

Expressiveness Using Voice, Body, and Story

*There is a vitality, a life force,
an energy, a quickening that is translated
through you into action.*

And because there is only one you in all time, this expression is unique.

Martha Graham

THE DAY OF JACK'S PRESENTATION TO HIS FIRM'S ANNUAL MEETING finally arrived. His was the first presentation of the first day. It would set the tone for the whole three-day affair. He had rehearsed several times, including two full dress rehearsals. The only thing he couldn't rehearse was presenting in front of all twenty-two hundred live partners.

The night before, after Jack had finished his rehearsal in the cold and empty hotel ballroom where plenary sessions would be held, we'd encouraged him to spend some time walking around the hall thinking—even saying aloud—"This is my concert hall! This is my space!" It's a common actor's technique. At first Jack was reluctant. "Too many people around," he'd protested.

Though the cavernous ballroom was empty, many technicians and others were finishing the stage and other preparations for the meeting the next morning. With our assurance that they'd seen stranger behavior, he did as we suggested, ending twenty minutes later onstage practically bellowing, "This is my space!"

We smiled at how far this mild-mannered, soft-spoken "Southern boy" had come. Jack's plan was to start at the podium with presidential teleprompters (the kind that let him read text off

clear glass screens while appearing to look at the audience) and then move on from there. Starting at the podium, where he'd delivered every other presentation he'd ever made, was a conscious decision. It let him start in a comfortable place. In fact, the whole presentation could be given from the podium, though that wasn't the plan. The plan was to abandon the podium after ten minutes and present in ways completely new for him and his company. The question was, what would he actually do once he stood there in front of all those partners?

He came onstage and, instead of walking to the podium, he stepped to the front of the stage and stood alone, silent. A hush fell over the vast room. "Before I begin," he said, "I have to know something. How many of you had trouble with those high-tech shower faucets the hotel put in? It took me fifteen minutes to figure the darn things out." He raised his hand with a big smile and waited. It was an electric moment because it was risky. What if he was the only person who'd had trouble?

We knew he'd succeeded when the audience responded with a burst of laughter. Slowly, hands began to sprout, until at least half the audience admitted near defeat by a faucet. Jack had known that before he launched into his message he needed to break the ice a little, to connect in a lighthearted way, to perhaps show a little of his own vulnerability or humanity.

Then he went to the podium and began his rehearsed talk, the laughter and good spirits still echoing through the hall.

His twofold goal emerged quickly and clearly. First, going global: *Enormous opportunities await us if we truly go global. And enormous dangers if we refuse or fail.*

He created an overarching metaphor by telling the story of how the railroad system developed in the western United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. At first there had been a maze of local and regional railroads only haphazardly connected. Then a few pioneers had had the foresight and ability to weld those autonomous units into an interconnected system that met customers' needs far better and improved business for the railroad owners. The analogy with his vision for this international financial services firm was clear.

Now the second part of his message: *Elect me CEO. I'm the guy who can take us global.*

Jack left the podium and went—actually he almost ran, he was so full of energy—into the audience. It was the beginning of his second passionate purpose. He was demonstrating a willingness to move out of his "comfort zone" and to make personal change. Video cameras around the hall projected his image on a huge onstage screen as he moved around the audience with a wireless mike in his hand.

He interviewed partners—their images flashed on the huge screen—from local offices already taking some of the steps needed to go global. These partners described what they had done and the results they'd gotten. Jack acknowledged their foresight and endorsed them and the steps they'd taken. "You see," he said to the entire group, "we've already begun. We have the expertise. We can do this."

Back onstage, Jack told a story from his boyhood of going to the local YMCA for swimming lessons. He and his classmates stood hesitantly by the side of the pool, as the instructor urged them into the water. Finally, Jack jumped in, and when he did, everyone else followed. It was his first lesson in leadership, he said. "Some of you have already jumped in. Now I'm jumping in. I hope and expect all of you will follow. The water's great!"

Then, the final and perhaps biggest stretch of all, he recited a short speech full of life and energy adapted from Shakespeare's *Tempest*:

*Be not afeared.
The world is full of enormous opportunities,
Changes and challenges
That give delight and hurt not.*

"I want you all to recite it with me," he called out, as he ran out into the audience again to recite it with them. The words appeared on the onstage screen. All twenty-two hundred partners read them out loud.

"What?!" he called out. "I can't hear you! Do it again!"

All twenty-two hundred of these stolid partners read out the words again.

"That's better!" he said. "Much better. But not good enough. We'll never make it that way. Again!"

He made them read the words five times until all twenty-two hundred people were on their feet bellowing the words with all their hearts. The applause at the end lasted a full five minutes and would have gone longer if Jack himself hadn't ended it.

When he was done, the hall was awake with energy and Jack had accomplished his twofold mission: He'd made clear his global vision for the firm. And, in demonstrating the kind of personal change and risk-taking that vision required, he'd also shown he was the fellow who could take them all where they needed to go.

His presentation ended with a Q and A session with the audience. He handled several questions easily and convincingly. Then, someone said, "Jack, I understand you've been using a personal coach. Is that correct?" The audience caught its breath. The implication was, "Do you need a personal coach because you're weak?" Everyone wondered how he would answer. This is the kind of small but crucial moment that tests a leader.

With a big smile, he said, "That's absolutely correct. In fact, she's right here at the third table. A lot of what you just saw and heard was due to her help." He paused for a moment, then said, "Many of you know I haven't relished giving speeches and presentations all these years. I thought it would be smart to get some help for this one. It's helped me step out of my comfort zone and I recommend it for all of you."

