



Small Biz Strategies
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By Dr. Marc Clark

"Really?" "You're kidding, right?" "You're not, well I accept." As I hung up my phone and with a broad smile racing across my face, I couldn't believe that I would be heading to Trinidad to be the keynote speaker at a hospitality conference. Trinidad was named by Christopher Columbus, who discovered this island during his third voyage to the New World in 1498. Cricket is the national sport (soccer ranks 2nd), and the multi-cultural democracy is a mixture of French, African, Asian, Indian, and Dutch ancestry. And did you know that Janelle Commissiong, the first black Miss Universe, who was crowned in 1977, was a Trinidadian?

I arrived a day early to ensure that I was at the top of my game when time came to making my presentation, but I was a bit perplexed as to how I would capture the attention of the audience that I was about to meet. Unknown to me, my host had scheduled a tour of the island, and how could I resist? Among the places that I visited included downtown Port of Spain, the capital city, Stollmeyers Castle, the national museum in Queen's Park, Fort George, the northern coast line and the Bamboo Cathedral. It was at this last location I had a revelation as to what I would say during my opening remarks at the conference. I shared the following story...

"One day a man planted a bamboo seedling. He cared for it, and each day he watered it and tended to it, making sure it had the proper sunlight to grow. After a year's time, the man saw that the plant had not grown at all, but he continued to water it, tend to it and make sure it was nourished by proper sunlight.

Again, after the second year the plant had not grown. He watered and tended it through the third year and the fourth. Suddenly, as if by magic, in the fifth it began growing. In fact, it grew two-and-a-half feet a day until in six weeks it was ninety feet tall.

The bamboo tree's growth is not magic. During its first five years, when it seems nothing is happening, it develops miles and miles of roots beneath the

Create an unforgettable meeting: Improve your level of communication as a presenter

ground. Though no growth is visible, the foundation is being established and strengthened.

The lesson is that there are times where we feel our lives are stagnating, or nothing is changing or no dramatic events are happening. In reality, those are the days we are building our own roots and growing strong for the days when growth hits us in spurts. This way our lives remain balanced."

There will come a time when you will be asked to present a subject or topic in front of your co-workers, company administration or perfect strangers. The size of the group may vary but the technique in communicating with them won't. You'll tense up and begin to have butterflies circling in your stomach. You don't know if you can do it, but the truth of the matter is that things will be well once you get those butterflies to fly in unison!

Below are five recommendations for enhancing and strengthening your general presentation and communication skills. At first you might find these a bit challenging to employ all the tips at the same time, but to the degree that you do, you will become more positively received by your audience.

Be natural and be yourself. Project to your audience that you are comfortable with yourself and with the situation. You possess the inner strength to do this. Give yourself a positive self-talk and let your character of confidence fill the room. Your audience will begin to connect with you immediately. Whether you think you will succeed or think that you will fail, you're correct, so lean towards the positive.

Encourage participation. Meeting attendees are not just recipients of information; they are an integral part of the sharing and learning process. They should be encouraged to ask questions and to contribute to the meetings discussion. A good presenter will use a wide variety of questions to draw meeting participants into a verbal exchange. Types of questions that could be used include: specific, general, open-ended, rebound and redirect. Meeting participants will get the feeling that you truly value them and what they have to say if you provide them with an venue to participate and encourage them to do so.

Practice, practice, practice your personal presentation style. Because a person's verbal, vocal and visual delivery have such a large impact on her or his success as a communicator, it is vital for a presenter to develop an appropriate personal presentation style and to use that style consistently. The only way that one becomes better at

presenting in front of others is to present in front of others. Become mindful of body language, facial expressions, grammar, voice pitch, rate of speech, tone, word inflection, personal mannerisms and using word fillers such as, "alright, okay, um, and ah."

Become an active listener. Your listening skills as a presenter are just as important as your speaking skills, and sometimes even greater. When meeting participants take the time to ask questions, they are seeking answers to specific concerns or interest. A good place to start when being addressed with a question is to provide the participant with your undivided attention, showing strong eye contact and presenting body language and facial expressions that expresses interest. The manner in which you deal with questions projects the level of interest and value you place on both the question and participant.

When appropriate insert humor. When people enjoy what they are doing, they are more likely to become motivated to participate in that thing they are doing. Research has dis-

covered that appropriate use of humor can increase meeting participant attention to and retention of information. When considering the use of humor in a meeting here are some rules to follow:

Humor should make a point and be attached to the information that is being presented.

If you have the least concern that the humor you are going to use may make someone uncomfortable or embarrassed, humiliated or self-conscious don't use it.

- Stay away from telling religious, political or sexual jokes.

- If you are going to tell a joke on somebody, make that somebody you.

- Be mindful that an accepted humorous behavior in one culture, could be unacceptable in another, and

- Always use humor in moderation.

Note: A bit of trivia...It is presumed that the novels *Robinson Crusoe* and *Treasure Island* are based on the fascinating islands of Trinidad and Tobago.

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