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ESSENTIAL SPEAKING TIPS FOR VIDEO CONFERENCES

A guide for communicating online
with ease and confidence.

BY GARY GENARD, PH.D.

The **Genard** Method

Dear Readers and Speakers!

Video conferencing as a business tool has been around for decades. Would you believe that the technology goes all the way back to 1927?

Meeting via videoconference has been routine for a while now. But with the recent Covid-19 pandemic, its use—and importance—has exploded. This new reality brings challenges and opportunities for all of us, whatever the size of our business.

For some time now, I've conducted video-based speech coaching with my clients who are located outside Greater Boston or internationally. But in the current crisis, I'm meeting with clients that may be just a few miles from my office . . . as well as around the globe. Fortunately, the transition has been easy, since speech training is ideally suited to online delivery. Even more important, we're all speaking and presenting in videoconferences now!

So how can you learn to speak at your best in person AND in videoconferences? As you might guess, I've been thinking and writing about that very topic. In this resource, you'll find six articles on speaking successfully via video conferencing or using video to improve your performance techniques. These tips and insights will boost your online impact and influence! Please share this PDF with your network. If you have comments or questions, please tweet and follow me @GaryGenard. I'd love to hear about your experiences.

Yours in great speaking,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gary', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Gary Genard, Ph.D.

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Why You Need to Get Good at Video Conferencing . . . Right Now!

By Gary Genard



Video business meetings have become a way of life. Here's the reason why you need to get good at video conferencing . . . right now!

This article is the last in my three-part series on video-based speaking during the coronavirus or COVID-19 epidemic. The first piece was on why online public speaking training is more important than ever. The second (last week's) covered how to improve your presentation skills for videoconferencing.

Today, I'll share something that I learned in the past few weeks while providing Zoom-based video speech coaching. It's something that I think you need to keep in mind for speaking successfully in business, especially in the current situation.

This doesn't concern training and preparing for the new norm of video-based communication, as my previous articles did. This time, I'll be talking how to do your best when you're actually presenting on the new "performance stage" that's being forced upon all of us.



Why Your Video Conferencing Skills Matter Now

If the shutdown we're all experiencing had been short-lived, this skill wouldn't be as important as it actually is. There would have been a period where meetings and even some presentations took place online. But then we'd quickly have gotten back into the swing of in-person sales pitches, team updates, and all the rest.

But that's not what's happening. Many of my clients—and I'll bet you too—aren't just practicing talks via video meetings. They're now *delivering* them that way. So Zoom, WebEx, Google Meet, or whatever platform you use is now the actual stage where you're performing.

That's important news for any company offering video-based coaching and training—but also for speakers, presenters, sales people, and anyone else now conducting business virtually. The great advantage of improving your skills in front of your webcam, then, is that this is the way you'll actually be presenting. Rehearsing in your office or home never had that advantage before now, since you'd always be speaking in another location.

That's why you need to get good and improve your skills at video conferencing right now. I discuss below how you should go about it.



How to Practice a Video Conference Presentation

A second advantage of preparing for a video conference with the same tool you'll be using in performance, is the ability to record your practice. In Zoom (the software I use), screen recording is effortless, and just as valuable as videotaping in face-to-face interactions. Come to think of it, "face-to-face" is an appropriate term for video-based meetings as well.

Here's how I suggest you put your talks together, so you know how to elevate your performance into great speaking. Start speaking out loud as early in the process as possible. Don't spend too much time in the "literary" realm of writing notes and then editing and polishing them. Get in the speaking mode right away, because the oral arena is where you'll be showing your stuff. That is, once you know what you want to say and are clear on your purpose, start speaking, *and only write down what sounds "right" in terms of how you want to reach the audience*. By the time you finish, you'll have a ready-made speech, and not a lot of notes that may or may not be on the mark when you're actually talking about them.

At that point, it's time to practice and record yourself in front of your webcam. When you watch yourself, you'll see and hear *exactly* what everyone else will be experiencing. You couldn't buy that level of accuracy before now, unless you had planned for a video meeting in the first place.

