

INTRODUCTION

The Wizard of *Aaaahs*

Once upon a time, I was living and working at the opposite end of California from Silicon Valley. I had spent the first half of my professional life in the world of show business, as a television producer for CBS, as a freelance screenwriter, and as a sometime novelist. I helped create news documentaries, feature films, dramas, and musicals. I had the opportunity to work with some of the most creative minds in the industry, from the legendary Mike Wallace on down. If you know anything about show business, you know that it's filled with peaks and valleys, and I had more than my share of valleys. But I met many interesting people and learned a lot, particularly about the art of telling a story in a clear, convincing manner.

Then, in 1987, I had a conversation with an old friend, Ben Rosen, one of the top venture capitalists in the high-technology world who was then Chairman of the Board of Compaq Computer Corporation. It was a conversation that changed my life.

Ben and I had met at Stanford University, where he was studying for his Master's in Electrical Engineering and I for mine in Speech and Drama. The engineer and the artist met only because we happened to be competing for the affections of the same girl. Our interest in the girl quickly faded, but our friendship did not. Ben followed my subsequent career in television and was well aware of my interest in the art of communication. As Compaq's chairman, he was also aware of an issue facing the great computer company: Its CEO, a talented executive named Rod

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Canion, had never developed a comfortable and effective style for public presentations.

Ben called to offer me a challenge: “Rod has worked on his weakness as a presenter,” he explained. “He’s even been coached by some of the experts in the field. But it hasn’t quite taken hold. Would you be interested in flying out to Houston to teach Rod what you know about communication?”

I was intrigued, but a little reluctant. After all, I didn’t know much about the world of business. But Ben closed the deal with an unusual offer: “Compaq has just come out with a line of hot, new laptop computers. I’ve seen that clunker you’re still using.” (I’d just laboriously drafted my second novel on Compaq’s huge, old, “luggable” computer, and had been coveting the sleek, new, expensive Compaq machines.) “Suppose we swap you one of our new laptops for your services?” he asked. I agreed on the spot.

I met with Canion at his Houston office, and Ben sat in on our session, watching as I taught Rod the basics of communicating a story with clarity and effectiveness. An hour into the program, we took a break, and Ben buttonholed me at the vending machine in the lounge. He was fascinated by what he’d seen. “Jerry,” Ben said, with a snap of his fingers, “There’s an enormous business opportunity here! I spend all day listening to presentations by CEOs who want me to invest in their businesses. You wouldn’t believe how complex and dry most of them are. You ought to move up to Silicon Valley and teach these people some of your storytelling skills. God knows they need your help!”

Naturally I was flattered. But I thought of myself as a television professional, not as a business consultant. “I don’t know anything about Silicon Valley or the computer business!” I protested.

Ben pressed me. “That doesn’t matter,” he insisted. “I’ll be able to introduce you to clients; I can show you how to run the business; I’ll help in many ways.”

Still I demurred, “It’s not a good idea to do business with friends.” Ben shook his head and dropped the matter, for the moment.

Like all successful people, Ben is successful because he is persistent, and he persisted with me. He talked about the idea, on and off, for six more months, but I was still hesitant. Finally, at Ben’s insistence, I agreed to make a pilot trip to Silicon Valley to meet some of his associates. One of them was Andrea Cunningham, a woman who had parlayed her experience as public relations counsel to Steve Jobs at Apple Computer into her own successful national public relations agency, Citigate Cunningham, Inc.

When I got to Andy’s office, she was in a fretful state over a presentation she was scheduled to make at a major technology conference. I took a quick look at a very rough outline she had prepared and suggested a simple re-ordering of her concepts into a more logical sequence. Then I skimmed through the high points of the new outline for her. Andy’s frown gave way to a smile, and she said, “You’re going to do very well here!”

My reluctance gradually melted away. I agreed to Ben’s business proposition, and Power Presentations was born.

