

Effective Speaking and Presentation

Selling Ideas, Gathering Support, Motivating Audiences

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Effective communication skills are essential for program managers – most of their activities involve the selling of ideas, gathering of support, or motivation of the program office staff and contractors, and often include speaking opportunities with the Department of Defense (DoD), other Services, or Congress and its staffers. Certainly, public speaking is entirely in the realm of possibility for today's program managers in carrying out their day-to-day activities and responsibilities.

To be effective, program managers must be masters of the three skill areas that most affect delivery and acceptance of ideas: audio, visual, and the feelings of both the speaker and the audience.¹ Given today's business environment of accelerated time management and minimal opportunities for actual contact, delivery of information in the most effective and efficient means possible helps to ensure the correct message is delivered, understood, and appropriate feedback obtained. Additionally, it minimizes confusion and wasted effort due to misinterpretation of the data when both parties are *succinct* and are able to feed back the message transmitted.

PROFILOR Assessment Reveals Strengths, Weaknesses

PROFILOR is a teaching tool that affords students the opportunity to receive 360-degree feedback from supervisors and peers on 24 critical skills required of program managers. It is administered to all students attending the Advanced Program Management Course, Defense Sys-

tems Management College (DSMC). When properly administered and acted upon, PROFILOR allows students to focus and target some of their learning on those activities that can have enormous benefit back in the workplace.

Revealingly, my PROFILOR results indicated that effective speaking was an area for personal improvement judged by my peers as well as my supervisor.² This deficiency in my professional bearing is a hindrance to my career and a detriment to any acquisition effort that I may encounter in my future career. The PROFILOR suggested two primary areas upon which to focus my efforts in correcting this shortfall:

- Speaking with enthusiasm and expressiveness.
- Speaking effectively in front of a group.

In the time allotted for the Program Management and Leadership curriculum of the Advanced Program Management Course, I worked to improve those areas by employing materials available in DSMC's Learning Resource Center (LRC), outside reading, suggested "practicing" techniques during class exercises, and while teaching a graduate-level college course part-time.

Speaking and the Use of Language

According to Broadcaster Earl Nightengale, "When a person doesn't know how to use the language, he or she will be forever barred from entering the sizeable and enjoyable world of privilege ... Poor speech cannot be hidden away. It's

there continually, as obvious as a cigar butt in the punchbowl."³

Dr J. Mitchell Perry, a consultant for effective communications, states that if our voice is an instrument, then language is the music.⁴ Accordingly, we must practice with our voice just as we would any musical instrument, and then master the language we put through that instrument. While most of us consider ourselves articulate and comfortable with our mother tongue, it is readily apparent that in professional speaking the rules change somewhat and we are judged as an authority based on our use of language.⁵

Tone, Inflection, Volume, Pace

The first thing an audience will notice when the speaker begins is the tone and inflection of the speaker's voice. While most people understand that a monotone dialogue is disastrous to a message, few of us consciously vary the volume and pace of our speech to preclude such a delivery. However, in a formal setting the importance of voice is amplified and every aspect placed under scrutiny either intentionally or unintentionally. By increasing and decreasing volume on important words, speeding up or slowing down the tempo of our conversation, and effective use of pausing, a speaker can force the audience to adjust their listening skills to match the new pace, thus preventing listeners from becoming too comfortable with what's happening and from going into automatic listening mode. An added advantage is that it requires the listeners to remain more attentive, which, in turn, improves the

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chances that they'll actually hear and understand what is being said.

The Message

What is being said is equally important as how it's being said. Several authors suggested reading as the best way to broaden one's vocabulary and to become comfortable with a variety of words. Another suggestion was to read aloud not only to synchronize the brain and the tongue, but also to become comfortable saying the new words as well as understanding what they mean. A broader vocabulary obviously does not mean attempting to astound the audience with verbiage

and verbosity, but an articulate and eloquent speaker commands more respect than one who appears to be stuck in middle-school English class.