Someone there later commented on "the authenticity of Jack's gesture of telling the truth. This was a real leadership moment, a moment of honesty and openness. It deeply enhanced (Jack's) stature and effectiveness as a leader."

Afterward, a crowd stormed the podium to congratulate Jack. Everyone had seen his past presentations and knew what a leap he'd made to unleash his voice and energy and movement for this one. Many of them said they were ready to follow his lead. At the election a day later, Jack won the top spot by a large margin. Pas-

sionate purpose had opened the door for him to communicate in a dynamic, compelling way.

Three rules for Expressiveness

From our experience in the theater and working with scores of executives like Jack, we've identified three Expressiveness rules:

1. Conquer your fear of overexpression.
2. Use your voice and body congruently.
3. Tell stories to unleash your Expressiveness.

Expressiveness rule #1: Conquer your fear of overexpression

It took a lot of work with Jack, but he was able to overcome one of the biggest obstacles we find among businesspeople when it comes to self-presentation: The fear of overexpression.

Most all of us fear being overly expressive, being tagged "flamboyant." In most businesses, that's not a good reputation.

Think of regulating your expressive power as you would turn a dial on your stereo. You probably think of actors as a full ten on that dial, in terms of their expressive power. Think of Robin Williams, who can be so flamboyant and "big" sometimes.

We're not saying you should go all the way to ten—that's for yelling "Look out!" when you see someone in the path of a speeding car. But we suspect you're probably setting your own dial between one and three in your business communication. We're suggesting that a three to seven is a better range. Even one-on-one, when you should turn the dial down a bit, you probably want to be at a three or four. Unless you're in adversarial negotiations, you want to let your emotions read on your face, and in your eyes and

body. And when you're in a group you should be going up to a five or six or seven, so that everyone can see what your face and body are communicating.

An actor adjusts her expressiveness dial in the same way when performing onstage versus performing in front of a camera. The stage actor must be much "bigger" with her expressions. She must literally throw them fifty or one hundred feet or more, all the way to the person in the last row. On camera, however, she must work with smaller expressions and gestures because the camera is much closer and more intimate. To use the Expressiveness needed onstage when performing to a camera would seem so over the top and dramatic as to appear phony.

Proper expression requires more than turning the dial up or down. As you move along that leadership spectrum from "responsive" to "assertive," you'll need to become more or less expressive. Generally, the more assertive you need to be, the fuller (not the same as simply louder) your expressiveness needs to be. Thus, captains and conceivers tend to be "bigger" in their Expressiveness than coaches or collaborators.

Steve Chambers, our former television actor-turned-executive vice president, brought to business an adaptable Expressiveness that he attributes to his acting training.

I was senior marketing executive, and then I was given sales too. For my first meeting with the entire sales group, I thought very hard about what that group needed from me. Salespeople are generals. They dictate. That's what they expect. Without thinking, I would have gone in and done a "Steve Chambers," the way I am in marketing, which is my more natural style—incredibly empathetic, a problem solver, motivating people the way I want to be motivated. But that's not what the salespeople needed or expected. For them I had to be the new sheriff in town. I needed a little edge, a little "prove it to me" attitude. They talk about sales strategy, but there's a lot less strategy in selling than in marketing. They needed to be talked to the way they would talk. So I created a mantra for them—"We close business"—and my voice and face said I meant business.

If you want to become more expressive, to become more assertive, you must be willing to experiment with letting go of habitual patterns and levels of expression—holding your body or using your voice a certain way. You will need to take a leap of faith and experiment with other patterns and levels to see what kind of feedback you get. In fact, don't rely on random comments from others. Enlist the active help of a friend to give you feedback as you try new modes of expression.

It happens over and over in our workshops, when we ask businesspeople to turn up the dial by releasing themselves from some comfortable habit (like hanging onto a podium or speaking softly with a smile all the time). They feel wildly uncomfortable. They're sure they've made fools of themselves. They're amazed when they hear from their workshop colleagues not only that they were perfectly normal, but that they were much more effective.

All we ask here is that you consider giving up your own habits of restraint. If you're like the thousands of businesspeople we've observed, those habits probably haven't served you very well.

Expressiveness rule #2: Use your voice and body **congruently**

A big problem we find time and again with businesspeople is the problem we saw with Richard at the beginning of Chapter 6. When he spoke to that group of directors, he said he was "tremendously excited," but his voice and body communicated a different message—in fact, it conveyed the exact opposite.

He wasn't congruent.

Congruence

All of us communicate in many ways simultaneously. Your spoken words communicate something. But as you say them, your voice itself—its pitch, tone, and so on—communicates something as well. Your face and body convey messages too. Problems arise when these different means of expression send different messages

simultaneously. If you think listeners should pay attention only to what you say, you're asking them to deny the wisdom of eons of human evolution. Survival depends on the ability to "read" the facial expression and body language of others. That probably explains the results of Albert Mehrabian's research into the powerful effect of messages conveyed by face, body, and voice.

The way to communicate most powerfully is to use all these means of expression *congruently*, so they all communicate the same message.

The price of incongruence is loss of credibility. We're convinced it's the reason so many leaders we see come across as insincere and artificial. Their voices say one thing, but their bodies or voices or facial expressions say something else. How can you trust someone who seems to be saying different things at the same time?

Some years ago, the CEO of a struggling major airline made a videotape, shown to all employees, in which he asked for their help in keeping the airline flying. In the video he said, "I want to ask you to help me today. I know this is difficult, but I want to ask you to consider a pay cut." Unfortunately, he made the videotape in what looked like a fairly plush executive office. As he spoke he leaned against a desk with a nervous smile on his face. Even though his words expressed urgency, his casual voice and body seemed to say, "Not a big deal." The employees refused to take a cut and the airline went out of business. We're not saying it was all because of that video, but the CEO certainly didn't help himself with it. That's the negative power of *incongruence*.

