

MODULE 8 - PRACTICALITIES

In this Module, we will look at some of the practicalities involved in giving a successful presentation. Never forget the details – these can cause you enormous and quite unnecessary problems. The other way of looking at it is that once you have dealt with these details, you can forget about them and focus all your attention on your audience.

The first of these topics concerns the use of cue cards.

Cue Cards

Throughout this course, we have said that you should not attempt to read your prepared script word for word.

As you will see by now, if you put the amount of effort into another script which you have put into the one you have been working on for this Certificate course, by the time it is completed you will probably be able to recite parts of it in your sleep, even though you've made no effort whatsoever to learn it by rote. You have worked and reworked it, and thus both the sequence and the main points are rooted firmly in your mind. You don't actually *need* to have the script in front of you.

Having said that, most people feel far more confident giving a presentation when they have something written in front of them to fall back on. It is a comfort blanket, and as such, it has value.

The best compromise is to create what are usually known as cue cards. These are normal white or coloured cards which you can buy in a pack very cheaply indeed from your local newsagent or stationers. On each card, in very large letters, write or print one point you want to make, or one specific sentence you want to use. Put them in order, and then you will have your speech in front of you. You'll find that what you say won't be exactly what you've written down in your prepared speech, but the main points will be there.

The great advantage, apart from the fact that, as we said, it is extremely difficult to read word for word from a prepared script, is that your presentation will sound spontaneous. You will be entering into a conversation with the audience, speaking to them, and not just reading a script regardless of who they are or what is of interest to them. You can expand on points which interest them and skip others if they are patently bored. You have more freedom to interact with them.

One trick is to use different coloured cards. You can, for example, use plain white cards for the main points of your script but yellow ones for your oratorical tricks. In this way, simply by seeing the colour of the next card, you know what is coming up next.

Don't forget that you can still have your complete written script with you as well, if you feel you need that reassurance.

The next thing to look at is the use of visual aids.

Visual aids

Some people are happy just listening to words: others need to see things on paper or in some other visual form in order to assimilate information. It is always a good idea, where possible, to use visual aids in order to capture the interest of as large a proportion of the audience as possible. You don't have to produce startling graphics or new information: it is quite acceptable to simply write down the key points you are making with your words. Visual aids can be computerised and sophisticated, but this is by no means essential.

Flipcharts

The most basic visual aid is the flip chart. It is useful for short presentations where you might wish to keep several key words or phrases on display throughout your talk. We have found that it is more beneficial to write these as they come up during the talk – if you write them before you begin and have them on display throughout, human nature dictates that your audience will be reading these rather than paying attention to what you are saying. Once they have heard what you have to say, then they can assimilate the information by reading the words as you write them. Flipcharts are cheap to buy if one is not being provided for you. They are available at most big high street stationers for a relatively low sum of money. When you buy a flipchart, buy pens of more than one colour. You may only be intending to write down a couple of phrases but it all goes back to the theme which has run through this course – keep your audience interested and entertained. Words written or underlined in more than one colour are more visually attractive than words in one colour only.

Overhead projectors

Overhead projectors are also commonly used during talks and presentations. They are useful but can present a number of drawbacks. Lights need to be dimmed in order to view the slides properly. If you have several slides to show during your talk, your constant request for “lights up” and “lights down” may be something that you might prefer to avoid. Another potential problem is getting your slides in the wrong order. As anyone who has ever given a slide show will tell you, this happens all too easily: there seems to be a special gremlin whose sole job is to disorganise slides. Double-check your slides before you start your talk, even if you have checked them before you left home.

Slides displayed on overhead projectors can, however, look very professional when used properly – but we would suggest using them only if they are going to add substantially to the impact of your talk. Another advantage these days is that the slides are now easy to produce using your home PC and printer. You can also produce paper printouts of the same slides to use as handouts after the talk if you so wish.

Computer graphics

PowerPoint presentations are becoming more common. Powerpoint is a software package which is part of Microsoft Office. This may totally bewilder those of you who

are not PC literate but read this section anyway – there will come a day in the not too distant future when you will be forced to acquire a computer whether you want to or not.