Think of it, in this age of enforced video conferencing, as a small but significant silver lining.

How to Improve Your Presentation Skills for Video Conferencing

By Gary Genard



You're conducting business online now. Do you know how to look and sound good? Here's how to improve your presentation skills for video conferencing!

The coronavirus or COVID-19 has changed business worldwide. Suddenly, we're forced to conduct business online far more than we used to. And that means a *lot more* video meetings and conferences.

Have you adjusted your presentation skills to meet the challenge?

If you're feeling isolated and a little anxious about video-based communication, paradoxically, you're not alone. Yet it still helps to know how to achieve presence and charisma, even when you're speaking online.

Here are two ways to come across more naturally and with greater impact when a webcam becomes your best friend!



Are You Coming Across Online the Right Way?

I recently read the following opinion concerning how we all need to communicate online now: that doing so is “somewhere between absence and presence.” This is nonsense. Why would you need to be present online any less than you do in person? The main difference between the two is that one is electronically transmitted. Other than that, you still need the presence that comes from authenticity. It’s may not be stage presence. Let’s call it instead “*Video Presence*.”

Can you learn this type of presence? Of course. When it comes to video-based coaching and training, we have marvelous tools today in any of the online meeting platforms. I have been using the Pro version of Zoom since before the pandemic, since I coach people from all over the world. One of the nice things about video meetings (and my clients have been commenting on this lately) is how well it fosters in-real-time conversations when you have no other option.

So if you want to communicate strongly in video meetings, don’t think of it as an “absence” that the coronavirus is forcing upon you. Consider, for one thing, that most of the time you’re very close to your screen—and so is everybody else. That’s actually a form of intimacy. (I won’t even mention how comfortable wearing your jammies is when no one can see it!)

Here’s another way to make your presentation skills pay off in a video conference: accept how easy it is to deal with your slides while you’re speaking. Instead of splitting your attention between listeners and the display screen—and as some presenters do, talking to the slides instead of the audience—it’s all now literally at your fingertips.

It should be even easier, then, to pay attention to your slides and listeners at the same time, since you’re already looking at both! It’s one way to know how to stay focused when you’re speaking. If the camera on your laptop or phone intimidates you, see my next point, on the next page.



How to Be at Your Best in Video Conferencing

I'll admit that for many people, speaking into a camera with no one else around seems odd and uncomfortable. It may be hard to motivate yourself for, say, a keynote if you can't see your audience. This problem can be magnified if you're presenting a webinar, when you have to speak for a long time before the relief of someone "raising their hand" to ask a question.

Here's the advice I give to clients who are going to appear in remote TV or radio interviews. Until recently, that meant politicians, diplomats, and sports commentators, and occasionally, a CEO, lawyer, or medical professional. But today, that means a lot of us who wouldn't have been speaking in this way before the current crisis.

Let's face it: it's a challenge for anybody to relate to a television camera, webcam, or radio microphone (or phone link) when there's no one else around. The thought that there will be 10s, scores, thousands, or even millions of people eventually watching or listening certainly doesn't help! So I recommend this: imagine that you're speaking to someone whose opinion you value.

That person might be a colleague, spouse, sibling, mentor, or your wise uncle. It should be a person you *really* would like to hear say, "Dave, that was terrific. You really hit it out of the park." When you imagine you're talking to that person (instead of a recording device), you'll come across at your best—as you would *in a natural conversation*.

All good public speaking is conversational. It doesn't matter if it takes place in a boardroom, your customer's office, a convention hall, or via video conferencing.

Why Online Public Speaking Training Is More Important Than Ever

By Gary Genard



How is your business adapting to coronavirus and travel bans? Here's why online public speaking training with a speech coach is more important than ever!

The coronavirus or Covid-19 is upon us—designated just this week by the World Health Organization as a pandemic. The stock market is see-sawing, events are being cancelled everywhere, we're in a serious economic downturn . . . and business travel is being banned.

So the question is: how is your company adapting?

At this juncture, you've probably recognized two things: (a) you have to figure out how to conduct more business online, and (b) your ability to communicate has just swelled in importance. In a shrinking business climate, you need to know how to pitch yourself or your company better than the competition. Period.