Congruence is yet another compelling reason for passionate purpose. If you believe deeply in what you're communicating, and you allow your passion to express itself, it will almost automatically align all your means of expression.

Actors train intensively

Actors practice for years to gain full control over every facet of communication. They learn to create whole characters virtually without speaking a word.

Kenneth Branagh conveys humorously a sense of what actors

go through in their training. He describes a voice class he took at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts in England. He had just delivered a speech by Hotspur from *Henry IV*, Part I, for which he'd given Hotspur a stutter—"For he made me m-m-m-mad!"

Palmer [the voice teacher] said, "Marvelous, absolutely super, tremendous grasp of that. A couple of reservations."

Here it was. The iron fist in the velvet glove.

"Horrendously stiff jaw there, Ken. That'll lose you all vocal flexibility if you're not careful. You've got to work on that sibilant 's.' Also those dark 'l's are letting you down badly. Don't want to be just a regional actor, do we? The hollow back really is a problem. It's affecting your rib control and contributing to that annoying sailor's roll you've developed. I think also if you can even out those vowel sounds, you'll do yourself a favour. Can't have kings sounding like peasants, can we?"

What can you do?

How can someone like you, who has never been trained, learn to use your voice and your body to express what you're saying?

We don't assume you can undertake years of study and practice, but there are some things you *can* do. There are simple techniques you can practice without professional guidance. Besides, simply being aware of certain concepts and possibilities can help you begin to expand your Expressiveness.

Relax (again!) Katharine Hepburn discovered how important learning to relax was early in her career.

I lost my voice and would get very hoarse whenever I played a part which was fast and loud. It was agony. . . . I think that I was so excited by life and living and my future that I was simply wound up so tight I didn't—couldn't—relax.

Relaxation is crucial for being present, for empathy, and now, for self-expression. Recall the airline CEO whose videotape we

described a moment ago. His palpable tension forced a nervous smile that undermined his urgent message. That's exactly what nervousness does. It can make the messages you're sending via voice, words, and body seem incongruent and, consequently, insincere.

Before any situation in which you will express yourself, but particularly before such major events as presentations, do the relaxation exercises that you've found work best for you.

Certainly, you should do belly breathing. You should do whatever exercises help you get "out of your head" and "into your body."

As Jack sat just offstage waiting to begin his presentation, we knew he was focusing on his breath and alternately tensing and relaxing parts of his body. We knew what he was doing because we'd coached him to do it; it was part of a prepresentation ritual he'd worked out for himself. But the ritual wasn't obvious to anyone else.

When he went onstage he was "up" and energized, yet relaxed. We could tell by the way he lightly held the microphone. We've seen many presenters who grip it for dear life. And when he moved, he moved fluidly, as he would in his own office.

Variety is the spice of expression In all that follows, variety is a common thread. It used to be said that if you didn't vary your voice, your body, and virtually every aspect of expression in a presentation every six minutes or so, you'd lose your audience to boredom. We suspect it's even less now, maybe a couple of minutes.

Television and movies are edited much faster now; scenes and angles change more quickly. There's something new to see and hear all the time. Because of that, people have come to expect constant variety, and if they don't get it, they tune out. So you must not only use the different modes of expression available with your voice and body, but also vary them frequently.

To provide variety is a gift to your audience. It will satisfy their needs and help you communicate your passionate purpose more effectively.

Marry language to passion Your choice of words matters.

Playwrights and actors don't speak in dull, everyday language. Mark Anthony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* didn't begin his great funeral oration with "Ladies and Gentlemen! May I have your attention?" Instead he said, "Friends! Romans! Countrymen! Lend me your ears!"

As James Earl Jones said,

A modern writer may be content to evoke a character's emotion. Shakespeare was never content until he found a character's passion. There is nothing more moving or powerful than the power of the Word when beautiful language is married to deep passion.

Language that matches the intensity of your passionate purpose will have a double benefit: It will lift *your* energy as you speak it—try saying "Lend me your ears" in a monotone. And the right words will raise the hair on the necks of your audience.

You've surely had that experience. The right words on the right occasion gave you goose bumps. They made you tingle all over. Or cry. Or laugh. Heightened language can do that.

Most all of us lack the ability to write that kind of language ourselves, but there are still some things anyone can do.

- *Find appropriate quotes from great works of literature.* Turn to Shakespeare, Auden, Whitman, Thoreau, Emerson, and other great poets, writers, and playwrights. The Bible, especially the King James version. Other religious texts, such as the Talmud or the Bhagavad Gita. Great political orations—the Gettysburg Address, Churchill's famous World War II speeches ("Blood, toil, sweat, and tears"). The right words in the right order can have a magical effect.
- *Use vivid language, with metaphor and imagery.* Vivid language will generate a stronger response from your audience. Provide vivid detail—the "dusty" road, the "weighty" document—to paint a picture, create an image in the mind's eye of your audience. Use sensory description so people

can see, smell, touch, taste, or hear what you're talking about. Use metaphor to make meaning memorable—winning was “sweet” and defeat “painful.” Jack clarified his vision for his firm by using the growth of a coherent railway system in the American West as a metaphor.

- *Speak plainly, clearly, and directly.* Many business leaders fill their speech with abstractions and jargon. Yet without exception the great speakers and actors move us with language plain, direct, concrete, and clear. They make no attempt to impress or confuse. “Lend me your ears!”
- *Learn from great orators.* The speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. illustrate these principles.

