun of it, to test our powers, to create harmony or even to create conflict.

These early experiences in negotiation provide the template from which we develop our skills. We need to be aware of the existence of these templates and their emotional effect on us to allow us to adjust them, particularly where we feel they do not serve us any longer.

This can feel uncomfortable, especially if we are not familiar with looking at the emotional side of things. It is, however, necessary to allow learning to occur and to free ourselves from those patterns if they are holding us back.

Negotiating win-wins, which is the most effective outcome in the long term, requires emotionally mature partners who can focus on the big picture, while getting the details right. These partners need to understand the difference between power and force. They need to recognise that the balance of power is temporary and can shift at any time. They also need to respect each other and work hard to be constructive at all times, looking for the benefits on either and both sides.

They need to care about the outcome of the negotiation without taking it personally and show their attitude in the language they use. They also need to listen carefully and ask effective and constructive questions that help to move towards the desired outcome, rather than feed their ego. And they need to be comfortable with silence and giving each other space to consider the options at hand.

I'd like to close with another quote – this time the source is known, it is Albert Einstein – that's worth bearing in mind when encountering difficult situations in any negotiation:

‘Every problem holds the seeds of an equal or greater opportunity.’

If you take this attitude and manage to persuade your negotiation partner to adopt it too, you should be able to achieve some of what you want, each time you negotiate. Having gained some insights into how to improve the outcome of our negotiations, we’ll spend the next chapter looking at another business communication skill that is considered essential in today’s fast changing business environment.

7. Facilitation of meetings and teamwork

“ Properly understood, today
could be the **MOST EXCITING** and
MOST INTERESTING day you
have ever lived. ”

Laura Teresa Marquez



Successful facilitation might appear as just a different name for successful negotiation. However, while the two are linked and make use of similar basic skills, like focused listening and effective questioning, there is one crucial difference: **negotiation** is concerned with the **content** of what we are trying to achieve, whereas facilitation concentrates on the **process**.

If you were to facilitate a negotiation between a group of people, at no time would you get involved in the actual discussion of the subject that is being negotiated. Your role is to ensure the smooth running of the negotiation and suggesting alternative ways of coming to a conclusion or desired outcome.

The **purpose** of facilitation is to **enable a group to succeed**. The facilitator is tasked with achieving that objective by performing some key tasks before, during and after the meeting or project:

- Preparation

‘Perfect preparation prevents poor performance’ is an old adage, which anyone ever trained in sales is very aware of. It usually makes the difference between success and failure, and lack of preparation is the easiest way of sabotaging the facilitation process. We need to prepare in two ways:

- Physical environment (ie venue, set-up, tools)

Choosing a venue and set-up that encourages an atmosphere of openness, constructiveness and collaboration can make all the difference to the ease with which the outcome is achieved, and with the level of satisfaction that all participants have with the experience.

- Mental environment (ie agenda, objectives, process)

Equally important is preparation of the mental environment that people will find themselves in during the facilitation process. Lack of brief, agenda, consensus about the objectives, and the process that will lead to those outcomes, can detract considerably from achieving anything constructive within the set timeframe.

Focused listening

It is easier to listen for all the different things going on if you are not involved in the content of the actual discussion. This is where the facilitator can add immense value to the group.

If people are grappling with the actual subject, actions required and consequences of those actions or non-actions, they might find it hard to listen between the lines and pick up on changes of tone by themselves or other members of the group. The climate of the

discussion changes, and what started as a constructive exploration of possible options, can end up a battle between egos and agendas.

The facilitator, because they are not involved in the content, can pick up on early warning signs that signal that change and prevent it.

- **Stimulating by asking the right questions**

In most group discussions some people are more vocal, confident, and able to express themselves than others. If left unchecked, this can lead to disenfranchisement of the 'quiet' members of the group, as they feel they are not being heard, as well as the group missing out on their contribution.

As with focused listening, the facilitator, who is not involved in the actual discussion, is better placed to notice which people have not spoken yet, and to encourage them by asking open questions directed at them.

- **Giving feedback**

Another important task is to clarify issues, positions and agendas, and to enable the group to refocus on the objectives at hand.

- Keeping time

This is especially important in ongoing projects, as it is easy to get carried away in discussions and exchanges of opinion, which then do not lead to action. And as the objective of most meetings or projects is to agree on a course of action, and then do it, this is not productive.

- Recording the meeting or project and agreed action points

This is vital to the success of the project, as experience has shown that only named and dated action points ever get done. Otherwise it is very easy for a responsibility gap to open up, where everyone agrees it needs to be done, but no-one feels responsible for doing it. As a consequence it doesn't get done.

- Follow-up on action points

Following on from the previous point, this is vital for exactly the same reasons.

As we can see, skillful facilitation can make quite a difference to the group process and to getting people closer to business success. Being a facilitator is therefore another essential business communication skill and is underpinned by the various skills we have been discussing before.