And that means improved public speaking skills, in-person and remotely.

Enter distance training via Skype, Zoom, Google Meet, or other easy-to-use platforms for video-based learning. And speech coaching and corporate presentation training are ideally suited to online courses such as those we offer at The Genard Method.



Online Courses in Public Speaking: They Work!

If you personally have had speech coaching or provided corporate public speaking training for your employees, then you know the value of in-person sessions or workshops. But we're in a different world now. Corporate travel and in-person meetings are suddenly being discouraged or prohibited outright. We've all heard about the conferences and large business gatherings that have sent Covid-19-positive attendees dispersing worldwide.

But the internet is an amazing resource . . . and one of the things it excels at is providing online coaching and training. In partnership with an outstanding speech coach, nothing is more convenient or cost-effective—and today, safer—than training made available by video conference or private online sessions.

Even before the current health crisis, we have been living in an increasingly visual world. One of the best aspects of video-based training is that it's strongly visual. There's not only the face-to-face intimacy allowed by web-cams. Your coach or trainer can also include slides or any other visual element he or she would use in an in-person workshop or private session. And any good video platform these days allows screen recording for critiques and feedback.



How to Still Help Your Employees Improve

And here's a heads-up for that big event you're planning (whenever you're able these days to go forward). Online coaching of your line-up of speakers beforehand can be combined with an in-person rehearsal at the actual venue. I've conducted a number of these trainings that are a godsend to companies whose key employees are spread all over the country or internationally.

We all know that these days, the scheduling of such events is looking shaky at best. But you can *still* help your employees improve—or help yourself—by keeping the online portions of the training. There's even a strong argument to be made for going forward with such training now, so your speakers are in good shape when you're able to hold the event and they have a hundred other things on their minds. (By the same reasoning, now may be the time to work on exploring an online option for getting over your fear of public speaking.)

Many of you may be limited to your office environment or working from home these days. But you have one of the most powerful resources—online public speaking training—literally at your fingertips for you or your staff to reach a new level of speaking effectiveness. You can bet that right now, your competition is certainly considering it.

Video Conferencing: How to Speak Dynamically In Front of the Camera

By Gary Genard



Video conferencing is becoming more prevalent every day. Here's how to speak dynamically in a virtual meeting when you're the one in front of the camera.

Recently, I was fortunate enough to get a personal tour of Cisco Systems's lineup of their TelePresence products at one of the company's facilities. It was a breathtaking array of state-of-the-art video conferencing technology.

Whether you use or are even aware of this leading company's products or you prefer one of their competitors, you should be aware of this fact: Virtual communication is changing the face of business. *Fast.*

If you work for a large enough company or organization, you already know this. Increasingly for the rest of us as well, *virtual presence* will be the mode we operate in. Cost incentives, efficiency, and the immediacy of sharing needed knowledge are the reasons why. So the question you need to answer, now or soon is: Are you ready to communicate at your best in your screen persona?

Here are four ways to make a strong entrance in the Theater of Virtual Presence, where the curtain is about to rise.



The Camera Is Your Audience: Speak to Them

The audience watching and listening to you in a video conference is a captive one—and that, as they say, is a good thing. They can only be in one place, and it's your job to direct their gaze to the one place *you're* in. This analogy of theater vs. film explains it well: When you sit watching a play, you can look wherever you like to observe what's going on: at the actor who's speaking, at his fellow performers, the scenery, or even up at the stage lights. When you watch a film, however, your gaze is captive—you can only look where the camera wants you to look.

If you want to influence your audience in a virtual meeting, you have to look at the camera, not at anyone on another screen. This takes some getting used to. In a recent telepresence training session with a client who was located in another room, he never seemed to look at the audience once—he was always looking over to the side. The reason was that he was looking at me, and I happened to be at the side of the conference room I was in, videotaping.

When we watched the recording, it was immediately obvious that he was looking in the wrong place, and not appearing to speak to his listeners at all. It was an easy fix to get him to direct his gaze at the camera. Teach yourself that *the camera IS the people you're talking to*. Once you get your gaze right, you'll come through as warm and genuine and speaking to your co-attendees. In our second taping in my client session, the difference was positive and dramatic.



