

Establish Credibility

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To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful.

—Edward R. Murrow

Credibility is a presenter characteristic perceived and assigned by the group. The group assigns the following attributes to the credible presenter: intelligence, competence, believability, and expertise. If the presenter's intention is to be perceived as an expert who is intelligent, competent, and believable, then the choreography of nonverbal moves can be orchestrated to increase the likelihood of gaining that credibility.

This is not to suggest that credibility will be established by simply implementing specific nonverbal patterns without having any actual expertise in a discipline. Nor will it be established if the presenter knows the content intimately and naively believes all that is necessary to impress an audience and gain credibility is expertise in a field or discipline. The presenter must be an expert both in the field and in presenting. The first few minutes of any presentation are crucial to actuate credibility as well as to increase the probability that a group will be receptive to the message. Actuating credibility is supported by the deliberate, strategic, and effective use of nonverbal skills.

Many books about presentation skills recommend establishing credibility early in a presentation. What does it look like and sound like when a presenter is credible? What specific actions increase the probability that a group will assign credibility to the presenter? How long does it take to build credibility, and how do you know when you've achieved it in the eyes of the audience?

Let's think first about some people that many of us perceive as credible—in other words, we consider them intelligent, competent, and believable,

The following links provide a few examples of both a credible and approachable voice.

Credible



Opening to 0:20
Tupac <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsxkOzrSebc>



2:14–2:20
Taylor Swift
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T2F4iP2ocBo>



9:30–9:50
Barack Obama
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAYVKZSWXhY>



1:30–1:35
Nicole Kidman
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUzW2ssrgtU>

and what they say is what they mean to say. This does not imply that we all agree with their views; remember that nonverbal moves can establish credibility even when others disagree with your idea. The following are interesting examples of people who demonstrate use of credible voice tone: the late newscaster Peter Jennings, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Remember, I am not necessarily saying that they are credible; rather, they consistently model a credible voice tone and the visual indicators of credibility. In the acting arena from my generation, Meryl Streep, Jane Alexander, George C. Scott, James Earl Jones, and Denzel Washington often portray highly credible characters. A good friend considers Clint Eastwood's Inspector Harry Callahan as the most credible character he knows—"Go ahead, make my day."

Each of these people is highly skilled at choosing the appropriate voice, stance, pause, gesture, and breathing. Each of these nonverbal moves, when used proficiently, increases credibility. By being conscious of these five skills, a presenter can succeed at establishing credibility despite perhaps not being initially viewed as credible.

Think of some of your favorite actors and actresses and their roles when they were highly credible. Then go to YouTube and watch a clip or two. You will most likely see the credible pattern of a narrow voice tone followed by a dropping of the chin. It is a ubiquitous pattern.



The First Impression

A teacher who attended a training on essential abilities for presenters sent an e-mail describing her success at establishing credibility. Natasha worked in a large urban school district, and with 3 years of classroom experience she accepted a curriculum coordinator position. She was nervous prior to her first meeting with the high school department chairs because she knew she had this one chance to set the stage for credibility and lay the groundwork for trust in front of more experienced and senior colleagues. She consciously prepared her opening for the meeting by scripting her verbal and nonverbal message with the intent of gaining credibility from the group.

As Natasha began the meeting, she took a deep, relaxing breath and stood still with her weight evenly distributed and her feet about hip distance apart. Her arms were at her side, her hands relaxed. As she began to speak, she made eye contact with those in the room and spoke in a voice that was relatively narrow in pitch. With each important point, the

tone of her voice subtly dropped in a synchronized cadence on the last word of each phrase. In the first 90 seconds, the stage was set for a successful meeting. Natasha had a successful meeting, and she attributed her success to the deliberate and conscious use of voice, stance, pause, gesture, and breathing.

Knowing the five skills linked to credibility is not enough; you also need to recognize what each skill looks and sounds like as well as when to use it. In the remainder of this chapter, each of these skills is isolated and described in distinct detail. Although we will “teach” each skill in isolation, in reality no skill stands alone. So keep in mind that nonverbal signals and the words you speak evolve from the choreography of individual skills combined in a complementary dance. Effective presentations depend on a careful blending of these skills.

