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# Introduction to the 7 Essential Abilities of Effective Presenters

*The newest computer can merely compound, at speed, the oldest problem in the relations between human beings, and in the end the communicator will be confronted with the old problem, of what to say and how to say it.*

Edward R. Murrow

**A**ll effective presenters establish credibility; build and sustain rapport; read the group; balance task, process, and group development; listen to and acknowledge participants; respond appropriately; and recover with grace. Combined, these abilities make up the cornerstone necessary to dance masterfully. Within each of these 7 abilities are five to eight specific skills and moves. Consequently, we describe more than 50 discrete skills in the chapters that follow. This book is organized around the 7 Essential Abilities, each of which corresponds to a particular chapter.

## **Essential Ability 1: Establish Credibility**

This lays the foundation for participants to attribute intelligence, competence, confidence, and expertise to the presenter. Credibility is a presenter characteristic perceived and assigned by the group. The specific

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skills associated with credibility include voice tone, use of the still gesture, credible stance, and abdominal breathing patterns.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Essential Ability 2: Build and Sustain Rapport**

This involves strategies and moves that create a short-term psychological state in which the lines of communication are wide open. When rapport is high, participants are cognitively responsive and therefore receptive to considering new understandings that challenge their current models of knowing. Knowing how to establish rapport, break rapport, and reestablish rapport are critical skills in the learning environment that support student thinking and problem solving.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Essential Ability 3: Read the Group**

This entails recognizing, processing, and responding to participants' nonverbal patterns. The presenter reads the group to anticipate their learning needs as well as their psychological and physiological needs. By reading the nonverbal behaviors of participants, an effective presenter can anticipate resistance, recognize receptivity, and choreograph facilitation moves that support positive group dynamics.

#### **Essential Ability 4: Balance Task, Process, and Group Development**

This involves an interaction between outcomes (task), protocols (process), and relationship (group development). Effectively balancing the three ensures acquiring a tangible outcome while promoting maximum learning and optimal participation in the time available.

#### **Essential Ability 5: Listen to and Acknowledge Participants**

This involves deliberate steps in a delicate dance. Adults offer several challenges in learning environments, one of which is the willingness to reveal what they know and don't know as well as what they are learning. Effective listening requires Ability 2 (Build and Sustain Rapport) as well as

specific voice, eye, gesture, and stance patterns to give participants the perception of being sincerely listened to and acknowledged. Participant engagement and learning depends on being understood and having the sense of feeling safe enough to divulge their thinking to the group.

### **Essential Ability 6: Respond Appropriately**

This is dependent on the effective implementation of the skills related to Ability 5. When a person feels listened to and acknowledged, the effective presenter can then deliver an appropriate response. Responding appropriately requires evaluating, synthesizing, and delivering a congruent verbal and nonverbal message. It is about making the person and the group *right*, by which we mean feeling safe to be wrong, to reveal learning, and to reveal what they do not know.

### **Essential Ability 7: Recover With Grace**

This involves the ability to recognize when the participants stop thinking and you have lost group rapport or group attention, or perhaps even just lost your place. Graceful nonverbal moves ensure that the group will stay present, focused, and engaged. This intriguing ability includes the nonverbal moves associated with changing location, pausing, gestures of location, and stance.

## **Reflection 1 | Exploring the 7 Essential Abilities**

To more effectively engage in the 7 Essential Abilities, take some time to complete the following reflection.

**Step 1:** Begin by reading the first ability again. Then, to surface your interpretation, paraphrase it in your own words.

**Step 2:** Think of a situation you observed in which you noticed an effective presenter using that ability.

**Step 3:** Repeat Steps 1 and 2 for each of the 7 Essential Abilities.

The patterns within the 7 Essential Abilities are ubiquitous in communication; people use them constantly and seamlessly at an unconscious or habitual level. By reading this book, you may experience a new consciousness in your own patterns—patterns that up until now you have always engaged in but perhaps never recognized. The gift of consciousness is not only found in recognizing the patterns, but also in

developing your perceptual acuity to recognize the influence these patterns have on your communication and how improved your relationships will become. Patterns of nonverbal communication are used by everyone and unconsciously understood by most. The enculturation of nonverbal patterns in communication is tacit in nature, and only a few written texts of rules and descriptors exist. Michael Grinder, a colleague, mentor, and friend, has authored several useful nonacademic books defining these patterns, including *ENVoY: Your Personal Guide to Classroom Management* (1993) for teachers and *The Elusive Obvious* (2008). Readers familiar with Grinder will recognize the parallel and interweaving ideas between his work and the 7 Essential Abilities. For the academically inclined, the most complete academic text on nonverbal patterns of communication within and across cultures is the three-volume magnum opus *Nonverbal Communication Across Disciplines*, by the linguist Fernando Poyatos (2002a, 2002b, 2002c).

You may discover some intriguing connections between the information in this book and things you already know. One is how intertwined the 7 Essential Abilities are with Howard Gardner's (1985) model of interpersonal intelligence. This connection is made even stronger in the model of nonverbal communicative intelligence (Zoller, 2008), in which critical thinking, problem solving, physiology, neurology, and metabolism are all interconnected and interdependent in communication. Another significant connection is found in Daniel Goleman's (2006) *Social Intelligence*. For Goleman, social intelligence is rooted in empathy and rapport, both of which are expressly dependent on nonverbal cues.

As you read this book, we hope that many discoveries emerge for you through the practices and rehearsals on your way to using your new learning in future presentations. It is our hunch that the value in learning will come from knowing what the skills are, why they are important, how to do them, and their potential benefits. So let's begin our own dance.