



Barbara Busey

## TOP TEN TIPS FOR STANDING OUT

Since 1990, I have been training people how to be more effective, compelling speakers. Many of my workshop clients claim they never have to actually give speeches—so all this stuff I teach doesn't *really* apply to them... Oh, but I beg to differ. The remarkable thing about having powerful presentation skills is that they “trickle down” to all of your interpersonal communications, whether in meetings, interviews, or phone calls. So mastering the tough skills of standing up and standing out in front of a crowd also means you will have the ability to stand out in all your interactions.

When you stand out, people are drawn to you. You exude a quality that makes a positive first impression, builds positive relationships, and has pay-off in terms of human relations, loyalty, and leadership potential.

Over the years, I've coached thousands of people on the dynamics of how they present themselves. And that experience has given me the opportunity to clearly see what traits really make a difference in someone's presence. I can state with confidence that there are a handful of qualities that consistently do give you *stand out* status. Doesn't matter how smart you are or talented or attractive—universally, these attributes can make you the kind of person that other people want to know, work with and do business with.

### Here are my Top Ten Stand Out Tips:

**1. LOOK 'EM IN THE EYE.** In our culture, eye communication is correlated with trust and credibility. What do you think about those who can't look at you while talking to you? At best, you might assume a lack of confidence or knowledge about what they're talking about. At worst, you may think they're lying. Neither are particularly desirable

assessments! And turn it around. Suppose you're the one talking and your listener is not looking at you. How does that make you feel? At best, you might feel like you're not being listened to; at worst, it sends a signal of disinterest and disrespect. That's certainly not conducive to good communication. Ironically, “eye communication” insures you're not having “I communication.” The ability to look someone in the eye—whether you're talking or listening—conveys an interest in the other party, which makes that person feel special, appreciated, listened to. Eye communication is a strong connecting behavior. It instills confidence and trust.

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**2. ASK, DON'T TELL.** This can be a transformational strategy. Keep this amazing irony in mind. People will like you more, think you're smarter, savvier, nicer and more interesting if *you* show interest in *them*. If you can believe and actually act upon the half-tongue-in-cheek saying, “It's not all about you,” you will find your interactions will be much more rewarding and results-oriented. The ability to show interest, concern, and a sort of wide-eyed wonder in others is the kind of skill that will win friends, build trust, and make people think positively and warmly about you.

The primary way you can express this interest is to learn to ask questions. Resist the temptation to interrupt someone's story, or dominate a conversation, or play “I can top that” responses. Give the other person room to talk, express, expound. Here's the irony. The more you give him the “floor,” the more wonderful he'll think you are. We all love people who seem to like us!

Remember, no one cares how much you know until they know how much you care. This ability to ask questions and show interest effectively conveys that caring.

### 3. LISTEN ACTIVELY

I'm not talking here about what's known as "evaluative listening," when you listen to the other person but are "evaluating" what you're hearing so you can prepare your response ("Yes, but..." or "Oh, that reminds me..."). Active listening is a very intentional, strategic skill where you're able to fulfill two very basic human needs—to be heard and to be understood. It involves three steps, which I like to capture with the acronym **EAR**:

The ultimate validation a speaker can receive is to be heard and understood.

- **Engage the speaker.** Show the speaker that you're listening by looking her in the eye, nodding occasionally, showing appropriate facial expressions (a smile for good news, concern for distressing news). Keep in mind that total silence does not imply listening. Be sure to give vocal signals such as: "mm-hmm," "yes," "really?," "I see," etc.
- **Actually hear the message.** This means you have to pay attention. Concentrate not only on the content, but also the intent, which is what the speaker might mean or feel. You might repeat key words or main ideas to stay on track. Taking notes is also a great tool for capturing the message.
- **Respond appropriately.** This third step is the key to effectively wielding the power of listening. This is what lets your speaker know you really heard and understood and are engaged in the conversation. It can take three forms:
  1. **Paraphrase.** Repeat the gist of the message. It is generally preceded by, "So what you're saying is..." or "In other words,..." or "If I understand you correctly,..." This lets the speaker know you did in fact hear what he said.
  2. **Probe.** This is a good technique to diffuse the tension that comes with disagreement.

After the speaker has made a statement, instead of launching into your rebuttal, you probe for more information. "Why do you think that?" "Can you give me some examples?" This lets the speaker know you're interested in hearing her side, which in turn will make her more likely to listen to your side.

3. **Reflect** back feelings. This is the finer-tuned skill of interpreting how the speaker feels about what she said. "You must be so proud," or "That must have made you angry," are examples of reflecting. This is the ultimate validation a speaker can receive: being heard and being understood.

### 4. PROJECT, UM, VOCAL POWER

Ironically, this is one of those strategies that's not so "stand out" in and of itself as it is glaringly detracting if you don't practice it. This is one of these tips that's easier to tell you what *not* to do:

#### Don't:

- **use fillers.** Have you ever, you know, listened to someone who, like, talked and you know, while they, um, were speaking, uh, they filled their speech, with, like, words that, uh, had no meaning? These "nonwords" serve only to distract. And they make you sound tentative and unsure. I believe there is no one more significant thing you could do to improve your vocal power than reducing the number of fillers you use.
- **speak in a monotone.** Interest in the voice is accomplished with appropriate emphasis on words. But the killer is the monotone. Without any interest in your voice, you can quickly turn off listeners, who are more inclined to fall asleep than hang on your every word.
- **mumble.** Your mother, as usual, was right. Not only is a mumblor hard to understand, but the impression is of someone who doesn't know what they're talking about. Articulate clearly, speak up, pronounce those consonants.