Hands Away From Face!

As you will know if you've ever been interviewed on a talk show, or even sat too close to your web cam when recording an online video: cameras magnify everything. Something as innocent as shifting your eyes to the edge of the computer can make you look shifty.

So keep that gaze steady and true. A special precaution: If you're too dependent on your notes or your computer screen, you'll be looking away from the viewer too often, and you'll make no emotional connection.

Another innocent habit you may have that can work against you in a virtual meeting, is touching your face. Again, the static nature of the camera's eye makes *anything* that takes place in that limited visual field noticeable. Hands to the face looks fidgety and is likely to pull our attention away from what you're saying. Think of it as one of those things you do when you're alone (as you may seem to be in that conference room) that you wouldn't want others to see.



Body Language Applies to Your Top Half Too

So what about those hands? Since you may feel like someone glued to a chair with the harsh camera's eye scrutinizing your every move, won't moving your hands be distracting too?

Actually, it won't. Body language doesn't only apply to your bottom half, after all, and using natural, strong gestures to support what you're saying is just as important if you're sitting down. In fact, people in online meetings who sit stiffly and seem afraid to move are uncomfortable to watch. So, feel free to gesture naturally. Just be sure the *size* of the gesture is appropriate, i.e., try to keep it within the width of your body, so your hands and arms aren't flailing outward. Gestures made the right way look well defined and controlled, and give the impression that *you're* in control.



Personalizing a Microphone or Camera

Finally, perhaps the most challenging aspect of speaking virtually: personalizing the mic or camera. We are at our best and most influential when we speak to people, not recording instruments. The whole idea of a teleconference is that our presence reaches everyone, not just the data we're sharing.

But speaking remotely includes the obvious limitation that the 2,000 people (or whatever the number is) we're speaking to can't be here with us—which is the reason for a virtual conference! Whether you're being interviewed virtually for a news program with a backdrop of your home city behind you, participating in a video conference, or responding remotely during a radio show, you may have *no one present* with you except for that microphone or video camera.

So how do you project the essence of your personality to a cold recording instrument? You can't. Instead, you have to make it human. Here's what I tell my clients and trainees: Imagine that the [microphone, camera, etc.] is someone whose opinion you care deeply about. It can be a colleague, a spouse, a child, a special friend, a mentor, or anyone else. It's someone you want to say at the end of your remarks, "That was really good. That's the you I admire. I'm proud of you."

You'd be amazed at how that "you" comes through the camera or microphone loud and clear. Now, use the best virtual meeting product your research and budget allows to get that person across to your fellow attendees, and you'll have the best of all possible teleworlds.

How Video Can Transform Your Public Speaking

By Gary Genard



It was an amazing testament to the power of using videotaping in public speaking training. And it came when I least expected it.

As an actor and speech coach, I use video constantly to help my clients achieve stage presence and a powerful performance persona. So I'm used to hearing people say they dread seeing themselves—then adding, “It wasn't as bad as I thought!” when they do.

It never fails. Videotaping proves itself over and over as an indispensable training tool of spoken performance.



Video Shows You What Others See

But that day in The Genard Method's training room was different. My client was a father of the bride preparing for the traditional wedding reception toast. He was excited and apprehensive and wanted to help make the day special for the newlyweds, just like everyone is in his situation.

The fact that he had a neurological condition to deal with as a speaker hadn't made a huge impression on me. After all, he faced the same need everyone does who delivers a speech at a wedding, funeral, or special event: to speak to the best of his ability and reflect well on the occasion. So that's what I was working with him on.

It was his reaction on seeing himself after our first taping that caught me off guard. His condition makes his gaze wander virtually constantly, and causes his head to jerk slightly from time to time. When he saw this on video, he was profoundly disturbed. I told him not to worry, that he couldn't do anything about his condition. But he said he *would* do something—he would concentrate on staying still and direct his eye contact the entire five minutes of his toast.

