

Sarah Cirone:

Hi everyone, and welcome to today's webinar, ***Beyond Engagement: Presentations That Move Your Audience to Learning and Action***, hosted by HRDQ-U and presented by Will Thalheimer. My name is Sarah and I will moderate today's webinar. The webinar will last around one hour. If you have any questions, just type them into the question area on your GoToWebinar control panel and we'll answer them as we can, or after the session by email. Our presenter today is Will Thalheimer, who does research-based consulting focused on learning evaluation and presentation design in workplace learning.

Sarah Cirone:

He performs Keynotes, workshops, evaluation strategy, smile-sheet rebuilds and research benchmarking. He is the founder of The Debunker Club, author of the award winning book, *Performance-Focused Smile Sheets*, creator of the Learning-Transfer Evaluation Model, creator and host of the Presentation-Science online workshop and co-host of the Truth-in-Learning podcast. Will consults at Work-Learning Research where he also publishes extensive free research to practice reports. It's an honor to have you speaking with us today, Will.

Will Thalheimer:

Thank you, Sarah, not only for that wonderful introduction, but also for all the work you've done over the last several months to organize this and get this thing together. So I appreciate that very much. I am going to turn off my visual here. Actually just read this research article that shows that although people who are watching like to see the speaker in action, it actually hurts the learning or hurts the uptake. So I have to do some more research to find other articles, but I'll just go with that one for now. So I'm going to talk about presentation skills today.

Will Thalheimer:

And I take a science of learning approach to those, and I'll get into all that later. Right now, I want to start with the reflection that presenting is a great privilege. We are sharing information with other people, and we hope in some ways to influence them to go beyond engagement, to actually take what they've learned from us and put it into practice. So with that privilege comes some responsibility. And of course, we all want to do good presentations. So I'm going to start us out with a question. And the question to you is, how would you rate yourself as a presenter? So I'm going to give you the choices, and then I'm going to share with you a poll that you can answer the question.

Will Thalheimer:

So here's your choices. Okay. And let me launch the poll and you can answer these. I put the F in

there and you can just sort of share that on the question thing, just to give me a sense of how many of you feel like presenting, doing public speaking is like the worst thing in the world for you. But let me launch this poll. Okay. You should be able to see that now. Okay. Looks like we have a typical bell curve. And Sarah, when I end this, will it give me an option to show everybody the results?

Sarah Cirone:

Yes, you can close the poll and then you can show the results.

Will Thalheimer:

Okay. Why don't I do that? Okay. So you can see none of us think we're world class presenter. We don't maybe want to admit that in public, but looks like we're sort of in a bell curve there. Some of us are fantastically good, generally good, sometimes good. So now, let me hide that and ask you this, some follow up questions. Okay. You've got an idea in your head where you are on that range. What about presenting to 2,000 people at a major conference? What about testifying or presenting in a courtroom? What about giving a sermon or a homily at your local religious house of worship? Or speaking to a high school class of 15 and 16 year old adolescence? What about presenting data? What about facilitating discussions, or teaching online, or being interviewed on camera or recording video of yourself?

Will Thalheimer:

Now, I asked those questions because I want to emphasize that presenting is a very complex thing. We can be comfortable in some situations and not in others, we can be really good in some situations and not in others. When I was a younger man and I was a trainer, the CEO of my company ... It was about 150, 200 person company. He basically said to me, "Will, I want you to do some training out there with our clients, but not too much. Really, I want you in the back office. You're just not that good as a presenter." He actually didn't tell me this. He actually, by mistake, sent an email around saying, "Thalheimer is not that good." Anyway, it's a long story. But he was right. I wasn't that good.

Will Thalheimer:

I have gotten better. I think I'm really good now. But I tell you that story to share that we're all on a journey, no matter where you put yourself on this A to F list. Even if you're a world class presenter, we can all get better at this. Presentations are so complex and there's so many ways to go about them, that there's always more to learn. I hope that I'll share some things today with you that you find valuable. So let me introduce myself so you know where I'm coming from, you know my sweet spots and my blind spots. I have a unique perspective on presentations. So it's important for you to know where I'm coming from.

Will Thalheimer:

So Work-Learning Research is my research and consulting practice. I've been doing this for 21 years. I basically do three things; I consult, I educate through workshops, and teaching and speaking, and I evaluate, evaluate learning programs. And one of the things I'm really grateful for, is some of the great clients I've had over the years. This is just a handful, but the Navy SEALs,

the Anti-Poverty Program, folks at Oxfam, the National Park Service, World Bank, the CDC. In fact, I was in touch with the CDC today regarding the coronavirus, just a brief conversation, nothing. I'm not involved in that, but just an interesting conversation.