Fillers

Most of us have phrases or words with which we are comfortable and use without realizing how distracting they can be to our message. Most of us easily recognize the "you know" and "umm" space fillers, but other words such as "always" and "never" may evoke subconscious negative responses and torpedo the idea we are trying to convey. Other phrases such as "why don't you," which implies someone isn't doing something correctly now and requires action on their part, and "to be hon-

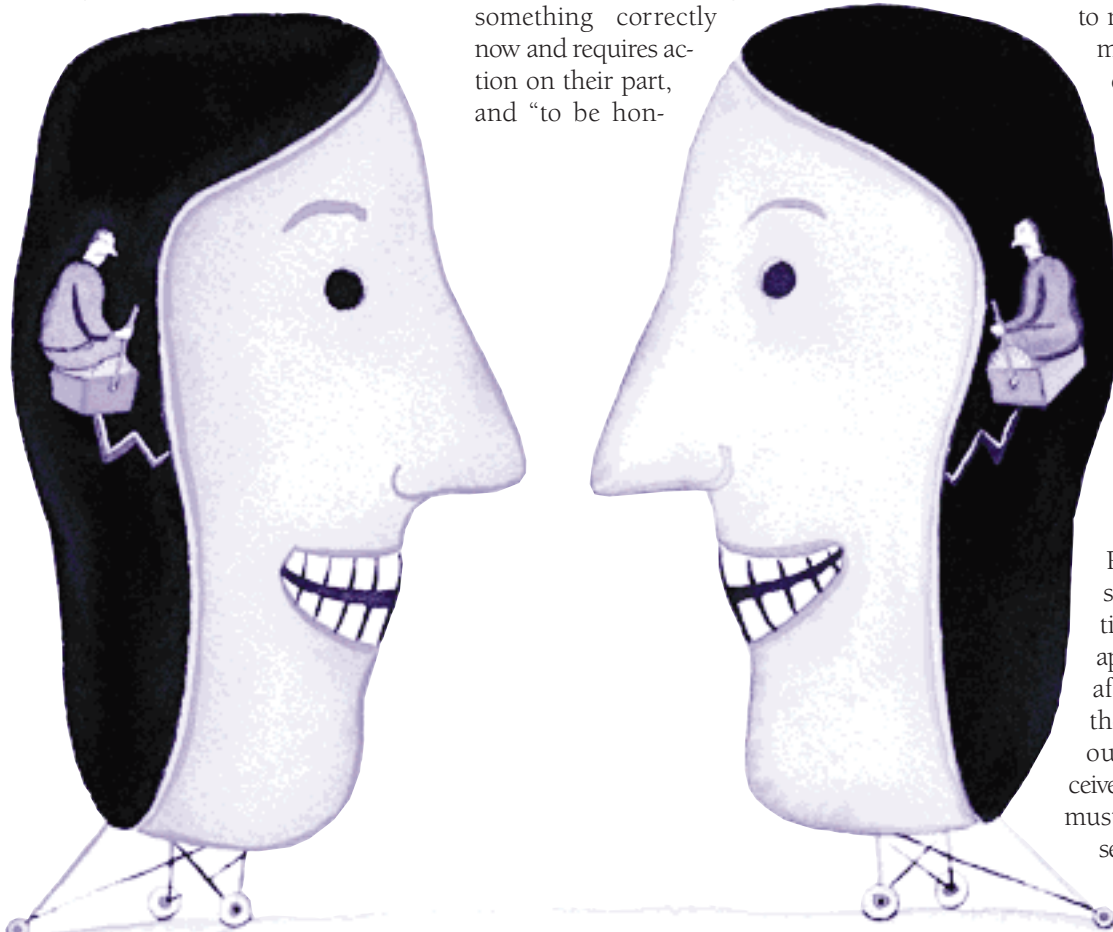
est," which implies the speaker hasn't been honest up to this point, can evoke the same reaction.

By becoming more aware of what is being said and changing to words that engender support and understanding or deflect hostility, effective speakers will make the audience feel more responsive and eager to listen to their message rather than retreating while they form a defensive response.