Powerpoint enables you to create slides on your PC. You can do this in colour or in black and white, you can add simple animations and you can set up your slide show so that with one click of the mouse, you move easily from one slide to the next. It sounds marvellous and it is. The only snag is that you need to have this material on a disk and you need a computer at your talk in order to use it. You also need some form of audio-visual apparatus which will project and magnify these slides onto a screen. You may think that no-one would ever be able to offer you this kind of facility, but you would be surprised. Many organisations have invested in a computer and of these, a number will have acquired the necessary audio-visual equipment. It is always worth asking if these facilities exist.

There are also a number of other, similar packages on the market.

Finding groups to speak to

This is simplicity itself.

The local library is a very under-used resource. It should be able to provide you with details of the majority of local groups, organisations, charities, voluntary groups and so on, complete with their addresses and the name of the organiser or main contact person. Don't forget also to look for details of local chapters of national or international organisations, such as the Women's Institute. In our experience, librarians are only too happy to help, perhaps because it gives them a chance to exercise their information retrieval skills instead of just checking in books. Tell them what you want and why – you are a therapist and you want to write a letter to local groups to see if they want a speaker. You are likely to have two responses. Firstly, a good librarian will know off the top of his head which groups are the best to approach. Again, our experience is that librarians will enter into the spirit of this and tell you which groups attract the best audiences, which are the best organised etc. You will not be the first person to have asked them this: they will be well used to this request. Equally, they will be very accustomed to these groups bringing in their posters to be put up in the library.

The second result is that the librarian will express interest themselves, or will know of someone who might be interested. Librarians are a source of information. They talk to people and people talk to them. Don't forget all those people who chat to the librarian when they bring in their books. A friend of one of the authors of this course asked a librarian where to find some information on how to make a successful insurance claim. She happened to know that the husband of a user worked in insurance – and this informal network took over, with the result that the claim was settled in record time.

Don't forget also that you can compile details of local doctor's surgeries, hospitals and clinics. They may also be interested in having you give a talk to a group of their patients or even their staff.

Look in your local directories such as Thompsons, Yellow Pages and any similar directories which may exist locally.

We would suggest not mailing all of the groups on your list at the same time. If you get a good response you may be overwhelmed. Equally, if you get a poor response, you can sit back and analyse the reasons why, perhaps causing you rewrite your letter or try different types of groups.

To help you, here is a standard introductory letter which you can reproduce.

Standard introductory letter

The following is a brief covering letter which you can send to a local group organiser offering your services as a speaker. You should also include your brochure and other informational material which you may have available.

Dear (insert name),

As someone who has been involved with several groups in the past, I know how difficult it can be to organise talks and presentations which might be of interest to your members.

As a qualified practitioner of [my therapy], established in the local area for [number of years] I would welcome the opportunity of giving a talk on ([my therapy] to your group and answering any questions which may arise.

I enclose my brochure and additional information for your perusal.

You can contact me on the address given above.

Yours sincerely,

J Bloggs

Keep your introductory letter short and to the point – otherwise you risk putting people off!

Health and safety

The safety of the audience is not normally something that the presenter of a talk has to take responsibility for: after all, you are a guest of the organisers as well as of the group to whom you will be speaking. It is, however, something that you would be wise to consider. It is always a good idea to ensure that the organiser (your contact) can reassure you that a fire alert system is in operation and that fire exit doors are properly indicated and **NOT** locked or otherwise obstructed. . A friendly reminder from you along the lines

of “I presume that all of the audience will know the layout of the venue and health and safety regulations of the hall, etc? If not who will be giving them this information before your talk?”

This often serves as a reminder to the organisers of their responsibilities in this area. You would be amazed at how few people consider this. One of the authors of this course has refused to speak at a venue where the fire exit doors were obstructed by a builder’s skip. This is a totally irresponsible and unacceptable situation. It may not be your immediate responsibility but that doesn’t and shouldn’t stop you from checking that people are physically safe while they are listening to you. You will also gain the respect of responsible organisers for your professional attitude.

On a more local level, when you enter the room you should ask people to keep walkways clear and not to put their bags etc on the floor where others might trip over them. Again, this should ideally be taken care of by the organiser – however, it is not unusual for speakers to arrive at venues where bags are strewn all over the place and tables are set up across fire exit doors for refreshments to be served.

