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# Preface

*Learning is not attained by chance. It must be sought for with ardor and attended to with diligence.*

Abigail Adams

**L**earning is a social event, and effective presenters provide the social glue that binds groups together in the learning environment. Music and dance are cultural glues that bind people together. All cultures dance as a way of connecting spiritually and emotionally and to transmit culture, story, and learning from one generation to the next; dance is the language of the soul. When music starts, you feel the beat. Dance steps flash through your mind; choices are made and the dance begins. Exhilarating, exciting, intimate—dance is the ultimate expression of nonverbal communication in humans. It gives us the social permission to be physically closer to a person than we might otherwise be in a casual or business conversation. Dance allows us the flexibility to either follow our partner or lead. Led by a skillful dancer, other dancers enter into a state of flow, a mental state that positive psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi (2003) defines as an operation in which a person is fully immersed in what she is doing by a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. This book is about creating that flow during your presentations.

Dance can include two people; it can include an entire room or even a stadium. Who among us has not experienced the energy of a live concert where thousands were engaged in dance? Now that is whole-room dancing! Rapport, group dynamics, and connectedness are through the roof in situations like these and together make for a very eventful and memorable experience.

You may be reading this book because you provide professional development to adult groups within your organization or to other organizations. You know the importance of being a subject matter expert.

You also know that subject matter expertise is not enough if you want every professional learning experience to be successful. How intrigued would you be if we told you that all effective presenters have in common specific dance steps they use to accelerate the development of rapport, positive group dynamics, and participant learning? What if while reading this book you discover that by using these skills you can dramatically increase your influence and effectiveness when teaching and presenting to adult groups? Would you be interested? Who would not say “Yes!” to that?

The choreography of presenting is about the choices we have made and can make to enhance the learning of participants when presenting to our peers, colleagues, and other adult groups. In the classic book *How to Make Meetings Work*, Doyle and Strauss (1976) describe the presenter’s challenge as “a combination tap dance, shuffle, and tango to a syncopated rhythm produced by unpredictable humans” (p. 89). The presenter’s skills, knowledge, and abilities are the kindling that ignites participants’ passion for learning. At the core of this quote from Doyle and Strauss are fundamental beliefs we have about presenting and facilitating. One core belief is that each of us only has control over ourselves. Another is that each individual is unique in the ways he views the world and learns. With these two core beliefs, we are able to work from a conscious framework that, by being flexible, conscious, and strategic with the tools contained in this book, we can design and deliver presentations that target learning in everyone.

As we watch a well-choreographed dance, the seemingly effortless movements are fluid, graceful, and purposeful. The same can be said of an effective presentation. The session has just the right rhythm, cadence, and timing. Hours of practice, rehearsal, and skills are essential for each performance. Dance is a powerful metaphor for effective presenting because dance is about leading and following, building rapport and trust, sharing passions, and living the moment.

We are not advocating that good presenters are formulaic, yet there is a formula. After all, there are specific steps to a tango, yet not all tangos look alike. It is here, in each step, that the deeper connection lives between the dancer and the audience. It happens in real time, and you adjust in real time according to the conditions, your state of mind, your intentions, and your goals. There is freedom to choose. The better the dance is understood and executed, the greater the experience for everyone involved.

Like dancing, presenting has patterns, and you adjust to the changing patterns—sometimes leading, sometimes following. You have a plan and know the destination. The plan is the scope and sequence of the workshop. It may contain a PowerPoint presentation along with a participant

packet. Once you begin, however, constant microadjustments in your live performance are essential if you want the experience to be memorable for participants. This book is about seeing and learning the patterns of communication that effective presenters use. For many, these are patterns we have always looked at yet may have never actually seen or fully understood. In the following chapters we pull the curtain back to reveal the previously invisible structure of the choreography of presenting.

The tools and strategies described in this book provide the details of a micromodel of communication that can be applied to any presentation and with any audience. By employing these skills and strategies, you will enable participants in your sessions to experience positive group dynamics and to learn more, and more quickly, because you have created an optimum learning environment. Two elements that contribute to an optimum learning environment—what Renatte and Geoffrey Caine (1994) call *relaxed alertness*—are emotional safety and cognitive challenge.

