

Power Presentation

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Power Presentation

Formal speech in an informal world

PATSY RODENBURG

MICHAEL JOSEPH

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To Max Rodenburg, my father, with love

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Introduction

On the morning of Wednesday 5th November, the day after the US presidential election, I arrived to teach at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, elated, even though I had had no sleep. Inevitably my students wanted to talk about the momentous event that they were witnessing and as I am a teacher of voice and communications, we naturally discussed Barack Obama's speech and presentation.

I was with first-year students aged between 18 and 24 and as they spoke I was struck by – in hindsight – a blatantly obvious epiphany: the majority of these students had never heard a politician speak like Barack Obama. That is, a world leader speaking with clarity, dignity, focus, passion, humanity and authenticity. A man prepared to care through his presentation and content. A man desiring that his words inspire and awaken.

My young students hadn't heard Mandela – they have lived through politicians using spin to hide the truth, and smirking and mocking as a presentation style. They have only experienced the casual, cynical approach to communication; the approach that assumes the audience is not equal to the presenter and can be duped.

On that morning, I had real hope that these students had begun to understand the power of words and the power of presence.

This book will put power and presence into your own speech. You will realize that even if you don't perceive yourself as a leader, at the moment you present in any context you are leading and you have to own your power and authority. In classical moral philosophy, power and leadership are rigorously discussed. Quite simply, if you have power you must use it for the general

good and use it responsibly. But – and here’s the paradox – you must use it. Most communicators who fail have failed to realize they have power and that power has an impact on all around. It is your role to lead as you communicate and you are going to fail if you don’t do it with presence.

It is probably safe to say that by picking up this book you know or believe that your ability to communicate is in some way failing you. You might have a fear or even a terror of speaking in public or an intense dislike of your voice. Perhaps your presentation has been criticized or even mocked, or you simply want to be better. When communication matters you are not as successful as your mind and heart want and know you can be. In other words, you know you are much more interesting than you sound!

I have spent my life working on voice, language and effective delivery. It is my passion and I only started this journey because of my own fears and struggles to communicate. I understand the pain and distress concerned with any inability you experience when your communication fails and I honour the struggle you face as you attempt to improve your voice and your verbal impact on the world.

However, you will soon realize that I intend to be direct and truthful as this book is for those of you who really want to work on and improve your presentation.

The work will demand practice and honesty, and in order to be a great communicator and presenter you will have to release your power, attention and presence. You have to accept certain non-negotiable truths.

Any communication that matters to you or the listener can never be casual or unprepared.

Communication is personal – human to human – and is at its best when there is humanity within the speaker.

Good communication, like achievement in any field, takes hard work, diligence and preparation.

Long before you breathe in and open your mouth to speak, even as you walk into a room or stand up to begin speaking, the people around you have made

decisions as to whether they will lend you their ears or give you their respect.

- How comfortable do you look?
- No-one can listen to a boring voice for more than a couple of minutes.
- No-one wants to or enjoys listening to a pushed or aggressive voice.
- The extreme effort required in listening to a mumbled voice frustrates, and although the overbeautiful voice can enthrall, that thrill is pointless if we hear the beauty of the voice rather than the words being spoken.
- No-one trusts arrogance, spin or apology.
- No-one wants to be addressed by a fidget or by someone so physically stiff that they can't move. Both positions exasperate us.
- No-one likes people who want to be liked, and those speakers who have a 'fuck you' attitude don't amuse us as they alienate goodwill.
- If you rush, we can't keep up; if you speak too slowly, we take offence as we think you think we are stupid.
- We don't want falseness – false power, charm or enthusiasm.
- We want the truth and we want your full attention.
- We want you to take full responsibility for what you say and stand by it.

We want you present. Presence in a speaker is the beginning and ending of all good and powerful communication.

This presence, which is a real and tangible energy, transforms all around it. When you communicate with your full presence your words will live, inspire, provoke and prevail.

Part 1

Power Presentation Preparation

1 The Three Circles of Energy in Power Presentation

The key to Power Presentation is human energy and how to maximize and use your present energy. I devised the Three Circles of Energy over thirty years ago as a clear description of how human energy works.

The First Circle is a human energy that is connected to itself. In First Circle you are preoccupied with yourself, you are probably in the past and in a place of taking and being unable to give.

The Third Circle is a generalized energy that comes from you and is blasted out into the world non-specifically. It is an energy of force and control. It is of the future. It is give and no take. In its worst manifestations, it means that people feel like objects rather than individuals.