Any of these vocal vagaries is a huge power and credibility detractor.

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## 5. ATTITUDE = ALTITUDE.

The better your attitude, the higher you'll soar. Positive people are better liked, more listened to, more appreciated, and more successful influencers and persuaders. Everyone says they don't like to be around negative people. But then if nobody likes it, who are all the folks with the dark, depressing, downer dispositions? Think twice before you diss someone behind their back, before you express that complaint, before you bemoan your fate or cast blame or find fault. Think positive, find the good, behave as if you love life, and people will be drawn to you like magnets.

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## 6. WATCH YOUR POSTURE

How you sit and stand conveys volumes about you. And the rules are different for each posture. When you're standing, note that tall, symmetrical posture conveys more presence than slouched, leaning (on one leg) posture. By symmetrical, I mean if you were to draw a line down the center of the body, it would be fairly balanced on both sides. Weight would be evenly distributed on both feet. Arms would be relaxed and open, mirroring each other. Symmetry is more poised than asymmetry when you're standing.



On the other hand, when you're seated, it's a different story. Try to picture someone sitting in a perfectly symmetrical



posture: both feet on the floor, legs together; her hands clasped in her lap, or even with each one resting on the arm of her chair. Does that symmetrical position look comfortable and at ease? Picture instead the person sitting with her legs crossed, her left arm resting on the arm

of the chair, and her right elbow propped on the other arm of the chair and the hand held up to her chin. Can you see how that conveys more comfort and ease?

I don't know why, but the bottom line is when you're standing, symmetrical posture has more power. But when you're seated, recognize that asymmetrical posture, such as with legs crossed or hands somewhat off-balance, has more confidence. Those guidelines will give you "stand out" posture.

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## 7. SHOW ENTHUSIASM

Ancient indigenous people recognized and revered the "power of presence." One of their beliefs was that you exhibit presence by "choosing to be present and visible, showing up energetically." Note the word *energetically*.

Energy, or enthusiasm, is a powerful stand out attribute. It's important because if you can't get excited

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about your product, your service, yourself—then I certainly can't. By conveying a conviction and passion for what you do, your presence is powerful, motivating, inspiring, and adds value. Enthusiasm sells.

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## 8. GET A GRIP

The quality of your handshake is a powerful first impression. It says volumes about your sense of confidence, your friendliness, your character. Let's talk about a good handshake:

The "proper" handshake form is "web to web." The web of your hand is space between your thumb and your forefinger. So when two hands meet, they should connect at their webs, not stop at the fingers. The backs of the hands are parallel to the walls (not the floor or ceiling). You wrap your fingers around the other person's hand, as much as size difference will allow, and *grasp it firmly*. **Firm** is the operative word here—you want to use enough pressure to convey that you have a sense of substance to you. Then there is some pumping action at the elbow or perhaps the shoulder.

And remember, this tip applies to women as well as men.

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## 9. SMILE

• A smile is one of the simplest nonverbal expressions we can make, yet it can pay enormous dividends. To be greeted with a genuine smile goes a long way towards creating good will and setting an encounter off on the best foot. I'm sure you're familiar with the old adage, "It takes more muscles to frown than it does to smile." Well, I'm not sure I agree with that. Think about it. Smile muscles have to work against gravity. That takes a little more effort than letting the corners of your mouth turn down.

A pleasant facial expression is like a magnet—it draws people to you and makes them feel positively about you. It's such an important first impression because it sets the tone for your interaction.

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## 10. SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF.

• Okay, I'm not talking about the little irritations and minor vexations of life. Rephrased, I'd ask you to consider that "little things mean a lot." What are the little things? Oh, things like writing a note—of thanks or sympathy or congratulations; doing a favor for someone, especially unasked; saying please and thank you; performing random acts of kindness; remembering someone's birthday; being reliable, accountable, and responsible; returning phone or email messages promptly; turning your cell phone off in public; being punctual; not texting at the luncheon meeting; being generous with praise; taking ownership for problems; giving credit where credit is due; remembering and using people's names. These are just some of the little things you can do to make a big impression—that will make you stand out.

**Barbara Busey**, president of Presentation Dynamics, teaches business professionals how to be more compelling speakers. She has been training, speaking and writing on the dynamics of presentations since 1990. Barbara is the author of the book *Stand Out When You Stand Up—An A to Z Guide to Powerful Presentations*; and producer of the audio CD, *The Compelling Speaker*, and the DVD, *How to be a More Dynamic S.P.E.A.K.E.R.*

Barbara is also the founder of the **Compelling Speaker Certification**, a turnkey system—complete with training content & technique, business strategies and marketing guidelines—that positions professional communicators to make a living training other business professionals to become more compelling speakers.

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