

THERE IS NO THERE THERE

The crowd hushes. The orator, last speaker in the final round, moves towards the front of the room. He looks at the judges, who nod their heads. He glances down, then looks every member of the audience directly in the eyes. He says

"*I Can See You Naked.*"

It's the title of a book. Your stampede to purchase it might be slowed by passing on the subtitle *A Fearless Guide to Making Great Presentations*. The author is Ron Hoff and he has some of the greatest tips an orator could ever use -- not to mention everyone else in the communication field.

The ideas I'm going to explain to you come directly from the book, but with a few of my own examples. The subject is what that mythical speaker above either had or did not have. And the instant he stood up to speak, you knew it.

Presence.

I've tried to explain presence to my classes, but the best definition came from a freshman. Presence is when you are THERE. Really there. Ronald Reagan has Presence. George Bush does not. Robert E. Lee had presence. Ulysses S. Grant did not. Bart has it. Homer doesn't.

When you consider that judges make up their minds about whether you are in the top or bottom half of the round within the first thirty seconds of your presentation, this element of presence is critical. And it is not something that only a precious few have been blessed to enjoy. Anybody can capture the quality of presence. Some of us have it naturally. Others of us must learn it.

So let's analyze it. What are the elements of presence?

1. **Openness.** The presenter moves with a purpose that envelops the entire room. The attitude is outward, not inward, concerned with their own problems. Take two musical performers. One takes the microphone gingerly, the other seems to pick it up as an afterthought, just before the cue. Meanwhile, the open performer looks at the audience. A smile crosses her lips. The audience leans forward, expecting a great performance. This means a feeling of

2. **Positive anticipation.** We can hardly wait for the presenter to speak, because they are eager to perform. There is nothing about them that suggests reluctance. They want that spotlight. They seem to reach for it because

3. **Nothing is tentative.** They are prepared and here they come!

4. **They move.** Now, you probably cannot walk during an oratory into the audience a la Donahue, but you can use the front of the room and especially you may use the attitude of your body. How much of your time do you spend standing straight up, with your shoulders still and the center of your body in you chest? That is static and eventually boring to you audience. MOVE! Lean to one side, bend at the waist, turn to the side. Gestures can actually cross the body, you know. We are not limited to the Classic Debater Chop. And speaking of chopping,

5. **They look good.** This is seemingly bad news to those of us who are aesthetically challenged. But looking good does not mean looking beautiful. It means for the gentlemen --

the clothes fit. They are pressed. The tie is tied correctly, the shoes are clean, the socks aren't left over from gym class, and the hair is not in the eyes. For the

ladies --

the clothes fit. They are not causing you to bust out all over, if you catch my drift. The shoes are not causing you to wobble like a new born colt. Makeup is minimal, and most importantly, the hair does not obscure your most important element of your presence -- your eyes. For all --

You look healthy. You look at the judge/s and a miracle occurs.

You smile.

I cannot recommend anything that will instantly add to your success more than a genuine smile that establishes a spark of communication between you and the judge/s. Of course, in adversarial American education, this is somehow considered a ploy -- kissing up. How very sad. Our opinions of people who smile are not merely influenced in the way that we like them -- we feel comfortable with them, too. In smiling at a judge, you are defusing an awkward situation not only for you, but for the critic.

6. **They expect you to enjoy yourself.** This, ultimately, is the secret of all great performances, no matter what the event. Take this motto and post it in a prominent place, and recite it after attendance every day.

The performance is for the benefit of the judge.

Good things happen to people with presence. There is no reason why you should not experience these good things. Presence is for all year, not just birthdays and Christmas.

Sorry.