Will Thalheimer:

So one thing that I've done over the years, is spend a lot of time looking at the scientific refereed journals on learning memory and instruction, and then translate that research into practical recommendations. So you can see I come at this from a research to practice perspective. And then I take that research, I write research to practice reports, I give them away for free on the Work-Learning Research catalog. By the way, these links, I'm going to give you a sort of meta link, you can go and get the slides and then you can pick up any of these. So if I'm going too fast to write these down or whatever, don't worry about that. You'll get them later.

Will Thalheimer:

I wrote the book on Performance-Focused Smile Sheets. I've got a new book that I'm working on now. The CEO's Guide to Training E-Learning and Workflow Learning: Reshaping Learning Into a Competitive Advantage. Really excited about the book. Anytime you're in a project like this, you get excited about it. And the Presentation-Science Workshop is an online anytime workshop. What I'm going to share with you today comes out of that workshop. So there's many approaches to presentations. I already hinted about this, but you can sort of see some of these. And when Sarah looked at my list, she said, "Will you spell Keynote right?" "No, no. I kind of wanted to do spell it wrong Keynote." You know what I mean?

Will Thalheimer:

If you're at a conference, the Keynote presenters tend to always do it the same way. But if you look at this list, there's many ways to think about presentations. And I'm certainly not an expert on all of these. What I bring I think, is a little bit of the science of learning perspective. I'm going to dig down into that of it. Of course, there's PowerPoint poisoning, there's death by PowerPoint and all that. I don't really think the tools are the issue, whether you're using PowerPoint, or Keynote, or Google Slides or Prezi. It's not the tool so much, it's how we use them. So like I said, take a science of learning approach. And why did I think to do that?

Will Thalheimer:

Well, when we're giving a presentation, we have our audience there in front of us, no matter what type of presentation we're giving, whether we're just talking about some data, we're debriefing our executives, we're talking with our project team, we're doing a training, or teaching or a professor, no matter what type of presentation we're giving, we want our audience to get something out of it. We want them to comprehend and then be able to take that away, remember it and to act on it. So I think thinking of our audience as learners is a really key idea. There's some fundamental aspects, right? We know that our learners are going to go up a learning curve, and they can slide down a forgetting curve. So success equals helping them learn but also helping them not forget, helping them to remember.

Will Thalheimer:

And incense and sustenance, we're doing this. We have a learning situation. Here you can see the bottom part of this is maybe a classroom of some kind, and the top part of this is a performance situation, a work team. What we're hoping is that the learning situation translates into work. We call that learning transfer. And just released a report on learning transfer. It's a major research report. It took me two years to do, compiling scientific research or review the scientific research, and there's a link there just to share that with you. But in some sense, I'm emphasizing this because that's what we want. We want to help people actually do something.

Will Thalheimer:

So we're aiming to our audience, what do they need? Well, in the workshop, I divided into four areas. We want to help our audience to engage, to learn, to remember and act. And we talk about engagement here. It's not just engagement for the sense of entertainment value. It's not just about sizzling slides, really exciting things. No, we want to engage in a way that allows these other things; learning, remembering and action to happen. The nice acronym for this is ELRA. Little mnemonic there. Okay.

Will Thalheimer:

So this is Joe and Joe is a speaker. You can see this double exposure here. He is giving a class, and then looks like he's teaching to the whole world or talking about something really important. But here's the situation. Joe makes an amazing presentation. People clap enthusiastically at the end, and they each have several practical goals for improvements they can make in their work. How would you rate the outcomes of Joe's efforts? And here are your choices. Joe did a good job. Joe, at a minimum did a reasonable job. Joe clearly did not do enough to be successful. Or another answer would be better. And I'm going to actually share a poll with you. It's coming out your way. So look at the scenario and make your choice.

Will Thalheimer:

This is going to be very interesting. This is going to be very interesting. I'm able to see your responses as they come in, and we have a lot of variability. We have a lot of variability which I wouldn't have predicted. But actually, when I show you these results, I think you'll see that it makes perfect sense. Okay. All right. So you can see it's like 30, 30, 30, except for the one that says, "Joe clearly did not do enough." Okay. So I'm really curious. And if you want to use the question window to give me a sense of this, those of you who chose another answer would be better. Why did you say that? Just no dissertations. Just a quick, what do you think the other better answer would be?

Sarah Cirone:

Charles says, "It's unknown until the learners actually do something with the learning that relates to actual results." Stewart responded, "Did his audience change their behavior?" Isabelle says, "Don't know if people took action." Rob says, "Joe did part of a good job about halfway."

Will Thalheimer:

Okay, great.

Sarah Cirone:

I'm seeing, "Because we don't have enough information yet come through." Yep.

Will Thalheimer:

So that's great. And by the way, Sarah is only able to read some of these responses to you, but there's a whole bunch of people responding there. Okay, great. So I'm going to play a dirty trick on you now, and I'm going to get rid of the last choice here and give you another poll. Now you can't choose that one, just out of curiosity and see what you say now, and now particularly that you've heard other people's responses. Very interesting. I think it's kind of devious, Sarah, that I get to see the results and the other people don't get to see them. But it adds a little more fun for me I think.