Voice

Each of us has a range in voice pitch that can be used effectively depending on the intended outcome. Voice pitch can be consciously selected based on deliberate intention. By changing your voice tone, you can change the meaning of the word and influence the listeners’ perceptions. In languages around the world, the linguist Poyatos (2002a) found that changes in pitch determine the meaning of a word. Kendon (2004), another linguist, linked voice tone and gesture to perceptions of authority and compassion. As with Grinder’s (1993) model, we can think of voice range as existing on a continuum from approachable to credible (Figure 1.1). One end is associated with a rhythmic intonation that is often associated with the intent to seek information. This is called *approachable voice*. Presenters use this voice pattern when seeking information, posing questions, or asking participants to consider an idea. Using the approachable voice, presenters build positive relationships that encourage participation by creating a psychologically safe environment with strong rapport.



6:30–6:40
Elon Musk
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oO8w6XcXJU8>



Approachable
6:30–6:40
Tupac
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsxkOzrSebc>



1:55–2:00
Nicole Kidman
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUzW2ssrgtU>



1:00–1:10
Adam Driver
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEvAUeq8Z7o>

FIGURE 1.1 Voice Pitch Continuum



On the other end of the continuum is a voice characterized by a more narrow modulation in pitch, which is often associated with sending information or giving directions. This is called *credible voice*. Presenters often use this voice when they want to be definitive, give instructions for an activity, and establish credibility. By using the credible voice, presenters can more effectively amplify important content, give directions, and inform. Each voice along the continuum is used purposefully and with intent. By developing conscious awareness of your initial voice range and a willingness to expand that range, you can have greater influence on participants during seminars, workshops, trainings, classes, and keynotes.³

Table 1.1 illustrates the visual indicators of approachable and credible voice patterns. The auditory indicators of an approachable voice pattern are characterized by rhythmic tonal variation and a rise in pitch at the end of the sentence. Smooth, fluent, and rhythmic, these kinesic and aural features increase the likelihood that the presenter will be perceived as invitational. The quality of participants' interpretations and understandings is enhanced through the congruent use of the presenter's verbal and nonverbal patterns.

TABLE 1.1 Visual Indicators of Voice Patterns

APPROACHABLE	CREDIBLE
Head bobs.	Head is relatively still.
Chin often rises at the end of a phrase or sentence.	Chin often drops at the end of a phrase or sentence.
Gestures are fluid, palms often facing up.	Gestures tend to be more still, palms often parallel to the ground or facing down.
Gestures are slow relative to personal baseline.	Gestures are fast relative to personal baseline.
Speaker tends to blink more.	Speaker tends to blink less.
Speaker often leans forward.	Speaker often maintains erect posture.
Weight may be on one leg more than other.	Weight is often distributed evenly on both feet.

The auditory indicators of a credible voice pattern include a flattening of pitch, with little deviation from a baseline, and often a drop in pitch at the end of a sentence or phrase. These patterns are on a continuum, so the more credible the voice, the less the head moves and the flatter the

rhythm of the voice is. The extreme end of this continuum is represented by complete stillness while talking until the final chin drop at the end of each phrase. As long as there is calm breathing accompanied with credible voice, there is strong likelihood that the presenter will be perceived as credible. Retired newscaster Tom Brokaw was a master of this pattern.



Practice 1.1 Approachable Voice

Say the following sentence while bobbing your head to add rhythm to the pitch in your voice.

As you consider what you have just read, what do you think might come next?



Practice 1.2 Credible Voice

Say the following sentence while holding your head fairly still and narrowing the pitch of your voice. Be sure to drop the pitch at the end phrase.

As you take out your books, turn to page 42.

Two factors are important when thinking about becoming a more effective presenter. First is recognizing that each skill can be represented on a continuum. Knowing the range of the continuum is useful because it allows freedom in the implementation of each skill. The second important point is being aware of your range along the continuum for each skill. By recognizing your habitual range, you can deliberately increase the usefulness of a skill to be of greater influence on your audience. Increasing the range of verbal and nonverbal skills offers greater potential to be of influence with the rich diversity of participants attending your sessions.