When you are present you are in the Second Circle. Your energy is connected to a specific point outside you. It is a place of give and take. You are connected to yourself and the world around you. Your audience is not a general mass but made up of individuals, and an exchange of energy takes place between you. The Second Circle energy is intimate and epic. It is the energy of survival and compassion. It is powerful but not forceful. By working through this book, you will learn to appreciate and understand these paradoxes and enjoy them! All these energies manifest in your body, breath, voice, speech, mind, heart and ears. They are contagious and will transform your ability to communicate effectively in all situations.

This will not be a strange magical mystery tour but a reconnection with your knowledge and experience which you can harness and control to be

more powerful and effective. Any moment of real curiosity and interest connects you to your presence. Any situation that requires survival will place you into your presence. When you are completely connected to something outside yourself – be it eye contact with a stranger across a crowded room or a beautiful painting – you are present. An unknown sound in the house at night or the startling connection you find with great music puts you into a listening presence. You will learn how to pragmatically channel your full presence and consequently your full power.

The Three Circles of Energy will transform your ability to communicate effectively in all situations and with work, the energy of Second Circle will become organic and constantly accessible, even in a time when human presence is under threat.

Let us begin before the real work on Second Circle, by examining the all-too-common First and Third Circle presentation energies.

First Circle Presentation

First Circle energy is when you focus energy on yourself. Your main point of concentration is internal. This energy is reflective and to the outside world you appear hidden or absent.

The physical signs of First Circle energy include a general slump or depression in your physical presence. You might walk scuffing your feet, or shuffle or fidget. Your head might droop forward slightly, resulting in very little eye contact with your audience. It often appears that you are more interested in the floor than the space around you. Shoulders can be rounded and the upper chest depressed with the spine being collapsed. And when standing in First Circle the feet are often too close together, the knees locked and weight back on the heels.

These tensions will communicate negatively to your audience long before you open your mouth and the communication will be ineffective as you appear weak, unsure and therefore unable to inspire confidence. Your breath and your voice will be affected and further disempower you as the chain

reaction continues. The First Circle voice can be barely audible. It can sound strained or be whispered, and the vocal energy falls back into the speaker instead of reaching the audience. This gives the words a mumbled or swallowed quality and sentences drop off and fall into the ground. This voice will often sound pessimistic, tired or bored and makes you feel more self-conscious. And you can't be a good listener in First Circle. Your imploding energy closes you off into a bubble so you are disengaged and often miss the point or misinterpret the conversation.

From the moment you come forth to speak you are signalling, 'I don't want to be here, I don't trust what I am saying, I don't care about my material, I don't care about you, nothing matters.' Now it is very likely you don't feel or think these things at all, but it's what comes across.

There is a belief that microphones will save the First Circle speaker. Wrong.

A microphone only amplifies what is there. If you are mumbling we just hear a louder mumble. Many First Circle speakers have been wooed into believing that their low-esteem posture and fidgeting will be hidden by fantastic visuals. If that is the case then why be there at all? Show a movie! If you are there you have to *be* there.

Third Circle Presentation

It is normal that First Circle speakers rapidly realize that their energy habits are completely ineffective in any important communication. The habitual First Circle communicator is more likely to seek help or stop presenting and find another route to power by being completely brilliant in some specific subject or discipline. Not so with Third Circle presenters, for whom there is an easy trap to fall into when speaking. The trap is that on a superficial level, a Third Circle presentation can be effective. It can control an audience and pump generalized energy into a room. However, it rarely inspires or makes the audience believe they matter. Because the Third Circle speaker splays out their energy without any specific focus and although this energy can be

enthusiastic, aggressive or entertaining it doesn't take the listener into consideration and is therefore controlling.

If First Circle energy is a place of denial, then Third Circle energy is one of bluff. This bluff can be seen in the bodies of Third Circle speakers. The chest is lifted and shoulders pulled back. The chin can be pulled up, giving the impression that we are being looked down upon, or the head thrust forward which overpenetrates our space. The jaw is often clenched with anticipation. When standing, the feet can be often too far apart, the walk too firm and noisy. The Third Circle body can invade others' space – space invaders who won't give way or yield to another body. They seem to take up too much space. This physical tension puts up a shield that desensitizes them to others.

A Third Circle voice is generally pushed and often too loud. We can always hear a Third Circle speaker but rarely listen. They are not listening to us – they do sometimes listen to themselves – which is why one of the most common habits of Third Circle is to interrupt or shout us down. They don't want your opinion unless it is their own.

You might have noticed that I didn't address you as a Third Circle speaker. The negative attributes of Third Circle are harsh and while I want you to recognize when you fall into this energy I don't want you to blame yourself. What's important is to realize that this type of presentation will get you through but it won't engage your audience or make a positive impact. It's a quick fix that just doesn't work in the long run.

