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7 CRIMES AGAINST COMMUNICATION

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1

Tips to slow down:

Practice Out Loud

You can't have an accurate idea of how long something will take until you give it a trial run. Force yourself to practice going through your material slower than your natural speech to get used to the feel of it.

Break Ideas Into Small Chunks

Pause between chunks and take a breath. Your audience will appreciate these "micro-breaks" between ideas and they need it to digest what you've just said. Practice this technique to get used to allowing a tiny bit of silence between thoughts.

Economize Your Message

Ask yourself, "why do they need to hear this?" Sometimes we get in the habit of sharing parts of the story that only really have relevance or value to us. Consider the audience and adjust your message to what they need to hear to take the desired action.

Exceeding the Speed Limit

In the world of spoken communication, faster is not better. The more formal a speaking occasion, the greater the nerves and the more likely we are to speed through our material in a race to the finish. When we speak really quickly, we burden the listeners who have to struggle to keep up. Presumably, we are saying something the listeners need to hear, so our job is to get it heard. Economical messaging is ideal, but economy does not equal speed. Going quickly will not make up for ideas that have been poorly thought out or preparing more information than we have time to deliver effectively.

Whenever possible, take time to consider the purpose of the message - "Why am I saying this and how will what I offer be valuable to my audience?" - and plan how to make the points as direct and simple as they can be.

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Falsely Invoking the Right to Remain Silent

It is impossible to stress strongly enough the value of practicing a presentation out loud. Practicing a presentation - or even a difficult conversation - in silent imagination, or simply flipping through slides and *thinking* about what you plan to say, will not prepare you for the real deal. Talking it out is a great way to make mistakes without consequence and solve potential problem prior to the occasion, rather than discovering it when the stakes are high. We often think we know how we will treat information but find we are tongue tied when we actually go to do it. This practice eliminates that problem.

Practicing out loud has the additional benefit of reducing anxiety. You have already heard your voice speaking on the subject so you will be used to hearing it again when you're in front of others.

Tips for Rehearsing:

Employ Deliberate Practice

Choose one or two areas of improvement to focus on each time you go through your material, rather than going for "general improvement." This way, you will be able to mark progress and keep your attention on a manageable number of objectives.

Don't Practice in the Mirror

It is nearly impossible to concentrate while looking in the mirror - we become distracted with our appearance and our delivery becomes phony and superficial. Use a video camera instead and keep your focus on your message. Then you may evaluate yourself more objectively after.

Practice in Chunks

If time is limited, and for most of us it is, work on one slide/ section for a while and then stop. Plan for short, focused rehearsals with specific goals in mind to maximize your time and your progress.

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"Charges against you are dismissed, but your attorney is sentenced to Brooks Brothers for a complete make-over,"

Tips for Looking Sharp:

What Looks Good?

Keep track of compliments. If you find that people say nice things every time you wear that blouse/jacket/tie, etc., that is a good indication that it should be in your regular rotation for high-stakes events.

Find a Good Tailor

One way to look sloppy is to wear clothing that doesn't fit well. We all hang onto clothes that we hope to fit into again someday, but don't wear this them until you do! Forget what the tag says, just make sure the clothing fits and is suited to your body type. Very few people can buy right off the rack and look good.

Keep an Emergency Pack

Carry Shout Wipes or other stain lifters if you're prone to spilling - or even a change of shirt, if it's chronic. Better to plan ahead than be caught with stained up clothing.

Indecent Exposure

Shirt, Tie, Nose, Fly. Check the mirror before going into a situation where you want to be heard. We have all been distracted by an undone zipper, an odd particle clinging to the tip of the nose, a flipped-up collar or a twisted tie. Check the shoes while you're at it.

Yes, these superficial things shouldn't matter, but why add anything that might distract or devalue the information we are sharing? Like it or not, appearances matter. In fact, they can strongly influence how trustworthy we seem to an audience and trustworthiness is key in achieving buy-in.

I have seen litigating attorneys representing clients in stained shirts, frayed collars, scuffed shoes, and ill-fitting suits. What does this say to the jury? "I don't care." If the advocate doesn't care, why should the jury?

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Operating an Expired License

Everyone is busy and time is limited. It is very stressful when someone has scheduled a certain amount of time for a meeting, presentation, conference call or conversation and that time is not honored. When we don't plan well and go overtime one of several things happens:

1) The audience begins to think only of the time and they stop listening. (Bad.)
2) The audience must cut us off. (Worse.)
3) We are looked at as someone who is unprepared and disrespectful of the time of others - making the audience late to whatever they have planned after. (Deadly.)

Plan for the time limitation, practice OUT LOUD, and if you find you're unable to fit all of your content into the time allotted without speeding (see #1), cut, cut, cut, offer an appendix for details, or even to continue in greater depth at another time.

