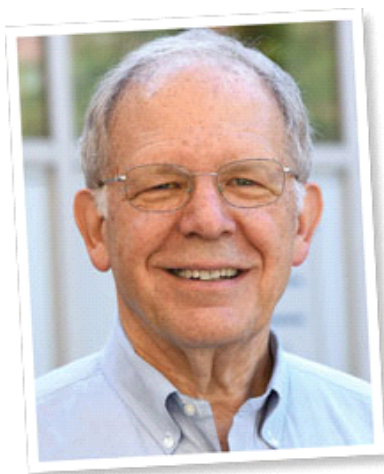


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Identifying the Real Problem Part II

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Last month, we looked at the misidentification of the problem when offering classes and events. Reframe them from “public speaking” events that scare your team members who are afraid of public speaking to a gathering of like-minded people engaged in helpful conversations among friends. Let’s look at my remaining tips.

- Stay professional while controlling the conversation. Don’t put down an audience member who’s trying to take over the agenda. The moderator will always lose audience trust if perceived to be picking on someone. Encourage the interrupting attendee to speak with you one-on-one later that day.

- Start and stop on time. Promptness shows respect for your audience. Say there’s an accident and only a few people arrive on time. Stand before your

audience and start a conversation about why they’ve come. Do they have a favorite plant? What are their plans for this year’s garden? This shows your respect for those who were on time, while delaying “the meat” of your presentation until more attendees arrive. One way to encourage audiences to arrive on time is a raffle beginning at the advertised start time. Everyone gets a ticket at the door. Drawings are held at the beginning and end. Event publicity should say, “Door prize drawings start at X:XX time.”

- “Who here has ...?” When asking a group question this implies it’s a common thing and okay to talk about. Saying, “Has anyone here ever ...?” sets up the activity as something unusual/weird and people may be more hesitant to admit they’re involved.

- Try not to put people on the spot. Any question that has a “why” and a “you” can be seen as accusatory. “Why did you plant roses there?” asks a person to justify their decision. Instead, “What was it about the area that it deserved roses?” focuses everyone’s attention on the place the roses were planted, not the individual involved.

- Put an ending time in your announcement. When that time comes, stop the discussion and say, “We’ve hit our announced stopping time. I understand some of you may have to leave now. If you want to stay a few minutes longer, we can go another XX minutes.” Give a definitive time when you’ll quit so people know if they can hang on for the “encore.” Those who must leave have permission to go without appearing to dislike the presentation. If there’s a dramatically smaller audience left, encourage them to come up front for a more friendly group discussion. The extended time shouldn’t be more than 15 to 20 minutes. It’s better to have them saying, “It ended too soon,” than asking “When will this end?”

- Survey the audience. As customers arrive, hand out pre-printed question and pencils. What was the best part of the event? What needed more detail? What topic would you like at an upcoming session? Should we notify you when that session is scheduled? This last question is critical because it shows your intention to follow through and creates a small obligation on the part of the customer to be there.

Depending on what your session is about, it can be beneficial—five-to-eight minutes before the end—to ask, “What did you hear today that will change your garden or gardening habits?” It’s fine to have your favorite customers ready to answer. This question helps remind attendees of different points they may have already forgotten, while emphasizing that some people have gotten valuable ideas. Audience testimony overpowers critics who might say, “There was nothing to learn here.” Once some audience members have shared what they learned others may freely contribute their successes, creating a group victory.

These concepts have worked for me. We’re all unique. Everyone must find what works for them. Don’t try to be what you aren’t—you’ll come across as phony. Your listeners are expecting a garden center employee, not a skilled orator. Be real. Build your following and enjoy sharing what you know. **GP**

Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future columns. Please contact him at wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com or (609) 731-8389.