Now that you have experienced the two extreme voice ranges, the next step is to explore when to use each one. Context determines which to use. When the intention is to seek information from participants or to have another person participate, it is most effective to use the approachable voice. When sending information, providing instructions, or managing behavior, it makes more sense to use the credible voice. In Practice 1.3, you will say the same message twice, first with an approachable voice and then with a credible voice. By doing this, you will experience both congruence and incongruence. Incongruence results from the mismatch

between what is said and the nonverbal pattern used. Congruence is achieved when the verbal message and nonverbal pattern are matched, or rather, aligned.



Practice 1.3 Matching Intention With Voice

Congruence: Say the following statement in an approachable voice.

You're suggesting the westward movement was in part developed through manifest destiny?

Incongruence: Say the following statement in a credible voice.

You're suggesting the westward movement was in part developed through manifest destiny?

Reflection: In the space below, write your thoughts about the influence of these voice patterns on the perceived meaning of these sentences.

Stance

For adults there are few things simpler than standing. Interestingly, it is one of the most difficult moves to describe in writing. I realize the majority of readers have been standing, with varying degrees of success, since about the age of 1. What you may not realize, however, is that your stance may very well influence your audience's perception of your credibility. It may surprise you how difficult it is to learn a new stance. When asked to change your stance, it feels not only contrived but also artificial and uncomfortable. A colleague and co-author of the first edition of this book, Claudette, struggled for several months to develop a more credible stance when presenting that differed from her default stance. By using her newly acquired credible stance, she found that she was better able to quickly win participants' attention, maintain their interest, and keep them focused on the content for longer periods of time using less effort than she did before perfecting this skill.

Five Elements of the Credible Stance

1. Feet are parallel and hip-distance apart.
2. Arms may be perpendicular to the ground, or the lower arm may be held such that it is parallel to the ground. Both arms held such that the lower arms are parallel to the ground also constitutes a credible stance.
3. Breathe abdominally, calmly, deeply.
4. Stand still, no rocking back and forth.
5. Maintain an erect yet relaxed posture.

There are five elements to consider when implementing a credible stance: placement of your feet, placement of your arms, your breathing, stillness, and your posture. To have a credible stance, place your feet hip-distance apart, with weight evenly distributed on both feet. Stand still, with your back straight, arms relaxed at your side and with your hands open and fingers slightly curved and relaxed. As you breathe calmly and deeply from the abdomen, your shoulders will automatically drop even before you open your mouth. The calm, deep breathing and relaxed shoulders contribute to an internal state of relaxed alertness. The group will perceive you to be a confident and competent speaker.

When you use the credible voice coupled with the proper stance when delivering content, the audience begins to attribute these qualities to content expertise, and they will tend to ask fewer questions while you are delivering content, thus reducing interruption to the flow. This pattern reduces the number of interruptions because it is linked to participants' auditory processing. The audience will be more attentive, less distracted, and more likely to receive clear and resonant communications. As they listen and absorb content, questions emerging from inattention or daydreaming will almost cease.



Losing My Way

I observed a teacher presenting to the staff at a large urban high school. The teacher, Louie, standing with one hand in his pocket and the other resting on the podium, introduced the first major topic of the morning. He leaned forward as he spoke and used a monotone voice with little inflection. To my surprise, the stance he used in front of

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his peers was nothing like the credible and commanding stance he used in front of his students when teaching. In the classroom he was effective, was well liked, and had great rapport with his students. During the first 5 minutes of his presentation to peers, however, several hands went up and he began taking questions. After responding to a few, he murmured under his breath, "Let's see, where was I?" It took him a few minutes to get back on track; in that time the group's attention decreased and his credibility was lost. As a result of being distracted by their questions, Louie wasted time because he had to repeat information and did not have the participants' unstated permission to hold their questions until a more appropriate time. The group momentum, or energy, and rapport became disrupted. The flow of information got interrupted, and Louie got flustered and lost his train of thought regarding the next important point he was going to make. Ultimately he did recover, but he used up valuable time.

