

A Review of Painless Presentations: The Proven, Stress-Free Way to Successful Public Speaking

–Reviewed by M.S.Rao¹

WHAT ARE THE DETAILS OF THE BOOK?

“There are two types of speakers. Those that are nervous and those that are liars.” - Mark Twain

If you want to learn the ropes of presentation, you read this book. If you want to be equipped with creative tools and techniques about presentation, you read this book. If you want an international authoritative resource on presentations, you read this book. If you want to beat your anxiety during presentations and grow as a successful speaker, you read this. Lenny Laskowski’s book titled, Painless Presentations: The Proven, Stress-Free Way to Successful Public Speaking contains 197 pages with 8 chapters detailing the tools and techniques you need to possess to deliver an effective, dynamic, and engaging presentation.

WHAT IS WORTHWHILE?

Lenny Laskowski needs no introduction. He is an internationally known professional speaker and the president of LJL Seminars with 35 years of experience. He is passionate about public speaking and wants to convert non-speakers to speakers, ordinary speakers to good speakers, and good speakers to great speakers. Hence, you can imagine the takeaways from this book.

WHAT IS INSIDE?

This book contains 8 chapters with an index. The chapter 1 speaks the seven aspects of speaking; chapter 2 analyses gathering information and materials; chapter 3 outlines the structure of presentation; chapter 4 shows the use of visual aids; chapter 5 explains various learning styles; chapter

¹ International Leadership Guru Founder, MSR Leadership Consultants, India.

Email: profmsr7@gmail.com

6 sends nonverbal messages; chapter 7 discusses handling the questions; and the chapter 8 concludes with delivering the effective speech.

Your presentation's structure should include three major components: introduction, body and conclusion. As a professional speaker, you would always analyze your audience and determine their specific needs and objectives. Your speech preparation should include the nine Ps: Prior proper preparation prevents poor performance of the person putting on the presentation.

Lenny elaborates the acronym for AUDIENCE as analysis, understanding, demographics, interest, environment, needs, customize and expectations. He coins a mnemonic device - INSPIRE where "I" stands for importance; "N" stands for needs; "S" stands for success; "P" stands for passion, "I" stands for influence; "R" stands for results; and "E" stands for enthusiasm. He provides diagrams about the bad and good physical arrangements such as Classroom style, U-shaped style, Theater or lecture style, and Dinner style within the presentation hall.

Lenny lists out some of the other classic symptoms associated with speaking anxiety as follows: Accelerated or increased heart rate; Trembling or shaky hands; Sweaty palms; Difficulty in breathing; Tingling or numbness in our hand and fingers; Nausea or stomach sickness; Chest pains; Shaky voice; Dry mouth or cotton mouth; Dizziness; Feeling of choking; and Hot or cold flashes. He outlines Monroe's five step motivated sequence as follows: Step 1: Get attention; Step 2: Establish a need; Step 3: Satisfy that need; Step 4: Visualize the future; and Step 5: Take action/actualization. He shares dozen deadly dangers which are the reasons for poor presentations. They are: no real clear objectives; poor preparation; no script; fuzzy opening; loss of focus during the body of the presentation; lack of concern about the audience; poor visual aids; weak evidence; poor delivery; negative attitude; anticlimactic ending; and no follow-up.

Lenny provides physical techniques to help reduce speaking anxiety:

1. Don't fight nervousness directly. Accept it and ease your way through it.
2. Take a brisk walk before your presentation.
3. Do not sit with your legs crossed, because one leg could cramp up or fall asleep.
4. Do some deep breathing exercises for about two to five minutes. This will help release endorphins, which are among the brain chemicals known as neurotransmitters. They function to transmit electrical signals within the nervous system.

5. Say to yourself, "Let's go!"

Lenny emphasizes the importance of transitions. He says transitions are an integral part of a smooth-flowing presentation, yet many speakers forget to plan their transitions. The following are some examples of transitions that work well:

1. Bridge words: Examples include further, meanwhile, however, in addition, consequently, and finally.
2. Trigger transition: Use the same word or idea twice. For example, "a similar example is .."
3. A question: "How many of you ..?"
4. A flashback: "Do you remember when I said ..?"
5. Point-by-point: "there are three points .. The first one is .. The second one is .." and so on.
6. Visual aids: sometimes it may be appropriate to add a visual between your visual aids for the sole purpose of providing a "visual" transition. Many times just a blank screen, as is used when using slides, works well.
7. Pausing: even a simple pause, when effectively used, can act as a transition.
8. Physical movement: the speaker should move or change location of his or her body when changing to a new idea or thought.
9. A story; the use of a story is very effective as a transition. It is also used to reinforce any points your just made.
10. PEP formula (point, example, point): this is a very common format used and also can be combined with the use of a story.

Lenny unfolds that there are three common mistakes presenters make with respect to transitions: They do not use transitions at all; they use transitions that are too short; and they use the same transition throughout the presentation and this becomes boring after a while. He advises two ideal locations where humor can be easily added are at the beginning of the presentation and at the end or at the transition between major sections of the presentation. He unfurls that if individuals aren't looking at you during presentation, they may not be listening either. Their reasons may include one or more of these factors:

Problem: They may not be able to hear you.

Solution: If you are not using a microphone, speak louder and note if that works.

Problem: They may be bored.

Solution: use some humor, increase your vocal variety or add powerful gestures or body movement.

Problem: They may be puzzled.

Solution: repeat and/or rephrase what you have just said.

Lenny suggests taking feedback at the end of every session and implores the readers to introspect on some of the following questions:

1. How could I have improved this presentation?
2. What didn't I like about my last presentation?
3. What were my good points?
4. What questions did my listeners ask? (these are clues that suggest that the information may need to be presented differently.)
5. Should I revamp the presentation?
6. Do I need to review a section of this book before preparing for my next presentation?
7. While watching excellent presenters and observing their good qualities, what do I notice about their use of visuals?

