
SO WHO SAID YOU'RE A "BAD" PRESENTER?

Respected Rules for Speaking and Why You Should Break Them—Mercilessly



Let me guess: You're a terrible presenter, right? You hate giving presentations. Some teacher or boss told you that you just don't have it when it comes to presenting. I bet that was a fun day. You'd love never to stand up in front of a crowd again, but you're stuck. You're required to present, maybe because of your job or your position in the community. And every time another presentation comes up, all you can think is "Ugh."

Or maybe you're a pretty decent presenter. You like taking on a challenge, but you sometimes get hung up on all the things you're supposed to do. You feel excited to stand up but still worry that you're not following all the rules.

I bet something else is true, too. You really *do* have something important to say. You've got a few opinions and probably a message you'd love to share with people—if only you could stop shaking and sweating.

So you took all the feedback to heart. You tried to change. First you tried to mimic famous orators or entertainers—and that made you feel like you were wearing someone else's clothes and

they didn't fit. Then you took classes, learned the "rules of speaking," and accepted abuse from counselors who just made you feel more awkward and worried. You just can't seem to get what you want, and you hate the fake, sales-y approach—which, of course, makes you hate presenting even more.

Excellent!

You have more potential to give great presentations than any polished phony on the planet. Because guess what? You're *not* innately a terrible presenter. Someone else's rules are making you "bad"—rules from Presentations 101—the rules that box you in, regulate everything you do, and define "good" presentations. Rules like "Always stand to the left of the screen," "Never cross the beam of the projector," and "Remain detached during the presentation."

Those rules are plain stupid! They hamstring you and keep you away from the real stuff—the mystical secret sauce of great presentations: your authentic self.

I once worked with an executive at an insurance company who was a really rotten presenter. He stood stiffly back by the screen and froze every time he stumbled on a word. And he was actually presenting something he really loved—his team's record-beating success! Take this guy off the stage, however, and one-on-one he was a gregarious, funny man. He'd been verbally whipped by so many coaches to follow the rules of presenting that his confidence was blown. He felt trapped in the space up by the screen and miles away from the audience.

I suggested he just be himself—to literally do whatever the heck made him comfortable. So he stood right at the front of the stage where he could see his audience's faces. Sometimes he stepped off the stage. In some parts of the presentation he even gave himself permission to sit down right in the audience! He

was miked, so everyone could hear him, and the audience loved how he became one of them rather than a distant expert on stage.

Leaving the stage, stumbling over words, and sitting down would all be considered classic “mistakes.” Who cares? What really mattered was that the audience connected with the success of this executive—his team beat all the records. And he suddenly felt connected again to his message, his excitement, and his audience. His voice and body loosened up, he stopped stumbling on words, and his stories became funny again. All this happened because he’d found a way to really be himself in his presentations, and that’s what worked.

And here’s the thing: if presentations really didn’t matter, we’d all just send memos. There are a million ways out there to share information, but no matter how much we digitize, we end up wanting human connection. We pay big money to see recording stars and great thinkers in person because their music and words touch us. And yes, it’s really important for people to hear you speak, too. Suppose you’re spearheading the effort to build a community park. You can have phone conversations, write letters to the editor, and start a community blog until you’re blue in the face. But when the advocates for a new park decide to get together, they want to hear your story. They want to connect with *you*, not a proxy of you.

I’m here to give you the ultimate out—the ultimate freedom. Be human, be you, make mistakes! Don’t worry about all the rules you’ve been taught. People would rather see you, warts and all, if you can communicate with passion. And that’s when all the things you want will follow—jobs, funding, support, partners, believers.

So do it! Your way.

It’s time for a longitudinal change in how we approach

presentations. It's time to turn what we consider "bad" on its head and reconsider what matters. The reason most people believe they're bad presenters is that they're bound by archaic rules that make them stiff and uncomfortable. This book is about giving yourself permission to be who you are and to present in a way that is authentically yours—mistakes and all. Everyone has something important to say. We all want to change people's minds about issues that really matter to us.

And if being the real you is "bad" according to nasty old rules, then let's change the definition. Just like Michael Jackson, you are now bad in the coolest way. Come on, people, say it with me—"I'm BAD."

We're all ready to break these rules. As a society, we have evolved, even if our presentation primers haven't. We prefer scratchy authenticity to plastic perfection. We are much more likely to trust an online vlogger than a slick scripted commercial. The vlogger's very mistakes, imperfections, and scruffy jeans make her more believable and appealing. And what's more, when she speaks enthusiastically about her opinions, we're drawn in like suntanned kids to a Slip 'n Slide. Now imagine a report given by an impeccably dressed executive who spouts corporate acronyms without cracking a smile. It's like comparing Velveeta to local artisanal cheese. We don't want scary processed-block perfection. We want the real deal—lumps, imperfections, and all.

And there's another reason the authentic stuff is yummier. Artisanal cheese is made by masters who've been at it for decades, whereas Velveeta comes from a factory. We respect mastery—produced by an authentic expert. We realize that they know their stuff and are willing to listen even if they aren't polished. You can be a master, too. You know about something that people would

love to hear about. And you can also master being an effective presenter in a way that feels right to you.

**In eloquent speaking it is the manner that wins,
not the words.... You are uniquely yourself—
unlike anyone else in this world—and that is
what you must project to an audience.**

—Elbert Hubbard

Still skeptical? You have every right to be. “If everyone thinks I’m a ‘bad’ presenter, how do I get to the cool kind of bad?”

I understand. So consider this. I’m fortunate to have worked with more than one thousand people in discovering the best way to be themselves in presentations. Whether they are professional speakers in front of a huge audience, a manager giving a quarterly report via teleconference, or a mom talking to the PTA committee, they can all find power and passion in being authentic. And that often means breaking all the old rules.

You see, I’m an improviser. I’ve been on the stage since I was five, and improv comedy is the core of my business and philosophy. Improvisation is about freedom, positivity, leapfrogging boundaries, and thinking on your feet. It’s about questioning all the rules, throwing out the script, and making it up as you go along. And that core philosophy has allowed me to make a career and life of throwing away all the outdated rules of training and presenting. Shy, skeptical, and gruff people have gone through my company’s courses and walked out transformed. Scientists, accountants, attorneys, engineers, editors, introverts, and