The Mission-Critical Presentation

In the first year of my startup, Ben, true to his word, introduced me to many influential people, primary among them were his venture capital colleagues, or VCs, as they are known in the trade. One of them was one of the most powerful men in Silicon Valley,

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Don Valentine. A founding partner of Sequoia Capital, one of the premier venture capital firms, Don had been one of the original investors in Apple Computer, Atari, Oracle, and Electronic Arts. Don granted me a courtesy interview, listened patiently as I described my services to him, and then said, “We have a company that’s about to go public, and we think it’ll do fairly well. It has a very esoteric technology that will be difficult to explain to investors. We’re planning on pricing the offering in the \$13.50 to \$15.50 range, but if the IPO road show presentation is any good, we can probably increase that share price by a couple of bucks. I’m going to introduce you to the CEO and ask him to have you help him with his presentation.”

The company was Cisco Systems. The CEO was John Morgridge. I helped John develop the presentation that explained the company’s complex networking technology. The message got through to the investors. On the day Cisco went public, its stock opened at \$18 a share and closed its first day of trading at \$22 a share (a then-unheard-of price jump). Cisco quickly became the darling of the investment community and the media. In an interview with the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Don Valentine, speaking in his role as Chairman of Cisco’s board, “attributed ‘at least \$2 to \$3’ of the increase to Weissman’s coaching. John Morgridge, president of Cisco, is somewhat less generous. He gives Weissman ‘at least an eighth of a point’—12 1/2 cents per share.”

That was some 400 IPO road shows ago. Among those others, I coached the IPO road shows of corporate luminaries such as Intuit and Yahoo! During that same time, I also helped another 400 firms, both public and pre-public, to grow their businesses.

Following the IPO, Cisco continued to call on me for their nuts-and-bolts presentations, ranging from *prezos* (as they are called inside Cisco) in their briefing centers given to small groups of potential new customers, to *prezos* in their annual NetWorkers conferences given to massive assemblages of end users. Their then-Vice President of Corporate Marketing, Cate Muther, required

that every product manager take my program. At the time, she said, “Jerry’s methods of presentation are now part of our culture; they help prepare our managers for industry leadership.” Today Cisco and many other high-technology companies continue to enlist my help in coaching their senior executives to communicate persuasively. The business press has called me everything from the man who “knows how to talk to money” (*Fast Company*) to “The Wizard of Aaahs” (*Forbes*).

The IPO road show is probably the most mission-critical presentation any businessperson will ever make. Succeeding in an IPO road show is the ultimate example of winning over the toughest crowd. The investors are both demanding and knowledgeable, the stakes are high, and a swing of one dollar in the share price of the offering translates into millions. But if you extend the logic a bit further, every crowd you encounter in business can be your toughest crowd, and every presentation you ever give is mission-critical. Every presentation is a stepping stone on the path to ultimate success. If any one presentation fails, there may be no tomorrow. You never get a second chance to make a first impression.

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Therefore, in my work with my clients, I treat every presentation as if it was as mission-critical as an IPO road show. I use this approach whether I am working to develop a private financing pitch, a product launch, a keynote speech, a panel appearance, an analysts’ call, a shareholders’ meeting, or a budget approval presentation. You can extend my array with your own presentation situations, be they external or internal, be they for an important contract, a major alliance, or a big sale.

Every business presentation has one common goal: the all-important art of persuasion, an art with literally dozens of applications for which *everyone* in business must be prepared. Persuasion

Persuasion is the classic challenge of sounding the clarion call to action, of getting your target audience to the experience known as *Aha!*

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In a cartoon, *Aha!* would be represented by the image of a light bulb clicking on above your audience's heads. It's that satisfying moment of understanding and agreement that occurs when an idea from one person's mind has been successfully communicated into another's. This process is a mystery as old as language itself and almost as profound as love; the ability of humans, using only words and symbols, to understand one another and find common ground in an idea, a plan, a dream.

Maybe you've enjoyed moments like this in your past experiences as a presenter, speaker, salesperson, or communicator, moments when you saw the light bulb go on, as eyes made contact, smiles spread, and heads nodded. *Aha!* is the moment when you know your audience is ready to march to your beat.