Sarah Cirone:

It does.

Will Thalheimer:

All right, I'm going to give you 10 more seconds. Actually just a few more seconds. Looks like you're stopping to respond. All right, here we go. Okay. So it looks like with those responses of your fellow participants today, some of you became a little bit more skeptical. So let me ask some follow up questions that I might ask. So we might ask, was the content good? Was it valid? Ethical? Could people actually use it? Or we might ask, will the audience know how to implement it? Yeah, maybe they got some good ideas. But do they actually know what to do? Will the audience know what to do to overcome obstacles? Did Joe do anything to inoculate people, to prepare people for some of the challenges and obstacles that they would face?

Will Thalheimer:

Will the audience remember what was learned? There is this really interesting finding in the Learning Research, and it shows that learners if you teach them something and you ask them, "Are you going to be able to remember this?" they sort of look inside their brain, and they say, "Oh, yeah, this is top of mind now. I'm clearly going to be able to remember this." But learners are very overly optimistic. So just because they gave a round of applause, and they really liked it and they thought it was going to be valuable, they thought they were going to be able to remember it, maybe not so. Hard to know. Did they learn it fully? Or did they only think they did? And does Joe give the audience any job aids or any other kind of support, to have some follow through? Does he do that?

Will Thalheimer:

So you can see and understanding you're asking some questions, and they're some of you in the back your minds have other questions you could ask as well. But it's important to keep in mind that there's a lot going on in our presentations, and we need to do some really good job to be completely effective. Okay. So let's talk about the engage part. And in the workshop, I cover three foundations. I'm going to go over part of these briefly with you. Let's start with bullet

points; death by PowerPoint bullet points. I'm going to start with Will's first law of PowerPoint dynamics, and I know I'm not the first one to say this, but PowerPoint does not kill your audience. It's the bullet points that do. I say here's what's happening.

Will Thalheimer:

We've got learners and they've seen a lot of presentations and they've seen a ton, probably thousands, maybe millions of bullet points. And they've been in presentations where they're bored. So when you show them bullet points, they're going to react to those and they're going to unconsciously sort of bring up, "I'm going to be bored on this." It's like habituation. The first time maybe you saw a PowerPoint bullet points, you were all excited like a great big scoop of ice cream, but over time you habituate to that. And the other thing that happens is, we've all been in a lot of bad presentations, and we see bullet points and we feel like death is coming. And so anytime we start with bullet points, we sort of lost our audience before we even began with them. So what can we do?

Will Thalheimer:

Well, here's one solution. We can disguise our bullet points as objects. I'm going to show you several slides. I just drew these from some of my presentations, not that they're the world's best slide designs, but just to show you how these things can work. So here's a slide I use to summarize a topic that I teach and you can see these items here. These are each bullet points or list items, but they've been presented in a way that doesn't look, and more importantly, doesn't feel like bullet points. Here's another one. Talk about gamification and talk about some of the aspects of gamification. These don't feel like bullet points. Here's another one. What level of expertise do you have about human learning? I'll let you scan these.

Will Thalheimer:

I could put these in a bullet point list, but again, they don't feel like bullet points. And here's one more. When I presented this to you earlier, did it feel like bullet points? No. And this is very simple. I'm just using a geometric object with a little transparency in there. Very simple to do. You can do this in more complex ways, but you can do it in simple ways as well. So to summarize this section, the thing I want to get across is we can turn our bullet points into objects very simply. Let's talk about eye paths, and this is one of my favorite topics. Let me show you what an eye path looks like. But first recognize that our audience members they're scanning our slides, they're scanning the room, their eyes are always moving around.

Will Thalheimer:

In fact, scientists have done a lot of work on eye movements and eye fixations. Here's someone looking at a website. You can see this is the Google search page and if you look here, this is their first eye fixation, and then they move to the second one, and the third one, and the fourth one and then they went all over the place. Now, this is not like 10 minutes. This is like maybe five to 10 seconds. Our eyes are always scanning. There's these movements that we don't even notice when we're looking at things. Notice also that they didn't look very much at the white space, but they looked very close to the spots where the white space ended. Okay. Here's another example.

Will Thalheimer:

You can see not too many fixations in the white space, but they are objects, they are on key areas of text. Here's another one. This is someone reading a book. The green is where they look when they open up the page. Okay? So they're sort of scanning all over and then they go into reading mode. But you can see that there's eye fixations as people read. Here's another way to look at where people are looking. These are called heat maps. And notice again, that people are looking at objects and words, but not too much in the white space. So the question we can then ask ourselves is, does your audience know where to look? If you're presenting some content on a slide, you want them looking at the slide. You don't want them looking at the back of somebody's head or the ... You don't even want them looking at you as a presenter.

