

A photograph of a theater stage. The stage is covered with red curtains. Above the curtains is a decorative archway with ornate, colorful patterns in gold, red, and blue. Several black speakers are visible on the stage, including a large one on the right and a smaller one on the left. The lighting is warm and focused on the stage.

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION— ENGAGE!

BY CHIP EICHELBERGER, CSP

A photograph of a theater stage. The stage is covered with red curtains. Above the curtains, there is a decorative border with gold and red patterns. The ceiling is also decorated with gold and red patterns. The overall atmosphere is ornate and classic.

HOW TO INVOLVE AND MOTIVATE YOUR AUDIENCE TO SET YOURSELF APART FROM THE CROWD

Jerry Garcia, legendary leader of The Grateful Dead, said, “You do not merely want to be considered just the best of the best. You want to be considered the only ones who do what you do.”

That is great marketing advice for anyone. In the highly competitive world of public speaking, the ability to engage an audience is critical for speakers who want to differentiate themselves in the marketplace. It gives them an edge, whether they keynote, train, offer teleseminars/webinars, or want to move from being authors to speakers.

So, what makes a speaker engaging? According to “the world’s funniest guitar virtuoso,” Mike Rayburn, CSP, “It is not a monologue; it is a dialogue. The less you are ‘presenting’ and the more you are in the moment, coming through you rather than from you, the better you will be.”

Interaction is about focusing on the audience, not you. The Webster's Dictionary definition of engagement in this context is emotional involvement or commitment.

To take engagement to the next level, you need both.

I developed my style of engaging an audience while working for motivational speaker Tony Robbins from 1988 to 1993. My job was to lead sales teams and work with promoters that filled his events throughout the United States, the U.K. and Australia. I did talks to sell tickets, mostly to skeptical sales people. I had to get commitments to take action now and purchase tickets. I gave over 1,200 talks before my first paid event.

I quickly learned the difference between presentation and persuasion. If I did a presentation, people would smile, thank me for coming, and say they would "think about it." But if I engaged, challenged and persuaded them, I got applause, ticket sales on the spot and referrals. What actions are you persuading audiences to take?

When I made the transition to professional speaking, I took what had worked for me in that arena and moved it to the main stage. I learned that people would rather be entertained than educated. If I got them to laugh, move, reevaluate and, most important, to change their emotional state by changing their physiology and internal dialogue, then I was successful in engaging and entertaining them.

Educating them was not enough.

Audiences want to interact and get involved, especially at a typical conference where they have seen 1,480 PowerPoint® slides, and have been "talked at" all day with very little engagement.

TOOLS OF ENGAGEMENT

"Contrast" is the keyword of emotional involvement. Think of developing more contrast in how you deliver your message using these three tools of engagement:

Body. Vary your gestures and facial expressions and make extended eye contact between two and five seconds. Move with a purpose on stage and don't wander. When in doubt, move in toward the audience and get off the stage when possible.

Engage one person at a time. Carry on a series of interesting connected conversations by moving from one set of eyes to the next. Speakers should appear to be looking at individuals, not the audience. Connecting regularly from one set of eyes to another takes emotional engagement to the next level. With a big audience, when you look at one, you appear to be looking at dozens.

Voice. Vary your voice inflection, pace and volume to transmit energy and make you interesting to listen to, mark out key words for greater emphasis and meaning, use silence and the power of pausing for emphasis.

Energy. Do not underestimate the power of "switching on" before

you begin. Vary the highs and lows in the emotional connection of your message, touch when appropriate and connect with the audience. Get the attendees to do something physically. Your energy on stage is contagious. How does your energy flow during your presentation?

PREPARE TO BE SUCCESSFUL

Audience engagement begins before the event. Calling and interviewing participants from different levels of the organization is essential. When possible, obtain permission to use direct quotes that illustrate that you have done your homework. You want the audience to think, "Wow, how did the speaker know all that? He was really well prepared."

When you arrive at the event, it is helpful to attend a few sessions and converse with other attendees over a meal before you speak. Introduce yourself to as many people as possible. Referencing what you learn will boost your credibility and score points with even the most skeptical audience members.

Before you go on stage, select the right music to set a fun, energetic tone for your presentation. Do not leave it up to the tech team to create energy in the room for you.

GET THEIR MOTORS RUNNING

I primarily do opening and closing keynotes that last 60 to 90 minutes. When the audience seems comatose, I ask attendees to stand shortly after

my captivating opening statement, quote, question, statistic or observation. I instruct them to greet others and ask: “Why are you here?” or “What is the best take-away so far?”

Then, I persuade them to do a 30-second wake-up message. A lively, upbeat song cued up to play right when it starts really increases involvement.

Amanda Gore, CSP, CPAE, uses speed to promote audience involvement. With this tactic, there simply isn't any time for their fears to come out.

A customized fill-in-the-blank form helps the audience put the material into action. They can fill in key items and take a few moments to answer questions. Ask them share their answers with someone. It is unusual for a “keynote,” but it works for me. Audience evaluations indicate that attendees enjoy this approach. .

This type of engagement gets people thinking and reevaluating, which leads to action, and decisions to change now. These interactions help overcome the Law of Diminishing Intent, which states that the longer you wait to implement an idea, the less enthusiasm you will have for it. Publicly declaring your commitment is a powerful tool.

YOU PUT YOUR WHOLE SELF IN

To engage the group, you must be engaged. Get into a “switched on” state before you take the stage. For me, it starts the night before. I eat a light dinner, read something positive, go to bed as early as possible and visualize. I believe motion creates emotion. It is

essential to exercise with a 30-minute aerobic session to introduce oxygen into your system in the morning.

Before taking the stage, I practice a physical and mental routine to get into a peak state. Other presenters have similar routines, for example, The Rolling Stone's Mick Jagger always requests a space of at least 40 yards near his dressing room where he can do wind sprints before he takes the stage. It works for him, even at 68 years of age.

Why is engaging the audience so critical? Depending on your topic, your task as speaker is to entertain, instruct, cajole, persuade, motivate, delight—pick as many as you wish. None of these can happen if you don't connect to the audience.

Connection to engagement, involvement to action—it's possible to make a true difference in the lives of your audience through what you do from the stage. As most of us feel called to speak on the topics we choose, so, too, is the satisfaction that comes from feeling like we're making a difference in someone's life. And of course, becoming known as an engaging speaker is great for your marketing, too!

The rules for engagement make the difference. Think big by taking starting with small steps. What will you change before you take the stage?



Chip Eichelberger, CSP, has switched on over 900 conventions in the past 17 years. He engages his audiences to look in the

Exaggeration Exercise

A digital video camera can be your best friend! (I like the Kodak Zi8.) Not only is it great to record and post video testimonials of clients who love your engaging style, you can also use it to practice - deliberately practice to be more engaging.

Videotape parts of your talk. But as you're speaking, exaggerate and try to go over the top with all your tools of engagement - Body, Voice, Energy. In the classes I do, this is always funny to watch. The speaker usually thinks it was too much and the rest of the class says it was terrific.

Why does this work? Because once you've felt what it's like to exaggerate, you'll probably fall back to a new “normal” - maybe 50% of what the videotape showed—that is much more engaging than where you started!

mirror, put on the hat of personal responsibility, and get switched on! To get Eichelberger's recommended room-setup and logistics guide to make your next event more engaging, contact him at chip@getswitchedon.com.