Before we move on, let's have another look at the top five personal skills of a successful facilitator:

- 1). Remaining neutral on issues – as a facilitator you are concerned with the process, rather than the content of the discussion;
- 2). Being an active listener – because you are outside the actual discussion, you can pick up on things that participants might not notice;
- 3). Knowing how to ask questions – keeping the tone of the discussion collaborative and constructive, as well as everybody involved, is vital to a successful outcome;
- 4). Encouraging open communication – only if everyone involved in the discussion is willing to give and gain respect by discussing their views openly and honestly, can we achieve buy-in to the actions necessary to achieve the desired outcome; and
- 5). Maintaining focus on the issues – ensuring that the participants in the discussion do not lose sight of the bigger picture and the long-term objectives that need to be achieved, as well as recognising what can be achieved within the time frame and concentrating on the action points necessary to get there.

8. Presentation skills

“ To **EXPRESS** the most difficult matters **CLEARLY** and **INTELLIGENTLY**, is to strike coins out of **PURE GOLD**. ”

Charles Dickens



Whether we are facilitating a discussion or project, or whether we are participating in it, we are all required to present ourselves in a business environment. For some of us this is easy and our natural way of being. For the large majority, however, it is nothing of the kind. On the contrary, it feels extremely uncomfortable, which means we try to do it as little as we can.

This, as we are well aware, is not the most effective way of getting better at it, but our fear of presenting outweighs our willingness, need or desire to get better at it. A few years ago a study into people's fears was undertaken across all levels of society (taking into account age, gender, income, etc). Death came third. Second was walking into a room full of strangers (aka networking). First was speaking in front of a group of people.

What does that tell us? Firstly, if you don't like presenting, you're not the only one.

Secondly, that it is time to demystify presenting and have a look at what we are afraid of and how we can begin to cope.

Everyone has their own gremlin about presenting, but here are a few that I have found to be very common for people:

- **Exposure** – what if people think I’m a fake?
- **Limelight** – actors call it stage fright – All eyes are on me and there’s nowhere to hide;
- **Discovery** – what if there are people in the audience that know more about this than I do?
- **Embarrassment** – what if I get asked a question I can’t answer?
- **Failure** – what if I dry up/forget my speech/lose my thread/mess up completely? and
- **Not being heard/understood** – What if my voice doesn’t carry? What if I’m not clear enough? What if people don’t understand what I’m talking about?

If you haven’t got a knot in your stomach by now, you are one of that rare breed of people who love and enjoy presenting. For the rest, the question is: ‘What can we do about it and how can we cope with those fears?’

Dealing with this fully would take a book on its own, or a three-day presentation skills course, but here are a few ground rules and pointers that can help you to make a start:

- **Preparation** – Those five Ps again: Perfect Preparation Prevents Poor Performance. It's a little bit like exams – being well prepared doesn't guarantee success, but you have a much better chance to do well.
- **Mental attitude** – Remember when you started to ride a bicycle when you were a child – where was your focus? On riding the bike, or on falling off it while you were learning? The same goes for presentations. If you focus all your energy on your potential failure, you are not giving yourself a chance.

Instead, **focus on communicating** the message you are trying to get across. That will help to take the focus off the fact that you're afraid and it will remind you of what you are here to do: communicate a message. Let's face it, unless we are a celebrity motivational speaker, most people will come to a presentation we give because they are interested in the subject, rather than in us.

Breathing – Remember to breathe at all times. Breathing helps to keep your blood and brain supplied with oxygen, which keeps them functioning at top speed. Breathing deeply is also a great way to relax and de-stress yourself.

The most important thing to remember, is to focus on the out breath! Breathe in deeply through your nose into your diaphragm (rather than your chest) and out completely through your mouth. Try it now; you'll see how the tension goes down with letting your breath out. That's after all why we sigh under stress. A sigh is just a long breath out, which lowers the tension and makes us feel better.

Voice control – Remember what you are there to do: communicate a message to other people. It really helps if they can hear what you are saying.

Start by standing up straight, making sure you are not pushing your head forwards or back, and think about reaching the person furthest away from you. Envisage talking directly to them. If they can hear you, it is likely that everyone in between will hear you, too. If you have a really quiet voice, then there are no short cuts. You'll have to get yourself some voice lessons. Most adult

education places will have them, and if you go for those targeted towards jobbing actors, they shouldn't be too expensive. They are usually great fun, very liberating and apart from helping with presentations, they usually also have a positive effect on your overall confidence.

Practice – Yes, back to the bike analogy – how did you learn to ride a bike, again? By not doing it? Or by keeping at it and getting back on each time you fell off? I rest my case.

Volunteering at every possible opportunity – I know, that's the bit you really didn't want to hear. But if we subscribe to the previous one, this is the best and most comfortable (relatively!) way to get to practice as much as you can. And the good news is, if you volunteer, you're choosing to do this (because you want to practice to get better at it), so you're in control. That has to be better than getting asked to do it, possibly at a time when it's really inconvenient and you don't have the time to prepare properly.

Let me finish this brief introduction into the skill of presenting with a few tips of what makes for good presentations:

- Structure, i.e.: intro, body and summary. The simplest way of looking at this is:

- Tell them what you are going to tell them (intro);
- Tell it them (body); and then
- Tell them what you told them (summary).