In your workplace, time is among the most limited of resources. Very few professionals have more time available than work to be done. Implementing an effective stance is a first step to gaining credibility, and establishing credibility ultimately saves time when it comes to delivering information or teaching content.

In contrast to Louie, another presenter, this time skillful, spoke to university faculty about effective teaching strategies in the college classroom. When Alicia delivered content about teaching, she stood still, with weight evenly distributed on both feet. Her range of voice modulation was narrow, and her pitch dropped with each important point. The audience was attentive and engaged during the 15-minute segment. She moved slowly and silently from where she delivered the content to a different location a few feet away. From this new location, Alicia called for questions and responded to each in a way that created comfort and understanding in the group. Then, with a pause and slow walking speed, she returned to her original delivery location and began the next topic. Alicia expertly established two locations, one for content and another for questions. As you will discover in Chapters 4 and 5, location is an important quality to consider when listening to and acknowledging participants. Location is also valuable when recovering with grace.

These two stories offer a contrast that illustrates the influence that the individual components of credibility have on group behavior. The effective implementation of the 7 Essential Abilities in Alicia's story illustrates several positive outcomes: the participants assigned credibility to the

presenter, the presentation moved with a synergistic flow, and the presentation supported participants' thinking and met intended outcomes within the allotted meeting time.

Pause

The right word may be effective, but no word was ever as effective as a rightly timed pause.

—Mark Twain

The pause is yet another nonverbal skill used effectively by Alicia. When presenting, the pause is not an empty silence; rather, as Poyatos (2002b) describes, it is an interactive segment between the presenter and audience that is filled with meaning and influence. According to Grinder (1997), the pause is the single most effective nonverbal pattern. What makes it so effective is that, more than any other single nonverbal skill, it has the greatest influence on the metabolism of the listener. In fact, when talking with another person, if the speaker pauses and stops breathing for a longer-than-normal breath, the other person will also stop breathing. I am not advocating that you hold your breath to get someone else to stop breathing. This example simply shows how connected we are to one another when conversing.

The pause, unique in its diverse applications, has many purposes. Consider using it in the following situations when presenting:

1. Before making an important point to gain the group's attention
2. After making an important point to support thinking by members in the audience
3. In the middle of a sentence to get the group's attention (a management application)
4. To stop side talking while you are presenting
5. Before asking an important question to generate anticipation
6. After someone responds to give you time to think

The pause can be used to establish credibility because it can increase the group's perception of a presenter's intelligence, thoughtfulness, passion, and empathy. It supports thinking and is an effective technique to indirectly get attention and manage groups.

The pause is most effective when it is accompanied by a still stance, calm breathing, indirect eye contact, and a frozen hand gesture. The

combination of these four elements is influential because the brain is hardwired to pay attention to pattern shifts. Recognizing pattern shifts is an essential part of our survival mechanism. Long ago, early humans might have gazed attentively across the swaying grasses of the savannah. Noticing a specific movement different from the swaying grasses, a pattern shift, would cause focus and attention on that change—it could be a lion stalking or prey fleeing. The ability to detect and discern differences and shifts in patterns has remained constant among humans to the present day. When presenting, those in the audience may not be lions or prey, but human neurology recognizes and responds in the training room as it did on the savannah. Skilled presenters understand how to use specific nonverbal patterns to gain attention without verbally asking for it by creating pattern shifts.

The pause can be used deliberately to circuitously manage adult groups, and this is an important skill to perfect as a presenter. Most adults take offense at being directly managed. When they perceive direct management during a presentation, their emotional resourcefulness decreases, substantially reducing the presenter's effectiveness. The successful managing of adults is best served through indirect nonverbal techniques as opposed to direct verbal commands. Consider when side talk occurs during a presentation. An ineffective presenter may stop talking and look directly at the guilty party. As the group's attention shifts from the presenter to the focus of the presenter's ire, they become more and more uncomfortable by the overt management of the presenter. This power move by the presenter lessens his or her credibility and often causes participants to shift uncomfortably in their seats, decreasing the group's receptivity and rapport.

