



## Use Professional Acting Skills For Oscar-Level Presentations

SpeakerNet News Teleseminar  
with Barbara Niven

What do Meryl Streep, Frank Langella, Kate Winslet, Sean Penn and Angelina Jolie have in common? They are all nominated for acting awards at this year's Oscars. Which mean they have all had a major impact on audiences.

As speakers, that's your job, too – to affect your audiences and bring change. Whether you speak about customer service, or sales, or personal growth, you are hired to have an impact, and that means you must touch both hearts and heads.

Actors know how to do this, because they are trained and directed in it. Speakers can take their cue from them, to up their presentation skills and increase standing ovations.

Speaking is a performance! However, few speakers fully integrate key acting skills and perspective into their presentations. Actors know the importance of setting the stage, using vocal nuances, creating characters and fully using their instruments (themselves) to elicit the desired emotions in their audience.

By using simple acting skills, you will dramatically increase your effectiveness and make yourself memorable.

- Comparisons between a speaker and an actor
  - An actor doesn't break the fourth wall to let an audience in.
  - An actor stays within himself and his fellow actors.
  - The audience must peer into their little world voyeuristically.
  - An actor memorizes a script exactly, starting with the words. Then he works backwards to discover the feelings and emotions behind them.
  - An actor must develop and use every ounce of his instrument: his body, his voice and his emotions
  - An actor must be in the moment and have a sense of play.
  - An actor knows how to entertain.



- A speaker must include the audience and reach out to embrace everyone in the room so that each thinks you are speaking only to them.
- A speaker feeds off the audience and they feed off you. It is a communion, and the audience participates in the process.
- A speaker starts with the ideas he wants to convey, and then the words come.
- A speaker doesn't memorize, but works with outlines, because his communion with the audience must be a living, breathing dance.
- Because of this, every speech is different and not a perfect echo of the one before. "Perfect" is death.
- A speaker must develop and use every ounce of his instrument: his body, his voice and his emotions.
- A speaker must be in the moment and have a sense of play.
- A speaker must know how to entertain and put on a performance too!

Actors and speakers both love standing ovations!

Well before the day of your presentation, you must do your homework:

- Start developing your voice as a finely tuned instrument
  - It is vital to cultivate your vocal technique, then paradoxically forget it when you actually perform! It must be so ingrained that it comes naturally when you need it, with no effort.
  - If you do teleseminars and webinars your voice is even more important than if you were performing in front of a live audience. It is all we have to go by.
  - I recommend that speakers work with a voice coach at least a few times. Actors and singers do. It is your main instrument as well. Learn how your voice works and how to use it most effectively.
  - My favorite voice coach is Bob Corff. I highly recommend his CD "Speakers Voice Method – Your Complete Voice Improvement Program". He has worked with most major celebrities in Hollywood, and you can buy his CDs at [www.corffvoice.com](http://www.corffvoice.com). I keep them in my car and do the exercises while I'm driving.
  - A vocal coach will teach you to
    - speak from your diaphragm
    - vary your tone and pitch
    - make your voice strong enough to be heard in the back of the room without a microphone
    - Play around with your voice and learn to use it for dramatic effect

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*"Don't settle for less than wonderful in your life.  
And don't give up five minutes before the miracle!"*  
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- Silence can be your friend!
- So can a whisper, a pause, and a laugh!
- On the day of your presentation, make sure you do vocal warm up exercises before you get there. Tension can cause it to tighten up.
- Sound systems sometimes go out – be prepared to fill the room with only your voice and your presence.
  
- Research your audience and decide what character you will need to play for them.
  - Who will you be speaking to?
  - What do they want or need from you in emotion, education and entertainment?
  - Decide who you need to “be” and create the “character” that will best help you communicate with your audience.
  - Choose proper wardrobe (is it a corporate client or a laid back group).
  - Use appropriate makeup.
  - Match your style and delivery to the group you’re speaking for.
  - Make sure your body language matches how you want to come across.
  
- This is Show Biz!
  - Every time you speak, it’s an event! A performance!
  - You are putting on a show every time you are in front of an audience, no matter what your topic is or where you present it.
  - Use acting tools to entertain as well as educate.
  - You are there to create an experience for yourself as well as your audience.
  - Remember the 3 “E”s: Educate, Entertain and leave them with an Experience.
  - You want to blow them away, so that they walk out the door differently than when they came in.



- Use your stage!
  - You must get into your space ahead of time, even if you have to do it the day before.
  - See it, walk it, get a feel for it and own your stage.
  - Have someone sit in the audience to tell you what looks good, and what they can see.
  - From this input, find your best “marks” to use, and make sure you use them.
  - Find out where your best light is, and remember to use it! It doesn't matter how good you are if they can't see you.
  - Set the stage. Coordinate your podium, PowerPoint screen, etc. so that you everything compliments each other, and you never block the screen.
  - Are people going before you? Is there a set change that is needed? Do you need someone to coordinate that for you? If so, work it out AHEAD of time. Leave nothing to chance.
  - On the day of, get there early and talk to the tech people yourself. Don't let it come from somebody else.
  - Test the tech stuff: sound system, DVD player, projector, etc.
  - Load everything so that it's ready to go and then test it and double test it.
  - Have backups of everything with you, including extra batteries, Power Point remote, thumb or flash drives of your presentation.
  - If there's a tech person, REHEARSE the order and cues – leave nothing to chance! Work on the premise that if something can go wrong it will!
  - If you have props, place them yourself. This can include your notes, Power Point remote, water, etc. Never ever trust somebody else, because if it doesn't get done, you are the one who is going to be alone on stage without it. (It's happened to every actor at one time or another in the middle of a performance.)
  