King was a preacher, and he and his audience had grown up in a rich tradition of biblical oratory. King first emerged as a civil rights leader through the power of his speeches. The seamstress Rosa Parks had refused to move to the back of a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Her simple refusal had unleashed a protest and a boycott of city buses. King, a relatively unknown young minister then, was named president of the newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association, at the urging of his fellow minister, Ralph Abernathy.

King's first task, with very little time to prepare, was to deliver a major speech to the thousands of blacks participating in the bus boycott. He began by noting that all present were citizens and therefore entitled to certain privileges. He reviewed the series of events leading to the boycott. He recognized Rosa Parks for her integrity. Then King found his pace. He declared it was time for patience to become protest.

And you know, my friends, there comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression.

The crowd began to reply with loud and positive choral responses.

There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July, and left standing amidst the chill of an Alpine November. We are here because we are tired now.

The crowd was with him, rushing forward.

We are not wrong in what we are doing. . . . If we are wrong—the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong. . . . If we are wrong, God Almighty is wrong.

The crowd roared in response.

King's biographer, Taylor Branch, described that moment: “The boycott was on. King would work on his timing but his oratory had just made him forever a public figure. In the few short minutes of his first political address, a power of communion emerged from him that would speak inexorably to strangers who would both love and revile him, like all prophets.”

Vocal variety What's the biggest problem you come across when you listen to someone? What drives you crazy? We bet it's someone speaking in a monotone. The speaker just drones on and on. Listeners stop listening.

The voice is an incredible instrument that allows a broad spectrum of expression. You'll probably never achieve the voice skills a trained actor possesses, but even being aware of the potential can help.

We talked to Kenneth Jay, our actor turned financial services executive, about how he uses his voice in business.

When you're speaking at a meeting, there are totally different rhythms and diction choices you make from a one-on-one, which is less formal and totally different. It's different with clients too. My voice tends to be bigger when I'm with clients. It's intuitive. There are word choices that I make when I'm with clients that are very specific. I tend to exaggerate the pitch and musical line of my voice when I am with clients. I modulate enormously. I start

and I stop. I change rhythms. These are all ways to get people to notice and plug in. When I am more intimate it gets a little quieter, there are a lot more pauses and there is a lot less inflection.

In case you're tempted to think small changes in the voice don't make a difference, here's a story from Maureen Stapleton.

We'd been running about four months or something [in Plaza Suite], and there was one laugh that was huge. It was built in, it was solid, it was there all the time, and one night I didn't get it. Gone! I was stunned. George C. Scott, who was the leading man, and I tried everything. He tried helping me; I tried every which way but I couldn't get it back. So I called Mike Nichols, our director, and I said, "Mike, I don't know what to do. I've tried everything. I lost the laugh on whatever the line was that's surefire, and I can't get it back. Would you please come and watch and tell me what to do?" So Mike did; he came back after the first act (and) said, "Take the second half of the sentence an octave lower." Okay, that sounds very technical, which it was. The next night I took the last half of the sentence an octave lower, and back came the laugh like gangbusters.

- **Vary your pitch:** You can make your voice high, like a violin, or low, like a cello. In Western culture, a lower pitch usually conveys authority, gravitas, and self-confidence.
- **Vary your volume:** Some people naturally speak more loudly, and others speak more softly. Both can be effective—assuming, obviously, you can be heard—but vary the volume for emphasis.
- **Vary your speed:** Some talk fast. Others talk slowly. Varying your speed can serve to emphasize something important.
- **Add warmth:** People like to hear a warm, rich voice, as opposed to a nasal twang. Think of James Earl Jones' voice; it's both deep and warm. You can find this quality when you yawn and speak at the same time.

- **Use pauses:** Pay attention to effective speakers. You'll notice they're not afraid to make a point and then say nothing for a second or two. It underlines the point and conveys a strong sense of conviction.

When we describe all these features of the voice, they can sound mechanical and even manipulative. But that's not how they're used. Actors learn and practice all these techniques and many more until they become automatic. And that's the point—to make the voice an instrument of marvelous variety that can effortlessly and unconsciously play whatever music your passionate purpose dictates. No actor, when performing, thinks, "Now I'm going to make my voice bigger and warmer." He simply does it because it's right for his character and the situation.

James Earl Jones explained it by telling a story about Ty Cobb.

"You have about forty different ways of sliding," people used to say to Ty Cobb. "How do you decide which way to slide?"

"I don't think about it, I just slide," he answered.

So it is with an actor's voice. You hope you have worked so hard for so long that you don't have to become self-conscious and think about it. You just use it organically, as the instrument of your art.

Body language Next time you're in a public place, like a shopping mall or some large event, watch how people move. See if you can tell anything about them—their mood, physical condition, personality—by the way they move. We bet you can tell a lot. When you're meeting a friend or loved one, you know their frame of mind just by seeing the way they move. They don't have to say a thing.

Michael Cunningham wrote about the way Nicole Kidman used her body (as well as a prosthetic nose) in her Oscar-winning portrayal of Virginia Woolf in the movie based on his book, *The Hours*:

I met Ms. Kidman, talked to her briefly about Woolf, and was asked if I'd like to see her in the Nose, which was the first I'd

heard about Ms. Kidman appearing in any nose other than her own. She was escorted to the makeup room, from which she emerged an hour later as another person entirely. Not only was her face unrecognizable, but her stance had changed. She held her head more sternly; she set her shoulders slightly forward, as if trying to conceal the fact that she expected, at any moment, a blow from behind.

There are many ways all of us “speak” with our bodies. By standing erect, head up, you communicate confidence. Your feelings play across your face. You lift your arms, for example, to emphasize a rise in sales. You move around as you speak to a group, approaching the group, entering its space, to emphasize a point and establish a closer bond. You use eye contact to connect with another person.

