Perfecting Presentation Skills
Presented by Jerry A. Gardner, Ph.D.
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PROGRAM NOTES:
Being an attorney in a courtroom, you have placed yourself in an environment that is very similar to that of the actor on a stage.

This is a workshop to develop presentation skills. We will study the elements of acting to better understand how we command an awareness of self and others within a given space and context.

- Movement
- Voice
- Ideas
- Physical gestures

The context in the courtroom is that potential of life and death decisions. For you as the attorney and for the jurors, once the trial is over, you go on with your life relatively unchanged. For the defendant, the results of the trial will impact the rest of their life.

Awareness of environment includes who is in the environment. We must also be aware of our selves in relationship to others in the environment of the courtroom.

What do actors do when they come to the stage? Their intuitive process is immediately engaged when they walk on to the stage. But this is not an automatic response—it is one that they have trained to develop.

Awareness of the environment is key. So, too, is awareness of yourself as the instrument of expression for ideas and events.

What are the skills and tools that you must develop and engage in to achieve this awareness?

1. Possession of a physical body
   a. Perceptions of self and surroundings become inhibited by tension
      i. Breath becomes shallow
      ii. Body is tense
      iii. We are disconnected, ungrounded
   b. Tension is both physiological and psychological
   c. Due to this tension, breathing and behaving become unnatural and convey uncertainty and a lack of confidence and clarity in our communication.
2. None of this is new information. These are obvious to us once we name them, but when we become tense and preoccupied we become oblivious to these very basic conditions.

We need to lay the foundation by becoming aware, at which point we can choose to change our habitual patterns and behaviors that impede us from becoming effective communicators.

Listening, concentration, and focus are key to laying this foundation of awareness.

Exercise:

Listening was the first one. Now get up and walk around. Look around you. You are all acting very familiar in this room. If you are, why is that? Really look and get to know this space.

How do you feel – are you hot, itchy? Is your tie or underwear too tight? Do you feel like you need to adjust your position, your clothes?

What would it take for you to be comfortable under these conditions? If you are uncomfortable, others will be affected by that discomfort and will judge you accordingly.

Now shift your focus again. Walk around the space. It may seem quite silly, but we do this all the time. Run our hands along the fabric of a chair.

Put your body in physical contact with the ground. You are receiving so much information every moment from your senses that you necessarily censor and shut out certain feelings and sensations.

It looks like some of you are a little uncomfortable taking your shoes off in this space. Consider the reaction you want to evoke in your audience. You want to move them to this place—where they are uncomfortable and seeking resolution.

Don’t start licking the chairs and tables, but be aware of your sense of taste.

Now be aware of your sense of smell—what were the products you put on before you left the house? Did you put on some smelly deodorant? What happens when you are talking to someone and they become distracted by an odor?

What happens when you make the leap to being aware of yourself in the space?

Now make another leap to being aware of yourself in relation to others in the space.
These are some basic tangible, measureable, observable, changes you can make that will change the way you present and communicate.

You have some basic information such as the players or characters in your environment when you walk into the courtroom setting. What other information is available to you about these characters?

*The intangible aspects:*

Be bold and deliberate in your actions. If you make a decision to act—then act clearly and deliberately.

Backing up to another foundational aspect: How have you been breathing? From where have you been breathing? Was there an awareness of the breath? Was it long, deep, shallow, ragged . . .?

Let’s reflect on the experiences you have just had – what did you notice?

The actor must be grounded, must have a sense of clarity, which can be accomplished by slowing down the breath and allowing it to relax. When we slow the breath down, and relax the body, a sense of clarity arises.

Go back for a few moments and examine how you breathe.

Now consider the question: Why do we breathe? We breathe to sustain life. If we are only taking half a breath, does that mean we are cutting off the full potentiality of the life we could be experiencing?

Now let’s look at a process that will allow us to perhaps be more aware of how we breathe and to do so with greater efficiency.

*Breathing Exercises:*

Get out of your chair and lay on the floor—on your back. Close your eyes.

I will guide you through a mediation that will introduce you to the natural state of your own breathing. As a baby, no one had to teach you how to breathe. As we grew older, we adopted less efficient habits of breathing unnaturally. We want to return to the baby’s breathing.

Be aware of the action of breathing – “I am breathing in . . . I am breathing out . . .”

A natural relaxation happens in the body. The breath is the connector between mind and body.

From this place of connectedness you will stand up and return to your chair. Don’t get up yet. As you get up I want you to observe the effortlessness of that movement, the flow of that movement, the direction of that movement and the efficiency of the movement.
What does efficiency mean? You pulled your back last night. You went to get up and felt the pain. You rolled back in bed and devised a new way to get up.

Open your perceptions. Breathe naturally in—breathe naturally out. Now stand up again.

Be aware of the natural flow of energy – let energy flow naturally. When a baby reaches, there is noting artificial about it. Be aware of how naturally you are able to move.

I want you lean forward and stand up naturally.

With groundedness and fluidity you move from seating to standing. This is relevant to how you move about and appear in the courtroom

What does it mean to be grounded as we move through space?

  Pulsing in space
  Touch your jaw. Is it tense? Is it relaxed?
  Put your hand on your abdomen. Make a sound. Feel the sound in your abdomen.
  Connect to ground, to breath, to sound.

  Pulse again and then hold still. Feel the residual movement. Be aware of the lasting effect of the movement and the connectedness of everything in space.

Now count 1 through 10 (listening for vocal quality). How well do you project your voice into space? Did you reinforce or return to tension, or did you retain the relaxed quality?

Now walk through space while counting, being aware of each other in space.

(We’re used to walking and chewing gum at the same time. Now-a-days we are walking and texting at the same time.)

You are aware of your breathing, of your voice, of yourself, and of others in the space.

Now we have laid the foundation of ground through the simplicity of the action.

And it is that simple.

When emotions arise, I must reflect back on how that emotion is affecting my body, breath, speech and mind, and how all of these then change. Conversely, the body, breath, speech, and mind can change the emotion.
The lynchpin is the breath. It may not necessarily change what we are feeling in that moment, but it allows us to slow the process, to prevent the cascade into tumult.

Do not be afraid of or avoid the pause. Give your audience time to process. Allow your words to land and rest on them. In order for that to happen, there must be an arc of movement, (which is what you create).

Never underestimate the intelligence. You must be an excellent communicator and an excellent storyteller to take us on a journey and achieve a resolution. If you want to take someone for a ride, you have to get them on the bus. How are you going to get them on the bus? There is an excellent fisherman—bait the hook and reel in the fish. The superb fisherman knows how to get them.

**Exercise:**
An actor or a good presenter knows how to give the story away. Therefore, you must have the ability to paint a clear picture in your audience's mind so they never have to guess. You must paint that picture of a thousand words in their mind.

Pass out objects—small rocks, etc. Examine the object—using concentration, observation, clarity of focus. Now with your hands behind your back, do not tell us what the object is, but describe the object to us.

You must identify universal points of reference that everyone can relate to that will establish where you are and what you are doing.

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