- Before you go on, make sure you are emotionally and physically ready to go!
  - Do whatever you need to do to have the right emotional energy level you need to be at when you enter. Your first moment is your most important!
  - Get off by yourself. It's more important to be prepared than to be social at this point. Get yourself sharp and focused.
  - Prepare offstage – have your “moment before”. For instance, if you have to come onstage full of positive energy, MOVE and do what you need to do to get yourself there. In one of my presentations, I come onstage and

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- talk about my battle with an eating disorder. I make sure I get myself back into that highly emotional state so that the audience can take the emotional roller-coaster ride with me.
- Here's an actor's tool: Use emotional and sense memory exercises to discover what you need to do to get you to your "moment before". Experiment and find triggers you can use to elicit different emotional states for yourself. They will be ready for you to pull out at a moment's notice.
  - Find your power and emotion, and keep it percolating inside you. Keep it simmering and trust that it will be ready when you need it!
  - Visualize yourself on stage having the desired effect on your audience.
  - You are going to make magic!
- Turn your tension into excitement!
    - Nerves are normal, always, for everyone.
    - Consciously feel whatever you are feeling, and know that it is okay.
    - Do a checklist of your body for tension.
    - Be conscious of how and where it is manifesting in your body, then do what you need to do to let it go.
    - There are specific exercises for this, ways to shake it off.
      - Move your body, walk a bit.
      - Consciously feel the sensation of your feet touching the floor. Reach out your hand and touch something. Look at it. Feel the texture. This will ground yourself in the present moment.
      - Shake your hands out, stretch...BREATHE!
      - Rotate your head to relax your neck.
      - One exercise that I do is simply jumping up and reaching high into the air above my head a few times. (It's a little hard in high heels though.)
      - Another great exercise is to shout "YES!" inside your head (silently) to pump yourself up. It absolutely changes your attitude into excitement and you can't wait to go on!
      - SMILE!!!
    - Think of yourself as a racehorse at the starting gate! Turn your nerves into excitement and your fear into fuel.
    - Pump yourself up for the powerful and fun experience you are going to have!



- Movement on stage
  - If you have a weird tick or habit, fix it. Otherwise the main thing is to just BE YOU. We will love you because you are authentic, in spite of pretty much anything.
  - Take your energy off yourself and your body. The more you think about it, the more self-conscious you are, and the more problems you'll have.
  - Focus on "landing" on the audience and really communicating your message to them. It takes your focus off of yourself.
  - Don't pace without a purpose, it dissipates your energy and makes the audience nervous.
  - If you feel the need to move, move! But don't be tentative.
  - Being still is powerful, but it doesn't mean no energy!
  - Don't hide behind the podium or the PowerPoint. You are the main focus.
  
- Get them at Hello every time with a dynamic, dramatic open!
  - There is no "right" way to do this.
  - Find an opening that you can authentically do.
  - Think out of the box. Take a risk! Get their attention!
  - Surprise yourself and them!
  - Whatever open you do, your close will match your theme.
  
- Be a great storyteller.
  - Your audience must live and breathe through you.
  - Be open, both physically and emotionally
  - Allow the audience "in" to see your heart and soul.
  - Your passion for what you are talking about will ignite theirs.
  - Use your audience! Feed off of them. Make it personal.
  - What emotions do you want to evoke in your audience?
  - Go through your presentation beforehand and map out your emotional outline.
  - Take yourself and them on an emotional journey.
  - Learn what you need to do to get them to go on the ride with you.
  - Know your presentation well enough that you don't just read the PowerPoint. Entertain!
  - Develop your storytelling skills
  - Create characters or voices to help paint the picture
    1. Keep it simple.



2. Go for the essence, not the whole character.
  3. Find the voice, the tilt of the head, the body language, the spirit.
  4. Practice, practice, practice in front of people who won't judge you. Ask for feedback.
  5. If you are tentative about it, or not confident in your choices, it will fall flat and you'll lose us.
- Have a sense of play! Be in the moment!
    - Take an improvisation class!
      - It will free you so much!
      - You will learn to be in the moment and to play with whatever happens.
      - You will never worry about trying to be too PERFECT again.
    - Don't go on auto pilot.
    - If you are truly present, every talk will be different, because each audience is different.
    - The audience knows when you are loose and also when you are tight.
    - If you are uncomfortable, the audience is nervous for you and you can't communicate effectively.
    - If you find yourself lost or off track, admit it. Be human. The audience will get on your side and root for you.
    - HUMOR is HUGE!
  
  - Dramatic Ending
    - Your open and your close must "kiss".
    - Your opening opens the window, and your ending closes it.
    - Find an open and close that work together that way, to complete the circle.
    - If you are doing a call to action, as in mentioning you are selling books at the back of the room, do that first. Then come back for the dramatic ending.
    - Make it a moment to remember, one that will change their lives as they walk out the door and drive home!



## Barbara Niven

Actress –Speaker – Coach

Barbara Niven is definitely living her dreams! She's one of Hollywood's busiest actresses, and served on the National Board of Directors for the Screen Actors Guild. She's also a popular speaker and recently joined the speaking faculty of Brian Tracy's [iLearningGlobal](#).

She is living proof that anyone can make his or her dreams come true, at any age. She says, "Every moment you have a choice, to move toward your dream or away from it." Her motto? "Don't settle for less than wonderful in your life – and don't give up five minutes before the miracle!"

In between film assignments, Barbara is in demand as a speaking and acting coach. She teaches speaking techniques, audition preparation and on-camera skills to a wide range of clients. If you'd like her to help you create and deliver your own Oscar-level presentations, please email her at [Barbara@BarbaraNiven.com](mailto:Barbara@BarbaraNiven.com). You can check out her website to find out more about her as well as her speaking topics and appearances at [www.BarbaraNiven.com](http://www.BarbaraNiven.com).