- Focus on the audience – person per person

Remember, you are here to communicate and share a message. To do that well you need to have eye contact and focus on the people you are communicating with. Have you ever tried having a conversation with someone who never looks at you, or is watching TV at the same time?

- Commitment – to the audience, the subject and structure

If I get the feeling you don't want to be there, aren't interested in the subject, or don't agree with the structure of your presentation, why should I give you my attention and time? Preparation time is the time for doubts, worries, and questioning yourself – once you're up there you've got to back what you're doing.

- Passion – show me why I should be interested in what you have to say

This is an expression of your commitment. From the audience's point of view you could summarise it into: 'I don't care what you show me, until you show me how much you care.'

- Modulation of the voice – no droning

This should come with the passion for your subject. Remember you are a human being trying to communicate a message you care about, rather than an android.

- Involvement – looking for feedback from the audience

This is the way to ensure that your message is coming across. Interact with the audience as much as you can, before, during and after the presentation. How else will you know that you are getting better?

- Having fun – There are few things more catching than seeing someone enjoying themselves. Have you ever tried to resist smiling at someone who smiles at you?

– Exactly

9. In conclusion

“ **EVERYTHING** becomes a little different as soon as it is spoken **OUT LOUD.** ”

Hermann Hesse



This concludes our brief foray into the world of business communication skills. I have tried to give you some insights into those vital skills that can make you one of those people who people like, know and trust – and want to do business with.

If you bear what we have looked at in mind, practice regularly and focus on how you are getting better, rather than give yourself a hard time for the mistakes you are bound to make, you will start to notice the difference good communication makes – to your business and to your life.

Here's to you becoming one of those people who others seek out to do business with – and to what that will do for your business.

Good luck and have fun.

10. About Nicole Bachmann

“Coming together is a **BEGINNING**, staying together is **PROCESS**, and working together is **SUCCESS.**”
Henry Ford



Nicole Bachmann is a masterful coach, facilitator and trainer with a strategic business background and a law degree.

In her longstanding career across the international media and other industries, she has successfully led and inspired a wide range of people from many different cultures in four different languages.

Her outstanding communication skills have enabled her to facilitate the most diverse groups across many nationalities and cultures into close-knit teams. Coaching and enabling the members of these teams to be effective leaders, as well as communicate effectively with each other and with other stakeholders, were instrumental in achieving this. This inspired the members of those groups to work together in a focused and effective way, ensuring objectives and budgets were met – and they greatly enjoyed doing so.

Nicole is passionate about people communicating well with each other – and themselves – all around the globe AND having fun every step of the way. She loves people and she loves performance – and assisting people in performing at their personal best really lights her candle.

This has led her to use her extensive experience in these fields and her excellent motivational skills to specialise in helping high flying business leaders and their teams with their leadership, performance and business communication skills.

Nicole facilitates learning of individuals and groups to improve their skills in leadership, personal effectiveness, performance management, accountability, creative problem solving, networking, presentations, public speaking, negotiation, facilitation, motivation, listening, questioning, and coaching.

Her outstanding ability to create a safe environment where people are happy – and even eager – to open up and look at what’s holding them back, allows deep learning to occur. This frees people from old behavioural patterns, and allows them to perform as well as communicate in a constructive and effective way, recognising and using all their new abilities and skills. The participants of her courses, events and coaching programmes come away as strong and effective leaders, communicating on a different level. This impacts on their business and personal relationships, bringing them greater success.

Nicole is a highly experienced networker, a motivational speaker much in demand, and a lecturer at the University of Essex. She is the founder of Brook & Mann, specialists in Confident Communication for Pro-active Professionals, a co-founder of www.beatprocrastination.com, a Networking Strategist with Magic of Networking, and an Executive Associate of Fraser Clarke Corporate Development.

She is a Fellow of the Institute for Independent Business, a Founding Member of the International Association of Coaches, and a proactive member of various networking organisations.

11. Further reading and useful contacts

“ The quality of our
COMMUNICATION is in the
response we receive. ”
Anon



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Amazon: www.amazon.co.uk

Beat Procrastination: www.beatprocrastination.com

BNI: www.bni-europe.com

Computerised Speech Writer:

www.school-for-champions.com/speaking/autowrite.htm

Ecademy: www.ecademy.com

Entrepreneurs World: www.entrepreneursworld.biz

FT online: www.ft.com

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com

NRG: www.nrg-networks.com

Toastmasters: www.toastmasters.org

University of Essex/BMT: www.essex.ac.uk/bmt/

Word 4 Word: www.w4wdp.com

XING: www.xing.com

Communicate your way to business success!

People do business with people they know, like and trust. So what knowledge and skills do people who are liked and trusted by others have that set them apart?

This book demystifies those crucial skills and points you towards speaking everybody else's language.

It explores ways of:

- Communicating with all kinds of people on many different levels
- motivating yourself and inspiring others
- getting what you want in negotiations
- facilitating diverse people into teams
- listening well and asking the right questions
- presenting yourself positively
- fostering other people's ideas and development

Speaking Volumes debunks the myth that people are born communicators and shows how, with practice, anyone can acquire these essential business skills. It also helps you to recognise those who are masters of this art and to learn from them.

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