

## **Performance-Leadership™: The Architecture and Artistry for Captivating an Audience**

**Mark Gorkin\***

*"The Stress Doc", USA*

**\*Corresponding Author:** Mark Gorkin, "The Stress Doc", USA.

**Received:** September 15, 2017; **Published:** October 16, 2017

A ground-breaking essay with links, pics, and comments along with a new model and method: the stress doc's im4 performance-leadership formula-architecture for captivating an audience.

### **IM<sup>4</sup>\*\* Performance-Leadership™: The Architecture and Artistry for Captivating an Audience**

You know that exuberant feeling when you don't just "walk your talk," but have actually raced and aced it. What conditions allow this to happen? Basically, I call it IM<sup>4</sup>\*\*<sup>\*</sup>: The Performance Formula-Architecture for Captivating an Audience: Imaginative Mind x Informative Message x Inspiring Messenger x Interactive Medium. Maybe I've stumbled on a new "Triple 'A'" - Architecture, Artistry and Audience. Please be patient. I'm the founder of a new AA group: Acronyms Anonymous! Anyway, last week, Wed. April 12<sup>th</sup>, (fittingly, my birthday), IM<sup>4</sup> was in play at a lunchtime keynote for the Virginia Beach-Hampton Roads SHRM Chapter - "Keys to Captivating an Audience".

FYI, here's a link with lively event pics and comments:

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:6258332040383459328/>

Let me identify the Four IMs and provide brief illustrations of the evolutionary tools and techniques that evoked unsolicited enthusiastic response from participants:

### **April 12<sup>th</sup> Testimonials**

Mark Gorkin helping us all be better communicators and facilitators at this month's HRSHRM chapter meeting...AND he rapped for us!

Karis T, SPHR, SHRM-SCP (the photographer and original post person).

So good to see you again yesterday. You're an absolute delight to listen to and an inspiration for those of us that may be introverted that there is hope to come out of our shell.

K, SPHR, SHRM-SCP

Great presentation!!! I was motivated the moment I entered the door. I walked out very energized!!

Tay Lane, PHR.

Thank you for such a great presentation on Wednesday. Also, I am hoping we can connect over the phone. I am doing some presentations and I want to start incorporating some of your great ideas!!! Thank you again, Susan Barr, SPHR, SHRM-SCP.

### **The IM<sup>4</sup> Performance Formula-Architecture**

#### **Imaginative Mind x Informative Message x Inspiring Messenger x Interactive Medium**

##### **Imaginative Mind**

The initial IM needs to kick in way before you go on stage. Surely, imagination and improvisation are vital tools once in performance mode. But the foundation or launching pad for high-impact presentational performance is "imaginative preparation". Go beyond the

logical sequencing of Power Point material and predictable rehearsal. (Though I have seen a lively presentation that was all cartoon-like slides poking fun of all the “stress carriers” in the legal profession). Generate a motivational mix of ideas and interaction. Pair your concise concepts with “Get FIT” - the Stress Doc’s acronym for FUN-Interactive-Thought-provoking - small group exercises. (Examples to follow). Begin to think like an “Orchestra Leader”: help individuals and the collective bring out their best music. At the same time, be sufficiently prepared so you can momentarily go “off message” and spontaneously engage in a “jazz riff” with your audience. And you’ll still have time for a crowd-cheering solo. (For me, my solo hits a high note when I suddenly inform the group of my secret identity: “I’m pioneering the field of psychologically humorous rap music and, as a therapist, calling it, of course, Shrink Rap™ Productions! I also break out the Blues Brother hat, sunglasses, and black tambourine regalia.

Not surprisingly, one participant wasn’t sure she was ready to break out in a rap (even if it’s an “Aristocratic Rap”) at her next company meeting. You can still develop mind-grabbing techniques, e.g. coming out in costume, or having a “Forms Funeral” to enable employees to deal with angst around computer systems changes, the loss of familiar procedures and, in general, an uncertain future.

Finally, the practical application of imagination reminds me that if you can pair a hard to pin down concept - such, as loss or adaptational angst - with a visual metaphor - e.g. “Forms Funeral” - that is, connect the abstract with a surprising or evocative yet relevant concrete image, people will better understand the issue they are facing. And understanding is the first step towards planning and taking action and, ultimately, having a greater sense of involvement along with control.