Why should you concern yourself with this? Well, it may be only that one time in a thousand, but what if a member of the audience thinks he smells smoke? What will you do or say? You may not be the organiser but you are the person standing up there on the stage and you are the person the audience will look to for advice and instructions. Why take the risk of this or something like it happening. Even apart from that, for your own health and safety it is inadvisable to speak in a venue which is a fire or other hazard. This is a totally unnecessary risk. The organisers will know there are laws and bye-laws to be kept and you should not be backward about reminding them of their duty.

Relaxation script

One of the other practical things you can do to ensure that all goes well on the day is to make yourself a relaxation tape. This is quick, simple to do, and works well.

We suggest that you make a tape using the following script which you can then play to yourself on a regular basis. This will improve your relaxation response

This is a basic hypnotic induction as spoken by the therapist. It acts as a series of suggestions which lead to a state of relaxation. It doesn’t matter that you are, in effect, talking to yourself: just speak the words as they are written.

You should speak slowly and clearly, aiming to deliver the induction at about half the speed of normal speech. Ensure that you are comfortable and begin as follows:

“Now that you are comfortable, we are going to go through a short relaxation exercise during which I am going to induce a state of relaxation. Now, what you will find is that this is a wonderfully relaxing state to be in, similar to daydreaming or that warm comfortable feeling we each experience just on waking or just before we go to sleep at

night. This short exercise will involve no effort at all on your part, leave all of the work to me: all that you have to do is relax. So... when you are ready, simply take a deep breath and hold it for a count of two, and as you exhale simply allow your eyes to close, and release all the worries, the stresses and strains ... just allow them all to ease from your body and release from your mind ... and the more relaxed you become the better you feel ... and the better you feel the more relaxed you become ... allow yourself to drift ... continue to take long slow deep breaths ... and concentrate on the sound of my voice ... and just relax ... breath deeply and relax ...

You realise of course that this time is just for you ... that just for a while ... nobody wants anything from you ... nobody needs anything from you ... and so you have absolutely nothing to do except to relax ... so relax ... release, relax and let go ... release all the worries, the stresses and strains ... just allow them all to ease from your body and release from your mind ... and the more relaxed you become the better you feel ... and the better you feel the more relaxed you become ...

While you sit there in that relaxed state you know of course that you remain in full control of your thoughts and actions at all times ... you are free to open your eyes or to speak at any time you wish ... that if ... while you are practising this state of relaxation on your own something should happen which requires your immediate attention, you can simply open your eyes and deal with it calmly and competently ... but for now ... just continue to relax and to breathe deeply ... concentrate on the sound of my voice ... and with every word that I say now you are going deeper and deeper into relaxation ... deeper and deeper into a quiet and a calm sort of feeling where there is absolutely nothing whatsoever for you to do except to relax ... release all the worries, the stresses and strains ... just allow them all to ease from your body and release from your mind ... and the more relaxed you become the better you feel ... and the better you feel the more relaxed you become ...

Concentrate now on your breathing ... and imagine ... imagine that as you breathe in ... that you are breathing in calmness ... and that as you exhale ... as you exhale ... that you are exhaling stress and tension ... you are breathing in calmness ... you are exhaling stress and tension ... and with every breath that you draw you are becoming just a little bit more relaxed ... each and every breath that you draw is relaxing you even more ... so that with every word that I say ... and every breath that you draw, you are going even deeper still into calmness ... quietness ... achieving a calm and a peaceful sort of feeling where all is quiet ... all is still ... and imagine comforting warmth ... surrounding you ... sunlight shining down on you and brightening your outlook ... warming and soothing you ... every cell ... every fibre of your being becoming as relaxed now as they possible can ... and all that you have to do to allow it to happen is to continue to listen to the sound of your breathing ... and to the sound of my voice ... and to co-operate with me ... to help you to relax ... because you know that by co-operating with me ... that you are really co-operating with yourself ...

Listen to the sound of your breathing for a moment ... just for a moment listen to the sound of your breathing ... you don't need to try to control it ... just continue to breath

naturally ... and notice how soothing it is to just listen to the sound of your own breathing ... then, continuing to listen to your breathing, focus your attention on the top of your head ... your scalp ... and you might be surprised to discover tension there ... so just imagine the sunshine ... shining down on your scalp ... on the top of your head ... and making it all nice and warm and comfortable ... and you feel all of the tension just draining away ... and you move your attention on down through the rest of your head ... the back and sides of your head ... then moving your attention on down to the forehead ... and feeling all of those little frown lines just disappear ... and as you think of each part ... just allow each part to relax ... as you think of each part just imagine that comfortable ... warm ... soothing feeling spreading to each part ... and relaxing each part ... and the more relaxed you become the better you feel ... and the better you feel the more relaxed you become ... the more you relax ... the better you feel ..

