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Virtual Coaching Session

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Overview to Virtual Presentation Coaching from Distinction Communication Inc.

Great delivery skills are usually a by-product of two fundamental areas; the 'what' part of communication which is our core messaging and the visuals we create. Then there's the 'how' part which are the skills we exhibit as we stand (or sit) and interact with those in front of us.

The important thing for all presenters to understand is that nearly all the perceptions they aspire to are driven by the how skills yet nearly all our preparation efforts are spent building our presentation visuals and content.

This coaching is primarily focused on your personal *delivery*. We've included online resources to help reinforce what you'll learn. To access the coaching alumni page where some of these materials are found, go to <https://distinctioncommunication.com/resources/alumni/> and type in the password: passion (because passionate speakers are the most effective!). You'll see a skills refresher video that highlights the coaching methods discussed throughout your feedback.

First Impressions

Whether we like it or not, our audiences form first impressions very quickly. Unfortunately, most presenters would admit the first few minutes of every presentation are always the toughest. Our mind is spinning, we're hoping our technology doesn't fail us and all eyes are now on us.

Observations

You immediately appear confident and prepared as you start. Immediately you get out from behind the podium to directly talk to your congregation.

Recommendations

I'd like to offer two personal observations and three general best practices to having a solid start/first impression.

- You often start with a quick introductory statement. For example, in Messed Up Church, you started with "Today I want to jump right in. It's something super close to my heart..." **Instead of saying you want to jump in, just do it!** Imagine walking up warmly to the room and starting, "I love the church but the church is messed up!" You start strong every time after these statements. Considering jumping into the story or idea without the preemptive statements.
- While you have a very confident vocal delivery (more on that later), I noticed that your starts had a few 'umms' (Messed Up Church). These are the moments when our heart rate might be higher or we're warming up to the spotlight. **Be mindful these first moments don't have those anxious sounding words sneak in.**
- Offer more open arm gestures with a **relaxed neutral position** between gestures. (This will take some on-going work to feel more natural and needs to be honed in practice) This skill is best practiced offline in neutral locations like the line at the grocery store. Your brain needs to relearn what feels natural. Just know this, relaxed arms between gestures looks natural to them.
- Take a casual but confident **step forward towards your audience** as you begin. Non-verbally this conveys you're ready to engagement and you're confident in your message. Plant your feet front and center for 1-2 minutes to get yourself established and let the adrenaline subside before trying to use more space.
- Start using **intentional eye contact** from the very first moment. (Think 3-4 second conversations with different segments of your audience) This is how we build trust with others quickly and how others perceive things like personal confidence and trustworthiness.

Online Resources

Video Blog [First Impression – They Happen Quickly!](#)
Blog [5-minutes to Create an Impression? How about 5-seconds?](#)

Eye Contact

How long are your conversations with individuals in your audience?

Observations

Although eye contact can feel impossible on a big stage with a spotlight in your face, you do a very good job. Most stage speakers stare into a teleprompter, their notes, or scan the room but you seem to look into the room, not over or through them. You reference materials at the podium and read from scripture, but when you're done referencing them, you come back to confident engagement and conversation with the room. That's a great discipline. Well done.

Recommendations

- Work on establishing **3-4 second 'conversations'** (that's good eye contact) around the room making sure to keep your eyes up and constantly engaged. The concept here is to talk to one person at a time. With a large audience, these conversations may not be with one person at a time but a *group* of people at a time (those 30 in the back corner for 3-4 seconds, then the 20 in back middle for 3-4 seconds, then the 5 on the front left etc). Although you do this well most of the time, your next level is consistency, making sure to not let your eyes scan the room between the conversations.
- I noticed some **unnaturally long blinks** in a few of the talks (Mother's Day 31:18, Rooted 27:35). I didn't watch the entirety of every talk so I'm not certain if this happens frequently or was just a random mannerism. If you catch yourself doing this, it's called a blocking mechanism. It separates you from the audience briefly as your figuring out content. Most of the time this happens during transitions (when speakers are trying to recall their content) and involved looking down at their shoes or the ceiling. There were times you'd look down at your materials for a few seconds while talking, not reading verbatim, but I couldn't tell if the materials were informing your next content or if it's another 'thinking spot' for your eyes as you're recalling content.
- As a general observation, eye contact has a secondary by-product: it slows us down in our vocal delivery. Your delivery is not too fast, but if you're feeling unusually nervous or not as prepared, increased levels of adrenaline may cause you to talk faster. This confident, engaged eye contact can help focus you and slow you down.

Online Resources

Podcast [Alumni Refresher – Eye Communication](#)

Blog [The One Presentation Skill That Anchors Them All](#)

Hands

Where are your hands getting stuck? What's their default? Our hands often betray our level of anxiety and is where many old habits have found a comfortable home. But using our hands effectively help drive our words deeper.

Observations

Throughout much of your speaking, you use meaningful gestures to add emphasis and energy. Meaningful gestures are illustrative of our content – not just flailing or bouncing up and down to a beat. Your next level is fine-tuning what they do between gestures.