Take up space It’s common to hear someone with presence described as “taking up space,” meaning they seem to occupy more space than their simple physical size would warrant. In fact, it has little to do with physical size and more to do with how they think of themselves as they move around the space.

You can try it yourself. First, think of yourself as solidly grounded, connected to the earth, though able to move. Then, think of yourself as literally taking up more physical space than your body actually requires. Imagine you’re much larger than you really are. Imagine you’re walking through the room with your arms extended wide. Imagine you’re a king or queen, someone of enormous authority. Imagine you’re in your own home, greeting and welcoming the people around you.

It will help to have visited the room where you’ll speak and made yourself comfortable with it. You might even do what Jack did—walk around the empty room, thinking and saying, “This is my space.”

All these exercises, and others like them, will give your confidence in your bearing, and that’s the secret of taking up space.

Taking space can be overdone, as a funny story by actor-businessman Kenneth Jay illustrates.

I’ve got a guy who’s a transactor, who is very passionate about what he does. All he wants to do is go out there and close deals. We were in a meeting with a tough risk manager and my deal guy got very passionate. He was getting resistance from the risk manager, so he stood up on a chair and said, “It’s insane if you don’t see my point.”

Unfortunately, the risk manager reacted badly to the dealmaker’s dramatic gesture. Kenneth had to call a break in the meeting and have a talk with his dealmaker. There may be situations where standing on a chair might help. This wasn’t one of them. Use your judgment.

Expressive rule #3: Tell stories to unleash your Expressiveness

Ever notice what happens when someone tells a story? The speaker’s voice, face, and whole body come alive. The audience comes alive too, pulled forward in their seats, each listener eager to hear what happens next. It’s a universal response.

Storytelling can help you naturally express yourselves congruently. Stories help you automatically pull together every means of expression and compensate for any lack of formal training in voice and body movement.

At a meeting Kathy once attended in Boston, where the audience was at least 75 percent Republican, the first speaker was a leading Democrat, Senator Edward Kennedy.

I looked around the room as Kennedy began speaking, and the expression on most faces seemed to say, “Oh God, do I have to listen to him one more time?” But Kennedy started his speech with a story and immediately you could feel the energy in the room change. For twenty minutes he told story after story, each with a clear point. He had the audience laughing and rapt at the same time. At the end he received an enthusiastic ovation and left the audience excited and energized. The next speaker was a Republican

congressman who opened his talk with a graph and proceeded to show one chart after another and spoke of nothing but dry facts and figures. After a few minutes of that, many attendees began reading their manuals and others went looking for coffee. Some even did the dreaded F-to-F (forehead to Formica). Only a few—clearly diehard Republicans—visibly tried to pay attention. The energy and enthusiasm in the room had completely evaporated. At that moment I knew that storytelling should be at the heart of our work.

Acting and theater come from storytelling. The first actors were bards, storytellers, who began acting out the characters in the stories they were telling. Eventually, different actors played different characters and storytelling evolved into acting.

Stories help you express emotion in two ways:

First, they give you permission to take on roles, speak in the voices of characters, laugh, cry, shout, whisper. Heightened expression is almost expected when you tell a good story.

Second, stories generate emotional responses from your audience. Just as stories let you ham it up a little, they give listeners permission to respond outright. Tears roll down cheeks. Faces get red with anger, eyes light up with delight.

Stories lift both speaker and audience into the realm of full-bodied life and feelings. *They touch both the heart and the head.*

Conceivers and coaches, in particular, will find storytelling a valuable tool. Stories are an ideal means for the conceiver to paint a vivid picture of the future as it can be in the conceiver's vision. A story can bring that vision to life and make it real.

Once, we were working with Gary, a vice president of marketing for a major petroleum company whose charge was to upgrade the convenience stores linked to the company's gas stations. The company brought in an Australian consulting firm, the Sydney Group, which had a lot of expertise in this area. Unfortunately, Gary's team felt it knew the U.S. market better than anyone else and didn't need help, and so it refused to connect with the Australian people. Gary decided he had to get a personal message across. We asked him if there was ever a time in his life when he'd

been kept out and ignored. There was and he told that story to his people.

My family moved around a lot, and when I was eleven years old we moved to a new town. I loved baseball, and I went to the baseball field where there was always a pickup game and I sat there waiting to be picked for the game. Nobody picked me. I just sat there. The next day I went back and again, nobody picked me. I went back again. They ignored me again, like I didn't exist. I was totally crushed and almost didn't go back the next day, but I did. Finally somebody picked me. You know what? I hit a home run for that team.

Well, the Sydney Group is feeling like I did, sitting on that bench, out in the cold. Nobody is using their talent. They know some things we don't know. Why don't we let them hit a home run for us?

It helped Gary's team take the first step toward accepting the new group.

How Kenneth Jay handled his dealmaker, the one who'd stood up on his chair, is a good example of telling a personal story as a coach. Kenneth called a break in the meeting and took his negotiator aside. But he didn't criticize him because the guy immediately said, "I screwed up. I couldn't help it. I'm not very good at reading these situations." Instead, Kenneth said,

It's really hard when you're the one that's happening to, because you feel like you're out of control. What's the first rule of holes? If you find yourself in one, stop digging. It's very difficult to do. I know this because I have a tendency to always want to win an argument, and that's because I have two brothers. Growing up, it was always about competition and getting airtime and never losing an argument. Every night at dinner the three of us and our father had these take-no-prisoners, never-say-die arguments. I still have trouble giving in. So I know when you're in the middle of it, you can't stop digging sometimes. So in the future, keep checking with me, not verbally, just watch me and take your cue from me.