The more skilled presenter, when noticing side talk, would confront side talk in a different way. As the presenter speaks, he strategically and intentionally interrupts himself during a multisyllabic word, which causes a larger pattern shift than merely stopping between words. In addition to the interruption, a pause follows the incomplete word. The presenter might shift to indirect eye contact as opposed to direct eye contact to lessen the degree of direct management of the group and the offenders. Implementing this skill set often results in the immediate cessation of side talk. Because the presenter is not looking at the guilty party, neither the group nor the talkers perceive that they are being managed. The side talk simply stops, and everyone starts paying attention again. In short, it is indirect management that preserves relationship and rapport, maintains credibility, and puts the group's learning needs above individual needs.



Practice 1.4 | Interrupt Myself: A Management Skill

1. Begin a sentence, and interrupt yourself about three words into the sentence. Be sure to interrupt a multisyllabic word.
2. Pause, drop eye contact from the group, and stand still.
3. Silently take a step aside (decontaminate).
4. Snap to, and begin the sentence from the beginning with a new voice pattern (amnesia): "One very impor—One very important point to consider is. . . ."

Before the pause, the speaker is talking, breathing, looking at the group, gesturing along with the words, and perhaps even moving. When the talking, looking, gesturing, and moving stop—yet calm breathing continues—the pause will gain the group's attention. As the presenter continues to breathe calmly, so does the group, ensuring uninterrupted rapport. Physiologically, it is crucial to maintain good blood flow to the neocortex to support focus, thinking, and engagement.

Gesture

Words represent your intellect. The sound, gesture, and movement represent your feelings.

Patricia Fripp

When listening to a presenter, attention is paid to the words as well as how they are spoken. Listeners also are unconsciously drawn to the speaker's face and gestures. Humans derive meaning from the message based not only on speech but also on facial expressions and gestures (Ekman & Friesen, 1969). The group is more likely to perceive credibility when the presenter holds gestures still while pausing. This is effective because the stillness created by the freezing of the gesture, coupled with the pause, captures the audience's attention, which in turn contributes to the group's perception of the presenter's intelligence.

The frozen hand gesture is the visual correlation to an auditory pause.

The frozen or still gesture is completely congruent with the pause. A frozen hand gesture is the visual correlation to an auditory pause. Once the presenter pauses and holds a frozen gesture, there is no misinterpreting the intention of the message. To appear credible, the suggestion is to strive for congruence between voice and gesture.

As noted at the outset of this section, the most effective gestures to gain credibility are those that are held still when the presenter pauses. The key to implementing an effective gesture is to coordinate it with the silent pause. This takes practice; however, once mastered, the influence and regularity of its effective use is a powerful tool when speaking. For example, former U.S. President Barack Obama often effectively implemented a frozen gesture during his pause and used gestures to accept a point or word.



17:14–17:33
Barack Obama



1:45–1:58
Barack Obama

The first clip is a useful example of simply using gestures and holding them still when pausing. The second clip demonstrates the use of a gesture to accentuate a word. In this case the word is *justice*. When he says “justice,” both hands move downward and then still. This is a high credible nonverbal move. It is true now as always that what you are doing speaks so loudly that others may not hear what you say.

Breathing

As you develop your understanding of the importance of breathing (your own and that of your audience), it is important to explore an emerging area of brain research. Fifteen years ago in a primate lab in Italy, something extraordinary happened (Rizzolatti & Gallese, 2002). Researchers discovered that specific premotor neurons in a monkey’s brain fired when the monkey saw the lab technician grab and eat a raisin. It turns out the neurons that fired in the monkey’s brain fired exactly the same as they would have had the monkey actually picked up the raisin and eaten it. In a sense, the brain was mirroring neurologically what the eyes were seeing. It was actually going through the premotor process of picking up a raisin and eating it as an internal process, even though the only external action was viewing the stimulus. This marked the discovery of *mirror neurons*. The revelation from this serendipitous event resulted in an important discovery about the human brain. In 2002, researchers from the University of Parma and the University of California, Los Angeles, discovered mirror neurons in humans; with that discovery, an onslaught of clinical applications and knowledge emerged (Stamenov & Gallese, 2002).