Tips for Timing:

- Be Realistic

If you are given too short a time slot for the material you are asked to/need to present, ask to extend to a longer slot. If they refuse, then let them know what will have to be sacrificed for the sake of time (some content).

- Time your rehearsals

Time yourself delivering the material at a slow-to-medium pace. This gets you used to slowing down and will give you a good idea of how long it takes to deliver the material in a meaningful way. (We don't want to sound like the legal language at the end of a car commercial!)

- Frame the Message

Open the presentation acknowledging the time limitation and demonstrate your commitment to honoring it. Let the audience know that you have prepared auxiliary materials for them to supplement the presentation and when you'll be available to continue/expand on the material. http://

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Failure to Appear

This is the crime of being buried in notes not looking up or connecting with those listening. The top of our head is not a very interesting visual. Talking into the page can also cause the voice to be constricted and difficult to hear.

Can everyone in the room/on the call read? Yes? Well, then, they really don't need you reading to them something they could read for themselves, then, do they?

It is important to be familiar with the material - though I discourage scripting word for word - so that your not clinging to each item on the page. There are also tricks with font size, spacing and tracking to allow us pick up essential information quickly and keep our face and eyes up and communicating to the group.

This one is altogether too common. Unless you're teaching preschool, reading aloud is a no-no.

Tips for Connecting:

- **Plan Well**

Organize your material in a logical way so that you have an easy time predicting what should come next. This is easier to do when you start with key talking points and then transition them into slides or a more formal plan, rather than beginning with slides. More on this later.

- **Rehearse Out Loud**

By now, you can see this is something I feel strongly about. It helps in so many ways you'd be foolish not to. Practice glancing down in a brief silence, gathering the next thought, raising your eyes, and explaining it. Repeat this mechanical process each time and, strange as it seems, you will appear more natural and have greater ease in keeping your place.

- **Use Limited Notes**

Use bullets, short phrases and key words only. Trying to find your place in a long paragraph is too difficult in the moment.

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Impersonating an Officer

People who try to mimic the style of other, more experienced, presenters often end up looking silly or artificial. Forcing another person's style often leads to a "sales-y" or "schtick-y" effect, and, at the very least, feels uncomfortable to the presenter. Delivery style is something that is best defined through the act of matching the message to the audience and providing that audience with information they will find valuable. Style is a side-effect of this and a clear objective, rather than something picked out and put on like a costume. When we stick to the intention of what we're saying, and we know what matters to those to whom we are speaking, a unique and comfortable style can emerge naturally.

We are who we are and that is good enough. What works for Tony Robbins or Ronald Reagan or Steve Jobs or Maya Angelou may not work for you.

Tips for Finding Your Own Style:

Be Honest

Know thyself (and stretch thyself). If you are a quiet sort, you may find you have a quiet style. Some of the best speakers use silence and measured pacing to great effect. You do need to be sure you're heard and that you have energy to hold the group's attention. That doesn't mean shouting or running around.

Focus on the "Why?"

When you are clear on why you are offering the information you share and how it benefits the group, you will be able to include details and language that accentuates the delivery and increases your impact.

Be Interested

We often worry about being interesting. Better to be interest*ed*. The more you are engaged with what you're saying, the more contagious that interest becomes. This also allows the best of you to emerge.

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7

Distracted Driving

Even if we're not on our phones or eating a meal, we can be highly distracted while doing things that deserve our full attention. Presenting can be one such times. People report "losing time," going on auto pilot, or going "out of body" while speaking to a group.

Regardless of what we call it or how it feels, one thing is sure: if we're not focused on what we're saying, we are less effective than we could be.

A common cause of distraction is anxiety: "Will they think this is/I am good?" "Did I prepare enough?" "Did they notice that mistake?" "Why is she looking at me that way?"

The key to obtaining and keeping laser focus on our purpose is in setting a clear, provocative, observable goal from the start. When we have a clear goal, distractions that come up may easily be redirected back to it.

Tips for Focusing:

Identify the Goal

Keep goals to those things you may actually observe (something your audience might say or do). If your goal is not observable, how to you go about obtaining it and, even more importantly, how do you know if you've reached it?

Look for Non-Verbal Cues

As you delivery your talk, look to your audience for signs that you are driving them effectively to the goal you set. Are they attentive? Listening? Should you increase your energy? Define a tricky term? Go back and reiterate what you just said? You'll never know if you're not watching your audience closely and looking for clues.

If You Drift, Come Back

No one is focused all the time. If you find your attention drifting, or your inner critic is getting loud, simply stop talking, take a breath, think of your goal, and jump back in.

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