Image

Although I've concentrated on the speaking skills in the first part of the article, due to its immediate relevancy to my PROFILOR assessment, a speaker's physical appearance — audience's first impression — is of equal importance. While some aspects of our appearance such as skin color, gender, and height cannot be changed, we can make the most of the first impression — overall image and projection of that image.⁶

Physical appearance such as clothing selection, hair, and even the appearance of our hands affects how we, and thereby the authority of our message, are perceived. The type of clothing must be appropriate to the setting and the audience,



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—Earl Nightingale

fit appropriately, and demonstrate awareness of basic grooming requirements (neat, clean, and in good repair). These elements are obvious. To address a congressional staff, one's dress should be conservative and professional in keeping with the institution. Conversely, if addressing a student research group on a field day to a museum, the attire should reflect the more casual aspect of the environment. Often program managers will be required to engage an audience with which they are unfamiliar.

A little research is required to make the most of the image projected. Speakers should inquire as to what is considered normal dress for the audience, especially in today's environment of business casual. By dressing inappropriately, speakers can inadvertently "advertise" that they are not "one of them" (intended audience) or are obviously out of touch with who and what the audience is as an organization. Doing so immediately establishes a negative image the moment such speakers appear on stage.

Leadership Skills and Business Etiquette

Also included in my research were lessons on today's business etiquette and necessary overall skills for leaders. Commanding respect as program managers is even more difficult if we are not recognizable as leaders. Even if our speech is brilliant, our appearance impeccable, and our command of the language truly impressive, our message will be lost if we have already offended the audience and placed ourselves in an unconstructive light. Hence, the ability to garner respect and operate in the realms of upper management is an important skill for the aspiring PM.

Leading is Not Inborn

While we intuitively understand that even leaders at the highest organizational levels were not born knowing how to conduct themselves in the upper echelons of business, it is reassuring to know that no one is born knowing how to be an executive. Although learning the skills necessary to lead varies in degree of difficulty, depending on personality and environment, each of today's leaders had

to analyze their own behavior and study, integrate, and internalize new skills commensurate with their rising level of responsibility and authority. Especially helpful to me was the realization that although my peers believed I needed improvement, so did every other leader who came before me — and if they could learn leadership skills, then I could as well.

Women in the Workplace

The review of etiquette and modern leadership was particularly illuminating as it pointed out how the changes in our society have affected the way we conduct business.⁷ The advent of women (especially) into the workforce has required changes in how we greet each other, how we interact on a professional level, and even how we address our business correspondence.

Workforce Diversity, Conflict Management

Leadership skills have changed to include working with a diverse workforce based not only on gender but also on race, ethnicity, beliefs, and in some instances educational backgrounds. Conflict management has become an important skill, especially the ability to discuss conflicts without inflaming the issue, to achieve a mutually acceptable solution to a contentious issue, and to preserve group cohesiveness in order to achieve maximum effectiveness. Again, the use and application of language appropriate to the situation assists a leader in negating the conflict.

International Environment

Operating effectively within the international environment is becoming increasingly important in today's environment. As the global economy progresses, defense contractors merge and employ various subcontractors that may not be American. Successful program managers must be able to maneuver effectively in this culturally and ethically challenging environment.

In my review, I identified several key areas as potential pitfalls, especially for a woman interfacing with male counterparts from a different country, such as the proper way to greet a customer or

peer both physically and verbally, acceptance of gifts, and appropriate dinner etiquette. The primary lesson that emerged from my review, however, is simple: use good judgment and common courtesy before engaging in international business relations. Be sure to do some informal research on foreign nations being visited; conversely, become familiar with the customs and culture of any foreign visitors or dignitaries before their arrival.

Bottom Line — Communications is an Absolutely Essential Skill

The ability to speak in a group setting and convey a message is an essential skill in the business environment. As a technical advisor to an acquisition (contracting) organization at the Air Staff level, I often must convey technical ideas and concepts in easily understandable terms. To obtain support for the various electronic commerce activities of the Air Force, I must make the transition from "techno-geek-speak" to "understanding" in a manner that encourages support and buy-in from the audience. The audience may range from a base-level organization all the way through to DoD or congressional staffers. I must adjust my image and speaking skills to match the audience without either insulting them or losing the message.

Practical Application

For immediate feedback on my progress toward this effort, I used a representative sampling of 16 students from a course on Information Technology that I teach to graduate students at the Joint Military Intelligence College. These students are not information technologists and are not familiar with the terms and concepts that I address during the 10-week course.

