

Presenting With Presence: Using Body Language to Build Trust

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When you are presenting to clients, your goal isn't just to share information – it's to be perceived as a trusted, knowledgeable partner. Long before your audience evaluates your slides or your solution, they're forming opinions based on how you show up. Your body language, movement, and expressions all play a critical role in establishing credibility and confidence.

I recently went through an internal Presentation Readiness training, and after spending two days dedicated to focusing on my skills, I had many takeaways. Here are three areas I've found to be most impactful when presenting, along with practical ways to apply them.

1. Eye Contact: Creating Individual Connection in a Group Setting

Strong eye contact signals confidence, authenticity, and respect. During a presentation, it's important to connect with every member of your audience in a way that makes each person feel seen – especially key decision makers.

Most of us have experienced one of two extremes as an audience member: a presenter who locks eyes with one person the entire time, or one who somehow manages to avoid looking at you altogether. Neither feels good, and both can unintentionally send the wrong message. The length and intention behind your eye contact matter more than we often realize.

Tip: Focus on making eye contact with one audience member per thought or sentence. When that idea is complete, intentionally shift your gaze to someone else. Over the course of your presentation, ensure you've made eye contact with everyone in the room. This approach creates connection without discomfort and helps your message land more personally.

2. Gestures and Posture: What Your Body Says Before You Speak

If I'm being honest, this is often the biggest giveaway of nerves – at least for me. Many of our physical "tells" happen without us realizing it: shifting weight from foot to foot, clapping hands, or fidgeting. While these movements may feel insignificant, an audience can interpret them as uncertainty or a lack of confidence, even when the content itself is strong.

Tip: Adopt an open, grounded posture as your default stance. Stand facing the audience with your arms relaxed at your sides when you're not moving. This communicates composure and confidence, even in moments of silence.

That said, strong presenters don't stay static. The most effective speakers balance composure with intentional, expressive gestures.

For example, if you're introducing a major innovation or sharing exciting results, standing still with your hands at your sides may undersell the message. In moments like these, larger gestures – such as opening your arms to emphasize scale or impact – can help visually reinforce the significance of what you're saying.

3. Movement: Channeling Energy with Purpose

Nervous energy is a natural part of presenting, and it tends to increase as the stakes rise – finalist presentations are a perfect example. The good news is that movement, when done intentionally, can work in your favor. It allows you to release that energy while also engaging your audience more effectively.

Tip: Be deliberate about where you are in the room. If your audience is spread across both sides, make sure you are too. When transitioning from one side of the room to the other, choose an audience member to make eye contact with as you move toward them. Once you arrive, plant your feet and finish your thought. This communicates purpose and confidence rather than anxiety.

A Practice Technique That Changed Everything for Me

The most valuable exercise I've used to improve my presenting skills was video recording my dry runs. Watching myself present – exactly as an audience would experience it – was humbling.

The first time, I watched the recording with no sound. Without the distraction of my words, I could focus solely on my body language and movement. I immediately noticed that I spent most of the presentation standing in one spot, unintentionally ignoring one side of the room. It was clear how that would impact who felt included.

The second time, I listened without watching. While my enthusiasm came through, my cadence did not. I was speaking so quickly that it would have been difficult for key decision makers to fully absorb the information – ultimately undermining the trust I was trying to build.

Once I identified these gaps, I practiced with intention, recording myself until my movements, pacing, and presence aligned with the message I wanted to deliver. It wasn't always comfortable, but it was incredibly effective. By experiencing my presentation the way my audience would, I was far better prepared to show up as the confident, credible partner I aimed to be.

As you prepare for your next high-stakes moment – whether it's an internal executive presentation, a finalist meeting, or a consultant discussion – I encourage you to intentionally apply these techniques. Small adjustments in eye contact, posture, and movement can dramatically change how your message is received and how much trust you build in the room. When your presence aligns with your content, you don't just present information – you show up as a confident, credible partner. Practicing with intention now can make all the difference when it matters most.