HOW TO PRESENT TO SENIOR MANAGEMENT WITHOUT BEING TERRIFIED: EIGHT STEPS

ONE

If you’re any way ambitious you’d better get ready to present to senior management. Why? Because, if my students in a California state prison are anything to go by, you become like the people you run with, and presumably you want to Run With The Big Boys. Enough said, right?

TWO

Practice. It takes hours to prepare a killer 5-minute talk. The only way you’ll know your material inside and out is by going over it with an associate, when you’re commuting, on the treadmill, in the line at Safeway. The ONLY way. If it’s thoroughly internalized your elbow won’t fall off when they throw you a question you weren’t “ready” for. In other words, the other reward for those hours of practice [believe it or not]: spontaneity that sparkles.

THREE

Don’t attempt to memorize other than the introduction and the conclusion, and leave PowerPoint to the amateurs [unless you’re ok with showing a slide while your audience is distracted away from your next three or four sentences].

FOUR

As the world-class executive speech coach Patricia Fripp says, your presentation doesn’t have to be perfect, but it does have to be personable. What you will end up saying won’t be a conversation, but it must sound conversational.

FIVE

Don’t make them wait for what you’re going to say. Flowery won’t cut it: start out with your conclusions. If, in effect, the speaker plays “guessy-guessy” with the listener, guess who’s going to lose every time?!

SIX

Show the costs, but couch them in a positive manner. If necessary, show how your solution is far less expensive than any alternative [including doing nothing on the fond assumption that the problem will just go away].

SEVEN

Got bad news to convey? Find some Bill Gates super-authority figure you can refer to – he/she will provide you cover. And if necessary, spell it out for them: “Hey, if you don’t like the message, then shoot Bill Gates!”

EIGHT

Look them in the eye when you talk. Eye contact represents a straight line to “persuasive” and “believable.” Be pointed. Follow FDR’s advice: “Be sincere, be brief, be seated.” “Short” means “more repeatable.” Stress the benefit[s] of choosing your course of action – benefits that are specific, vivid and obtainable.

Assuming you do all this right you will have learned to think like senior management, to identify with senior management. Translation: organically, the next step is to JOIN senior management, isn’t that right?