Will Thalheimer:

So how does this work? Well, we present a lot of data. So what we know, data is the big thing now. So this is some data we could present and this is what's going to happen. And I did this manually but probably be a lot more eye fixations, but just think about what's happening here. A person is going to start looking, they might look here on the left, say, "This red block here, what does that mean?" And then they have to go over here, "Extra review with no practice." And they go back, "So this is extra review with no practice. What's the green thing?" And then they have to go back, "That's retrieval practice with no feedback." And so you can see that their eyes are going all over the place. That's not that effective.

Will Thalheimer:

We should not use these legends in our graphs. In the workshop I call them fleas. We should get rid of the fleas. All right. So what should we do? Well, this will be better. Okay. They don't have to do eye movements all away from the area of focus you want them to have, but this is not good enough either. What would be better is show these things one at a time. Again, the key here is getting our audience to pay attention to where they need to pay attention, as we're helping them form mental models of what we're talking about. So oftentimes, we're presenting people with a lot of information all at once. So this is a page that I've developed. And if I just let people look at it, and even if I'm verbally trying to track people on it, their eyes are going to be going all over the place.

Will Thalheimer:

And they're probably, if they're in a culture or a language culture that starts at the top and goes from the top to the bottom, and left to right, they're going to probably start over here. But really, I don't want them to do that. I want to say, "Okay. Now you know people have a need to know, so how do we work backwards from that?" They already know something. We can use an analogy or metaphor to get them to need to know, and then I can take them through this one piece at a time, a much better way to support our audience members in learning and comprehending the content we're presenting.

Will Thalheimer:

So to summarize the eye path phenomenon section. We want to guide people's attention, we

want to show one object at a time. And by the way, this suggests that we need to have one of these. If you want to search online to buy one of these, they're called ... I don't know why they call them this, but they call them wireless presenters. They're beneficial in two ways. You can use a laser pointer to point out things, but you can also very easily go back and forth, or move forward through your animations, so that you can focus on your audience and showing things one at a time. And there's one other thing, using white space to make the objects pop out. White space allows those objects to pop out.

Will Thalheimer:

All right. The third one, logos and templates. All right, so this is a template. This is in PowerPoint or in Office 365. It's a decorative graphic. You can have one at the bottom too. They offer them both. I mean, then you can present your material in there. I can present my logo and the title of the course, and it looks pretty nice. But let's think about this a little bit. Let's look at one of the great presenters of all time, Steve Jobs. Did he have decorative graphics in his slides? No, most of the time did not have that decorative graphics. Sometimes he would have a logo but not very often. Okay, very clean. Let's think about this.

Will Thalheimer:

On this, using this template, we only have 58% of the screen geography is really usable. Here's another template. This has got a screen geography of 78% you can use. 78% is useful. This is a slide I developed back in 2003 with a big header and got my logo back then. I'm only using 73% of the screen geography. Here's a movie, Avatar. Would you put decorative graphics on that or a logo on it? No, of course not, because you don't want to distract your audience. You don't want them eye pathing toward the logo. You don't want them eye pathing toward the decorative graphics, you want them to feel immersed.

Will Thalheimer:

So there's a belief that our marketing departments have, that we always want to have our branding on every slide. That's crazy. Put it on the first slide, put it on the last slide, maybe sneaking in occasionally but don't put it on every slide. Incidentally, this would only be using 79% of the screen geography. All right. So to summarize this, don't distract with logos and branding, maximize your screen geography and use extra geography. Now, the importance of having that geography is to use white space so that your objects pop out. All right. Data. This all present a lot of data. What do you think about this? In the question box, why don't you share, what do you like about it? What don't you like about it?

Sarah Cirone:

You can just type your response into the question box in your GoToWebinar control panel. And they're coming in. Corey says, "Not easily accessible." Stephen says, "I like that it goes from 2018, then 2019, then 2020." Wow. Kyle says, "Like. Don't need to look for a key." Katie says, "No data on the left." Trisha says, "It's easy to read." Harrell says, "It's too busy, and what's the story behind it?" Candice says, "Confusing, makes you look for meaning of the colors."

Will Thalheimer:

Right. Okay, great. And thank you for all those responses. It looks like we have hundreds there. So yeah, first of all these colors are no good. In fact, some of you may be visual savant and know more about this than I do. But I'm just going to show you a few things that I saw. Number one, those colors were bad so we can do this. More importantly, we don't have to be satisfied with the graph that we have. We can write over it. So you might say something as a presenter. "Okay, so here we are in 2020. I want you to look at the trends that we've had to get here." And then you might just draw an arrow. "And you can see with burgers, we're losing revenue, hotdogs are flat, and tacos are taking off." Just a simple thing like this can help.

Will Thalheimer:

I think one of you mentioned telling a story, helps us tell a story about the graph. Again, not only tells a story, but even more importantly, it guides the attention of our audience so that they can get meaning out of our graphic. Okay. So I'm going to take you a little bit beyond engagement, not to go into great detail, but just to give you a sense of how we can think about learning, remembering and action as well. So we talked about engagement. I talked about interactivity maps, where basically you can look at your presentation as a whole, and see where you have a lack of interactivity. Talk about audio. These are all critical things when we're thinking about the podium, should you be behind a lectern or not? Using conversational language as opposed to formal language. By the way, that's a good thing to do, and more.