I've written this book to share the persuasive techniques and tools I offer my clients. You can use them in your business on a daily basis. The presentation principles my clients have used to attract their billions of investor dollars can work for you, too.

The Art of Telling Your Story

Don Valentine of Sequoia Capital, the legendary venture capitalist who introduced me to Cisco, sits through thousands of presentations every year, most of them made by shrewd entrepreneurs in search of funding for their new business concepts. Don is continually shocked by the failure of most of these presentations to communicate effectively and persuasively.

He once summed it up to me this way: "Jerry, the problem is that nobody knows how to tell a story. And what's worse, nobody *knows* that they don't know how to tell a story!"

This problem is multiplied and compounded 30 million times a day, a figure which, according to recent estimates, is how many PowerPoint presentations are made every business day. Presentation audiences, from the Midas-like Don Valentines to overbooked executives sitting through run-of-the-mill staff meetings, are constantly and relentlessly besieged with torrents of excessive words and slides.

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Why? Why wouldn't every presenter, seeking that clarion call to action, be, as the U.S. Army urges, all that they can be? The reason is that the overwhelming majority of business presentations merely serve to convey data, not to persuade.

When I moved from the world of television to the world of business, I saw immediately that the problem in those massive transmissions of information down one-way streets to passive audiences was not at all communication . . . with the emphasis on the *co-* . . . they were one-way streets that ground to a halt at a dead end.

In the television medium, ideas and images are also broadcast in one direction over the air, cable, or satellite, but there is a return loop, a feedback, an interaction that comes barreling back at the broadcaster in the form of ratings, critics, sponsors, letters, telephone calls, emails, and sometimes even regulatory legislation.

In the Medium that Marshall McLuhan labeled *The Message*, when the message is not clear, and when the satisfaction of the audience is not manifest, the foregone conclusion is sudden death: The television series is cancelled. In business, when the point is not crystal clear, and when the benefit to the audience is not vividly evident, the investment is declined, the sale is not made, the approval is not granted; the presentation fails.

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In my Power Presentations programs for my clients, and in this book, I bring a media sensibility to the business community, to deliver a set of prescriptive techniques and services that enables presenters like you to achieve their clarion call to action with their audiences, to get them to *Aha!*

A New Approach to Presentations

The techniques you'll be learning in these pages are a blend of new and old concepts from a broad array of disciplines.

When creating television public affairs programs, I had to wade through hours of archival and new film footage and reels of videotape, rifle through massive reports, sort through stacks of interviews, and boil it all down to a clear 28-minute-and-40-second program that would capture . . . and hold . . . the audience's attention. I've netted these story development methods into a simple set of techniques and forms for businesspeople like you. Most of the professional writers I've met use these same techniques to tap into natural creative processes that every human being possesses.

In television, I worked in multi-million-dollar control rooms equipped with electronic character generators, vast color palettes, chroma key insertion, and computer-driven, on-screen animation. These capabilities are now readily available in Microsoft's PowerPoint software, installed in over 250 million computers. Unfortunately, as I'm sure anyone who has seen a recent business presentation can attest, most presenters apply these powerful functions with all the subtlety of an MTV video. Instead, they should be following Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's surgically appropriate advice: *Less Is More*. I've developed a simple set of guidelines to help you apply Mies' principle to create visual support for your presentations, to help you design your numeric and text charts so that, rather than overwhelm, confuse, and

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distract your audience, they enhance and clarify your persuasive message.

In television, I directed both film and video cameras, and then spliced and arranged their output into a compelling story. In doing so, I employed the professional practices of cinematography and editing to tell a story and create an impact on the audience. I've translated these sophisticated methodologies into a simple set of continuity techniques . . . that you can readily implement with PowerPoint . . . to help you tell your story.

