

This month's continuing professional development focus is on professionalism and leadership. Communications and presentation coach Khalid Aziz has tips for marketing leaders who want to stand out from the crowd

Fastlane

The 20 minute course in... professionalism

Whether you're more the mismatched socks type, or someone who starches their collar, it's worth considering whether you're presenting yourself to best effect at work

The notion of senior managers at Goldman Sachs and Barclays Bank receiving lessons in charisma from classical actors was the funniest thing Radio 4 Today programme presenter

Evan Davis had heard that morning.

"Trained to have charisma, surely you can't be trained in that?" he asked incredulously.

The programme was discussing how the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and other classical acting schools, are boosting income by coaching business leaders in presentation, charisma and leadership qualities.

The image of senior executives refining their power walk might seem comical, but in reality this has been happening in coaching organisations for decades. The up-and-coming marketer must not only be proficient in his or her specific skillset, but also possess a wealth of softer skills essential to effective leadership.

While it's certainly true that some leaders are born, this is true only for a minority. The vast majority of us pick up skills as we go along – some may be self-taught, but most of us benefit from coaching to help us on our way.

The parallel with politicians is obvious. Most leading political figures have been put through extensive "work" to enhance their charisma and their voter appeal.

In the 1970s the Conservative Party sent for Gordon Rees, a Granada Television producer, who lowered Margaret Thatcher's piercing, scolding trill by 46 hertz to become deeper and more resonant in pitch.

More recently George Osborne received help from a Harley Street speech and drama

consultant to transform his posh, clipped and somewhat strangulated voice into something rather more "of the people". Today his voice is deeper, more conversational and relaxed. David Cameron, perhaps even posher than his friend, was perceived as having a "better" posh voice, less likely to jar with the electorate.

Image consultants worked with moderate success to transform Gordon Brown from a brooding, dour number cruncher with crumpled suits and gnawed finger nails into a better-groomed, more debonair character, but still lacking the polish of his political rivals.

The seminal work by Albert Mehrabian of the University of California in the 1960s, *Silent Messages*, demonstrated the emphasis



Dos and don'ts

→ **Do** go to bed early the night before a major interview or speech. Think of it as a performance to be delivered with passion and energy. A tired, drawn appearance will detract from your perceived ability to work vigorously.

→ **Do** test out your presentations on sensible work colleagues beforehand. Have you hit the right note – literally and metaphorically?

→ **Do** try de-stressing exercises before any presentation. It will not only make you feel better, but also enhance the quality of your delivery.

→ **Don't** work on the words of a speech without practising your delivery. Not many of us write as we would speak, which leads to convoluted and complicated prose that will lose your audience.

→ **Don't** decide what you are going to wear for an important occasion on the morning of the event. Prepare your outfit in advance – iron your clothes and polish your shoes. Even the smallest blemish suggests a lack of attention to detail, which raises questions about your attitude to work.

→ **Don't** be complacent. Be open to self-improvement by asking those nearest to you for an honest opinion.

Tips from the top

Professor Khalid Aziz is chairman of the Aziz Corporation, which coaches and mentors executives in communications and professionalism

Proper preparation prevents poor performance. Or, as the radio presenter John Humphreys is reported to have said, the three ingredients to a great media interview are preparation, preparation and preparation. The same is undoubtedly true for any performance or interview. But while many assume the focus is purely on content, in reality the preparation needs to involve rehearsals. How do you sound and how do you look? These factors will be remembered long after the content has been forgotten.

Less is more. Don't make too many points during an important presentation. Trying to do too much not only places enormous pressure on you, but also dilutes the vital messages – these need to be reinforced with strong body language and vocal emphasis.

Never neglect presentation or you'll lose respect. A mistake in your appearance can lead to a negative impression. To obtain the right style you must wear clothes to enhance all your physical features including your skin, hair, teeth and hands. You must develop the "triangle of influence", drawn with its point at the centre of your breast bone to take in your eyes and your head. This is where you want others to focus. To enhance this, add colour in the form of a scarf, tie, brooch or make-up to provide a lift to this area.

audiences place on image and voice. Mehrabian developed techniques to measure how a presentation dealing with emotions or feelings affects an audience, dividing influences into non-verbal – facial expression, tone and speed of delivery – and verbal – the impact of the words themselves.

The results of his work were surprising. He concluded that 55 per cent of the impact came from non-verbal influences such as image, confidence, posture and demeanour, 38 per cent from vocal factors such as the tone, resonance and speed of delivery, leaving just 7 per cent for the words themselves.

