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| **2018 MOBTS Teaching Conference for Management Educators**  **Paper Submission** |

**Stop, Aim, Deliver: An Exercise in Focusing on**

**And Engaging your Audience**

**Introduction**

In our professional development and training classes we impress upon students that whether you are presenting to a management team or delivering a lecture in a classroom, you are the main event and to communicate your message appropriately you need to engage the audience.  Appearance, body movement, eye contact and vocal tone will prove to be more impactful than the rote delivery of the content you are presenting and helps connect the audience to the message. The intent of this interactive exercise is to teach students how to focus and concentrate their attention on their audience, minimize distraction and to step away from podiums or other “safety zones” that separate them from their listeners. The target audience of this exercise has been on under-graduate business students in classes on presentation and training delivery; however the activity could be used for any level of student or instructor engaged in these types of activities.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

There is a lot of support in the cognitive literature to suggest that it is a good idea to teach students to step away from a podium. From an internal perspective, the sensory-tonic literature has demonstrated that people tend to judge themselves as smaller when in close proximity to a physical structure such as a wall, or can we say podium, as compared to being in open space where they judge themselves to be taller or longer than they actually are (Shontz, 1969). Overestimates of length and height have also been linked to feeling more successful and more effective (Fisher, 1986). The field of Proxemics refers to the study of eye contact and how people physically distance themselves from others. Standing face to face with moderate eye contact relates to feeling of mutual liking. Standing face-to-face and staring is associated with hostility. Standing at a distance, for example behind a podium, is associated with indifference, aversion and apathy (Howard & 2009). Thus there is research support for the commonly given instruction to maintain eye contact with the audience, or the comment that a podium is a barrier or crutch for the presenter.

The activity described in this paper is based on theory from cognitive and sports psychology and involves the concepts of attention and focus. Focused attention refers to the conscious process of concentration, which is directing attention to a single object where ‘focus’ represents the center of activity or attention, a focal point. Selective attention refers to the unconscious or subconscious process of selecting certain stimuli to react to while screening out other stimuli that are occurring simultaneously. Focused attention involves concentrating on a specific activity or series of activities. Focus can be either internal as in self-monitoring ones internal, mental or bodily reactions to stimuli or external as in scanning the environment. Focus can also be narrow, such as concentrating on only a specific sensory stimulus, or broad such as monitoring one’s general reaction to multiple stimuli. The following figure adapted from an article titled ‘Concentration and Attention Control Training’ (ExRx.net) illustrates how the combination of both of these dimensions relates to differences in concentration methods.

External Internal

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| Narrow | Attentional Focus (AF) - Object  Sensory Forking  Method of Loci | AF – muscle movement  Rehearsal/Practice  Reaction specificity  Meditation |
| Broad | Environmental scanning and assessment, openness to discovery, and exploration, seeking feedback | General self-monitoring, multi-tasking |

Figure 1: Concentration and Focus Methods

Research on cognition has shown that human beings have preferences for visual and auditory modalities of stimuli. These are also the two types of stimuli modality most used in learning situations. The kinesthetic modality, which involves touch, space and motion is a less preferred area. In fact, in a study on nurses’ contact with patients it was found that most were unaware of their touch and movement until they actually watched video of themselves interacting with patients. This was significant since the authors found that contact style had an impact on patient recovery (Backaberg, Gummesson, Brunt, & Rask, 2015). Although authors in training and learning literature have often called on professionals to design training environments that are rich in multiple sensory modalities, research has shown that when you try to create learning environments with equal concentrations of stimuli from multiple modalities, interference increases and learning declines (Noe, 2017). In other words, it becomes a case of too much of a good thing. Therefore, in order to focus on a least preferred sensory modality it is important to isolate it from the more dominant modalities. Forking refers to the process of bifurcation, branching and separating. In the case of sensory forking you consciously separating different modalities of stimuli (auditory, visual, and kinesthetic) for the purpose of focused attention or concentrating on a specific modality. In the case of our activity we are using the concept of sensory forking, to isolate and focus on kinesthetic stimuli. While this technique is commonly used in sports psychology in working with athletes from all types of disciplines from com dart throwing (Shafizadn, Platt & Bahram, 2013); track and field (Ille, Selin, Do, & Thon, 2013); gymnastics (Abdollahipour, Wulf, Psotta & Nieto, 2015); and golf (Bell & Hardy, 2009). These studies in general conclude that external focused attention improves performance while internal focused attention is either ineffective or can diminish performance. We have not seen applications in education with students. In this regard besides addressing a common problem for presenters and trainers, we think the use of this technique is a contribution to the field of education. With regards to the model in figure 1, during this activity we are in the External/Narrow cell and, during the debriefing session after the exercise, in the External/Broad cell.

Our activity is also based on concepts from Adult Learning Theory, which states that adults learn best in environments where they are directly experiencing the learning, have a sense of being in control, can apply the training to a specific work-related problem, understand the importance of the training, and receive both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards.

**Learning Objectives**

1. Increase selective attention of the student and engagement of their audience.
2. Overcome fear of being up in front of an audience.
3. Gain a better awareness of their body position, gestures, eye contact, and facial expressions in order to exert more control and achieve more purposeful movement.

