

On Rehearsal by Cathy C. Bonczek

When people ask me how to attain presentation mastery, I say, “Rehearse.” That’s the route to presentation brilliance.

Let’s focus on three aspects of rehearsal:

- Why it’s important
- How to rehearse
- The benefits of rehearsing

Why is rehearsing so important?

When you do something for the first time, you will likely make a mistake or two. Wouldn’t you rather make your mistakes in front of the mirror, or a trusted colleague, rather than in the room with a prospect or client? Secondly, **the mistakes we make often lead to better choices – or at least, more interesting choices.** Practically, rehearsing allows you to understand the story line from beginning to end. You can decide whether you are delivering the right message, or if you’ve been derailed by a side story.

Here are some ways to rehearse effectively:

1. Runthrough: Do a table read, as actors do when they have a new script.
2. Adjust the semantics: Make sure all the words are part of your everyday vocabulary.
3. Cut out the extra words.
4. Figure out the emotion underpinning the message – is this good news? Or a cautionary tale?
5. Do the stage work: understand the room, the technology, the visibility of slides and the acoustics.
6. Choose your transitions between subjects or speakers. Better to think of these in advance then leave them to chance when you are presenting.

Rehearsal Benefits:

The more you understand your message and the language you want to use - the more easily you can adopt a conversational tone. This tone will keep you more genuine and relatable than an unnatural “presentation voice.” The more reps you give yourself, the greater your confidence will be when it’s time to speak. You’ll know your conclusion, you’ll know the potential side conversations, and you’ll be at ease navigating whatever might come up.

Your confidence will give you the ability to pivot and nimbly address whatever your audience most wants to spend time on, while still maintaining control of the narrative. Finally, you will have better performance quality, if you’ve taken some time to think about where to stand, how to move, what gestures will illuminate your message, and how to use your voice as the appropriate soundtrack to your story.

There are even benefits to a bad rehearsal! You quickly learn what the potential pitfalls might be (for example, perhaps you can’t pronounce a certain word). It will help you make the appropriate changes to uplift the presentation when you deliver it for real. Plus, it’s healthy to fail constructively – we are all too obsessed with being perfect all the time. Better to be embarrassed in a rehearsal in front of your colleagues than in front of a prospect or client.

Speaking of time – that’s the only negative I can think of regarding rehearsal. It does take time. The rewards outweigh the inconvenience. And you can start to incorporate rehearsal in small doses. You can take 5 minutes to rehearse your introduction, and maybe 3 more to do the conclusion. Those “bookends” will give you great comfort at the two most difficult times of every presentation or meeting. Rehearsal should become a priority in your preparation and development of key messages. Small amounts of time allotted to honing the message will yield big rewards.

The bottom line is: done well or done poorly, rehearsal will improve your ultimate performance.