I've also drawn many of my communication and persuasion techniques from classical sources, such as the writings of Aristotle. (Please don't let the word "classical" intimidate you. A wise person once defined a classic simply as something that endures because it works. I predict you'll rediscover the truth of that definition in these pages.) In ancient times, rhetoric was considered the greatest of the liberal arts; and what the philosophers of old called rhetoric is, in fact, what we refer to today as great storytelling. As you read, you'll come to see the relevance of Aristotle's concepts to all the types of stories you need to tell in business, storytelling that will persuade your audience to respond to your call to action.

Other methods I reference are based on established knowledge, as well as recent discoveries about the human mind. These scientific findings which detail how *all* brains and eyes absorb information relate directly to how *every* audience reacts to *any* data input.

This combination of traditional and advanced techniques for communication and persuasion will offer what I'm confident you'll find to be a unique and effective system that will help you present to win.

You'll notice that I give frequent and significant emphasis to the word "story," which is intentional. In this book, as in my programs

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and seminars, I focus first and foremost on helping you define the elements of your story and the story of your business. The traditional presentation skills, body language, gestures, voice modulation, eye contact, and answering questions from the audience, are also important. But in this book, they'll take a backseat to defining your story.

This puzzles many people who've heard me described (somewhat inaccurately) as a "speech consultant," or even an "acting coach." In fact, some clients, when first meeting me say, "Oh, I don't need any help with my story. Just show me what to do with my hands while I speak. And show me how to keep myself from saying, 'Ummm.'" Fortunately for them, and for you, I won't honor that request in these pages. There are a couple of good reasons for this:

First, there's a plethora of other books in the marketplace that teach delivery skills, some reasonably well. I'm interested in offering you advice that you won't find elsewhere. (I will, however, provide you with a checklist for the physical presentation environment in the Appendix, called "Tools of the Trade.")

When the story is right, the delivery itself tends to fall into place, almost magically so.

Second, and more important, I'm convinced that *getting your story right* is the critical factor in making your presentation powerful; far more so than your delivery skills. In fact, I've found that, when the story is right, the delivery itself tends to fall into place, almost magically so. The reverse is never true. You may be the most polished speaker on earth, but if your story isn't clear and focused, your message will fail.

Let me share an illustrative anecdote:

In 1991, I got an anxious phone call from the public relations people at Microsoft, regular clients of mine. "We have a young executive here named Jeff Raikes," they explained. "He's

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scheduled to make a presentation about a new product of ours, and we wonder if you could help him prepare. It's called Windows for Pen Computers, the newest member of the Windows family of products."

"Fine," I replied, "Let's book a three-day program for Jeff."

There was a slight pause on the other end of the line. "Well, we're very pressed for time. Jeff has only one day. But it's really important that his delivery skills get polished. He's very smart and knows his stuff, but he just isn't comfortable. Can you make a difference in one day's time?"

"I'll try," I said.

What happened next is revealing. As requested, I spent one day with Jeff. But I had *no* time to work on Jeff's voice or body language. Instead, we used our time to develop a cohesive focus of Windows for Pen Computing: about what this remarkable new software product was designed to do, about the markets Microsoft hoped to serve with it, the history behind its development, the benefits it offered computer users. In short, we created the *story* Jeff had to tell.

I helped Jeff make some decisions about his story: which elements were most relevant and compelling to his audience; which technical details were necessary, and equally important, which ones were superfluous. Then I helped Jeff organize his presentation so that the key ideas would flow naturally from beginning to end. By the end of the day, we'd worked through the entire story. Jeff was not only in command of the material, but also comfortable about delivering it.

The results? Jeff's presentation went over phenomenally well. Afterward, the public relations people at Microsoft who knew I'd coached Jeff, praised me for the job I'd done on Jeff's delivery skills, though in fact we'd never discussed those at all. *Simply getting the story right helped to transform a hesitant and*

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uncertain speaker into a dynamic and confident one. Today, Jeff Raikes is Group Vice President responsible for Microsoft's Productivity and Business Services, and one of Microsoft's most prominent and effective spokesmen. Among his current responsibilities is Microsoft's Tablet PC, the evolved 21st century version of the technology that began as Windows for Pen Computing.