Will Thalheimer:

What about learning? We can make comparisons to help learners understand what we're talking about. It's good to compare for example good examples, bad examples, also worked examples, taking people through the process of going through, whether it's an algebra problem, whether it's an IT issue, even I used to be a leadership trainer. And even I thought back on some of the things I did as a leadership trainer, were giving people examples of how you would talk to your direct reports, during a conflict, during a time to get feedback from people, et cetera. We can show these things. People need to see those. We can connect with people's prior knowledge, we can use analogies and metaphors, et cetera.

Will Thalheimer:

When we think about remembering, look to the learning research, we can provide people with realistic practice. Scenario questions are really powerful, and spacing repetitions of content, not verbatim, but in varied ways we can space over time. All these things support long term memory. And also utilize context, put people in context simulate good people practice in that. We talk about action we can think about aligning to goals, but also using triggered action planning, a way to do action planning that gets us thinking about how to create spontaneous remembering, back when they encounter relevant situations in their work, sharing goals with others, offering reminders afterwards, et cetera.

Will Thalheimer:

So I wanted to practice what I preach here today, and give you access to the presenter's performance tool. And you can see it's like 11 pages long. It's a lot of stuff on there, but like over 100 things you can do to think about to fine tune your presentations. And there's the link. It's

obviously www.presentation-science.net/pptool. And again, if you're trying to write this down crazily, you don't need to do that. I'm going to give you one simple link you can access the slides. Okay. So I want to, based on the things we learned, we talked about bullet points, we talked about eye paths, and we talked about logos and templates, and really helping our learners to understand, helping them focus their attention, et cetera.

Will Thalheimer:

What do you think about group discussions? Are they good? Are they bad? How should we think about them? So I know this is a big question. I thought we try to get through this and see if we came up with any insights that we could share. And Sarah will ... Sorry Sarah to give you this tough task, but let's see if we can read these off and make sense of these.

Sarah Cirone:

Nancy says, "Excellent if relevant." Niha says, "If they're directed and facilitated well, I think it's a great tool to use." Edith says, "I like them. Table talk is interactive." Stewart's response is, "Love group discussions if the group is not too big."

Will Thalheimer:

I see somebody said, and they went by so I missed her name, "But they can be boring if you use it too much."

Sarah Cirone:

Yes. Dave says, "Short elbow partners." Karen is saying, "Hard to gather the group back together." Yes, we have some great responses coming through here.

Will Thalheimer:

Yeah, let me share my bias. Not my bias, my thoughts. So I think group discussions can be great. I use group discussions all the time. But group discussions just like our PowerPoint slides, they have to be focused. We don't want people rambling on, going off on tangents, there's some dangers to it. You can learn some information that might not be correct in there and that sort of infects everybody. People can talk about lunch, people can get off track, you can waste time. On the other hand, sometimes we need mental breaks. Discussions if they're focused, can add to benefits.

Will Thalheimer:

So one, we're deepening our understanding of the topic, we're getting different perspectives. It supports creativity and innovation. In the workshop, I talk about insight learning, how we can develop creativity. It can be good for that. Again, it's a balance but just the thing that I want to warn us against. I remember being in a workshop. I was actually observing, and somebody came to me and said, "Wow, there's so much energy in the room." People were in discussions and my thought was, "Well, yeah, but is the energy directed toward learning? Is it supporting it? Is it helping people remember? Or is it troublesome?" So group discussions are great. But as you can see, one of our jobs as a presenter is to make sure that these interactions are as useful as

possible.

Will Thalheimer:

Okay. Great. So I was reading some of your comments. All right. So I said I would give you this link again. I'm going to actually skim through this because I'm going to give you the master link. Here's the link to the slides, and the link to the slides also has ... Well, in the slides there's obvious the links if you open those up, but I gave you a few other links as well. Okay. So with that, I'm going to keep that there and we're going to go on, and do you have any questions? I think it's time to open up to questions. I will get to our next slide in a minute, Sarah, but just to give people a chance to write that down. And then as people are crafting your questions, what questions do you have?

Sarah Cirone:

Yes.

Will Thalheimer:

If you want to make a point as opposed to a question, that's fine too. We're open.

Sarah Cirone:

And they're already coming through, Will. Stewart's asking, "How do you handle someone who wants to hijack the session?"

Will Thalheimer:

Well, you mean, I usually bring a baseball bat. Now, first of all, what I found is if you design your presentation well, and you are authentic and honest, and you admit that you don't know everything, and you are open to listening, usually you won't get people to hijack your session. But if you do get that, you can do some tricks, you can say, "We'll talk about that later, or I'd love to talk with you about that. But I think for the rest of the people, they're not going to want to hear that, we're going to go on and you and I can talk about that later." Sometimes if they're the only expert in the room, you can enlist them in helping out and sharing information. So there's lots of things to do there.