Second Circle Presentation

When you are lucky enough to experience a present Second Circle presentation or meeting you will encounter some or even all of the following qualities.

- The speaker will have an energized yet open body and delivery.
- You will feel that you, the listener, matter, and through the speaker's eye contact you will feel connected to the presentation.

- You will feel spoken ‘to’ not ‘at’.
- Their voice will be open and clear, not pushed and forcing you back.
- You won’t have to struggle to hear them but will listen with ease.
- The speaker will have energy and passion but this energy appears effortless and efficient.
- You won’t worry about the speaker as their presence makes you secure in the knowledge that they know what they are doing.
- There is authenticity and humanity in their presence and even if there are a thousand people present, the speaker is speaking to you alone.

These qualities are communicated because the speaker has focused their energy on you. There is no focus on themselves, or any general outward sweep of splayed energy. The focus is on specific points outside themselves – this energy is given to and takes from those points.

Form and Content

A great and inspiring communicator is present and in Second Circle contact with the form and content of their presentation. We will be discussing and working on both but at the beginning of this journey you should assess what you are good at.

Form is how you present through your body, voice and speech and if this is in Second Circle then you will be communicating physically very well. However, you could have been trained in form but have no connection or presence with content.

In other words, you might sound great but actually say nothing. Certain educations teach this extremely well: well-presented hollowness.

Or you could have great content and know and own your knowledge in Second Circle but struggle to form it through your physical acts of communication.

I have to say that if your content is good but your form poor, you have probably been frustratingly overlooked and enraged at the success of hollow presenters.

Perhaps it is a sign of the times but I am increasingly noticing that the hollow ones are crumbling and failing while those with content are moving into the forefront as leaders.

Let us harness both form and content in power presentation.

2 Tools of the Trade

The vast majority of us were born with an efficient and aligned body, a wonderful voice, remarkable speech muscles, a full and releasing breath system and ears that can hear clearly and precisely. These are the tools of your trade when it comes to Power Presentation but they are often made rusty with bad habits. It's time to strip those away and return you to that natural empowering state. Remember:

- Every part of your body, breath, voice, speech and listening abilities communicates consciously or unconsciously to an audience. If you feel trapped in your body or your voice then your message will be trapped.
- If the body is tense, then the breath and voice are tense. A tense voice constricts the sounds and generalizes the meaning. We can all hear a pushed voice but can't really distinguish the words.
- If you can't breathe fully you cannot voice, feel or think fully.

Unless you are fully present and care about what you are saying your body, breath, voice, speech and listening abilities won't work together and cannot really impact on the world. We have all seen beautifully placed bodies and heard resonant voices but unless they are present and the human being in them is actually *there* then we don't really care.

BODY

Your natural body, before it becomes warped and distorted by life, is an amazingly aligned, powerful and efficient embodiment of you and your presence. Watch a young child alert with curiosity and wonder. They stand or sit with their naturally good posture, shoulders released, head balanced, feet

on the ground and their whole being focused forward on and into their point of concentration. Their bodies are clean of any useless tension.

You started there.

You have a memory of being completely and unselfconsciously in your body and you have to excavate and rediscover that body. Something and someone took that body away from you – a remark, a need to please or a need to be unnoticed in a room drove you to distort the very thing that houses you.

After good physical exertion, at the point of exhilaration (before exhaustion!), your body is present. Rowing, surfing, skateboarding, windsurfing, rock-climbing, a brisk walk over rough ground, martial arts, all place you in efficient alignment. In fact, any activity that can only be achieved by ignoring the useless grips of tension will return our often underused, decadent bodies to their natural presence.

If you have ever faced danger and coped rather than fallen to pieces, you might remember how all the useless tensions dropped off your body, enabling you to become fully present and consequently survive.

Begin to notice activities that place you into your body. This is the present, powerful Second Circle body that you must bring to every important meeting and communication.

Where Are You Now?

You have flashes of presence in your body but where are you now?

Do You Live Mostly in a First or Third Circle Body?

Gather recent photographs of yourself. Find some that you posed for and some that were taken surreptitiously and include some side and back shots of your body. Try to find photos in which you are not wearing heavy or concealing clothes. Stand and look at yourself in a full-length mirror. Even lingering in front of a reflective shop window will be very informative.

When you start looking at yourself in photos and mirrors you will begin to gather a goldmine of information that will immediately change you, the world

around you and every act of communication you make from now on.