Kenneth's story about himself and his weakness probably did more to help the negotiator learn than any lecture or admonition could.

Whatever kind of story you tell, the key requirement is that you make it dramatic. You always want the listeners asking, "What happens next?" Get into the story as fast as you can—we call it "vertical takeoff"—by eliminating as many preliminaries as possible. Then build the suspense and don't give away the ending until the end.

Since most stories are told orally, here are some features of effective storytelling that can help your stories come alive.

- *Present tense:* "It's 1982 and I'm standing in front of an angry board of directors." This is more important when telling a story in person than on the printed page, because, when done live, the present tense adds an air of immediacy. Experiment. See if it helps enliven your story.
- *Bullet phrases:* It's better to use punchy, brief, even incomplete sentences. It will help you raise the energy level of your telling, give pace to the story, make it easier for listeners to comprehend, and help you avoid those awful "ah's" and "um's" that can punctuate long spoken sentences.
- *Descriptive/sensory language:* Use words that evoke sounds, sights, tastes, and smells. They help the reader experience the story along with you, and they are words you can highlight with your voice as you speak.
- *Variety in voice, face, and body:* A reminder of what we said earlier—vary the volume and tone of your voice, and let the emotion show on your face and in the way you move and hold your body.

You want to draw your audience into the story. Capture the mood and feeling of what's happening. Don't give the ending

away. The question, "What happened next?" is usually what keeps the listener interested.

A colleague of ours once worked with a major maker of massive earthmoving machinery. Its technology was outdated, its manufacturing too costly, and its competitors backed by parent companies with deep pockets. Its stock price had dropped steadily for three years. Once an industry leader, it was struggling to stay alive. The new CEO, whom everyone knew as Buck, called the company's top four hundred managers to St. Louis, its home office, and spoke to them all in a large hotel ballroom.

He began by explaining "the company troubles," which everyone knew about. Then he told them what needed to be done—"a new way of doing business." There was nothing new in what he said; one way or the other they'd all heard it more than once in the previous six months.

Then, something triggered a memory in Buck's mind, and he began to tell a story of the day he joined the company twenty-five years earlier.

It's 1975 and I'm a green M.E. (mechanical engineer). They give me a problem nobody else could fix. They figure I'll break my pick on it too. It's a problem with a critical mechanical linkage on the old Model 472. For six months that machine is my entire life. I'm sure I'm going to fail. I'm gonna be canned. I'm waking up every night at 3 A.M. I'm chewing my fingernails down to stubs. Then one day at a meeting, we start talking about some other damn thing and it's like the solution just walks in and introduces itself. There it is.

When he recalled in that big hotel ballroom how much he had wanted to help the company back then, and how deeply he still cared, Buck's voice broke and he had to stop talking for several moments. Buck was a big, burly metal-bender and that room was full of big, burly metal-benders. According to our colleague, there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

Later, everyone would remember that incident as the moment

something changed. Departments decided to work out their differences. Resistance to new technology began to melt. Management began to see labor as a partner instead of an adversary.

Hard work turned the company around, but that story and the moment of authentic emotion it released was, by all accounts, the bolt of lightning that first energized the process of change.

Buck didn't plan what he did. It happened. Fortunately, he had all the expressive tools needed to communicate what he felt and what he wanted everyone else in that room to feel about the company. He probably hadn't explicitly identified his passionate purpose beforehand, but it was there nonetheless. It was to reveal to everyone there the depths of his feeling for their company and its future. Because his actions came out of something so deeply and genuinely felt, they were real and authentic.

Develop the willingness and the skills to express yourself fully, and when your passionate purpose needs expression, you will be able to communicate it without thinking.

PRACTICES FOR CHAPTER 7

Expressiveness Using Voice, Body, and Story

Expressiveness
rule #1: Conquer your fear of overexpression

Heightened Language

Purpose: To spice up dry, technical, or mundane language

Exercise: In his 1963 "I have a dream" speech, Martin Luther King, Jr. used poetic imagery and the language of metaphor to convey powerful ideas. For example, instead of merely saying "I hope that one day blacks and whites will get along," Dr. King said:

*I have a dream
that one day on the red hills of Georgia
the sons of former slaves
and the sons of former slave owners
will be able to sit down together
at the table of brotherhood.*

In the same way, you can use heightened language to inspire your audience, to lead them in a call to action. For this exercise, find these three things:

1. A poem that you love
2. A favorite quote
3. A metaphor (such as King's "table of brotherhood")

See if you can include all three of these elements in your next presentation or meeting. Make sure to get feedback afterward. Did they think you were overly poetic or expressive? What was the effect that using more dramatic language had on the audience?

Expressiveness
rule #2: Use your voice and body congruently

Vocal Variety

Purpose: To break out of the monotone trap

Exercise: We have all had the experience of sitting in a meeting while the speaker is droning on and on (and on and on!) in a monotone. And nothing puts your audience to sleep faster. Here are a couple of exercises to break free from the monotone trap:

- **Practice Bringing a Story to Life.** In the last chapter, you practiced expressing emotions by reading a story to a child. This time, take the same story, and practice vocal variety, using the chart on page 184. You can practice by yourself first, and then by reading aloud to a child. Notice the effect of varying pitch, speed, and volume—how does each contribute to raising or lowering the dramatic tension and engaging your audience? How does changing the warmth of your voice affect how the different characters come across? Does the child stop paying attention when you pause, or does a pause create more suspense?
- **Extra Help.** If you're having trouble with certain aspects of vocal variety, try these coaching tips:
 - **Pitch**—Go as high and low as you can. You may never go this far in a business presentation, but it's great practice to do it when reading to a child. If you're reading the part of a princess, allow your voice to go up into squeaky falsetto. An evil character can have a low, rumbling, gravelly voice. Practicing this way will open up

greater flexibility in your voice. Singing in the shower or in your car can help too.