Sarah Cirone:

Great. Carol would like for you to talk about the difference between presentation and facilitation.

Will Thalheimer:

Well, so the connotation of a presentation is we are conveying information. But one of my messages to all of you, is that presentation shouldn't be just about conveying information. If we start with the end in mind, that we want people to be able to remember and to act, then we work backwards from there, so some of that is presenting information. But we know if we just present information to people that they are going to forget a lot of it, because it's coming at them too fast. We're not giving them a chance to reinforce it. We're not giving them those

things we talked about in remembering, retrieval, practice. We're not spacing things out over time. We're not having them get different perspectives about it. So facilitation is really about how you facilitate or make those interactions happen in a way that supports that whole process, that supports engagement, and learning, and remembering and action.

Sarah Cirone:

Great. And Stephanie would like to know, "Well, what are your recommendations for virtual meetings, and encouraging discussion and action?"

Will Thalheimer:

Well, one of the things I highlight in the workshop is that when we present these days, it's not just about face-to-face presentations. In fact, more and more of us are going to be presenting online, and you see this with tools like Zoom. Everybody can now have an online meeting and then you can do online trainings as well. So a lot of the same principles that we should talk about for face-to-face presentations, we need to do online as well. And you actually reminded me of something here. I'm going to now show my smiling face again since we're doing questions. And by the way, I can move this slide now because I'm sure you've all done that. Okay.

Will Thalheimer:

So one of the things that I recommend when you present online is that you have some time. Actually when you present online or when you're recording videos for people to consume later, is that you show your face but you don't show it while you're presenting material. You don't want to do those things simultaneously. But you can do it sort of in a serial way. So right now you can see me, helps me bond with you, you bond with me. But then when I'm actually presenting the content, not to do it. So you want the humanity. One thing we took out of learning when we had e-learning, particularly asynchronous e-learning, was that we didn't have that humanity, we didn't have that connection.

Will Thalheimer:

One of the benefits of classroom training is that you are seeing the audience and they are seeing you. So that's one thing for online learning. But there's other things as well like interactivity. You've got to have interactivity, but it has to be meaningful interactivity. You can see some of the things I did today, and we had a short time frame. I just presented for maybe 40 minutes. But I like to use scenario questions, get people involved, have some discussions, have people share their own ideas. Oftentimes, you don't want to set yourself up as the only one with good ideas, because people in your audience are smart, and have things that they know that you don't know, et cetera. So I went on and on about that answer, but yeah, there's lots there.

Sarah Cirone:

Great. Regina asks, "How do you engage an audience that doesn't want to be in the session?"

Will Thalheimer:

By the way, I saw Stephanie had a question about, "How do I blackout my background?" Okay,

so I'm going to show you the dirty little secret here, everybody. It's a screen. Okay. I shoot a lot of videos for my online workshops, I shoot videos and I've decided that having less distraction in the back is good. So I just have a black screen behind this. And if you want to send me an email, I'll tell you which exact one I have so you can get it too. It's a good one. So what was the question? Sorry.

Sarah Cirone:

The question was from Regina and she was asking, "How do you engage an audience that doesn't want to be in the session?"

Will Thalheimer:

Well, first thing I would do is think about it from a big picture perspective. Why aren't they there? Or why aren't they there in their minds? Why did we invite them there, to a session that they don't want to be in? Okay? So clearly you don't normally want to do that. Maybe they're all right so they don't need the training. Maybe they're wrong. I mean, you need to figure out all those things. Now, if they really do need to be there and they're just not motivated, maybe there was something we could have done in advance to get them a little intrigued, "Well, maybe I'll give this a chance." Let's say you've trained the same sort of audience over and over, and you know what their objections are, you can start out with that.

Will Thalheimer:

You can say, "Hey, I know a lot of you don't want to be here." But let me share with you what I've learned over the past teaching these other folks. Now, I don't like to have elephants in the room. If there's issues like that, I like to bring it out on the table, talk about it. But also you've got to have good content that resonates with people, that you've got to make it interesting that people get involved right away. Give people realistic situations. They probably don't want to be there because they don't think they need to be there.

Will Thalheimer:

Well, give them some situations where they're going to have a tough time, and where they're going to know that they should know the answer or they should know what to do. So you can motivate them. You've got to use all of the tools in our toolbox, our empathy, our ability to create and craft really good exercises, our ability to diagnose and help people self diagnose what they know and what they don't know. So there's a lot there. I don't have a full dissertation for you on that, but there's a lot we can do.

Sarah Cirone:

Great. Monica would like to know, she says, "I do live demos in my learning and can't get people to speak up when I asked a group question. Should I pick on someone instead, ask directed questions to each learner?"