- Starting from the top of your body, begin to assess where and how you generally hold your head. Do you pull it back with your chin in the air or push it forward so it juts out (Third)? Do you look down, is it hard to see your eyes or do you hold your head to one side (First)? The head is very heavy and all of these positions place an inefficient work toll on your neck and spine, and affect your voice. From the audience point of view the Third Circle head positions signal superiority or acute determination if not aggression. The First Circle head positions signal shyness, a victim or submissiveness.
- Moving down, the state of your shoulders can, and am not dramatizing this, destroy your ability to be effective. The shoulders should naturally hang without distortion, bracing or placing. We are designed to swing! You can't swing if the shoulders are held or placed. Any tension in your shoulders will have a direct impact on your ability to breathe, produce your voice, or speak freely. I believe that this tension is so powerful that when we see it in others our shoulders rise or tense with the speaker's. Over the years I have put hundreds of very fearful performers on stage and I can tell you without doubt that unless they can release their shoulders they have not a hope in dealing with their fear. That is how crucial it is to address your shoulder tensions. In First Circle the shoulders lift up or are pulled around. In Third Circle they are pulled back or forced down.
- Still in relation to your shoulders, now look more specifically at your chest, particularly your sternum, that plate of bone that protects your heart. With First Circle shoulders your chest has collapsed. Viewing from the side you can see your chest is depressed and from the back you are rounded so, in effect, you are hidden and this is what comes across to your audience. With Third Circle shoulders your sternum has lifted itself up and pushes your chest into the world. From the side you are hoisted up into space through the sternum and from the back you can see the back locked around mid-centre. This braced and hoisted chest might feel strong to you but actually is weakening your breath and spine. You are shielding you heart, and we the audience feel that you are unreachable and untouchable. This position is the antithesis of being open and vulnerable – both essential qualities in the give and take of being present and in the dialogue of life. You might appear forceful but not powerful. Power has vulnerability and sensitivity! You are dangerous to others and yourself without these qualities.

The placing of the sternum is connected to the state of your spine. Many years ago I knew a genius osteopath, who had worked with the great Alexander. He said quite simply, 'Patsy, when your spine goes, you age.' You can do all the cosmetic surgery you want but if the spine has no real placing or strength you will age rapidly. Today I see young people with the spines of pensioners. Unnatural head positioning, shoulder and sternum tensions will contribute to debilitating back pain but more directly if your spine is slumped or held too rigidly the centre of your body and being will crumble. You

cannot be in your body and breathe fully and are consequently, to the world, a pushover.

- Look at your spine. Is it slumped? This collapse of a slumped spine can be seen from the front around the centre of the body, pushing the stomach out and pulling the head down. From the side the back rounds in and the shoulders curve round. From behind you are ball-shaped. This physical stance screams 'spineless' to the world. It is the classic First Circle victim posture.

Is your spine too rigid, held in place without any give or flexibility? So many of us have been taught to sit up straight and pull our shoulders back as a quick way to improve the adolescent slump. Although the spine looks strong when held in this way, its lack of flexibility constricts the neck, jaw, shoulders, upper chest and stomach muscles. Without freedom in the spine you are also a 'push over'. Stand braced and in this way and you can be floored with a shove. The weakness in this Third Circle posture lies in its lack of give and flexibility. It is a forced stance rather than a powerful one. If you present with this spine the lack of give in it communicates a sureness bordering on stubbornness, an unchallengeable quality for people who are easily intimidated but for those who enjoy a challenge it beckons an attack. The lack of give in this kind of spine can even make you seem like a bully or someone intolerant of transformation. A tree with this kind of rigidity would not survive a storm.

- Now look at your abdominal area, the stomach and the whole pelvic area. As you move further from your head and where your voice is produced – the larynx in the neck – it is easy to believe that these areas do not matter to your ability to present, particularly if you do most of your work sitting down. This assumption comes directly from a society that has forgotten we are not heads on sticks but physical beings that have to breathe and feel fully in order to think and live fully.

Other complex issues around this abdominal area are twinned with vanity and sex. Holding in the stomach is a device most of us have tried to appear slimmer and wriggling or thrusting out the pelvic area are habits used to display sexual interest.

The full power of the human breath system is stored in this area. You could even say our whole human power is centred here. I can prove that the breath-support muscles of the abdominal muscles power the voice's full release. I cannot prove but strongly suspect that all our deep and profound feelings lodge here. Here lives your authentic self, and here is produced your authentic voice.

Holding or distorting the abdominal area severely impedes your ability to speak fully – particularly to large groups of people – and blocks your emotional connections as you speak. You cannot be passionate. You can't fully feel and therefore your audience cannot feel you or what you say. You have no power and you are disconnected from your presence.

Look at your abdominal area. If you can see a hold you will also be able to feel it. As