One significant understanding to emerge from all of this is the connection between mirror neurons and breathing. How a person breathes influences blood flow and oxygen intake, thus impacting the capacity for

thinking. The presence of mirror neurons also suggests a relationship between a presenter's breathing pattern and the group's breathing pattern. If a presenter is breathing high and fast, the audience will match that pattern, releasing chemicals associated with the fight-or-flight response. The blood flow to the neocortex is reduced, and thinking becomes more difficult for the presenter as well as for the group.

Conversely, when the presenter breathes slowly, primarily using the abdominal muscles, the group will mirror that breathing pattern. By breathing this way, our neurological baseline remains intact and chemicals supporting the fight-or-flight response are not released. Sufficient oxygen and blood flow reach the neocortex, and our capacity for thinking remains functional. Additionally, a presenter exhibiting a calm breathing pattern is perceived by the audience as more confident and competent, thus creating an opportunity to establish and maintain credibility. Chapter 2 discusses the role of mirror neurons in the area of rapport. But first a story on breathing.

A colleague of mine was asked to give a 1-hour presentation. Unfortunately, the host asked him to cover too much content in the allotted time. Consequently, he talked too fast, paused too little, and breathed too quickly and highly. His high breathing contributed to the audience's state of mind being less receptive than it could have been. The audience did not perceive the presenter to be credible. In fact, they perceived him as nervous and unsure of his content, as evidenced in the postseminar evaluations. In reality, the presenter had 15 years of research and presentation experience and knew his content intimately. This incongruence and the audience's perceptions were the direct result of the presenter's high breathing, rapid delivery, and insufficient pauses. Had he been congruent, the participants might have learned and retained much more from that 1-hour session. Sometimes it is more effective to go slow in order to support learning.

It is essential for presenters to recognize their own breathing as well as the group's breathing. This ability allows presenters to be of greater influence with the group and is essential in establishing and maintaining credibility. A group's breathing pattern is recognizable. For example, observe a person sitting in a chair inhaling: notice that the shoulders rise a little and the head moves back ever so slightly. As she exhales, her head often moves forward and the shoulders drop slightly. The movement is subtle, yet it is perceptible at a surprising distance once you know what to look for. As suggested by Grinder (1997), another effective way to recognize inhaling and exhaling is to observe what he calls secondary evidence. For instance, when a person breathes in, he becomes larger and the clothes tend to become

smoother, less wrinkled. As he exhales, the clothes wrinkle. It is also easier to enhance perceptual acuity by observing someone breathing from a side profile. From the side, you can see the head move backward and forward. Once recognized, this pattern becomes more recognizable when looking at someone straight on. The ability to perceive group breathing is learned through ongoing observation. Once learned, an important step is to know what to do when you notice either yourself or the group not breathing or breathing shallowly. This is addressed in Chapter 7.

Sometimes when presenting, you may pause to think of what to say next or to choose what word will most effectively communicate the intended content. During these cognitive pauses when you are stuck searching for a word or idea, you may become still and inadvertently stop your own breathing. It is at this time that you may utter the infamous placeholder “um” or “you know.” This may be a natural verbal response to your internal deliberation and thinking; on one level, freezing your moves reduces the need for the brain to process movements, sounds, gestures, and so on. When breathing is paused, however, oxygen is no longer added to the blood. As the oxygen levels in the blood decrease, the fight-or-flight response is initiated by the release of cortisol. Blood flow is shunted away from the brain and directed to the muscles. This entire neurological and physiological process occurs in less than 20 milliseconds. The decrease of blood flow to the brain results in a decrease in the capacity to think clearly. The brain, an organ that makes up about 2% of your body mass yet consumes up to 35% of the oxygen, is a high-octane engine. When oxygen is limited, the brain functions much less efficiently.

