DRIVEN to Lead

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An instructional technique for the rapid development of presentation skills is described. The Process involves Desensitization, Relaxation, Invention, Enactment and Networking. Over the period of one-semester students develop or enhance their presentation skills and gain leadership experience coaching others in presentation skill development. This process has resulted in marked improvement in presentation confidence and skill as well as improvement in coaching skills.

ii) Introduction (including learner objectives)

One of the most important functions a leader performs is that of communication, virtually all of it oral communication. Public speaking is often described as one of the greatest of human fears, rivaling even the fear of death (Bender, 2000). For many, the thought of standing up in front of an audience evokes images of queasy stomachs, sweating palms, dry mouths, fainting, embarrassment and most other reactions attributable to terror. Unfortunately most instruction on public speaking emphasizes the intellectual content and organization of the speech, often relying on technology such as PowerPoint to provide effective impact. Our in-class or in-course opportunities afford a rich opportunity for practitioners to develop this skill as well as affording a leadership learning opportunities for class peers. This paper describes a technique used by the author to rapidly develop confidence in individual learners as well as a coaching model for group peers to develop their leadership skills in the development of presenter confidence.

iii) Background

To cultivate this critical skill I developed this technique for rapidly developing confidence and competence in oral presentations. As well, the technique provides the peer coaches with a unique opportunity to develop their own leadership skills through direct exercise of their ability to motivate,

educate and provide critical feedback to under confident presenters. Through over 15 years of use and constant refinement it has proven to be more effective in rapidly overcoming the fear of public speaking than anything else. It engages both the learner as well as he peer coaches in developing leadership skills, knowledge and confidence. The technique also lends itself to many situations in which you can anticipate a great deal of tension such as conflict management, negotiation or dealing with difficult people

iv) How it works

DRIVEN is the acronym for the instructional technique used to improve presenter's skill and confidence through Desensitization, Relaxation, Invention, Visualization, Enactment and Networking.

At the outset the instructor asks the students to identify their confidence in front of an audience on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being the highest level.

Those with the lowest levels in the class are individually invited to stand in front of the class and become engaged in overcoming their own natural fear of being stared at by large numbers of people.

Desensitization- Instruct the student as follows:

Stand up in front of the room

Ask the audience to look at you.

Notice the fear reaction.... queasiness, sweaty palms rapid breathing, pounding heart ...all symptoms of stress.

Now, ask them to close their eyes. Again look at the group and notice the decrease in tension. Repeat this process several times.

Go back to your seat and start again, walk around room asking the audience to keep its eyes closed. Look in each face. Repeat the process asking the audience to keep its eyes open.

Point to each member of the audience individually, moving around the room.

Practice in a variety of physically awkward rooms. Put up drawings of eyes or happy faces when you don't have an audience to work with. Do this over and over until you are bored with it.

Relaxation

The next step is for the instructor to engage the audience in a relaxation exercise to create a state of calm in which they become open to suggestion**.** The instructor directs the audience as follows:

Sit up straight, squeeze the thumb and index fingers together, close their eyes and breathe in and out noticing the rhythm of their breathing.

Tighten the muscles of your feet and then relax them. This is continued until a the major muscle groups have been tightened and relaxed concluding with the hands,

As thoughts enter your head let any thoughts slip away and refocus on breathing.

Notice the waves of relaxation, warmth and calm come over you.

Touch your fingers together as a signal to relax.

Ask the audience to slowly open their eyes and to practice this several times a day to condition themselves to rapidly generate the relaxation response.

Invention -The individuals in the audience are advised to creatively begin to put their presentation together. The instructor lays out an approach that is clear and simple.

Start with an outline and 2-3 points the presentation will make.

Develop an opening, body (2-3 Points you want to make) and conclusion

Create a strong compelling conclusion.

Build anecdotes to emphasize points.

Practice reading the entire presentation to see how it sounds

Visualization - The instructor introduces the process of visualization to instill a feeling of repetitive confidence in presentation ability. The audience is taken back through the relaxation process and is visualize as follows:

Picture a favorite peaceful, calm, pleasant scene. (Sunrise, sunset, lake)

Picture yourself in that scene doing some favorite rhythmic activity walking swimming walking, horseback riding...

Finally visualize yourself up in front of audience calm, relaxed, making eye contact, using gestures, engaging the audience in an even well modulated voice. Everything is under control.

If you make a mistake nothing tragic happens, you don't apologize but just continue right on with the presentation as if nothing had happened.

