

winning smiles

Why a smile is an essential element in every presenter's toolbox

by Michael Doctoroff

I first became aware of the importance of smiling several years ago. I was taking a Dale Carnegie course in "dynamic presentation techniques." Over the course of those two very memorable days, our coaches programmed each attendee to give seven presentations, which were recorded and then privately reviewed with the coaches.

The learning was both intense and personally embarrassing. Oh boy! If you've ever seen a recording of one of your own presentations, you know what I mean. Nothing is like you imagine, from the sound of your voice, to your personal posture, to your inflections, to the very fit of your clothes.

For one of my last recorded sessions, I was challenged to make a presentation in which I had to elucidate on an analogy of my choosing. I elected to compare the trials and tribulations of my early career to the red apple I found sitting on an adjacent table.

I suggested that my feelings about unemployment were probably akin to the way the apple felt when no one picked it up; I compared its tight red skin to my own younger, tauter skin; then I correlated my aging and graying to the apple's fermenting into apple cider and apple Jack - flattering myself that we both aged well. Thankfully, my colleagues found the presentation to be hilarious.

Then came the moment of real learning. Professional criticism. When the coach took me to the back room, showed me the recording and asked me what I thought of the presenter (me), I could freely say: great subject, good inflection, good gestures, good posture, eye contact, etc. But then she asked what was wrong. I said, "I don't believe it, that guy never smiles." When she

asked if I had a reason for not smiling, I admitted to being self-conscious about my crooked teeth.

Before my next presentation this clever coach told the whole class to laugh at what I was saying no matter what I said. So, when I spoke, they laughed. When they laughed, I smiled. I found I was actually enjoying myself.

Surely, the coach was not really concerned with my smiling per se - most audiences do not consciously evaluate trainers on whether or not they smile. Rather, the critical piece was the role that laughter and smiling played in turning my funny but dry presentation into one that was accessible, engaging and effective.

Every Trainer a Smiler?

This experience has caused me to add "a smile" to the list of required tools for every trainer. If you're not yet sold on its importance, take a moment to think about the people and presenters you have liked best and those who made the greatest impact on you. I'd be willing to bet that the majority of them are smilers.

Don't be shy to admit that people's pearly whites draw you in, too. Plenty of data suggests that we are not alone:

- Smiling is contagious. 95% of the time, if you smile at someone, they'll smile back at you. You can easily verify this by smiling at associates or even at strangers you pass on the street
- Smiling is a means of non-verbal communication, like saying "hello" or "have a great day." A smile,



however, says more than the words, because it adds warmth and nuance to your words.

The Smiling Trainer

For the trainer, the effects of a single smile are multiplied. One smile is returned by a host of smiles. Furthermore, when the smile is added to the message of the trainer, it communicates excitement about the topic and makes the message more interesting.

Smiling helps to increase the retention of your message. Accelerated learning experts tell us of the importance of creating a relaxed, stress-free environment. A smile is an easy and low-cost way to make your group comfortable, relaxed, and open to learning.

The challenge for those unaccustomed to smiling is training themselves to flex those facial muscles and make it happen. And don't be discouraged by thoughts of bad teeth, sunken jaw, smirks, etc. The most important thing is the twinkle in your eyes. Rest assured, if you're talking to a group, they're suitably distant to miss your imperfections and focus on the positive effects of your smile.

Becoming a Smiler

Unfortunately, training yourself to smile is not as easy as it seems. No matter how great your passion for your topic, if you're unaccustomed to smiling about it, you will most likely fall back on old ways and forget. Here are some tips to help you out.

Exercise your face muscles

Smiling requires facial muscles that need to be strengthened, just like any other muscle in your body. Spend a few minutes each day working those muscles by making a variety of faces. It's probably best to schedule a certain time of the day when you can have complete privacy. But you can try it out now, as you stare at your computer or paper printout of this article.



Look in the mirror

Spend a few minutes each day in front of the mirror, smiling at yourself. You can do this at home or at work. If you are in your office, a simple way to do this, which will also benefit customers and colleagues, is to attach a "smile mirror" to your computer or phone. A "smile mirror" is a wallet-sized mirror (small enough not to be distracting and big enough to show your mouth), with a smiley imprinted on it. The mirror acts as a continual reminder to put on a happy face. Smile mirrors are available at Trainers Warehouse.

Practice

The system that works best for me is practice. Whenever I see someone looking at me, I smile. I've made a game of seeing whether they smile back. Just as the statistics suggest, they usually do

a **smile** creates happiness in training, promotes **good will** in business, and is the **cornerstone of friendship**.

~Author unknown

and the two of us share a happy, friendly moment.

Although you may sometimes forget to smile, the positive sensation you experience when you remember will likely be habit forming. Then, when you're more in the groove of flexing those facial muscles, smiling will also be easier when you're in the midst of a training session or presentation.

Post a smile memento at your workstation

You may have your own favorite poem or quote that brings a smile to your face each time you look at it. One of mine is quoted above.

A funny or laughing photo of a child, family member, friend or pet can also do the trick. You might even write yourself a note on the image that says, "SMILE!"

Meditate

If you practice meditation, you might try those Eastern techniques to improve your ability and facility with smiling.

WiiFIT Face Training

For those who live in Japan, learning to smile might be a fast and easy lesson. Nintendo just came out with WiiFIT Face Training that is supposed to train your facial muscles so that you can enjoy nicer smiles and livelier expressions. Unfortunately, this product is not yet sold in the US, but if it were, Nintendo advises limiting your training to 15 minutes per day.

Make it a habit

An American alternative to face training is the relatively inexpensive "Hypnosis Download" (\$16.95 from hypnosis-downloads.com). It comes with a 90-

day money back guarantee. With this system, a relaxing introduction leads the listener to a detached trance state. In this state, the listener begins to rehearse using their smile more and more, even before they come out of the trance. I haven't tried it personally, but I have to admit I was intrigued by the website.

Conclusion

Interspersing smiles into your presentation is critical to engaging and connecting with your audience. Whether smiling comes naturally or is self-taught, whether it's built into your muscle memory or kept in your back pocket, every trainer and presenter should keep a smile in its rightful position at the top of the presentation checklist, along with gestures, diction, inflection, posture, eye contact, clothing, and content.

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