Lenny offers tools to adopt when you are the visual aid: Do not have a sloppy appearance. Dress professionally and at least as well as the best dressed member of your audience. Don't bury your hand in your pocket. Do not play with the change in your pocket or with your jewelry. Do not hide behind the lectern. Use your hands to describe as much as you can. Always face your audience, not the visual aid, when you speak. Never turn your back to the audience.

Lenny lists out seven most common learning styles. They are visual or spatial; auditory or aural; verbal or linguistic; physical or kinesthetic; logical or mathematical; social or interpersonal; and solitary or intrapersonal. He shares the characteristics of solitary learners as follows:

- Like working alone and being independent.
- Usually avoid crowds.
- Like attending self-help seminars and workshops.
- Have read all the self-help books.
- Prefer to work on problems by going somewhere quiet to work.
- Tend to spend too much time trying to solve the problem.
- Like setting goals.
- Know what they want to do with their lives.
- Feel a need to always know their direction in life.
- Always request time to think things over.
- Like to think about things that will get back to people.

Lenny unfolds an individual's personality profile is identified along four dimensions as per The Myers-Briggs type Indicator such as orientation to life (Extroverted/Introverted); perception (Sensing/Intuitive); decision

making (Thinking/Feeling); and attitude toward the outside world (Judgment/Perception). He cautions that you cannot be expected to develop a different presentation style for each personality type; however, you should strive to use and incorporate a variety of learning styles during your presentations.

Lenny shows the benefits of effective physical action such as they make messages more meaningful; add punctuation to your presentations; and help relieve nervous tension. He groups gestures in four categories such as descriptive gestures; emphatic gestures; suggestive gestures; and prompting gestures. He investigates some common faults of inexperienced or ineffective speakers as: gripping or leaning on the lectern; tapping fingers biting or licking lips; playing with coins or jewelry; frowning, adjusting hair or clothing; and head wagging.

Lenny provides tools to diffuse hostility as follows: Make sure you have been understood. Be poised and positive. Eliminate conflicting ideas by illustrating the commonality of the audience's goals and your goals. Never become argumentative. Allay yourself with positive symbols. Controversial issues always involve symbols, and the side most effectively associated with positive symbols-such as law, economic security, and conversation-will be more likely to prevail. Try to relate your side to emotional symbols as a powerful aid to your persuasive appeal. Be truthful. Play it straight, even if your position seems momentarily weakened. Be friendly. Always control your temper. Be fair. Don't place your hands on your hips and don't point at the audience. Avoid condescending phrases.

For successful handling of questions Lenny shares five-step process:

Step 1: Listen to the entire question. Don't only listen to the words, but also watch the person's demeanor while he or she asks the question. Notice the person's body language.

Step 2: Repeat the entire question.

Step 3: Pause for a moment. Collect your thoughts, smile, and take deep breath.

Step 4: Answer or respond to the question. Respond to the question as professionally as you can, maintaining eye contact with the audience member who asked you the question.

Step 5: After you have responded to a question, you should bridge to the next question. You create this bridge by asking the person if you answered the question. You can say this in many different ways. "Does that help you?" "Is that the type of you were looking for?" and so on. Once the person says "yes" or nods in agreement, this gives you permission to

move on to the next question. If the person says “no,” ask him or her to rephrase the question. Repeat the process as described earlier until the person is satisfied with your response.

Lenny asserts that anyone can give a speech, but certainly not everyone can give an effective presentation. Public speaking is not a gift you are born with. Fortunately, giving effective presentations is a skill you can acquire. He concludes with final techniques on presentation as follows:

1. Find your objective.
2. Know your audience.
3. Be totally prepared.
4. Hook your audience instantly.
5. Plan your gestures and body movements.
6. Use good delivery techniques.
7. Cite personal examples whenever possible. Use personal stories to support your messages and key points.
8. Maintain a sharp focus.
9. Speak persuasively.
10. Keep a positive attitude.
11. Add impact with visuals.
12. Follow up for success.

WHAT ARE THE TAKEAWAYS?

Lenny highlights various minor things that make a huge positive difference if we take them seriously. Here are the takeaways from the book:

- Be clear on what message you want to convey to your audiences.
- Your audience needs to believe you really care about them.
- Most presentations fail because the message is unclear. Your intended message may not agree with the message your audience received.
- The wrong presentation delivered to the right audience is just as ineffective as the right presentation delivered to the wrong audience.
- To become an effective presenter, it is essential that you get rid of your mask and share your true feelings with your audience.
- Speak from the heart and speak to the soul.
- Quit while you’re ahead. Don’t exceed the allotted time. Keep an eye on the clock or have someone signal you. Be prepared to give appropriate closing remarks.

WHAT IS THE RECOMMENDATION?

Lenny Laskowski is an international expert in public speaking and he effectively integrated his rich experience and provided several sutras of speaking to the readers. He did tons of research on the topic and authored this book. He is a genius in delivering presentations, and a master trainer in public speaking.

It is a widely researched book with great ideas and insights. It is anecdotal, and lively with examples and illustrations. It contains visuals to reach out to the audiences. You can also see the visual demonstrations by Lenny in the book showing right body language postures. It is written in a simple language and conversational tone. This is a good resource for presenters who want excel as professional presenters.

The book provides A to Z of public speaking. Anyone who wants to learn about the length and breadth of public speaking this is the best book under the sun on the earth. If you are passionate about public speaking, read this book more than once. It will change the way you think about presentations, converts your anxiety into energy, and equips you with tool and techniques to excel as a great speaker.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Product Details
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