



Stand *out* whenever you Speak

Communications Training White Paper  
*Second in the series*

# Speak Like Obama

## How To Speak With Impact And Engagement

Whether you agree with his politics or not, most would say that President Barack Obama knows all about proper pace and eye contact; the keys to speaking with impact and influence.

Fine, but what is it exactly that he's really doing? Most importantly, can you do it too?

In our first white paper, we stated that good, relaxed conversation is *Receiver Driven*. In a one-to-one conversation, the speaker (transmitter) needs to observe reactions from the listener (receiver) as he or she talks. In fact, it's the receiver who controls the pace of the transmitter. Through nods, puzzled looks or other verbal or non-verbal signals, the receiver encourages the transmitter to speed up, slow down, even to stop.

Certainly, that makes sense one-on-one, but how on earth can it work one to 1,000? If I'm speaking to a large group, how can I seem to give the audience control yet convey my message?

President Obama understands that connecting with an audience of 1 or 1,000 has everything to do with his pace and his eye contact; both of which need to be well timed.

### Wouldn't you Like To Speak Like President Obama?

You can be as good as, even better than President Obama, or any great speaker you can think of. Ok, but how?



Find an interesting newspaper article and hold it in front of you in one hand. In your other hand, hold your mobile phone or tablet at eye level and get ready to tape. Hit record and deliver a couple of minutes of the article out loud. Pause only at commas and periods. Don't worry about where you look as you deliver your 'remarks.'

Now, with newspaper and mobile device in hand, deliver the same piece of text again, only this time try the following:

- Press record.
- In silence, look at your phone for two seconds,
- Then look down at the article and quickly take two, three, at most, four words into your mind.
- Next, look up at your phone (the imaginary audience), pause, again in silence, for two complete seconds, and without looking away from your device, deliver the words you just picked up.
- Pause for another two complete seconds.
- Then and only then, look down at the article and pick up another two, three or four words.
- Look up at your phone, pause for two seconds, deliver those words, and keep looking at your phone for another two complete seconds.
- Repeat these steps, varying the number of words you pick up and deliver, until you reach the end.
- Play back both versions and compare. Which version looks more like how President Obama would deliver it?

It might seem a bit mechanical at first, but try it again, vary the number of seconds you pause between ideas. The more you do it, the more comfortable you get with the process. Just as with any physical skill, like learning how to golf or to play the piano, repeating the correct behaviour makes you better.

The opportunity to become an impactful speaker, even one like President Obama, is very achievable.

Why, because you've not only learned, but you're practicing the two secrets to speaking with impact, proper use of pace and the importance of well-timed eye contact.

## The Dynamics of Pace

Pace is made up of two components...*Rate of Words* and *Rate of Ideas*. *Rate of Words* is how fast the actual words come out of your mouth and you never want to slow them down. An idea is something you say that gives your audience 'pause' to think about what you've just said. People can't listen and think at the same time. On the other hand, *Rate of Ideas*, involves pausing between your ideas, giving the audience a chance to think about what you've just said and anticipate what you are about to say.

To speak impactfully then, means to speak with proper pace.

Regrettably, most speakers abhor silence thinking it makes them seem unprepared. If they pepper their remarks with pauses, the audience will think there is something wrong. Nothing could be further from the truth. Pausing before and after you deliver ideas makes you appear more relaxed and confident.

Speaking impactfully depends directly upon a speakers' ability to use silence with confidence. However, speaking formally makes people anxious. Even experienced speakers feel a little nervous and anyone who is nervous has a distorted perception of time. When they stand in front of an audience they may think that every pause is an eternity, because of their adrenalin, and it's the adrenalin that creates a cocoon of distorted time. In reality, the pause may be so slight that the audience doesn't notice it at all.

## Proper Eye Contact

To speak effectively then, you must pause before and after each 'bite' of information (i.e. an idea) is delivered. But it is also crucial that you look at your audience just before and after an idea is delivered.

The eye contact you make with your audience **before** you deliver an idea makes you appear to be thinking about what you are going to say. As well, the audience is anticipating what it is you are about to say.

## Anticipation = Engagement

The eye contact you make with your audience **after** you deliver an idea gives the audience the impression that you are looking for their reaction; did they get the idea; can you go on?

This is how you seemingly give your audience of 1 or 1,000 control over your pace. It is how you make your presentation *Receiver Driven*. And it's probably the single most important piece of speaking behaviour you can learn.

In relaxed conversation, you always get eye contact right because it's instinctual. Try talking to someone about an idea you want them to understand. Look down and away as you finish each utterance. I bet you can't do it. It's virtually impossible.

