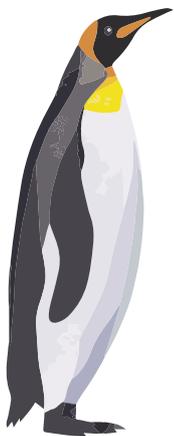


BEYOND THE ICE BREAKER



**GROUP ENERGY,
MOTIVATION AND
ENGAGEMENT**

BY PAM MACDONALD

The level of engagement and interaction that a presenter is able to create and maintain during a presentation is frequently one of the most significant indicators of success and satisfaction for the presenter and the group. As professional presenters we will reflect back on a day or a seminar and the levels of energy and engagement are often the bars against which we define and measure our own performance and success.

Engagement levels are closely linked to energy and motivation because the behaviour and activity level of a group is typically an indicator of the amount of interest that the group has in the topic and the event. As engagement or energy levels drop, often associated with the time of day and fatigue, it can be all too easy for the presenter to begin feeling concerned that they have “lost” the group or that there is something going on that they have failed to notice.

Yet engagement and energy are two different elements of success and effectiveness in a presenting environment.

So how do you define, and then establish and maintain, the desired level of energy and engagement in your sessions? The response to this is going to vary widely according to the context and type of presentation you are giving, the nature of the content and you personally because each presenter is unique and has their own style.

Engagement

Engagement is related to interest and participation which includes non-verbal aspects of behaviour and interaction. Often assessed in employee surveys, engagement is described as the level of interest and care that has individuals go above and beyond the minimum that is required - also known as discretionary effort. Hence, in a training room, engagement could be described as

voluntary contribution.

The manner in which a presenter first engages with the audience has a very strong impact on group energy and motivation. Think back to a time when you have just not “hit it off” with a group - and it has happened to us all at some stage of our professional career. That session is probably not one where you felt positive about the subsequent level of interaction and energy within the group.

Be aware of your body language at all times when with a group and especially so at the beginning of the day. Pay attention to the side of the room that you enter from. If possible it is recommended to enter the field of view of your audience from their left. From a neuro linguistic programming perspective this means that you enter from their past and will be with them into the future. It subtly creates hope and a positive orientation to what you have to deliver.

Reflect on how some speakers deliver powerful and high impact messages. Examine their body language and especially the gestures associated with key phrases. Where are your hands and your arms? Do you use small subtle gestures that stay within the frame of your body and personal space or are you metaphorically speaking opening yourself up to welcome others and engage in a learning experience with them?

Engagement can often be associated with feelings of being welcomed and also being like the other person. One of the most difficult things for many new presenters to overcome is their ability to be themselves whilst also indicating to others that they have things in common.

Energy

Energy and motivation relates to willingness to participate and the degree to which the participants act on or respond to requests of the facilitator.

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Energy can also be described as mood, flavour, or feel of a room. It is influenced by the emotional state of every person in the room. Many of us have tried the experiment of smiling at someone who seems sad or angry and noticing how their mood “lifts” as a result.

Those who have introvert preferences will have a natural tendency to use small gestures that are close to the body unless they are particularly animated or making a specific point significant. Some circumstances may benefit from the use of larger more open gestures than you normally would in order to engage and encompass an audience. Calm energy befits many topics and contexts and is useful to create a learning space that is welcoming and safe for the audience to explore new areas.

For those who have higher energy or extravert preferences, it may be wise to ensure that your gestures are closer to your body and smaller otherwise you can easily overwhelm. Energy levels can have tangible effects on individuals and will directly influence engagement levels. A room of introverts feeling overwhelmed will not have the energy or capability to engage in activity.

Indicators of energy levels within a room need to be identified and assessed based on the room itself not on the perception of the presenter. A room filled with lawyers will feel very different to a room filled with personal trainers and yet their engagement and energy levels may be similarly positive.

What can a presenter do to assess the energy in a room?

The first step is to ensure that your own personal energy is in the desired frame. Did you sleep well the night before? Have you completed your usual pre-presentation routine? (If you do not have one, create one that anchors you into a state of feeling effective and connected to the group as well as confident and comfortable with the

content and plan for the session).

Remember to breathe and to quietly use all of your senses to gauge the energy in the room. Some might describe this as checking in with your intuition while others describe it as the mood or “temperature”. Whatever you choose to call it, take a moment to check in with the mood of the room several times during the day. Be attentive to your own instinct - in other words get out of your own way - to remain alert to shifts or changes in the room.

Body language is subtle and many people unconsciously mirror and match the body language of others. In many situations if a presenter is uncomfortable for whatever reason (including wearing new shoes) then the audience senses that discomfort and responds to it. Be alert to how your own energy and mood affects others around you. Remember also that you can be influenced by such subtle cues as well. It is important to not allow the physical impact of a room such as air temperature or seat comfort to mislead you on how you interpret the energy and engagement levels of your audience.

Engagement and energy are related yet independent and will vary between groups as well as within groups as time goes on. As a presenter and facilitator it is your responsibility to be aware of both and to influence them by your own behaviour and projection - what you sow is what you tend to reap.

Pam Macdonald has trained thousands of people in Australia and overseas and is known for her energy and enthusiasm which underpin her ability to engage groups to get great results. Working in public, private and VET sectors, Pam is versatile and experienced facilitating in many contexts. Contact via pam@broadspring.com.au