- **Warmth**—Yawn! On a big inhalation, open your mouth as wide as you can, stretch the back of your throat, and allow the soft palate (the fleshy rear portion of the roof of your mouth) to expand. This creates maximum space in your mouth and throat. Then, on the out breath, say “Aaaahhhh!” on a big sigh of relief. If you put your hand on your chest while you do this, you'll feel some real vibration. This is called chest resonance. Try speaking words using this voice. Find a story with a dragon, ogre, or monster, and give it this “yawn voice.” Then, try toning the effect down, just keeping the feeling of warmth, without the big volume.
- **Pauses**—We tend to think that pauses are bad, “dead air,” and that our audience will think we've lost it. In fact, your audience *needs* pauses to process what you're saying. Experiment with the difference between using lots of short pauses, versus taking a long pause only now and then. Short pauses, which can create a natural feeling, are opportunities for you to breathe, and provide time for your message to sink in. The strategic use of a long pause—particularly in the middle of a sentence—can create real suspense, and even bring your audience back if they've been tuning out.
- **Apply Vocal Variety.** Now take a business presentation and deliver it with vocal variety. You can do this by yourself, first—you may wish to record your voice and listen to it afterward. See how much variety you can use before it begins to sound like too much. Get a friend to listen and comment. A couple of specifics to focus on:
 - **Bullets**—Notice how using vocal variety can help you vary the sound of items on a list. For example, if you have three bullets on a slide, see what happens if you subtly change the delivery so that the first bullet is slow and low, the second is high and fast, and the third is warm and with pauses. Make sure your vocal choices are congruent with the meaning of your words. The audience will not realize you're doing this—all they'll

notice is that you are a more engaging speaker and they'll be much more likely to remember your points.

- **Big Picture**—Vocal variety can also help differentiate the different parts of your presentation. The contents of one slide can be made to sound different from the next. The beginning of the talk can have a completely different quality from what follows. Experiment—how can you use vocal variety to give your conclusion more dramatic impact and weight?

Vocal Variety		
←	What Can Change	→
deep/low bass tenor	Pitch	high alto soprano
soft	Volume	loud
slow	Speed	fast
yawn (chest resonance)	Warmth	nasal twang (face resonance)
many and/or long pauses	Pauses	no pauses

Body Language

Purpose: To improve static presence or address fear of using body and space

Exercises and Practices: Body language is something actors and business leaders know and use fluently. Try these approaches for better understanding and using your body congruently:

- **Become Aware.** Next time you're in a public place, like a shopping mall or some large event, watch how people move. See if you can tell anything about them—their mood, physical condition, personality—by the way they

walk and hold themselves. When you meet a friend or loved one, and have a chance to see them move, try to guess their frame of mind before they say a word.

- **Posture.** People with presence tend to hold themselves erect. If you slouch and let your shoulders round in, it communicates a lack of confidence. However, correcting bad posture involves more than "standing up straight." To correct years of bad posture may take considerable effort and the help of a teacher or coach. We often recommend Pilates training to get your body strong so it can release your shoulders and help you stand up straighter. Tai chi, martial arts, Alexander Technique, or yoga can help too.
- **Facial Expression.** Some people prefer a poker face, one that reveals nothing about their state of mind. While we recognize there are some situations when a poker face might be useful, in general you will connect with others better if you allow your face to reveal what you feel. Just as you can mirror someone else's voice, you can mirror their facial expressions. Facial mirroring says, "I understand you." There's nothing more supportive for a public speaker, as we know from our own experience, than to look out at an audience and see facial expressions that say, "We're with you." Try doing this in your next team or one-on-one meeting.
- **Gesture.** Notice how others use their arms and hands when they talk. Some people, some entire cultures, favor great expression. Others prefer to be more self-contained. There are appropriate times for both approaches, but in general you'll communicate better if you use gestures that are congruent with what you're saying. If you're talking about a rise in sales, lift up an arm. If you're talking about expanding an operation, extend your arms wide. Again, notice what others do, including professional speakers or television personalities, and pay attention to what you think works well.
- **Movement.** This applies in particular when you're standing and speaking to a group:
 - **Use the Space.** Walking, especially in combination with pausing, can be a powerful combination. Make an

important point, then pause, and while pausing, move to a different position. Then begin speaking again. (It's usually not a good idea to talk while moving.) If you're telling a story, let the different locations on your stage represent different locations in the story (e.g., home and office) and move to those locations when the story changes scenes.

- **Distance.** Moving can change the energy level in the room. If you stand far from the audience—at the podium, for example—that's a safe, low-energy place for you in relation to the audience. But if you move toward the audience, you create a more intimate connection. And, if it's physically possible, moving right up to or into the audience will pick up the energy level in the room enormously.
- **Wake-up Call.** Whenever you enter someone else's space—an individual's or an audience's—you create a moment of high potential, even danger. Will you call on someone? What do you want? What are you going to do? People wake up when the speaker approaches. Be aware of that dynamic and use it to add energy and emphasis to your message.
- **Taking Up Space.** Some people seem to take up more space in a room than their physical size alone would justify. These exercises will give increased confidence to your bearing:
 - **Grounding.** Walk around in an empty room. Think of yourself as solidly grounded, with your center of gravity not in your chest but in your pelvis where your legs and hips connect. Think of yourself as solidly connected to the earth.
 - **Expanding.** Then, think of yourself as literally taking up more physical space than your body actually requires. Imagine you're much larger than you really are. Walk through the room with your arms extended wide. Imagine you're a king or queen, someone of enormous authority, because people usually give such figures a lot of space. Imagine you are in your own home, greeting and welcoming the people around you. We know one

fellow who imagined he was a general with enormous epaulets extending out from his shoulders.