And he did it. It really was an extraordinary demonstration of the power of concentration in a speaker. Equally important, it brought home to me as dramatically as possible just how valuable a video camera can be in preparing for public speaking appearances. (To strengthen your own eye contact, see my article on how to dramatically improve your eye contact with this technique.)

Below are four more reasons why videotaping your own practice sessions is a great idea.



Video Reveals Your Energy Level as a Speaker

Most people understandably focus on their content as they prepare to speak: “What am I going to say, and how am I going to get it across?”

But it’s that “how to get it across” element that assumes such an important part of an audience’s reception of you and your message. And that has partly to do with the amount of energy you project across the footlights.

It’s a performance concept, and an essential element of an actor’s toolkit; and business and professional speakers should be aware of it. Discussing energy levels with clients is one thing. But watching them become aware of it as they see themselves is another.

That renowned speech coach Sir Isaac Newton said it best: “For every action, there’s an equal and opposite reaction.” Give your audience an energetic performance and they will respond more enthusiastically in return. Video will help you see immediately where you fall on the speaker’s energy meter.

Video Can Help You Stay More Focused in Presentations

“I look like I’m following a mouse with my eyes!” my client said. The client happened to be a United States senator, and our coaching session was taking place in the U.S. Capitol building. And in this case, video was almost literally an eye-opener.

We were simulating an upcoming committee hearing, and so our session involved the senator sitting at a table speaking. One of his staffers videotaped our first take, and we watched it. That’s when the senator saw what his eyes were doing while he was speaking. He meant that it looked like he was watching a mouse run around on the table.

We all got a chuckle at that, and then got down to business. The video camera continued to tell the simple truth—which was that the senator, on the spot, developed the ability to look at his listener with unwavering attention. As practiced performers, politicians often have the talent to improve their outward behavior that quickly—but the video camera was the tool that provided the leverage.



Video Puts Your Public Speaking Body Language Front-and-Center

“I wander back and forth constantly.”

“I seem to be swaying in an invisible breeze.”

“I’m listing to starboard!”

Ask any speech coach, and they’ll tell you they hear comments like these all the time from clients watching themselves on video for the first time. I call it having an out-of-body experience: seeing yourself as others do, and often reacting similarly.

In this way, video is a device for accomplishing something remarkable in an instant: showing you how nonverbal communication can trump anything you say. Offer a great topic and prepare to within an inch of your life—then do something odd physically while you’re speaking and feel your credibility and impact dissolve. Public speaking is a performance art, and video will show you how much your body language contributes to the form.

Allow me to share the true story of my client, a young professional woman who dressed impeccably, the day she watched herself on video. Her presentation was carefully prepared, with relevant sales figures and a strong PowerPoint deck. But her mind was consumed with one habit she displayed while presenting.

“OMG. . . . Why am I *rubbing my belly*?!” she screamed. The audience, of course, would have been wondering the same thing, if we hadn’t caught the habit in time in our practice session. Thanks, videotape.

Video Can Boost Your Confidence

And now for the best news of all: video is a confidence booster.

Yes, it will show you some of the things my clients mentioned above experienced. But remember that in each case, horrified viewing led to solid improvement. That “It’s not as bad as I thought!” reaction usually leads in turn to focused practice and skills advancement.

The best aspect of video in this regard is the Before-and-After Effect. Improvement in public speaking is sometimes hard to quantify; after all, it’s not a case of “either the mathematical equation works out or it doesn’t.” Video, however, can fill that gap, becoming a marvelous tool for quantifying skills development.

It’s all there on tape, you see: your increasing ease and control from Take 1, to Take 2, to however many takes it takes! So use video, on a high-def camera or your tablet or your phone. You might even have the response, the last one I’ll mention, that many clients do who see just how far they’ve come:

“Wow.”

How to Use Video to Boost Your Speaking Credibility and Charisma

By Gary Genard



Need a great tool to help you be a more effective presenter? Here's how to use video to boost your speaking credibility and charisma.

Videorecording yourself in practice sessions is a great way to improve your speaking skills. You probably already knew that.