To evaluate the students' level of understanding, on the first day of class I gave them a pre-test. As the class progressed, I obtained feedback each class period by conducting a review of the previous class meeting — this provided information on the effectiveness of my teaching techniques. As the course progressed, it appeared I became more effective in conveying complex ideas, as more of the stu-

dents were able to answer the review questions. Additionally, their enthusiasm for the course increased, as I was able to convey the importance and possibilities of information technology relative to their profession. Student presentations on emerging technologies from this group were significantly more encompassing, more drastic (“ethereal” technologies), and more thorough than those from previous classes.⁸

The review of books, tapes, and audio CDs during the time allotted for the Advanced Program Management Course provided significant food for thought as well as valuable suggestions on ways to more effectively communicate with my audience – and hopefully correct the professional shortfall identified by my peers in the PROFILOR assessment.

Editor’s Note: The author welcomes questions or comments on this article. Contact her at carolyn.lee@pentagon.af.mil.

ENDNOTES

1. J. Mitchell Perry, Dr., “Winning Communication Skills: Four Keys to Personal and Professional Success,” Audio CDs, Jim Perry Corporation.
2. PROFILOR Assessment conducted July 2000; results obtained September 2000, DSMC.
3. Quote from Broadcaster Earl Nightingale in *Earl Nightingale’s Greatest Discovery*, CD 3.
4. Quote from Broadcaster Earl Nightingale in *Earl Nightingale’s Greatest Discovery*, CD 2.
5. Toogood, Granville N., *The Articulate Executive: Learn to Look, Act, and Sound Like a Leader*, McGraw-Hill: New York, 1996, p. 16.
6. White, Julie, “Image and Self-Projection,” LRC, DSMC, Oct. 5, 2000, Video-tape.
7. Sourcecom, “Business Image and Etiquette,” LRC, DSMC, Oct. 5, 2000 (four Audiotapes).
8. Actual tracking of grades was the “tool” required by DSMC for this Program Management and Leadership (PML) activity.

Dr. Mark E. Nissen Named Winner of Naval Postgraduate School 2000 Menneken Faculty Award

Dr. Mark E. Nissen, Manager of the DAU External Acquisition Research Program, was named Winner of the 2000 Menneken Faculty Award for Excellence in Scientific Research. Nissen's award was announced Dec. 15, 2000, at Monterey, Calif., during a ceremony honoring the graduates at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS). The Menneken represents the highest research award given at NPS, and competition is campus-wide. Nissen's selection as this year's winner is particularly significant, given that the award has never before gone to an acquisition faculty member.



The Menneken Award recognizes recent, highly meritorious research having identifiable impact on Navy or other DoD technology. The award is open to all faculty professor positions. Each year, a committee of distinguished faculty members solicits nominations for the Menneken. Nissen was cited for his “outstanding contribution to knowledge systems, for his ability to demonstrate to DoD and Department of Navy the applicability of his theoretical work in military settings, and for enlisting student involvement in his research work.”

Professor Shu Liao, Associated Chair for Research in the Systems Management Department, NPS, nominated Nissen for the award:

“Despite his relatively junior status at the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), Professor Nissen is a very promising academic with an already-impressive record of research and publication that directly benefits the Navy and DoD ... [Dr. Nissen] was the first to develop and employ measurement-driven inference for intelligent, automated reasoning about process innovation. His Knowledge-based Organizational Process Redesign system was demonstrated through application to redesign key procurement and contracting processes in a major aviation command of the Navy ... Professor Nissen then further defined the state of the art through research and development of the Intelligent Mall, a multi-agent system to automate and support supply chain processes for the military ... Professor Nissen then adapted this agent technology and integrated his research with novel economics work from Game Theory and Market Theory ... focused on developing agent-based markets for automatically matching sailors with jobs through a Web environment ... Professor Nissen is currently extending his research to focus on the Navy's new concept of knowledge-centric warfare.”

As manager of the DAU External Acquisition Research Program, Nissen is a researcher first and bureaucrat third. This helps the program attract some of the best researchers in the world. Relevant information about Nissen's research is available online at <http://web.nps.navy.mil/~menissen/>.