### Informative Message

One secret ingredient for adding power and punch to content and delivery is pithiness and concept-practice partnership. After the program, one somewhat startled participant asked if I always presented in this manner, as if it was a radical idea. Actually, it’s been a trial and error model and method that has evolved and mutated over blood, sweat, and time. I either provide: a) potent conceptual bullet points for five minutes (seven at the most) and then move the group into a team exercise that illuminates the streamlined ideas and tools or b) we do the aforementioned “Get FIT” exercise - this platform becomes the springboard for bringing to life concepts, skills, and strategies. And again, I often use time limits to make sure there’s a vital and continuous ebb and flow between lecture and learning lab. For example, I’ll end an exercise even though the energy in the room is fairly high. Just means folks will be even more ready for the next experience.

The conscious use of two related elements - time and surprise - also informs my message. And two paragons of communication - Shakespeare and Twain - would approve. For the Bard, “Brevity is the soul of wit”. While for America’s renowned author, speaker, and humorist, “Wit is the sudden marriage of ideas which before their union were not perceived to have any relation”. And I’ve come up with two acronyms (actually, one is a redesign), that, hopefully, illuminate these truths:

- 1) The Stress Doc’s New KISS: Keep It Short (or Simple) and Smart! (Much better than the conventional, Keep It Simple, Stupid!), and
- 2) The Memorable MISS: Make It Sassy (or Subtle) and Surprising!

In a world dominated by smartphones, your first challenge as a communicator-leader-educator-performer is to get folks to, “Stop, Look, and Listen”. Message sent cannot equal message received if you don’t have people’s “Attention”. As one of the above testimonials indicated: Great presentation!!! I was motivated the moment I entered the door. A provocative “Short and Smart” Story often does the trick. After some opening, light hearted patter, I suddenly said, “Hey, we’re gonna have fun...but it’s not all fun and games. I can be tough. I recall a Practice Safe Stress program. A State Department manager, challenged me with, ‘What do you call it if you don’t have any stress?’ My immediate reply: Denial!” Not only did I get folk’s attention...I also began cultivating an atmosphere of “Anticipation”: “What will this edgy guy do next?” The performance edge: I want people on the edge of their seats...focused on and taking in my immediate message and wondering about future movement.

### Inspiring Messenger

When thinking of inspiring figures, certain people and personality traits typically come to mind. (I'll let you fill in the blank; FYI, Abraham Lincoln is at the top of my list). However, charisma or a magnetic personality isn't necessarily the bottom-line characteristic. For me, language and ideas, passion and courage, engaging and challenging or surpassing the expectations of an audience are a pretty inspiring mix.

Even a thought-provoking exercise can take you and an audience down an inspirational path. For example, in the recent "Keys to Captivating an Audience" program, I deviated from the norm of the fluff, ice-breaker exercise. I broke the large group into small groups and, then, in terms of communication substance and style, had them differentiate "compelling" from "captivating". (BTW, the idea for this exercise came during my "imaginative" preparation phase). In addition to subsequently providing dictionary definitions, I also delineated actual and theoretical polar synonyms that personally illuminate the more inner/forceful-driven nature of "compelling" and the more outer/fantasy-driven nature of "captivating":

Compelling: Push...Force...Focus...Purpose...Head...Soul

Captivating: Pull...Fantasy...Flow...Passion...Heart...Spirit

Compelling gets your attention; captivating is alluring. And having folks ponder such intellectually and emotionally charged concepts, not only helps grab immediate attention ("I was motivated the moment I entered the door") but may have future appeal ("I am hoping we can connect over the phone. I am doing some presentations and I want to start incorporating some of your great ideas!!!").

In addition, while concept differentiation is an unconventional opening, it was mostly cognitively challenging. I don't want the first exercise to be perceived as too emotionally risky. Initially, the goal is to engage participants by having them feel curious yet comfortable rather than vulnerable. And, as mentioned, I don't do superficial!

### Quickly Shifting Presentation Gears

Then, as soon as we completed the compelling-captivating exercise, I suddenly did a 180. Seemingly out of the blue, though, in truth, premeditated, I asked the group, "What do you think of this guy up here, even after just 5 - 10 minutes?" I also encouraged them to share "pros and cons" - e.g. whether they see me as being "serious, silly, or self-centered".