Will Thalheimer:

You should definitely pick on people. "Hey, Janet. Janet. Come on, Janet. You should know this."

No, you shouldn't do that. Well, one of the things you can try to do, and this is actually a strategy from focus groups. If you're a really good focus group facilitator, what you do in the very beginning, you ask people some simple questions to get them talking. You ask them questions about themselves, or what they like, things like that so they just sort of get practice, they get comfortable talking. So that's one of the things you can do. But yeah, you can pick on ... Not pick on people, that's not the right word, but you can ask people to do this and you can tell them in advance. "So I'm going to randomly pick one of you to answer this question, and then we'll get a discussion going." So there's nothing wrong with that.

Will Thalheimer:

I mean, you don't want to seem like a jerk about it. You got to do it in a way that smooth and not blaming them for not responding. The thing I always like to think is, it's my fault. If things aren't going the way in the classroom, it's not their fault. Even if it is their fault, you got to tell yourself, "It's not my fault." I mean, it is my fault. I have to figure out a way to get them engaged, to get them interacting in a way that's going to support their learning. If it doesn't work this training session, I try something different in the next one, take sort of an experimental approach of figuring out what works over time.

Sarah Cirone:

Great. [Gel 00:47:30] said, next month she's going to give a one hour workshop in San Jose to engineers, who are becoming managers on the topic of coaching, how do you assess the needs of your audience before presenting before a group you've never met before?

Will Thalheimer:

That's great. And what's really great about it is, you recognize that you should know your audience and you don't know your audience. So I would try to get permission or take permission to find out about them, and what they know and what they don't know. I was a leadership trainer and that was what we did. I worked for a company called the Strategic Management Group, and we would train people who had risen up the ranks through the technical side, whether they were programmers, engineers, technical people, and turn them into managers or support them in their journey to become a manager.

Will Thalheimer:

And what's interesting there is these are people that excel, they're really smart, but they focused their attention throughout their lives on things as opposed to people. Not all of them, but for a lot of part. So we needed to make them sensitive to some of these people issues. And one of the keys there was to have them empathize with how they like to be managed. Yeah, but do whatever you can to find out about them.

Sarah Cirone:

Jessica would like to know, "When presenting to both in person and remote people, what are some key tips to engage both groups effectively?"

Will Thalheimer:

Yeah, I've done that. That is really tough. So one of the things ... I mean, the obvious thing is to keep both of them in mind, and you need to pay attention that if you're using like hand signals in the room, the people that only have your screenshots may not be able to see your hand signals. So you can't use hand signals. Or if you use hand signals you have to say, "Well, in the upper left corner, you can see object A," and you have to do things like that. It takes a little practice. So the key is to empathize and to take time out, and when you ask a question of your audience, the in person audience, you also want to say, "Any of you who are online, what do you think about that?" It's good to have someone supporting you so you're not the only person, so that you can take time, or that the other person can observe what the folks online are saying and feed that back to you. If you can't do that, you're going to have to take a little time to do that throughout the split attention.

Sarah Cirone:

Great. Corey would like to know what "protect my voice" means, under your target actions from your performance tool.

Will Thalheimer:

Great. Well, so when we present we're using our voice and we don't present a lot, and then we present all at once like a couple day program or even like a half day program, your voice can be strained. And so you just want to make sure that you don't do things that are going to strain it even further. So for example, a lot of us may go and speak at a conference or go to a ... We are the trainer, we have to travel to Cincinnati and make a training. And so the night before, what do we do? We're going to see some old friends, we're going to go out to a restaurant. Well, the restaurant is probably really loud and to be heard, you have to yell. So you're straining your voice and then the next day you start your program, and by 11:00 your voice is just gone.

Will Thalheimer:

So it's good to protect your voice in that way, be smart about it. Think about what you're drinking. You want to hydrate yourself long before the session. Some people have issues with certain drinks. Some people say that drinking coffee hurts their voice. Some people say drinking milk hurts their voice. You have to figure that out, what works for you, what doesn't. I have a really, I don't know, sensitive voice or something. So I've been to sessions where I can't talk or my voice gets [inaudible 00:52:11], sort of squeaks or ... It's just terrible. You don't want that to happen. So that's what I mean by "protect your voice."

Sarah Cirone:

Great. Mercy asks, "How do you handle a tough audience? So sometimes it's a required session and people are resistant before you even start."

Will Thalheimer:

So I can see there's a lot of fear about going up against an unmotivated audience. Well, I think I said this, I don't want to beat a dead horse here but you've got to make it relevant, you got to have good exercises. If you have the benefit of being able to do several sessions with the same

type of group, then you're going to learn over time what works. If you can't do that, you might want to prepare. So if you can grab a few people from your target audience, your representative target audience, and show them what you're going to do, and they can give you feedback in advance so you can anticipate some of the things. If you know somebody else who's presented to the same kind of group, you want to talk to them in advance and find out what the issues are.