A clear and concise story can give a presenter the clarity of mind to present with poise.

The lesson: All the vocal pyrotechnics and animated body language in the world can't improve a confusing story, while a clear and concise story can give a presenter the clarity of mind to present with poise.

The Psychological Sell

I've described the classic art of persuasion as getting your audience to *Aha!* To be truly effective, however, one *Aha!* is not enough. The Power Presentation is a continuous series of end-to-end *Aha!*s.

The good presenter grabs their minds at the beginning of the presentation, navigates them through all the various parts, themes, and ideas, *never letting go*, and then deposits them at the call to action.

I liken making presentations to massage therapy. The good massage therapist never takes his or her hands off your body. In the same way, the good presenter never lets go of the audience. The good presenter grabs their minds at the beginning of the presentation, navigates them through all the various parts, themes, and ideas, *never letting go*, and then deposits them at the call to action.

Notice the verbs I used in this analogy to describe the work of a skilled presenter: *grab*, *navigate*, and *deposit*. All three can be reduced to a least-common denominator verb: manage. People are the deciding factor in business decisions, and management is

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the number one factor in investment decisions. The good presenter is one who effectively *manages* the minds of the audience. Therefore, the subliminal takeaway of the effective presentation is *Effective Management*.

Of course, no one is ever going to conclude explicitly that a good presenter is an effective manager, a skilled executive, an excellent director, or a superb CEO. That's a bit of a stretch. But the converse proves the point. Unconsciously, the audience makes assumptions. If they are subjected to a presentation whose point is unclear, they will be resistant to responding to the call to action.

Influential investors from Warren Buffett to Peter Lynch subscribe to the commonly held principle of investing only in businesses they understand.

When your story is not clear, when it's fragmented or overly complex, the audience has to work hard to make sense of it. Eventually, this hard work begins to produce first resistance, then irritation, then loss of confidence.

A recent book by Steve Krug about Web design has little to do with my business, but its title states my point succinctly: *Don't Make Me Think*.

The effective presenter makes it easy for the audience to grasp ideas without having to work. The effective presentation story leads the audience to an irrefutable conclusion. The journey gives the audience a psychological comfort level that makes it easy for them to say "Yes" to whatever the presenter is proposing. Presenting, therefore, is essentially selling.

Of course, I would never minimize the importance of having solid factual evidence that validates your business premise. A well-honed presentation is no substitute for a well-conceived business plan, just as a commanding speaking style is no substitute for personal integrity. You must have the steak as well as the sizzle. Yet when two companies or two individuals of equal strength are



competing, the winner is likely to be the one who tells the story more persuasively.

In the end, the most subtle impact of a clear and compelling presentation is perhaps the most powerful effect of all: The person who is able to tell an effective business story is perceived as being in command, and deserves the confidence of others. When you are in command of your story, you are in command of the room. Your audience will follow where you lead, and so will money, influence, power, and success.

The person who is able to tell an effective business story is perceived as being in command, and deserves the confidence of others.

This is the core message and value of this book to you, no matter what role or level in business you currently occupy. Perhaps one day you'll go public with a company of your own, and then I hope the techniques you'll

learn here will help you make millions. Before that happens, however, you'll have to get past many mission-critical hurdles, because *every* business decision turns on your ability to tell your story. So please use the same persuasive techniques you'll find in these pages in those scores of other stepping stones along the way.

To help you master them, I'll show you how Cisco persuaded investors to provide billions in capital to support a technology so esoteric that, even today, few people really understand it. I'll show you how Yahoo! capitalized on the emerging fascination with the Internet by transforming an irreverent brand image into a meaningful investment presentation. And how Luminous Networks, a telecommunications startup company, was able to raise \$80 million in private capital during one of the steepest market declines in history. I helped create Power Presentations for each of these companies. I hope to do the same for you.

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This book is about presentations, yes. But it's about much more than that. It's about psychology, about storytelling, about getting every audience to respond to your call to action. It's about presenting to win.