

Your Public Presence

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Be Earnest and Genuine

Authenticity is the key to a positive and powerful public presence. This briefing offers ideas for improving the way you are perceived by others. These techniques and tactics will be ineffective if you are pretending to be something you are not. You will be uncomfortable, and others will notice, if you behave in a way that is not sincere and genuine.

To maintain your authenticity, take the following steps:

1. Your story – practice telling your life story. Create a biological narrative for yourself that reveals who you are and what is important to you. Think of early experiences that shaped your interests and aspirations. Include periods when things were not going well and turning points that changed you. Practice telling this story to yourself. You can draw on parts of it from time to time as appropriate, and share it with others. More importantly, you should tell it to yourself as a way to define and ground who you are.
2. Your values – discover your core values. Describe for yourself the four or five fundamental principles or beliefs that guide your decisions and actions. How do these relate to your life story? (Use Qm² Value Cards to discover your core values.)
3. Self awareness – There are things about each of us that we cannot see. Ask a friend to help you see yourself more clearly.
4. Self confidence – everyone has strengths, and everyone has weaknesses. Practice “*positive self-talk*.” Focus and build on your natural strengths. Remember that when others appear to be more powerful, more knowledgeable, or more skilled than you, maybe they are and maybe they aren’t. This should have no affect on your own sense of who you are and what you can do.
5. Practice - be aware of and seek to correct your weaknesses. Having a powerful and positive public presence comes more easily to some people than to others. Regardless, everyone has to practice in order to perfect certain techniques. Push yourself to overcome your weaknesses. Practice in front of the mirror. Role play with a friend. Test yourself, seek feedback, and keep working at it.

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Well Learned Social Fears

Many of us have been taught behaviors that can get in the way of creating a positive public presence. These lessons cause us to be fearful and lead us to make assumptions about other people.

1. Don't talk to strangers!
2. Wait for a "proper introduction."
3. Good things come to those who wait. Don't be pushy.
4. Better safe than sorry. Don't risk being rebuffed or embarrassed.
5. This is a two way street. They should introduce themselves to me.
6. They are only interested in their own circle of friends.
7. I have nothing in common with them. They won't be interested in me, and I probably won't be interested in them.
8. They're smarter, more attractive, and richer than I am; I won't fit in.

What are Your Nervous Habits?

Everyone has nervous habits. You should be conscious of yours and seek to avoid them.

- Laughing too much
- Parenthetical comments under your breath
- Fiddling with a pen
- What are yours?

Get Out There!

Are you hiding in your office? Put aside your fears and get out there. You have hired professionals to do their jobs. Step back and let them. Delegate internal matters to your senior staff and free your time to be in your community.

Set "out there" goals for yourself.

- How many public speaking engagements have you had in the past six months? How many will you schedule for the next three months?
- How many major donors or donor prospects have you visited in the past six months? How many are you scheduled to visit in the next three months?
- How many civic or business leaders have you had lunch with in the past six months? How many will you have in the next three months?
- How many community events have you attended in the past six months? How many will you attend in the next three months?

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Preparation

Your public presence becomes public in various settings: at a large gathering where you are among many strangers; at small meetings or over lunch with a few people; or at a program where you are asked to speak. Whatever the setting, and whatever your fears, you need to prepare.

Have a Plan

1. What's the event about? Who are the hosts/the sponsors/the leaders? Read about them.
2. What do you hope to accomplish? Focus on the potential benefits to you and your organization. Make a list of these.
3. Identify those you want to meet. (But don't ignore those you encounter along the way.)
4. Identify commonalities with the people you are likely to meet. Prepare to ask them about their interests.
5. Plan and practice small talk – read the paper (sports/business)
6. Review your nonprofit's talking points.
7. Bring an ample supply of business cards.

Prepare to Introduce Yourself

Practice introducing yourself in a powerful and positive way:

- Look the person in the eye
- Give a firm handshake
- Smile
- Say clearly your name and title
- Say "I'm delighted to meet you" or something similar.
- Address the person by his or her name.
- If you are attending the event with someone on your staff, practice how you will introduce them, and practice how they will introduce you. What positive words will you use to describe one another?

Good Manners

- Good manners are a source of power
- Attentive men who open doors for ladies score points with those who are watching
- Be mindful of the tone and level of your voice
- Be wary of the challenge of balancing food and drink while you are standing and talking.

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Positive Self-Talk

Combat confidence dips. Make your own enthusiasm! Take responsibility for the quality of this experience.

What are you saying to yourself?

- *I'm too shy, dull.*
- *I talk too much.*
- *I have nothing important to say.*
- *Others know more than me.*
- *I don't know what to say.*
- *I'm too nervous.*
- *I'm afraid of being rebuffed or embarrassed.*

Tell yourself:

- *I have my own strengths and knowledge; I am an equal here.*
- *I am interested in getting to know these people; I may learn something from them.*
- *They may be shy; I can help them get to know other people.*
- *There is little likelihood that I will be rebuffed; if I am it's their problem, not mine.*
- *I have the power to affect the quality of this experience for myself and for others.*

Index Card

Create an index card of hints to help you.