While this might sound extreme, consider the party leaders' televised debates in the run-up to the UK general election. Weeks on, can we really remember what was said? It's more likely we can recall an image of the three men. Did they appear tired, enthusiastic, optimistic, leader-like?

In the now famous Nixon versus Kennedy presidential debates, a youthful looking Kennedy came out as the clear winner in the TV debates against a tired looking Nixon, who had refused makeup. Interestingly, the same debate, as heard by a radio audience, was clearly won by Nixon.

In a business context, the Aziz Corporation estimates that Mehrabian's research, based on his students' responses to emotional issues, probably underestimates the effectiveness of the words themselves. In a business environment, we estimate that 60 per cent of the impact of a presentation results from non-verbal influences, as well as tone, resonance and speed of delivery, while just 40 per cent come from the actual words used.

Marketers would do well to remember then that an essential part of the presentation should be devoted to image and voice as well as content. While this may appear superficial, the impact of "performance" factors should not be underrated.

Dress to impress

As the old adage goes, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. That first impression can be significantly improved by creating the right

appearance and dressing the part, which is harder now than it has ever been.

Thirty years ago companies laid down strict rules for business dress; the proverbial man from IBM would be clad in regulation white shirt and blue suit. Today you not only have to hit the right level of formality, but also need to be able to look the part on dress-down occasions when there is no office uniform.

When deciding how to dress for work you need to be clear about the role you are performing and the qualities expected of this role. Are you trying to project an image of authority, conservatism, maturity, creativity,

dynamism or approachability? Your wardrobe needs to reinforce these messages about you. It would be unwise, for instance, in an organisation making major cost-savings to arrive dressed head to toe in Armani.

Aziz Corp suggests to its own clients that they create business wardrobes appropriate to them, ranging from level four – most formal (suits) down to level one – casual. The hardest to get right is the office casual. Men are particularly prone to turn casual into scruffy. At the extremes we have seen executives sporting dungarees and bright striped shirts – acceptable maybe for a weekend at home, but definitely inappropriate for corporate life.

The colour of clothes make bold statements about the wearer. "John Major grey" suggests professionalism, but also can be perceived as a little dreary. Red suggests confidence, assertiveness and dynamism; beige signals empathy; and blue, as you might expect, states conservatism, as well as dependability.

Not only do the right clothes strike the right impression, they also make us feel better inside. And with that comes extra self-esteem and confidence.

Today you have to hit the right level of formality and look the part on dress-down days when there is no office uniform



Need to polish up your presentation skills, learn how to assert yourself and use appropriate body language for effective communication? The Institute offers a range of courses to help you master the behaviours of success

Essential presentation skills

10 June; 5 October 2010 (London)
This foundation-level, one-day course provides you with the skills to give an effective, confident presentation. It earns you **7 CPD hours** and covers how to use appropriate body language and eye contact, as well as maintaining audience rapport and dealing with questions.

Leadership skills for new managers

22 June; 14 September; 9 November 2010 (London)
This induction course is aimed at new or potential new managers who lack the skills to make the transition between

team member and team leader. This foundation-level, one-day course will earn you **7 CPD hours** and will help you to replicate the behaviour of success. On this course delegates will learn how to use key communication techniques and to understand management styles.

Assert yourself

5 July; 25 October 2010 (London)
This course helps you to build the most important marketing tools of all: self-confidence and mutual respect. Using enjoyable, interactive exercises you will learn to ensure you are heard, respected and appreciated.

Presentation masterclass

24-25 June; 14-15 September; 2-3 December 2010 (Moor Hall)
This programme aims to develop powerful presenters who are confident in their performance and able to build and maintain rapport with their audience. This advanced, two-day masterclass will earn you **14 CPD hours** and aims to give you higher levels of competence and credibility.

For training bookings and advice please call the Institute on +44 (0)1628 427200 or e-mail training@cim.co.uk
For more information, visit www.cim.co.uk/training

● **Don't forget that you can earn one CPD hour for each issue of The Marketer you read.**

Voice control

At drama school students learn to project their voice so they can be heard clearly from high up in the stalls. Likewise executives need to ensure they can be heard but, as with acting, that is really the minimum requirement.

The sound or tone of a voice can act as a mirror. It tells the audience when we are sad, stressed or excited. Judgements on personality are often made on the sound of someone's voice. A "harsh" sounding voice is often interpreted as aggressive

and insincere, while a thin, weak sounding voice may be interpreted as lacking in knowledge or conviction, even though such conclusions may be unfounded in fact. Voice tone can be changed, sometimes dramatically, but this requires recognition that a problem exists in the first place.