Most of the comments, alas, were positive - confident, entertaining, passionate, great energy, etc. I say alas, because a great way of beginning to build trust and, ultimately, inspire is for people to see that you can calmly and coolly handle their criticism. (Years ago, I recall a workshop participant likening me to Clint Eastwood 😊). So, not able to get the external gibes, I poked some good-natured fun at myself. First, instinctively, in an exaggerated, non-verbal manner, I kept encouraging all the positives: "Hey, I can listen to this all day..." But then added a familiar punchline, "You know the old expression: Vanity thy name is Gorkin!"

Actually, from calm and cool to being vital and vain, and all emotional points in between, able to accept and authentically express the myriad parts of oneself - the strong and the vulnerable, the serious and the quirky, to reveal both the cave and stage personae - this is what makes people exclaim, "Wow, you've got great energy". And, of course, they are really asking, "How do I get some of that?" (Or as an above testimonial writer noted: "You're an absolute delight to listen to and an inspiration for those of us that may be introverted that there is hope to come out of our shell").

### Inspiring Factors

As a close to this section, let's review some of the factors that may have helped folks begin to see me as inspiring:

1. **Language and Ideas:** Not only do I try to make words come alive and paint pictures, but I'm encouraging people to reflect upon or think anew about both common and uncommon terms and ideas. Recall Twain's notion of "wit": the sudden marriage of seem-

ingly disparate ideas...that may well reveal a greater, perhaps inspiring, truth. Again, the same gentleman that noted the frequent, yin-yang weave of concepts and exercises, also appreciated my very purposeful use of words.

2. **Courageous:** Courage is not just performing feats of daring under critical or life-threatening conditions. In my mind, it also means acknowledging and sometimes revealing your warts and weaknesses - sometimes by choice, sometimes involuntarily - whether in an intimate relationship or in a larger social-performance arena. (I just had a semi-traumatic flashback to the performance anxiety in my early days of Cable TV). And it's also the courage to invite criticism...enough said. But wait...I believe being audacious involves another character trait: Being your fullest self with being full of yourself! Amen and women, to that!
3. **Being Slightly Outrageous:** When someone commented on my unorthodox or "out there" style, my immediate counter: Nobody's paying me...I can say whatever I want! And then gave a "not really" smile while shaking my head ever so slightly. At minimum, the willingness to speak the unspeakable is often courageous and may be "out-rage-ous".
4. **Self-Effacing Humor:** People often admire "the comfortable in one's own skin" quality of individuals who can poke gentle fun at themselves. As I once penned: People are less defensive and more open to a serious message that's gift-wrapped with humor. Getting people to laugh with you, often helps win them over to your side or cause.
5. **Surprising:** Surprising is often at the heart of each of the four preceding factors. And with this inspiring foundation, there's not too big a gap from having folks wondering what next you will do to having them see you with a sense of wonder! Remember, imaginatively playing with serious or substantive content, often makes surprising a springboard to inspiring!

And, once again, I shifted the focus, hopefully building a bridge to the fourth IM. As acclaimed author and essayist, Adam Gopnik, has observed: Repetition is the law of nature, but variation is the rule of life.

### Interactive Medium

As already noted, having a conceptual discussion introduce a related and illuminating small group exercise generates new sharing and learning flow. Returning to the "great energy" observation in our previous discussion, now the question was, "When do you have your best energy?" (Or second best, this is a PG-rated program 😊). I also asked them to "discuss barriers and bridges to head and heart flow". So, we are expanding the inspirational field: encouraging participants to acknowledge when they are at least passionate, if not inspiring. Also, motivating them to acknowledge, if not begin to confront, some of those barriers to less censored and more authentic expression. (Actually, the final exercise, brings this last point to life: "Share an Embarrassing Moment". I also call it the "Confronting Your Intimate FOE" Exercise: From Fear of Exposure to the Fun of Embarrassment. Based on the energy and laughter in the room, admittedly after the initial awkward silence, the exercise truly walks its talk!).