Now take a deep breath ... slowly ... very slowly ... and this time simply unclench your teeth and allow the breath to escape through your mouth ... and feel your jaw muscles relaxing ... and repeat that once or twice more until you are happy that you have released the tension from your jaw muscles ...

Now move your attention on down through your neck ... relaxing your neck ... and moving on down to your shoulders ... again spreading comforting warmth ... and relaxation ... relaxing your shoulders ... arms ... wrists ... hands and fingers ... just release relax and let go...

Now concentrate on your back ... the large and small muscles of the back ... you are well supported by the chair that you are sitting on ... so you can relax the muscles of your back ... and as you relax the large and small muscles of your back you find the spine relaxing ... and you are well supported by the chair ... so just allow all of the muscles of your back ... large and small ... to relax ... feeling that comforting warmth spread as you do ...

Now relax your chest ... the large and small muscles of your chest relaxing ... and as you relax the muscles between your ribs ... you find that your breathing comes much easier ... as your diaphragm relaxes ... as your diaphragm relaxes your breathing comes much easier ... taking no effort at all on your part ... and you feel so much more relaxed ... calmer ... quieter ... and more peaceful inside...

Now move your attention on down to your stomach ... and relax all of the internal organs ... just allowing everything to relax ... and as you think of your stomach ... relax your stomach and feel ... once again ... that comforting warmth spreading throughout your body ... as you continue to drift ... to feel good ... to feel calm ... and relaxed...

Now move your attention on down to your legs ... relaxing your hips in passing ... relaxing the large and small muscles of your thighs ... calves ... ankles ... feet and toes ... and as you think of each part ... just allow each part to relax ... and go deeper still ... because now ... from the top of your head ... all the way down to the soles of your feet ... you are as relaxed and stress free now as it is possible for you to be today ... you

might find a tingling sensation in the soles of your feet as tension and stress leave your body ... you might find yourself feeling heavy ... light ... warm and comfortable ... all of these are perfectly natural ...

Now ... to enhance this relaxation even more I am going to count down backwards from eight to zero ... backwards from eight to zero ... and I would like you to use your imagination to see each number as I speak it ... and each number down will serve to take you one step more deeply into relaxation ... each number down is a step down ... into greater levels of relaxation ... greater levels of peace and greater freedom from the stresses and strains of every day living ... so really ... really concentrate now ... and the first number is eight ... stepping down to seven ... feeling calmer ... six ... really see the numbers ... five ... notice what colour your numbers are as you double your state of relaxation with the next step ... four ... doubling your state of relaxation ... three ... nearly there now ... nearly totally relaxed ... two ... calmer and calmer still ... taking the next step down into total relaxation ... one ... and then the final step down into relaxation ... zero ... zero ... zero ... just release ... relax and let go ...

And as you sit there, relaxed and peaceful, you know that in the future the very things which could previously have upset you ... why, they will now just calm you and relax you ... and the more something could have previously upset you ... why the more it will now calm you and relax you...

And you will find also that the anxieties of your mind will be released at night in your dreams ... the anxieties of your mind will be released at night in your dreams ...

REPEAT EACH SUGGESTION IN ITALICS TWICE, THEN CONTINUE

And in a moment I will be counting back up from one to five ... and when I say five I will be asking you to open your eyes ... and when you hear five and I ask you to open your eyes ... as soon as you do open your eyes ... you will return to complete conscious awareness ... as soon as I say five and ask you to open your eyes ... when you do open your eyes ... you will immediately return to complete conscious awareness ... ready to return to the ordinary everyday tasks that await you ... and when you leave here today ... you will continue to feel relaxed and calm for some time afterwards ... and you will notice that you are becoming calmer ... and more confident ... as your inner strengths begin to surface... and the count is one... and you are starting to stir... two ... coming up three ... stretching and yawning ... four ... and five open your eyes please and return to complete conscious awareness ...”

Play this tape two or three times a week for a couple of weeks after you make it, and then play it just before you are due to speak. It will noticeably reduce your anxiety levels.