Coaching can also affect other areas of the voice, including pitch, intonation and resonance. Voice pitch helps to convey the emotional content of speech. When excited or tense the voice often becomes shrill, and too deep a voice may result in hoarseness.



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 Pitch variety can be used to keep the audience's interest, as well as to highlight the key points in your presentation. If you want an audience to hear and feel a new idea in your presentation, find a new pitch in the voice at the start of the first sentence when you explain that idea. This change of vocal stress is the aural equivalent of starting a new paragraph.

Intonation is the way the "tune" of our voices alters while speaking. It helps us to emphasise important aspects of what we are saying and to add interest and variety to what is being said. Varying intonation helps prevent the voice from sounding monotonous or boring.

Resonance, which is the way the voice vibrates in the cavities of the chest, neck, mouth and nose, has the effect of amplifying and strengthening the sound of the voice. Too little resonance reduces the carrying power and projection of the voice. An imbalance in resonance between the mouth and nose results in speech that sounds too nasal or as if the speaker has a blocked nose.

While specialist voice coaches can work miracles – think of Margaret Thatcher – there are certain exercises we can all do to help, such as maintaining a relaxed upright posture. This allows the body to provide a stable base for air to move freely and effortlessly from the lungs through the voice box and to the mouth.

Speaking of accents

While politicians use voice coaches to perfect a tone that will win the electorate, does the same apply outside politics?

Certainly in the past 15 years in broadcasting we have seen the regional accent being embraced at the expense of "received pronunciation" (RP), with some presenters being dismissed as sounding "too posh".

In business, however, RP still rules, with widespread prejudice reported against people with regional accents. Our research shows that senior British bosses believe that someone with an overseas accent, including American, Continental European, Indian or Asian, is more likely to succeed than someone with an accent from the English regions.

In a survey of several hundred senior UK executives, 79 per cent believed a strong regional accent is a disadvantage in business. Business people with a home counties accent are considered to be generally successful by 77 per cent of those in business, followed by those with an American accent (73 per cent), a Scottish accent (63 per cent), a Continental European accent (52 per cent) or an Indian or Asian accent (25 per cent).

In contrast, 64 per cent of business people regard those with a Liverpudlian tone as being generally unsuccessful, closely followed by those with a Birmingham or West Midlands accent (63 per cent), a Cockney accent (52 per cent) and Geordie or West Country accents (48 per cent).

So even if you think like Albert Einstein, if you sound like a soap star from *Corrie* you will face often unspoken prejudice in the business world. It may seem totally unfair, but accents can speak louder than words. **tm**

Khalid Aziz is chairman of the Aziz Corporation

Are you ready to lead like a pro?

After a weekend playing tennis, you have painful blisters on your feet. Do you:

- a) Come to work in open-toe sandals. No one will mind. They employ you for your brain, not your feet.
- b) Travel in your sandals, but bring your formal work shoes to change into at work.
- c) You squeeze your weeping feet into your Jimmy Choos, or male equivalent, before leaving home. Perfectionism must not be compromised.

After returning to work at New Year a colleague remarks that you look as if you enjoyed your Christmas dinner. Do you:

- a) Pat your extended stomach contentedly and chuckle?
- b) Look in the mirror and check the fit of your clothes. Cut back on calories

until you're back to your old self.
c) Call your personal trainer immediately.

Ten minutes into your presentation, the audience is noticeably fidgeting. Do you:

- a) Ignore it. It's their responsibility to listen.
- b) Re-establish rapport by diverting to a subject close to their hearts. Speak with passion and enthusiasm. Afterwards, review how you could have spoken better.
- c) Tell some jokes to entertain them. The content can wait for another day.

Mostly (a)s

You are blind to the impact of body language and voice and are sceptical of the value of image over content. People may laugh at you behind your back, but you neither know nor care.

Mostly (b)s

While your first priority is to ensure you do and say the right things, you are prepared to work at your image and voice. You recognise that your messages need to be reinforced appropriately and you are not afraid to seek help in this area.

Mostly (c)s

Image is king. You have a keen sense of self-awareness and know how you must be seen. You ensure everything about you matches your perceived persona, from your watch to your car. You have probably tried every cure under the sun for baldness or wrinkles (if appropriate) and may also have experimented with cosmetic surgery or fillers – perhaps this image thing has gone too far?