Picture yourself moving around making each point and concluding your presentation successfully. You are fully relaxed and in control.

Enactment - The instructor introduces the notion of the individual dress rehearsal to polish the presentation and get the feel for how it looks and sounds. The students are given this set of instructions on how to proceed.

Stand up on your own and practice the presentation as you will give it over and over until you are totally familiar with the material and can leave parts of it out without anyone knowing there's a glitch.

Make a series of happy faces, sad faces and cross eye-d faces and post them in awkward spots around the room. You can also use your pets or relatives and friends if they are available. Practice gestures, movement, eye contact and vocal variety

Work especially hard on your introduction you have less than 30 seconds to engage the audience, after that it is very hard to re-engage them.

Network - *The* instructor introduces the concept of peer coaching group to perfect the presentation skills. Working with groups of five to six people the instructor provides the students with the following challenges.

Designate a presentation coordinator to take lead in developing presentation by assigning voice, gesture, movement and eye coaches as well as coordinating the coaching activities.

Go through Desensitization, Relaxation and Visualizationwith speaker and group

Get presenter on his/her feet in front of group and practice the at least 3 times

Elicit active physical participation by coaches providing <u>positive</u> support and encouragement to the speaker. The coach's function is to provide positive reinforcement and critical feedback for improvement

Ask the speaker what is needed to increase comfort level and improve and to tell the coaches when something isn't working and get them to try different things.

v) Results to date

With well over 2000 students having exposure to the DRIVEN process the results have shown consistent improvement on the part of all presenters with the greatest improvement being in those that started off with very little confidence.

The most improved students often reflect extremely positively on the process

"I *hate standing up in front of people to present or facilitate. I tend to be very nervous being alone and having many eyes on me. However, this course was a great opportunity to overcome this. Now, being able to enjoy doing presentations and facilitation, is a big step"*

"The first word that came to mind when I walked into this class was "TERRIFIED". Not terrified because of the work load would overwhelm me or that I didn't know anybody in the room, but terrified because standing up in front of people makes me speak at the speed of light, have tunnel vision, stutter and turn the shade of tomato red. My legs almost buckled underneath me when I had to stand up to say my name." As the course progressed and this student had been involved with the DRIVEN process for about 5 weeks she reported she had undergone an amazing transformation. *"I had to do a presentation worth 40% of my grade for my fourth year Ecological Research Project. Needless to say this entailed me expressing detailed scientific knowledge in my specific field of research. So with 30 minutes to go I reviewed my work and simply stood up in front of the review board (without overheads or PowerPoint presentation) and confidently broke down my work into simple objectives and methods. I used all the presentation tactics we talked about in class and knocked their socks off. My presentation did not have any of the detail that other people had in their presentations but I was the only person in the class to receive an A. Every single one of my comments said I was a very confident and convincing speaker."*

The experience of being coached and coaching also has a Comments on coaching from experienced speakers and leaders as well as those being worked on

"My peers were all great coaches because they helped me to identify my needs and supported me so much that my confidence grew. They kept making meaningful suggestions on how I could improve my presentation skills and they spent a lot of time with me practicing the skills. It was a lot easier accepting feed back from a group of peers, rather than a professor because there were no marks at stake and I knew that their concern was genuine.. Like you said in one lecture, "the more we understand each other's motivations the better we can achieve everyone's individual and collective needs."

"Now at the end of the semester I realize I have made a difference in the lives of some of my group members. I was overwhelmed by the difference I saw in 'Jane' during our final group presentation. While she was presenting, I couldn't help but think she was an entirely different person form the 'Jane' we saw present in early September. I was so proud of her! I am also very proud of the relationship we established I don't want in any way to take away from her accomplishments, what she did to improve her presentation skills was through her own dedication and hard work. In seeing 'Jane's' achievement, I also see an achievement of my own. Two of my goals in taking this course were to try and take on the role of facilitator in the group and to improve my abilities to mange conflict. In working with 'Jane I feels that I made improvement towards both of these goals."

vi) Conclusions and Future Implications

The application of DRIVEN has the potential to dramatically improve presentation confidence and skill in a relatively short time. Additionally, using peer coaches significantly enhances the coaches' ability and confidence as leaders. Introducing this concept early in students University education can greatly improve their performance in presentations and in-group work

References

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Huber, NS (1999). *Leading from within: Developing personal direction.* Malabar FL: Krieger