Will Thalheimer:

But again, it's about being relevant, being real and authentic. And one of the mistakes that you can make as a trainer is to be too full of yourself, and nobody likes that. So it's about being a human being. There's persuasion research that you can draw on about how to relate to people, emphasizing how you are like the audience. So there's a lot you can do there. But I want to ... I mean, this is like the third question we're asking on this topic. So clearly, there's a sense that you're dreading this or you have some difficult audiences to deal with. Number one, that's going to happen. You just got to be psychologically ready for it. And number two, there's things we can do to know that audience and get better, understand where they're coming from.

Sarah Cirone:

Great.

Will Thalheimer:

And I'll say one other thing. Sometimes the training we're teaching is not the training that's needed. We can get into a "We know best" kind of mode or "Our organization knows best," but maybe we're training stuff that they're really not going to benefit folks. So if you get in a situation like that and you know it's not really going to benefit them, but you have to go with it anyway, so maybe you add a few more games and maybe a few more fun things. Maybe you're authentic with people say, "Yeah, let's make the best of this."

Sarah Cirone:

Sandra would like to know what your thoughts are on icebreakers.

Will Thalheimer:

Well, interesting, my podcast partner, Matt Richter, we have a podcast called Truth in Learning, and he put up a comment about this just the other day on LinkedIn. And he said, "Don't use icebreakers," essentially. And honestly I agreed with him. Icebreakers, they're typically inauthentic, introverts hate them. It sends a message to the audience that you're there to manipulate them, so it comes off as sort of manipulative. It's not a good way to start all the time. Now, some ways breakers can work and we do need to think about, what can we do to make our audience members comfortable, make them want to engage?

Will Thalheimer:

But we don't have to have some icebreaker like, "Okay, I want you to think of the animal that best represents who you are at work," and some silly thing like that. That, for people who see themselves as serious, want to be there for serious reasons, it just takes them out of that

mindset. So it's okay to want to break the ice but do it in a way that's relevant, and then that shows respect for your audience, but what they'll really like and resonate with.

Sarah Cirone:

We have time here for maybe one or two more questions. And Mimi says that she's not comfortable with presentations or speaking, but she unfortunately ends up doing it a lot, and she'd like to know how she can get her nerves under control.

Will Thalheimer:

You mean besides drugs?

Sarah Cirone:

Yeah.

Will Thalheimer:

Okay. Well, there's a number of things. Number one, you can practice, and practice and practice. And actually, it's the best thing to do. And if you design your slides well ... A lot of times, we worry when we're presenting that we need to say everything we need to say, so what we do is we create a list of bullet point slides, or even some people will read their presentation, and that's using the mistaken notion that we need to make sure everything gets across. But that's the biggest mistake. I learned this early on. It took me a while actually, but I learned it. If you don't say something or you're not covering a particular point, it's really not that important. They're not going to know you didn't say it.

Will Thalheimer:

So first of all, get that idea out of your head and figure out what triggers you to be nervous. For me, I get nervous if I can't remember what I want to say, particularly like in an introduction. Sometimes I spent hours and hours practicing this long introduction that I want to do, I want it to be motivational, et cetera, but it makes me really nervous that I'm going to miss out on that. I've gotten pretty good at it now. But I've also learned, "Wait a minute, why do I need this big long introduction that I'm getting nervous about? Why don't I do a really short introduction and get them right into an activity?" A lot of people can calm down once you start interacting with your audience.

Will Thalheimer:

So try to do that really quickly. But figure out what your triggers are, and what your calm triggers are too and try to move in that direction. Again, it's practice, it's getting feedback, doing the presentation in advance to people you know who can give you feedback. The key thing is to do this over time, and eventually it's like desensitization training. Like if you're afraid of spiders, the best way to become unafraid of spiders is to see a spider in the distance, and then gradually bring it closer or see like a daddy long-legs, a friendly spider, and then work your way up to tarantula or something like that. So desensitization training, do that on your presentations and you will eventually get less nervous. And the other thing I'll say, use the energy, use the nervous

energy to project, to share your enthusiasm as well. So think of it not as a terrible thing, but as a good thing.

Sarah Cirone:

Great. And that is all the time that we have for today. We've had some great questions. Thank you, Will. That was really great. We appreciate you looking to HRDQ for your training needs. We publish research-based experiential learning products that you can deliver in your organization. Check out our online or print self assessments or up out of your seat games, or reproducible workshops that you can customize and more, either at our website or give our customer service team a call. And if you need help learning a training program or you'd like one of our expert trainers to deliver it for you, we also provide those services. We look forward to being your soft skills training resource. This is all the time that we have for today. Thank you very much, Will.

Will Thalheimer:

Thank you, Sarah, and thank you everybody. Great participation, I really appreciate it. And if I can help, please get in touch with me.

Sarah Cirone:

Yes, and thank you all for participating in today's webinar. Happy training.