But did you know that practicing with a video camera, tablet or smart phone can give you more of the qualities you'd like audiences to see in you? And help you establish rapport with listeners? And make you more likable?

Not a bad list of benefits for a tool you may carry around daily in your pocket or in your purse!

Video Can Help You Look and Sound Good

Some years ago, I ran across a book by David Ball entitled *Theater Tips and Strategies for Jury Trials*. Mr. Ball is a former theater professional and professor who, in the words of this book's Foreword, "shows trial lawyers how to use concepts from theater to persuade and motivate."^[i] One of the ways he accomplishes this in the book is to discuss how attorneys should use video to prepare witnesses for testimony. I've always thought the method described is a supportive and creative way to help a client come across—for business as well as testimony—with confidence, credibility, and charisma.

In fact, there's no reason why you can't use the same technique on your own to improve your speaking skills. So here's a way to use some self-video to A) buttress your skills, B) improve your sense of how you appear to others, and C) strengthen those qualities you like most in yourself as a speaker.

Step One: Your List of Qualities of a Good Speaker

The key to video recording yourself to improve your speaking skills is not to be too critical until you're good and ready. Sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

To start, video twenty minutes or so of your presentation. If that's your entire speech, so much the better; but at any rate don't let it go on too long. Now, before you watch yourself, write down how you would like to be perceived by your audience.

Ball suggests identifying "two or three desirable qualities" (such as authoritativeness or credibility) that you think will work in your favor. Do the same on the other side of the ledger, concerning qualities you'd like to avoid (arrogance, rambling, lack of conviction, and so on). Your goal is to create a list of positive qualities you want to foster in yourself and negatives you want to avoid.

Now watch the video. Stop whenever you spot a quality—positive or negative—that's on your list. This is your complete task during your first viewing. Note that you're not concerned with content; and try not to list qualities that weren't on your two lists. You can take note of them later.

Step Two: Learning to Self-Correct Your Presentation Weaknesses

Give your speech or presentation (or the twenty-minute opening segment) again, videotaping yourself a second time. The chances are good that you'll begin to self-correct based on your awareness of the qualities in yourself you want to encourage or diminish that you noticed in your first effort.

Play the video of Take #2 back right away, noticing any improvement in desirable qualities or diminishment of undesirable ones. Feel free to stop the tape whenever you like, attempting to speak with a good characteristic you didn't think came through clearly enough, or to correct an unfavorable trait.

Step Three: Seeing the Bigger Picture for Effective Presentations

Next, let what you've done so far sink in for a day or two. Then record a third practice session. By now, you should be incorporating the improvements you've been working on. From this point, feel free to note anything concerning content that you'd like to improve.

You can also be on the lookout for positive or negative qualities that weren't on your original lists.

Watching yourself like this will give you the "out-of-body experience" you need to understand how others perceive you. After all, that's where credibility and charisma live, not in your own head.

[i] David Ball, *Theater Tips and Strategies for Jury Trials*, 3d ed. (Boulder, CO: National Institute for Trial Advocacy, 2003), ix.

The Genard Method

PERFORMANCE-BASED
PUBLIC SPEAKING TRAINING

The Genard Method is a unique system of communication skills training based in the techniques of the theater. Developed by stage actor and executive speech coach Dr. Gary Genard, the Method develops business leaders and teams who speak with confidence, access their natural talents, and connect with and move listeners. Great speakers use emotions and stagecraft—not just information—to bring their ideas to life and positively influence stakeholders.

Dr. Genard's approach to speaking in public, from impromptu meetings to high-profile keynotes, focuses on storytelling, voice and body expressiveness, and a keen appreciation of audience psychology and persuasion. His programs are designed to empower anyone to craft and deliver engaging, credible, and compelling presentations. The Genard Method services individuals and organizations worldwide through Executive Speech Coaching, Presentation Skills Training, Conference and Keynote Speaker Training, and customized private coaching for individuals who want to conquer fear of public speaking. Contact us to request more information or to schedule a discovery call.

The Genard Method

93 Concord Avenue | Belmont, MA 02478

617-993-3410

GenardMethod.com

info@genardmethod.com

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