

Richard Hall

**brilliant**

**Presentation**

What the best  
presenters know,  
do and say

**3rd Edition**

## Praise for *Brilliant Presentation*

Courage, heart, imagination – the Wizard of Oz journey continues. Being a truly brilliant presenter has got harder, new skills are constantly required. But Richard has thought of everything, and in his own inimitable, wonderful way, stands right beside you as you present yourself into a brilliant future. No surer guide or truer companion.

*Jeanne-Marie Gescher OBE, Founder of CGA Beijing*

Piffle! We all love a dense deck of PowerPoint slides! Especially when read at us in a monotonal drone! Only some people lose consciousness! Don't buy this book and waste your time reading loads of brilliant tips from one of the most insightful people you could ever hope to meet!

*Daryll Scott, High-Performance Coach, noggin*

Richard is one of those individuals who watches your presentation with soft eyes, then approaches you afterwards and in one creative sentence, delivers a playful or metaphoric comment that gets right to the nub of it. This book provides instant access to the precise observations of a wise owl who has attentively sat through decades of presentations, and he sums up that wealth of experience brilliantly.

*Leon Taylor, Mentor, Speaker, Author and Olympic Medallist*

Richard is one of the best coaches and presenters I know. This book brings these skills together to help all of us present ourselves and our subject for maximum impact.

*Peter Lederer CBE, Chairman of The Gleneagles Hotel*

experience the serious sense of power as you control a room of people and focus on working an audience. You will scarcely be able to wait before your next presentation or speech. You have entered that most dangerous of phases called ‘new’ – as in new driver, new golfer, new jogger. You are likely to sweep all before you, terrify passers-by and be alternately full and then devoid of confidence. Your body will become full of adrenaline, serotonin and nerves.

But if you want to progress, here are the steps you need to take and a description of what reaching each level requires.

## Five levels to brilliance

I’ve created these five levels because to improve you have to know where you start. Imagine life without examinations, a career without promotion and a progression up the hierarchy; imagine a world where there was no good and bad, just cheerfully mediocre.

First of all, be aware of where you start. In all the presentation coaching programmes I run, whether it’s through modesty or acute self-criticism, few people rate themselves as a good presenter. We are about to change that.

### Level one: novice presenter

Surprisingly few people make it beyond this point. I call them ‘weekend presenters’ – people who do the odd presentation and can cope perfectly competently with small groups. You are good at your job, be it junior brand manager, personnel executive or management accountant. Presentations are neither very important to you, nor are you especially nervous at the prospect of addressing a breakout group.

You tend to ‘busk it’ and do your own PowerPoint slides, crammed with bullet points, a few hours before your presentation. This is ‘a script on the screen’, there to help you, the presenter, not the audience. You make a virtue out of the low-key provision of information. At all costs you avoid the risk of what I call ‘theatrical performance’, because this increases the potential for greater or more conspicuous failure.

If you are asked if you want lights, make-up, autocue and a sound system, or if you are told that you’ll be talking to an audience of 100, or that this can be career-shaping, then your nerves will probably start to kick in.

It’s important to recognise that people like you are probably pretty good communicators with your peers. But you’d much rather communicate with them in small and relatively informal groups – sitting down rather than standing up.

**brilliant tip**

Presenting sitting down and standing up are very different. To be brilliant you must be good on your feet. So always rehearse standing up.

It’s also important that we don’t criticise you for achieving only level one. It’s a rule of this book, and life, that you need to try to get better but that it is far better to be a brilliant presenter at this level than a neurotic presenter at level two.

However, there are things you can think about if you are going to improve:

**brilliant tips**

- As a novice, focus on de-cluttering slides so they are clearer and simpler for the audience to interact with.
- Discard slides if the presentation is to a small group.
- Give the presentation a splash of colour – something to remember.
- Think about exactly what it is you want to achieve – outcomes, not just inputs.
- Think about the audience.

What level-one presenters should do now (you may be beginning to feel that you fall into this category by now) is to review your last three presentations to see if they made sense, whether they could have been better, how you'd do them differently or better, and how you'd cope if you were asked to do a big presentation to senior management at a conference right now.

You may survive perfectly well as a novice but stepping up to the next level won't harm your career prospects.