If you pause, and then hold your breath, your thinking will dry up and the audience may become puzzled. When puzzled, participants breathe more shallowly and soon start down the same path of confusion and distraction. Even momentary lapses that impact the flow of oxygen to your brain may create the need for a retooling and a recovery skill in the training room. Unfortunately, once the brain stops thinking, those without conscious access to these skills might just stand there. Auditory processors have been heard to say, “Now, what was I going to say” or “I just lost my train of thought.” Absent calling for a break, there is little else to do. The converse is to be conscious of your breathing and how it impacts that of others. Used well, it can be a cornerstone to the manner in which your audience perceives your competence and confidence and how they assign credibility to you and what you want to say.

By pausing and not breathing, you can also inadvertently cause the audience to hold their breath and, through mirror neurons, channel your physiology to them. You give them cause to be concerned because they are also feeling the effects of fight-or-flight chemicals. By appropriately pausing, closing

your mouth, and breathing, you encourage the audience to remain calm and receptive. They assign you credibility and perceive you as being intelligent and competent. As you become more conscious of your breathing and how it impacts others, you become a more effective presenter.



Practice 1.5 Establish Credibility

This rehearsal is designed to support your learning related to the skills of establishing credibility. To complete this rehearsal exercise, first think of an upcoming meeting, training, or other professional learning event where you are the presenter. In the left-hand column, write your verbal script to your opening. In the right-hand column, create your nonverbal choreography incorporating the five skills that support the establishing of credibility. Once you have completed your design, practice.

VERBAL MESSAGE	NONVERBAL CHOREOGRAPHY
	Voice
	Stance
	Pause
	Gesture
	Breathing
Example:	
Good morning, and thank you for the invitation to work with you today.	From center stage, stand still. And with a slight head tilt for approachability, using a credible voice and a palms-up gesture sweeping toward the group, say, "Good morning." Shift to approachable voice and say, "Thank you." Use a one-handed gesture (hand vertical), as you start to say, "thank." Move the gesture downward and then freeze the gesture as you say, "you." Then use both hands to gesture to the group as you finish the statement.

The RIFF of Communication

Whether or not you ever played guitar, you are probably familiar with the concept of a riff in music. It is the repeating harmonic pattern in a song or melody. Jazz musicians are very familiar with the riff. When they begin a song, and play a few bars, they find a riff of interest. They

then pull that riff out and plan lots of variations of that riff and return to the song. A few more bars are played and they find another riff of interest. They then pull that riff out and play lots of variations before they return to the song. Technically, that is what jazz is, variations on the riff.

Consider the patterns found in the 7 Essential Abilities to have their own unique RIFFs, characteristics of *range*, *intensity*, *frequency*, and *flow*. These are also important aspects of nonverbal communication. Range is the quality related to how far away from baseline a pattern is deployed. For instance, a gesture may extend only to the point where the elbow is next to the torso, or it may extend to where the elbow is 10 or 12 inches from the torso. The further from the baseline level next to the torso, the larger the range.

Knowing your range of patterns is important because it is the shifting of your patterns that gets the attention of participants. And sometimes to get the attention we need to extend beyond our RIFF.

As an example using the gesture, you know what you are saying and what you are about to say. You also are paying attention to the participants' attention to you. As you speak, you may notice that not enough participants are looking at you and you are about to say something important. At this point, consider using a gesture just beyond your range. This new pattern will increase the probability that participants will look at you because the new pattern stimulates the unconscious part of their brain that pays attention to patterns. When you introduce a new pattern, they will look at you.

RIFF

Range—how far off your normal baseline

Intensity—the sharpness and speed of the pattern when implemented

Frequency—how many times a pattern is used in a given time period

Flow—the ability to shift between unconscious competence to conscious competence

Intensity is a quality related to the sharpness and speed with which a pattern is used. One way to understand intensity is to think of how people use gestures when speaking. In baseball, the umpire is the master of the dance. When he calls balls and strikes, the speed and sharpness of his

gestures indicating balls and strikes contributes to the drama of the game. Sometimes a called strike comes slightly delayed after the ball reaches the catcher's glove and the umpire's hand comes up, slowly indicating a strike. At other times, as the ball enters the catcher's glove, the umpire quickly and sharply slices his arm down and up in a classic strike move—it is definitive, dramatic, and not up for negotiation.