Recommendations

- **Practice a neutral (hands at your side) position between gestures.** You have great gestures but they don't always know what to do in-between the expressions. For example, in Rooted 29:03 you'll see the elbows get stuck bent and hands held mid-air. Other times, you rest them back on the podium. And then at other times, your hands come together in front of your sternum. Instead, try letting your hands drop to your sides. It might feel odd but it's a comfortable, composed 'neutral position' for our hands. To be sure we're not gesturing too much ('talking hands'), find neutral position in this open posture about half the time.
- **Larger** – You have a great large gestures. Most people keep their gestures close to the chest (instincts say when you feel uncomfortable, protect your vital organs, which is why speakers often have hands collapsed in front of them). Good job getting them away from your body.
- **Linger** – Our nervousness can often manifest itself in jerky, nervous hand gestures. Practice holding them out two or three seconds longer so they appear intentional. You do a good job of this. Nothing looks frantic.
- **Library** – As we grow as presenters, we seek to expand our library of comfortable go-to gestures. This happens by looking for words that add impact. ("Wide range of options", "Deeper engagement", "Collaborate more effectively") Be looking for phrases like these in your presentation and practice corresponding gestures every time you run through the presentation.

Online Resources

Podcast [Alumni Refresher – Meaningful Gestures](#)
Blog [Every Time You Present, a Lifetime of Baggage Sits in the Front Row](#)

Voice

Are you missing important vocal punctuation? The difference between a good speaker and great speaker can be the power of their vocal delivery; whether they're honoring the periods or commas in their content.

Observations

Your vocal delivery is probably your biggest strength! You sound unhurried, confident, and passionate. If you have been practicing this, it has paid off big time. Well done.

Recommendations

- **Pace** – Your pace never sounds hurried. It subtly changes as you get excited or slow down to make a point. Very effective.
- **Pause** – Pauses are the solution to filler words (umms, uhhs). As noted on the first impression page, sometimes umms sneak into your first minute. I have heard these sneak into sermons during personal stories and then fall off when the content turns back to scripture or take-aways for the audience. I also hear these sneak in after a joke when we're filling the silence (in fear the audience won't respond). I heard this happen after you joke about circumcision in the Messed Up talk. Finally, I heard 'You know?' or 'Right?' after your ideas. They're not pervasive but a way to keep fine-tuning this skills!
- **Variety** – You have great emphasis and variety in your vocal delivery. This is how we perceive a speaker to be genuine and truly passionate about their talk. It makes us more dynamic and sound more interesting. Well done.
- **Preaching cadence** – I've observed that preachers 'sound different' when presenting. There are two factors. First, they lose natural inflections at their punctuation marks – ending ideas on commas rather than dropping down their inflection to a period like we naturally do in conversation. Second, they sustain a louder volume (not always shouting – although sometimes) that seems unnatural. This all varies wildly based on denomination. If you want to be perceived as more conversational and relatable, catch yourself speaking in a loud assertive volume that sounds 'preachy'. Listen for natural cadence instead of a more staccato delivery. Some congregations are used to a preaching cadence from their leaders while others crave a more 'down to earth' conversational style. I'm simply pointing out the mechanical differences!

Online Resources

Podcast [Alumni Refresher – Vocal Variety](#)

Video Blog [Life, Balance and Priorities](#)

Movement

Are you using any movement (using your space) and are you using it purposefully?

Observations

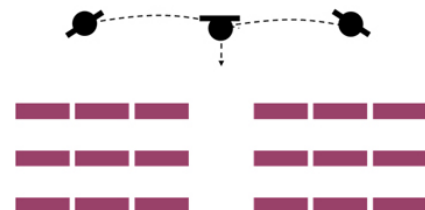
Movement is not always appropriate. Small settings. Behind podiums. Seated presentations. But when you have the space, a movement game plan can help you be more engaging and show more energy.

Warning: A little movement goes a very long way.

You would move out from behind the podium, which is great best practice. Be careful that you're not swaying or pacing when you stop walking on stage – other forms of movement that look less composed or comfortable. There were times in the Mother's Day talk where I felt you moved around the sides of the podium too often. That could very quickly turn into pacing, which is distracting. I believe you also would move to the left side of the podium/room more often than to the right. Best practice is to balance out evenly time in different 'corners'.

Recommendations

- Always get yourself planted front and center working your **First Impression Game Plan for several minutes** before even considering movement. (Quick movement looks like anxious movement.)
- When moving, always consider **using a "puller" to move you across your space**. A puller is one 3-4 second conversation that you'll use to pull you their direction in the room. Perhaps it's just a few feet around a board room table. Maybe it's 4 or 5 good strides across a stage. Scale appropriately but always use a puller. A good presenter will then plant their feet for a while – avoiding distracting pacing. Don't forget to plant and orient your posture to the whole room no matter where you've landed. Then settle back into your 3-4 second conversations around the room. Take your time before pulling to another part of the room.
- When you close, always return to that up same front center spot.
- Remember – a little movement goes a long way and movement can easily run amok when we are nervous or anxious.



Online Resources

Podcast [Alumni Refresher – Purposeful Movement](#)