Interactive exercises, in addition to creating that conceptual-practical ebb and flow along with facilitating conditions for surprise, encourage all manner and degrees of sharing, self-revelation, and psycho-social engagement. Let me list five specific features and benefits of creating subgroups of collaboration, for transforming a presentation into a sharing-learning lab and participatory-performance arena:

**More Active Audience Involvement:** Participants become integral players in the show. First, as a presenter, talking less often helps your messaging take on a greater sense of importance, i.e. the "E. F. Hutton" effect. But most important, exercises allow for tapping into the collective experience and knowledge - folly and wisdom - in the room. And having the small groups report back their discussions to the large group helps all feel they are journeying in a diverse yet still common boat. Naturally, the boat may have some holes, and sometimes takes on water. Also, the exercises hopefully become increasingly challenging seas. Still it's our boat and, by being active players, most are more committed to making this boat - from team to overall presentation - work.

**Challenging the “Self”-less Team:** While collaboration is a hallmark of this interactive-team medium, it does not erase individual impact. I’ve always been vaguely uncomfortable with the wall poster axiom, “There’s No ‘I’ in Team”. Forget diversity; no different points of view? Eventually, I decided that while there may, in fact, be no ‘I’ in the spelling of team ...There Are Two “I”s in Winning...and these “I”s can “C”: Winning teams blend Individual Creativity and Interactive Community! And the benefits are mutual: creative individuals often challenge a group to move beyond its comfort zone, providing a vision that may open hearts and minds. And now there’s the possibility for new action. In return, the collective pulls the creator back from the overly self-centered ledge, while also challenging this unconventional thinker to make her ideas and vision more accessible to and workable for others.

**Evolve Openness and Trust:** Exercises are purposefully orchestrated for head-heart difficulty and participant vulnerability. Initially, all should be able to venture a share without the fear of revealing too much and feeling exposed. This strategic touch progressively builds intimacy and trust between you and the audience and, most importantly, among team members and the group as a whole. Of course, it’s not all scripted. How a group handles conflict can make or break the team experience. Also, as a leader, I may spontaneously use an exercise out of sequence based on a reading of the emotional energy, or lack thereof, in the room. (The exercise debrief may need to account for this deviation by encouraging more audience questions and ventilation).

**From Intimacy to Inspiration:** The group exchange of histories, viewpoints, and personalities, the sharing of flaws and foibles, vulnerabilities and idiosyncrasies, help many individuals recognize they are not weird or alone. (Okay, maybe still a little weird). Listening to others stories begins to facilitate a connection based on essence not surface. Stories become mirrors for more candid self-reflection and subsequent disclosure. In fact, the ability to tell a meaningful and motivational, compelling and/or captivating story helps an individual begin a process of metamorphosis: from unknown to distinct group member, from intimate peer to inspiring role model.

**Multifaceted Synergy:** Finally, a playful and problem-solving medium, that is, both high task and human touch, is a powerful platform not just for engagement, nor simply for sharing ideas and emotions. Small group interaction is the medium par excellence for generating synergy: a) where the rich and unpredictable interaction of the individual parts, that is, distinct individuals plus the complex and coordinated communication among these parts, creates a generative whole; now  $2 + 2 = 5$ . And perhaps the biggest magical occurrence is when these same parts creatively evolve into productive partners!

### Closing Summary

An ambitious model and method has been presented: IM<sup>4</sup> Performance-Leadership: The Architecture and Artistry for Captivating an Audience. As has been outlined, the four dynamic, multiplicative components of IM<sup>4</sup> Performance-Leadership:

**Imaginative Mind:** preparation linking new and surprising components and relationships.

**Informative Message:** the rich yet concise interplay of concept, skill, and interaction-application.

**Inspiring Messenger:** a real and risk-taking individual bringing his or her full self to the arena.

**Interactive Medium:** a sharing-learning lab and participatory-performance platform inviting synergy.

Performance-learning formula-architecture has reflected “experimental innovation”: trial and error (at times a little terror), along with sometimes more, sometimes less tinkering, over the course of four decades. (In hindsight, I wish I’d done more experimenting and adapting). Nonetheless, this initial, trail-blazing exposition will provide a pathway for and expedite the learning process of kindred, IM<sup>4</sup> Performance-Learning spirits!

**Volume 5 Issue 6 October 2017**

**©All rights reserved by Mark Gorkin.**