

# Rehearsal's not for sissies

Once had a colleague who said that everyone is in two businesses: their own, and show biz. He didn't go far enough.

Every business is show business. Business would be impossible without theater. Theater artists have the ability to believe in imaginary circumstances and act so the audience believes them. A business speaker must also believe in her product, idea, or service—and speak so as to create belief in others.

As a business speaker, if you are lucky enough to believe in your message, you have a better chance of making others believe—not guaranteed, but a better chance. If you don't believe in your product, you've got to scratch and claw your way into belief. How? How do you hoist yourself into contagious belief? The simplest way is to rehearse.

## Find the reasoning. Find the words. Find the attitude.

Find the gestures that make you feel connected with yourself and the subject. If you're not turning yourself on when you talk you're turning the audience off. I know that when I'm excited about some domestic issue at home, I'm more engaging. If I feel connected to my thoughts and believe wholeheartedly in the power of my reasoning, my demeanor is (if I do say so myself) captivating. My wife and daughter actually listen to me.

My domestic rant may not be the best template for a corporate or scientific presentation, but bear with me. Which is more convincing: a speaker's conviction or her reasoning? Isn't that the same as asking which blade in a pair of scissors does the cutting? You need both. Intelligent people will dismiss conviction without clear thinking. And reasoning without an emotional investment by the speaker is busywork—boring, pedantic, and inconsequential to all. You need both—reasoning and conviction.

Rehearsing aloud, you acquire both. And they feed each other. You find words that bring your thoughts to life, and when your thoughts are lively, you grasp them with greater conviction and infuse them with passion. Oliver Wendell Holmes said, "Eloquence is reason set on fire." Rehearsal can help you find the reason and set it on fire.

So what are the standard excuses that the business presenter makes when she says she can't or won't rehearse?

- **No time!** (He's making slides five minutes before show time, making his performance slide.)
- **No need!** (She's done the same talk a thousand times; her suit could make it, and often does.)
- **No sense!** (He thinks rehearsal makes him stale. Without it, he's cooked.)
- **No standards!** (Everybody in her company/industry is mediocre. Why should she be any different?)
- **No ego!** (He doesn't want to experience the awkwardness and vulnerability of finding his own voice, alone or in front of colleagues. Wimp!)
- **No show!** (She thinks showmanship is unprofessional, which smacks of sour grapes. She's probably afraid she doesn't have the gene.)
- **No guts!** (If he doesn't rehearse, he'll have an excuse when his talks flab out and fail.)

## A good presentation can make a career.

A bad one can leave you clinging to the suburbs of success for years to come. Actors get a month; we only get a few days. Let us remember that business without show business is no business. Rehearsal makes our thinking crisper, our language more vivid, and our passion a better ally. Without rehearsal, we have no show. If you have any sense, you'll rehearse.