- Remind yourself of good behaviors
- Allay your fears – get confident – positive self talk
- Be a “host”
- Meet the right people
- Have fun

In a Crowd of Strangers

- Enter with energy, enthusiasm, purpose
- Behave with courtesy, charm, caring, chutzpah
- Timely arrival and departure; stay long enough
- Redefine stranger – look for what you have in common and be eager to talk to them, to discover who they are and what interests them.
- Don't wait to be introduced. Introduce yourself. Others' lack of social skills can limit you. Rely on yourself.
- Switch to “HOST” behavior. Guests wait; a host acts!
 - Extend yourself – retrieve coats and get drinks for others
 - Initiate conversations
 - Draw out the wallflowers – include them in the conversation
 - Introduce others – mention commonalities
 - Compliment them
 - Care – make it real
 - If you act like a host, they will remember you
 - Acting like a host gives you power

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- Go with a Buddy – but don't be attached at the hip! Have a plan for each of you.
- Position yourself near the buffet or bar so that others will see you.
- Mindful of the booze.
- Treat everyone well.
- *Get out there – speak – take risks!*

One-on-One or in Small Groups

- When talking to someone you should be completely absorbed by what they are saying and not let your mind wander.
- Hold your comments until the other person is finished talking.
- Do not let distractions like ringing telephones distract your attention. Do not stop the conversation to answer a phone unless you are expecting a call that is really urgent and important. Taking a call sends a message to the other person that the call is more important than meeting with him or her.
- When talking face to face nod your head affirmatively or say "I see" or "Tell me more," or other comments to let the person know you are listening and interested in what they are saying.
- Encourage the conversation.
- Sense nonverbal language.
- Bring others into the conversation by asking them what they think. Facilitate the conversation.
- Use the other person's name when you are introduced, and several times more during the conversation. But don't over do it.
- Avoid violating another person's personal space.
- Look into their eyes, smiling. Smile frequently.
- Be open: open hands, uncrossed arms, face the other person, relaxed, lean slightly forward.

How You Present Yourself – Your Voice

Ask a friend to tell you about your voice. Unless you have a serious impediment, there probably is no need to take voice lessons. However, there may be small things you can practice, such as speaking more slowly or clearly.

- Resonance – richness of voice tone – you may not be able to control this, but you should be aware of how you sound.
- Speed – do you tend to talk too fast or too slow?
- Rhythm – flow, pace – do you pause too much or not enough? Do you interject "you know" or "like" into your conversation?
- Pitch – high or low sound
- Volume - loudness
- Inflection – change in pitch and volume
- Clarity – crisp enunciation – do people understand you when you speak?

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How You Present Yourself – Your Appearance

The rules for dress have relaxed over the past decade. You need to think carefully about the impression you want to make, taking into consideration the purpose of the gathering and who you will be seeing – or more to the point, who will be seeing you.

- Who do you know whose style and look always impress you? How do they pull it off?
- Dress appropriately for the setting and for the people you will be meeting. Be professional.
- Determine the professional standard for your position: How do your board members dress for work? How do they dress for board meetings? How does your lawyer dress? How do leaders in your community dress? You should be in their league.
- It is better to be overdressed than underdressed – be one notch up.
- Dress so that the focus is on you and not on what you are wearing.
- Keep your look simple and successful, especially when presenting.
- Select clothing, fragrances, jewelry, hairstyle, etc. that do not detract from your professional image.
- Clothing should be of good quality, fit well, and be clean and neat.
- Select a professional hair style. Avoid playing with or adjusting your hair.
- Suits and conservatively tailored dresses work well for women.
- Jewelry can convey credibility. Leave the fun stuff for your weekends and go for conservative, classic styles.
- Dark suits are safe for men. Red ties evoke power; blue and brown are more friendly. Use colors to suit the purpose of the meeting.
- Your clothes are your image, check the mirror and see what others see.

Some examples of dressing the part:

- At Southwest Airlines pilots have a uniform: dark suit, white shirt, and a tie. Flight attendants wear polo shirts and khaki pants or shorts. Each form of dress sends a message. You would not want the pilots to dress casually. You would not want the attendants to be so formal.
- At the Strong Museum in Rochester, NY, the front line staff wear polo shirts, presenting a casual and friendly appearance to the visitors. Sometimes the executive director wears a polo shirt as well, and sometimes he wears a suit. It depends upon his schedule for the day.

Taking Notes

As you spend more time out of the office being with other leaders, you will learn more and more about them and about what is going on in your community. You need to have a system for keeping track of what you are learning.

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The best way to do this is to call your office immediately after an event or meeting, while your thoughts are fresh. Leave a message for yourself, your assistant, or the development director – whoever is tasked with keeping the information. Describe the meeting, identify who you talked with, and state what you learned. Also indicate any follow up action that should be taken.

Your message should be transcribed and entered into a system so that the information can be tracked and easily retrieved.

Get out there! - Go – Go Often – Be a Host - Mingle – Make Friends - Have Fun!

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EXERCISE – THE BENEFITS OF ATTENDING A PUBLIC EVENT OR ACTIVITY

Consider the last event or activity you attended for professional purposes. Using hindsight, complete this form.*

EVENT _____
 SPONSOR _____
 PURPOSE _____
 LOCATION _____
 ATTENDEES _____
 REASON FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION _____

PERSONAL BENEFITS	PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	

What are some personal or professional benefits of attending a public activity or event?

Personal:

- Increase personal stature
- Develop more ease with strangers
- Build self-confidence
- Make new friends – contacts
- Acquire knowledge
- Have Fun

Professional:

- Perceived as powerful and credible
- Recognized as a community resource
- Community networking, establish connections; build rapport
- Gain insights, learn information.
- Increase business; build revenue
- Expand audience
- Promote the institution
- Have Fun

What will you do differently to increase the benefits derived from the next public event you attend?

*This form is adapted from Susan Roane, *How to Work a Room* (1988)