- **Owning.** Go into the room where you'll speak and make yourself comfortable with it beforehand. You might even do what Jack did—walk around the empty space, thinking and saying, "This is my space." Don't be shy—this technique really works!
- **Eye Contact.** We've saved one of the most important means of body expression for last—the eyes.
 - Eye contact when you're expressing yourself is critical—without maintaining eye contact, you risk losing the attention of a listener. It's just as important in a meeting or presentation as in a one-on-one. In our experience, speakers make two major errors. First, they want to include everyone and so their eyes shift much too rapidly around the room. Or even worse, they speak to the back of the room. Second, they focus too much on looking at the materials they're presenting, whether it's a speech in front of them or a slide projected on a screen. In both cases, they haven't used their eyes to connect with the audience. Some antidotes:
 - If the group is fairly small, be sure to establish eye contact for several seconds with each person in the group at least once in the meeting.
 - Throughout your talk, speak to individuals, one at a time, never to some blank spot between people or to the piece of paper in your hand.
 - A good rule is to maintain eye contact with one person for an entire thought. Then move to another person for the next thought. Move from person to person that way, rather than going back to the same person all the time.
 - If the group is large, you cannot literally connect with everyone in the room. Fortunately, you don't need to. The people in the back of the room will feel connected if they see you connecting with audience members near the front. Be sure to divide your time between people on one side and people on the other side.

Congruency

Purpose: To address insincerity, lack of credibility, or lack of trust

Practice: A great tool for noticing congruence versus incongruence is voicemail. By taking the body out of the equation, we can focus specifically on the quality of the voice, and how it matches—or contradicts—the content of the message:

- Become a connoisseur of incoming messages—does the caller's delivery really match the text? Notice how speakers use changes in pitch, volume, tempo, enunciation, and vocal quality, to convey warmth, concern, humor, urgency, etc. Who does it really well? How can you emulate them?
- Listen to your own outgoing message, and critique it for congruence. Then redo it as many times as necessary until it carries just the right tone you wish to convey.

Expressiveness
rule #3: Tell stories to unleash your expressiveness

Storytelling

Purpose: To add dynamism to impersonal, dry, or technical presentations

Exercise: At the end of Chapter 5, we introduced an exercise of cataloguing stories from your life that would help you connect with others. In the same journal, you could also start recording stories that could be used in business presentations. Choose from the following types of stories.

- Types of Stories:**
- Personal: "When I was seventeen . . ."
 - Moments that made you who you are or that clarified your values

- Moments when you discovered your voice or leadership potential
- Personal Business: "When I was working at . . ."
- Heroic moments—difficult but worthwhile struggles or extraordinary feats in business
- Overcoming resistance to change
- Learning experiences (moments of truth)
- Impersonal Business: "Jack Welch at GE . . ."
- Dangerous mistakes in business
- Stories of how your company has handled these things in past
- Stories of how future could look: bright or dark
- Universal Myths or Fables: "You know the story of . . ."
- The Trojan Horse
- Sisyphus
- The Tortoise and the Hare

Telling Stories with Drama

Purpose: To connect with your audience and engage them through stories

- Practice:**
- Review "Tips for Telling Stories with Drama," to follow. Choose three that would make the biggest difference in your storytelling.
 - For your next presentation, include a story and apply the three tips you chose.
 - Ask a colleague for feedback after your presentation.

- Tips for Telling Stories with Drama:**
- Reexperience the event. Do not lead up to the real story with a lot of runway time. Instead, begin in the middle of the action and use the present tense. Example: "*It is our second meeting with this client when, suddenly, someone says, 'Why not . . .'*" instead of "*We received a call from client A. We had one meeting that went fine. In our second meeting . . .*"
 - Be succinct: Use bullet phrases and fewer "ands" to connect sentences. End each sentence with a verbal

period, a small pause. Example: *"We go through the report, page by page. Bill looks up at me suddenly. He says: 'Jim, we've done it. The work we've put in has finally paid off,' "* instead of *"We go through the report page by page and Bill looks up at me suddenly and says that we'd done it and the work we'd put in had finally paid off."*

- Use sensory images and descriptive language: Sensory images (*"marble conference table"* instead of *"conference table,"* *"ten-pound computer printout"* instead of *"computer printout"*) help people visualize the story. The above examples appeal to the sense of vision and touch (weight). You can also appeal to the senses of smell, hearing, and taste. Make sure to be selective with your use of images. One or two key images should be sufficient and will leave room for the listener to actively participate by contributing detail.
- Have a clear beginning, middle, and end: Tell the story from a *"point of innocence,"* as if you don't know how it will end. Keep the listener waiting for the outcome. Example: *"We worked with a client whose costs of production were not competitive. We did X, Y, and Z. As a result, they were able to reduce costs by thirty percent,"* instead of *"We helped a client reduce costs by thirty percent. Here's how we did it. . . ."*
- Use vocal and physical variety: Whenever you have a different character in the story, use a different vocal tone and physical posture. If there is action in the story use gestures and deliberate movement to express that action. For example, if your *"costs have skyrocketed,"* let your hand move upward through space to illustrate your point.

ACT IV

SELF-KNOWING

The ability to accept yourself, to be authentic, and to reflect your values in your decisions and actions