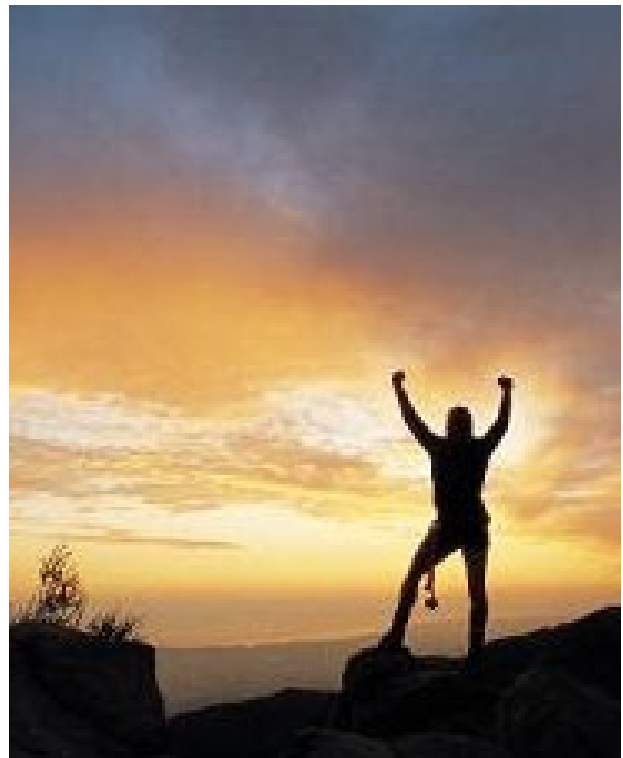
In a one-on-one conversation, when you say something to the person with whom you're having a conversation, you naturally watch to see if they understand what you have said. As much as to say, "Did you get that?" You check for their reaction, whether it be a nod that says, "Go on," or a puzzled expression that means you need to clarify your idea or stop to let them think their way through what you've just said. These are the mechanics of Receiver Driven conversation. You react to the listener, and you are guided by those reactions.

What changes when you get in front of a group?

Many 'polished' presenters don't understand how proper Eye Contact works, and why it's important. They believe all that matters is to be looking at the audience as much as possible while they speak.

They use notes or memorize as much of the text as they can, and deliver the words staring out at the audience. Then, as soon as they finish an utterance, generally as they're speaking the last word, they glance back at their notes to find more words to say.

The effect is catastrophic. The audience subconsciously perceives that the speaker is diving back to his notes to find the next thing to say. It's an action that dismisses what has just been said as if it was wrong, or the speaker wished he hadn't said it. It says to the audience, "Don't bother with that. I'm about to say something better." The audience puts aside any effort to think about the last utterance in order to anticipate what's about to be said.



## Conclusion

An audience's attention will always be significantly influenced by the speaker's ability to pause before and after key ideas and make eye contact with them before and after delivering these ideas.

Most importantly, the job of a speaker is not to talk, but to make their audience think, and the audience thinks in silence. Speaking delivers the content that we want to communicate. But the actual process of communication takes place in the silence.

Now, not only do you know what great speakers like President Obama do to speak with impact and influence and why it's important, you've even given it a go. Keep practicing and refining as you go. In no time, proper pace and eye contact will seem instinctual. You too can speak like Obama.

## Key Points to Remember

1. Pace is made up of ***Rate of Words*** and ***Rate of Ideas***.
2. Your job as a speaker is not to talk, it's to make your audience think, and they can only think in silence.
3. You must look at the audience during your pauses. It shows you are looking for their reaction, as you would in a relaxed one-on-one conversation.

## Next In The Series

Next in our continuing series, learn:

- Some very simple but effective approaches to making sure the audience is quickly able to grasp the points you wish to make and is able to follow your reasoning in a well-structured way.
- How to develop and use notes properly so that you deliver a more coherent message, safeguarding against needless rambling or the nightmare of "losing your place."
- Four guiding principles that will forever transform your use of visuals.

## Previously

Please contact Black Isle for our first white paper, '**Is Anybody Listening?**' to learn why success in speaking means that your audience remembers you and your message.

## Contact

Barry Kuntz  
Black Isle Consultants (NA) Ltd.  
#2302 – 70 Distillery Lane  
C: 647.220.1702  
Bkuntz@black-isle.com

## References

1. Anthony, Ray and Warren Bennis. Talking to the Top: Executive's Guide to Career-Making Presentations. Collingdale, PA: DIANE Publishing, 1999.
2. Rasmussen, Erika. "Now Presenting to the CEO." Sales and Marketing Management, 15, no. 1 (1999).
3. Zelazny, Gene. Say It with Presentations: How to Design and Deliver Successful Business Presentations. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000.
4. Martin, Pamela, Pemberton, J Michael, Making the executive presentation Information Management Journal, Nov/Dec 2003
5. Avery-Denison. "Critical Link between Presentation Skills, Upward Mobility." The American Salesman. August 1991.
6. Slesinski, Raymond. "Giving a Top-Notch Executive Presentation." Supervision. April 1990.
7. Holtz, Herman. The Executive's Guide to Winning Presentations. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991

### About Barry Kuntz

As a senior executive with General Motors of Canada, Barry was faced with making hundreds of presentations upwards, downwards and to his peers. In 1992 he took a speaking program with Black Isle, a global consultancy with offices in Toronto, Hong Kong, and London.

He liked the program so much that he joined Black Isle as its Managing Director and has embarked on a journey that has been uplifting, inspiring, and rewarding.

### About Black Isle

For over 20 years, Black Isle has been recognized for teaching leaders how to stand out whenever they speak. It has a distinctive and radical approach to communications training that gives leaders both the

skills and confidence to approach the most daunting presentations with the knowledge that their message will be understood, remembered and acted u