Whatever your definition of a good presenter is, this book is designed to challenge and expand it. It does not teach you tricks or tips for presenting or how to prepare a presentation. Nor does it teach you how to make a PowerPoint slide, use a laser pointer, or create attractive handouts. Rather, this book is about becoming more conscious, purposeful, intentional, and present in the moment when presenting or facilitating.

All journeys have a destination, and we believe that choice lives within the journey. The more extensive your repertoire, the more options you have and the more successful you are as a presenter. The framework of the repertoire has multiple levels: the specific skills, their contexts (when they are effective, not effective, when to be proactive and reactive), patterns, and the ability to recognize and react to them. Navigating through the unpredictable while anticipating potential challenges to seek alternative paths is best facilitated when you have a set of tools that you can consciously access. The better you know these skills and their applications, the more likely your success.

When presenting to adults, your subject matter expertise is important; however, knowing how to present and how to react to the unpredictability of participants is more important in terms of making a difference in participant learning. If it is only about content and subject matter, why meet? People can read the content on their own. So why do we meet in order to learn? Because learning is a social event, it is a conscious act whose level of achievement is directly proportional to the ardent diligence the learner brings. We believe the passion for learning is facilitated, nurtured, and developed by the dance that the skilled presenter engages in. It is the dance that creates and sustains relationship, between participants and presenter and among participants. This complex and dynamically rich

social intranet of learning is the dance, and the choreography determines its level of success.

Have you ever had an event in your professional life that resulted in a personal transformation so profound that your newly discovered frame of mind resulted in a new clarity? You can think of it as discovering a new universe right in front of you that you had always looked at yet never seen. Our hunch is that each of us has at least one in our life. Here is a story about one of those events from Kendall's perspective.



### FIRST CONTACT

In January 1993, I was promoted to a science curriculum coordinator position for a large school district in California. In that role, professional development, curriculum development, assessment, and standards emerged as focal points of responsibility. In February, the director of curriculum asked me to come to her office. With excitement beaming from her eyes and a welcome rhythm to her voice, Lynda told me I would be attending a five-day session on nonverbal classroom management by a wonderful presenter. She went on about how fantastic the presenter was and that she was sending me so that I could bring the content back to the district to provide training to classroom teachers.

The idea of attending a five-day session on nonverbal classroom management was not on my list of the 100 things I want to do before I die. After all, I thought with smug arrogance, I was the science coordinator and wanted to attend workshops on inquiry, on hands-on science, and learn real stuff about how our universe works. Besides, I grew up in Los Angeles in the 1970s and was familiar with Erhard Seminars Training, transcendental meditation, encounter groups, and body language. In fact, I even told my boss about these experiences and said, "Come on, I don't think learning about body language is going to be useful; it's all a cliché anyway. Besides I grew up in L.A. and know all that." As I reflect back now I think, how smug. I also realize now how encouraging, forward thinking, and wonderful Lynda was because that event changed everything.

So I anticipated this five-day training with my customary dread and reluctance, despite reports that the presenter, Michael Grinder, was very good and that his work was sound. On a cool spring morning in March, I arrived at the training site and wondered how I would endure five days of this stuff. The session was to start at 8:30. As the start time grew near, sitting in the back row near the door, I grew more angry and frustrated, thinking, "This is five days I won't get back!"

Little did I know that a transformation in the way I thought about presenting, delivering presentations, teaching, and learning had begun. About 15 minutes before the session formally began, the presenter greeted each of us and moved about the room with deliberate moves. He moved like a dancer, effortlessly shifting his steps and becoming a colleague and peer when he came to greet us,

instantly developing rapport with each of us. I say rapport, but at that time in my life I did not have a name for it or a way of describing it. By the end of the first hour, I knew something significant was happening. My reluctance shifted to keenness, and my resistance shifted to an embrace of the content that started the wonderful lifelong journey that continues to this day.

What made such a difference? It was not just the content. Yes, the content was solid and good quality, but initially I did not want it. Had I heard all those messages before? Of course! But it was the presenter's dance that made the most significant difference in my receptivity and openness to consider what he had to offer. And it was not that the presenter sang and danced. As Bennis and Biederman (1988) say in *Organizing Genius*, "one can sing and dance. Or one can create an environment in which singers and dancers flourish" (p. 70). In this workshop, I watched the presenter's song and dance, consciously unaware that he was also creating an environment in which we participants flourished and learned to sing and dance to the tune of classroom management.

