

Reach Through the Lens

By Deborah Shames

Since September 11th, the way we communicate in business has changed dramatically. Physical travel has fallen off, while teleconferencing has skyrocketed. Agencies that usually take a back seat have been called upon to answer questions about everything from the safety of our mail, to the preparedness of our disaster resources. Any one of us could suddenly be thrust into the spotlight. Are you prepared?

Most professionals are accustomed to public speaking before a live audience. Truly effective communicators have also mastered the art of on-camera and media interviews. Each demands a different skill set.

When speaking in front of a group, you establish a rapport and respond to the energy of the room. On-camera, it's just you staring down the barrel of a hunk of optics. Looking around will make the audience wonder what else is going on and what they are missing. Assigning an identity to the lens helps to reduce the barrier between you, but appearing confident in this medium requires generating energy from within.

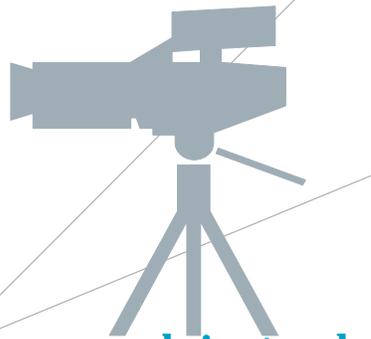
With experience and a dynamic presentation, you can hold the attention of a live audience for long stretches of time. With the advent of television and quick cutting in films, a "talking head" can only get away with about eighteen seconds. Any longer without visual images and your audience will be bored.

In terms of body language, you want to appear relaxed in both venues. However, the range of motion is different for each. On stage, a speaker attempts to engage the person in the last row. Physical gestures are broad and animated. You move your entire body according to the limits of the physical space.

On camera, your movements must be compact and contained. Subtle is more effective than broad. Find out how "wide" or "tight" you are being framed. If you are being shot from the waist up, feel free to use your entire upper body and hands to gesture.

In contrast, if the framing is an extreme close-up (commonly called an ECU) facial gestures are critical. Moving slightly forward says "interested," while sitting back says "prove it to me." Close ups and "push-ins" are used to convey intense emotion and intimacy. The audience believes they can look into your eyes and read what you are thinking or feeling. Understanding this concept allows you to use it to your advantage.

Media interviews have their own unique parameters. When answering difficult questions, a calm demeanor and tone is even more effective than the actual content. Prior to being interviewed, make a conscious decision about what you want to avoid speaking about, and what you want to emphasize. Choose no more than 3-5 points



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and be thoroughly prepared on these issues. One of the reasons politicians are so effective is that they direct the conversation to their own agenda, no matter what the question.

Although you never want to be caught unprepared, there is one surefire way to keep any statement from being used by the press. Simply DO NOT finish your sentence. Since very little filming is done live, stop midstream and politely say "Let's start over." Collect your thoughts and begin again. Don't worry about being perfect. Your goal is to save yourself an embarrassing moment or slip of the tongue.

In terms of wardrobe, choose clothes according to the effect you'd like to achieve. Dark colors (gray, brown, black and navy) convey authority and power. Lighter colors, closer to your skin tone, translate into approachability and warmth. To achieve an "authoritative" presence on video, navy appears black and beige, white.

When you're being taped, do not wear white, black or bright red. (Blue is always a good bet.) Avoid small patterns on ties, suits and blouses which "moiré" and distract the viewer. On film, your only concern is the design and color of the set. The last thing you want to do is wear the same palette as the backdrop and fade away from the neck down!

On camera, makeup (especially powder) is essential for men and women. The lights are hot and make you sweat, which will be interpreted as nervousness or guilt. Companies like Mac make an entire line of on-camera makeup available to the public. And don't forget room temperature water to keep your voice lubricated and your mouth from going dry.

If you want help with your speaking skills, a presentation coach can bring out your strengths and diminish your weaknesses. Together you can

- ★ learn techniques to relax and minimize stress before a presentation,
- ★ diminish or eliminate any exaggerated movements or "tics" that pull focus and distract from your message,
- ★ modify an accent or speech impediment that keeps you from being clearly understood, or
- ★ master the art of the "sound bite" and succinct phrasing.

Make sure to hire a coach who is experienced in the medium of film and video. It's not enough to be told to "use your hands," or "make friends with the camera." You want to know what to expect when working in a studio environment; rehearse potential media interviews; and receive incisive, honest feedback about how you appear on camera. Most importantly, you want to acquire the skills that give you confidence and allow you to be in control of an unforgiving medium.

Deborah Shames [WLK2] is a presentation coach and partner in David Booth Associates. She is the award-winning director of over 60 films and videos, directing luminaries such as Wendie Malick, Rita Moreno, Danny Glover, and Angela Lansbury. Deborah has coached Directors of Sun Microsystems, real estate agents at Coldwell Banker, Sales Managers for Quixdata Systems, as well as TV anchors and authors prior to national book tours. You can reach Deborah at 818/346-1844 or through her website at www.boothcoaching.com.