### Level two: apprentice presenter

Getting to the level of apprentice presenter is, in golfing terms, the equivalent of playing off 18 and regularly breaking 90. In cooking terms it's equivalent to being able to do anything that Jamie Oliver throws at you. You are the kind of person for whom dinner parties hold no terrors.

Apprentice presenters are competent. You know how to put together half-decent slides and a well-argued story. You suffer from nerves but you remain in control. You've probably done

about 10 presentations, of which about half have been at all-singing, all-dancing sales events and audiences have been generous in their praise of you.

You realise that you should have spent more time on preparation, but you are a very busy person and the thing that gets left till last is always the presentation. You know that your slides are a bit dull and last time you decided to build in a more visual approach, but when that slide showing a herd of gazelle bolting across a plain came up you couldn't remember what it was supposed to signify so you said 'these deer are frightened just like our competitors'. This got a laugh but it made little sense when the next slide that came up said 'the competitive threat – why we should worry'.

Level-two presenters are ambitious and you realise that your prospects can be enhanced by being a bit more adept. There are several things you need to think about.



### **brilliant tips**

- An apprentice should spend a lot more time on preparation.
- Go for a visual approach but with a verbal clue – having 'victim or predator?' on the gazelle slide might have helped the flow (and, by the way, they *are* gazelle not *deer*, that was just careless).
- Script yourself more tightly, especially as you move to more staged events.
- Work on the beginning, the end and the killer central slide if you are to graduate to the next level.
- Lighten up a little ... you will stand out if you let your charm and personality shine through.

### Level three: craftsman presenter

At this level, presentation skills will affect your career progress. You will be asked to give speeches at events, and others will be glad to know that such a craftsman is speaking at a conference.

It is widely recognised that you are confident and competent, and that you are completely reliable. You are courteous to technicians and you deliver stylish, well-thought-out presentations which reflect how much time, effort and creativity has been spent on them. In fact, you now spend a huge amount of time preparing – probably an increasing amount for each presentation you do. You keep a ‘presentation box’ at home into which interesting cuttings, pictures or cartoons go. You have a book of great quotations. You have become a management book junkie. Doing presentations has now become a hobby.

Craftsmen presenters promote themselves as industry experts with a view to being candidates for invitations to international events: What’s New 2011? in Las Vegas, a think-in for senior managers; The Innovation Forum in St Lucia 2011; New Wave Thinking in the New World in Shanghai 2012; Why Dubai? 2012; After Tom Peters ... in Buenos Aires 2012; New Frontiers, New Thinking Ladders in Sydney 2013. Your speeches have been assembled in a short book by Prentice Hall entitled *The Craft of Originality*. Your reputation is made.

But you are still only a level-three craftsman. If you were to see this rating you’d probably say, somewhat indignantly, ‘but everyone says I am brilliant’. Maybe, but sometimes a bit dull, perhaps a bit second-hand. A bit – no, not just a bit – *much* too safe, too solidly in your comfort zone. You’re very good but you aren’t great. You’ll get invited but you won’t get star billing.

You no longer get a flutter of nerves when you present. You are in perfect control. You are urbane, funny, supremely confident and consistent. But you too have several things you could address to reach the next level.

**brilliant tips**

- As a craftsman you should carry on presenting – you like doing it and the audience seems to like you.
- Ask yourself a searching question – what are you achieving?
- Reflect on whether or not your company – which is subsidising your activities – deserves a bigger shout in the messages being put out. Are you selling the company hard enough? Or are you just selling *yourself*?
- Try to be more exciting, frightening, dramatic – anything to get out of the safety box you are in.
- Work with others to raise your game – if you were a golfer we'd be wanting to get you down to low single figures ... and you can do that, almost certainly.
- Try to do one controversial and challenging presentation that puts you under a bit of pressure.
- Write a book to set up the new controversial positioning.

### Level four: star presenter

This is the most dangerous level of all. At their very best, stars are Oscar winners and incomparably talented – at their worst they are just dreadful.

If you are one you'll suffer agonies before any performance as though your stomach is being eaten alive by ferrets. Before you perform you are horrible to everyone around – technicians, friends, colleagues, lovers, wives – everyone. You want to change everything at the last minute – always.

Star presenters give the words 'prima donna' new meaning. You are supremely confident yet inwardly utterly devoid of confidence. You are a mess of extremes – happy, sad, energetic, inert, loving, vindictive, inclusive and divisive. You are very focused