Additionally, it is the change in intensity that creates the perception of emotion from the audience as they listen to you. Here is an example: if you speak with an approachable voice while breathing low in the abdomen and hold a gesture with space between your fingers and a curved palm facing upward, the group will perceive you as being calm and relaxed. However, when you shift your voice to credible, increase the pace and volume while shifting your breathing to the chest, and hold your gesture vertical, straight, with no space between the fingers and move the gesture up and down with speed, the group will perceive that you are angry or adamant. You may be; however, what we know is that the perception of emotion is correlated to the changes in speed and sharpness of your nonverbal gestures. Relaxed breathing, a moderate pace of speaking, and gentle gestures are signals of calm, relaxed, thoughtful emotional states. Higher breathing, quicker paces of speaking, and sharper gestures are correlated with emotions of anger, frustration, or being adamant.

Reflect on your own range of patterns. Think of variations in your own voice volume and pitch. In some settings, such as a lecture, you may speak more loudly than you would when sitting on the couch next to your spouse. Think also about how often you gesture, deliberately or habitually. There is great variation in the number of times a person gestures when speaking. Reflect on an emotional conversation. You may remember that you started that conversation using a quiet voice with few gestures. As emotions intensified, your voice very likely increased in pitch and volume. There was also a good chance that you increased the frequency and intensity of your gestures. Becoming aware of personal range and frequency helps you better choose specific nonverbal moves.

Mastering the ability to shift the intensity of your nonverbal and verbal patterns increases your influence on what the audience will feel during your presentations. And people will remember how you made them feel.

Frequency refers to how often the pattern is used. Generally, the more frequently a pattern is used, the less effective it becomes. Also, the more frequently a pattern is used, the greater the risk is of irritating the audience.

We all have the following experience of hearing the word filler presenter: “Um, thank you for coming. Um, our first, um, item on the agenda. Um,

is, um, the budget, um.” Or perhaps you have sat in a meeting or presentation where the person running the event has a favorite word. Something like, “Got it” or “OK.” It can become so irritating and distracting that you notice people next to you tick marking on their notes how many times the presenter repeated something.

Since there are a limited number of patterns, about 50 in this book, we are going to repeat them. By having conscious awareness of our frequencies of patterns, we can ensure we keep the participants focused on the content and not on our distracting behaviors.

To increase your effectiveness as a presenter, it is a good idea to extend your range of voice tone and choose the appropriate tone depending on the intent. It is important when presenting to recognize that there will be times when use of the appropriate and specific tone will be outside your normal range at work or home. It isn't always as simple as choosing one or the other voice tone. Rather, it is a dynamic interplay between the two—using each with deliberate intention. Appropriate use of voice selection can increase a group's perception of your credibility as a presenter.

A dear friend who is a gifted presenter expertly uses humor in his presentations. He uses jokes for transition between different topics. After a joke, he switches to a credible stance so seamlessly that the audience knows by the modulation shift in his voice that he is now teaching content. The audience takes out their pencils, ready to take notes. A flattening of his voice tone as well as his shift in stance and gesture indicate the transition to the new content.

Summary

- ✓ Credibility is a presenter characteristic perceived and assigned by the group.
- ✓ Using the approachable voice, a presenter builds positive relationships that encourage participation by creating a psychologically safe environment with strong rapport.
- ✓ Congruent use of voice tone contributes to participants' perception of the presenter's credibility. The credible voice has a narrow range of tonal quality, and the chin often drops at the end of a phrase or sentence.

- ✓ Increasing the range of verbal and nonverbal skills offers greater potential for a presenter to have influence with the rich diversity of participants attending the session.
- ✓ The pause can be used to establish credibility because it can increase the group's perception of a presenter's intelligence, thoughtfulness, passion, and empathy.
- ✓ A still hand gesture is the visual correlation to an auditory pause.
- ✓ A presenter's breathing pattern absolutely influences how the audience breathes and thinks.

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