As I sat in this workshop, I realized that my own internal resistance and skepticism ebbed, as did that of others in the room. Most important, I realized that the shift in my thinking, my attitude, and my participation was in response to the presenter's nonverbal moves. At the end of the first day, I had a glimpse of a great presenter leading a great workshop and I was beginning to see things in ways I never had before. I began to see the interplay of communication patterns between presenter and audience and the presenter's skillful ability to choreograph his steps to support our learning every step of the way.

The presenter created a learning environment in which we flourished because we felt as if we were his partners—being a partner is essential to constructing meaning. As he changed his steps, we changed with him. As we changed our steps, he changed with us. Ever respectful and entertaining, he kept a keen eye focused on our learning. That gifted presenter demonstrated what Doyle and Strauss (1976) recognize as a challenge, the ability to do "a combination tap dance, shuffle, and tango to a syncopated rhythm produced by unpredictable humans" (p. 89). What the presenter did can be reduced to a single idea: he was respectful to the audience. The skill sets he mastered and demonstrated were the steps that make up the dance of the presenter. What does honoring an audience look, sound, and feel like? This book will lead you through the steps of this exquisite dance.



## ABOUT THIS BOOK

In the chapters ahead, we explicitly describe how to plan, think, choreograph, and dance like a presenter. We are not talking about presenters who want to just get through the presentation and look good while doing it. Nor are we talking about presenters who merely talk to showcase their

expertise. Effective presenting, like dancing, doesn't just appear in our midst. It has to be planned and adjusted in the moment—a challenge that runs counter to the powerful urge for some to simply rely on their content expertise or on the coattails of their own charisma. Given that presenters are experts in their field does not necessarily make them experts at presenting. Leo Tolstoy famously contended that “All happy families resemble one another; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” We contend that effective presenters are all alike, and all ineffective presenters are ineffective in their own way.

This book unpacks and describes the skills that effective presenters have in common. When used effectively, these skills can increase the good and decrease, if not eliminate, the negative impact of unpredictable situations and disruptive behaviors found in all settings where people come together to learn and to conduct business. By learning and practicing these skills, you will become more conscious of the profound influence these patterns have on participant learning, rapport, and relationship. When used congruently and appropriately, these skills can significantly enhance the delivery of presentations.

This book describes how to think like a presenter—leading to proficiency in declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge. Effective presenters know what to do, how to do it, and, most important, when and if to do it. The what, when, and how of nonverbal and verbal patterns are dependent on specific content and contextual knowledge as well as a high level of proficiency at understanding and influencing group dynamics.

Our focus on the similarities among all effective presenters is framed in the 7 Essential Abilities of Effective Presenters, which incorporate both verbal and nonverbal patterns of communication and can be learned and mastered in order to effectively address the wide range of behaviors that participants display.

Humans are unpredictable, therefore it is unlikely that a presenter can consistently predict what participants are going to say or how they are going to respond or react to a given situation. What is predictable, however, like a changing dance step, is that there is a menu of plausible participant behaviors that can positively or negatively influence a presentation. Some negative behaviors may include asking many questions, side-talking with a neighbor, processing out loud, sending text messages, reading e-mail, or playing Sudoku. The gifted presenter, adept in the skills described in this book, has a vast repertoire of strategies that effectively engage participants, increasing the likelihood of participation and interaction while allowing flexibility during those unpredictable moments.

To enhance your learning while reading this book, we embrace a model from the arts. Artists practice, and practice usually entails a focus

on individual skills and moves. Next, they rehearse. Rehearsal is a safe learning environment in which performers put their skills to test in real-life simulations. After many practices and rehearsals comes the performance. The performance is your presentation. We submit that the work you do in this book, in the practice sessions and rehearsals, will make a difference in the quality of your presentations and in the learning of those who attend. Engaging in deliberate and focused practice and rehearsals contributes to a well-executed performance. By learning and practicing these skills, you will become more conscious of the profound influence that these communication patterns have on participant learning, rapport, and receptivity. When used congruently and appropriately, these skills will significantly enhance the delivery of your next presentation by elevating your craftsmanship and providing you with a toolbox for navigating the unexpected.