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Win them Early, Win them Forever

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Published: March 5, 2013

As a public speaker, you can impact your attendees in many ways to make sure they gain optimal benefits from your appearances. One way occurs *before* you begin your formal presentation.

Although not all speaking venues give you a chance to greet participants as they arrive or to engage in pre-speech warm-ups, you will get many chances to do so. Use this opportunity well and you may win the audience's favor during your formal presentation and have them on your side long after.

You had me at 'hello'

To leave an indelible impression, engage in a practice I saw undertaken with aplomb by author and speaker Roger Dawson. Before a presentation in Tampa, he positioned himself at the entrance of the lecture hall. More than 400 people piled into the room, and he shook hands and greeted every one of them.

I hadn't met Roger before, but I was aware of several of his best-selling books on negotiation. At first I thought, "Why is this guy standing at the door and pressing himself on us? Isn't this a little aggressive?" Yet, as his speech unfolded, I realized that he was a master at the podium and an expert in his field.

In assessing his pre-speech gesture, I began to realize that he had taken control of the room. He was making a personal connection with every single audience member. As he spoke, everyone realized that he or she had been personally greeted by this dynamic presenter. The greeting solidified attendees' connection to him, enhanced their willingness to follow his presentation and made them more favorably disposed to what he was saying. He undoubtedly got high marks for his speech.

Beat the odds

In subsequent months, I researched the notion of greeting audience members at the door. I found that by making such efforts, a speaker instantly increases the probability that his/her audience will respond favorably. By greeting entrants at the meeting room door, you can achieve a demonstrably higher

probability of favorable ratings. Your greeting to each and every participant psychologically makes it hard for them, psychologically, to negatively evaluate your presentation.

It takes time and energy to engage in such a gesture, and some speakers are leery that the energy required might detract from their presentation. To be a master speaker, however, you have to find the requisite energy. Some professionals feed off this early-round interaction and generate even higher energy once they begin their formal presentations.

While some audience members will be befuddled, most are sincerely pleased. One-on-one encounters don't occur often enough between speakers and audience members.

Win, win, win

Greeting each member individually is a value-added benefit that few meeting planners are likely to see, but all are likely to enjoy. Meeting planners are always seeking added bonuses for their attendees. Greeting people before your speech conveys a powerful message to your meeting planner — “I am a professional. I am here for you and your audience. I am willing to go to great lengths to ensure an outstanding experience for everyone involved.”