**Exercise Overview**

This exercise originated in a Training and Development course. The instructor was trying to help the students learn standard presentation technique – engaging the audience using body language, eye contact and movement. The idea was to encourage the students to move away from the podium or desk and make themselves one with the audience. Working with a student athlete, they transformed an exercise commonly used in basketball practice to one applicable for the classroom. This has been since been leveraged by an instructor teaching a Professional Development course where students are required to deliver an “executive” presentation.

The activity follows a lecture, discussion and demonstration on effective presentation technique. The exercise consists of the use of basic classroom equipment (i.e., podium, multi-media projector, presentation remote control, etc.), several pre-developed 3-slide PowerPoint presentations (number of presentations can vary, but the use of several different messages for variety works well) and three 8 ½ x 11 floor markers printed with the words “Stop”, “Aim” and “Deliver.” In our activity, students are videotaped delivering their “presentation” incorporating the Stop, Aim, Deliver technique. The videos are loaded to a private Google drive for learning purposes and students are encouraged to evaluate their individual video to understand ways to improve their technique to support the preparation for their final presentation. This is not a requirement of the exercise, but if desired videotaping equipment would also be required.

On the day of the activity, the PowerPoint presentations are loaded to the computer and the three floor markers are positioned several feet apart and away from the podium. Students select or are provided a 3-slide PowerPoint deck which they will present to the class using the various presentation techniques being taught. Students are asked to take a few minutes to “memorize” the basic concepts of the PowerPoint text in preparation for delivery. Only the basic concepts are required as the focus of the exercise is on presentation technique and not content delivery. Each student takes about 5-7 minutes to present and another 10 minutes are reserved for feedback.

To complete the exercise, each student is asked to volunteer or is randomly assigned to approach the classroom podium. At the podium, they collect the remote control, introduce themselves and welcome the audience. Then, using the information contained on slide one (1) the student approaches the first floor marker, “stop” and delivers the information contained on the first slide paying attention to non-verbal ques. In this event the student is “practicing” effective body movement, hand / arm gestures, assuring they are not “back” to the audience, etc. They seamlessly advance the slide and approach the second floor marker, “aim” again making sure they are not back to the audience and deliver the message on slide two (2) focusing on making eye contact with a particular area of the audience. Finally, the student seamlessly advances the slide and moves to the third floor marker, “deliver” and, using a combination of making eye contact and using non-verbal ques (body language), delivers the information contained on the third slide. At the conclusion of each presentation, first the audience and then the instructor provides feedback to the participant. The feedback loop serves two purposes; 1) to give constructive feedback and praise to the presenter and, 2) to give the members of the audience the opportunity to observe and note “good” and “not so good” practice to benefit their own learning.

**Session Description and Plan**

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| **Time** | **Content** |
| 5 minutes | *Welcome and Introduction:*  Welcome the participants  Introduce the facilitators, concept and activity to be presented. |
| 15 minutes | *Intent and Theoretical Foundation:*  Provide an overview of the intent of the exercise and the target audience. Discuss of the theoretical foundation / teaching implications for this teaching activity. |
| 5 minutes | *Explain the Activity and Equipment Required:*  Students are asked to “practice” their delivery technique by presenting a 3-slide deck presentation to the class. Users of the activity will need to make sure they have the equipment required including basic classroom equipment, several pre-developed 3-slide PowerPoint presentations and three 8 ½ x 11 floor markers printed with the words “Stop”, “Aim” and “Deliver.”  Using the provided 3-slide PowerPoint deck they will:   * “Memorize” the general message of the PowerPoint text * Deliver the “presentation” incorporating the Stop, Aim, Deliver technique by:   + - Approach the podium for an introduction     - Move to the first floor marker “stop” and deliver the message paying attention to non-verbal ques.     - Move to the second floor marker “aim” and deliver the message, directing attention to a particular area of the audience.     - Move to the third marker on the floor “deliver” and incorporating both non-verbal ques and focused eye contact deliver the final message. * Conduct an individual feedback session |
| 15 minutes | *Conduct a “Mock” Exercise with the Audience*  Complete a mock session with the participants in the audience. Call for volunteers (need at least 4 people to volunteer) and prep them for the activity. Provide volunteers with slide deck and presentation remote. Complete a feedback session. Complete exercise 4 times. |
| 10 minutes | *Group Discussion:*  Ideas, suggestions, and brainstorming on how these principals could be leveraged across various courses or in new ways not presented here |

**Summary and Unique Contribution to MOBTS**

The work presented in this proposal has not been presented to MOBTS and is not under current review by an outside source. While the technique of external focused attention is widely used in athletics, we have not seen applications in the classroom. The literature would strongly support its use in presentation and training courses as a means of increasing audience engagement and self-confidence of leaders. The design of this particular exercise is well supported by the research as it follows the concept of external focused attention, which has been found to be the most efficacious in improving performance. Anecdotal and classroom evaluations suggest that the technique works, however it has not been investigated under controlled experimental conditions which is recommended in order to further support its effectiveness.

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