

## 4 ways to prepare for important meetings and presentations

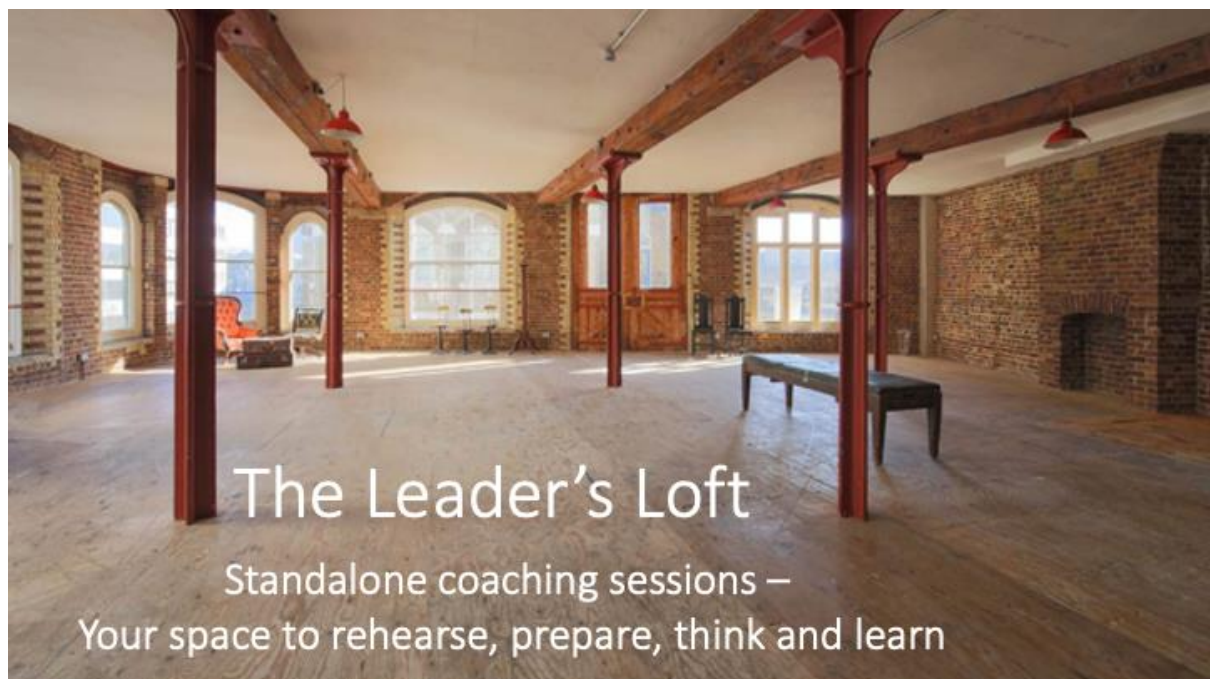
### A self-coaching resource from the Leader's Loft

[www.springblueconsulting.com](http://www.springblueconsulting.com)

I've always enjoyed helping my clients prepare for difficult meetings or presentations and I recently identified that I have used four different learning perspectives in the past: working on dynamics, messaging, emotions and delivery.

In this article/learning resource, I offer my thoughts and a few tips for you to self-coach. If you prefer to work with someone, I have created The Leader's Loft, a new coaching offering giving you an opportunity to call upon a trusted coach for a one-off session whenever you need one to prepare for an important event, maybe a crucial presentation, a difficult conversation or feedback, an announcement, or a job interview:

- You reserve a 1h30 session on Calendly and answer a few questions
- I send you a fee rate based on your seniority and type of organisation
- If you decide to go ahead, you pay, we hold the session (with the last 10mns for debrief)
- 3 weeks later, you receive questionnaire about the session's impact and your feedback



## Work on the Dynamics

Difficult or important meetings are anxiety-provoking for good reasons. They often hide difficult dynamics at play that leave you feeling somewhat disempowered, confused or under threat. Crucial presentations to new stakeholders or clients are different. There may be fewer difficult dynamics but careful thinking of your role or source of power may be what helps you deliver your best performance.

Here's what you may want to explore:

- Your audience's real needs and current perspective/beliefs. What is the impact you want to have on them?
- Review power differentials, challenge your mental models of the dynamics present in the room. How would a total stranger see the situation? What can you realistically expect it to be at the end of your meeting? What would be a great outcome?
- Take a third person perspective again to clarify your own role and decide your best outcome for that meeting or event
- Sometimes you need to break down the outcomes into steps and design a meeting flow and process that supports your objectives (Example typical steps: establish credibility, contract on purpose of the meeting, gather information, identify decision points, discuss options, encourage healthy dissent and objections, make a decision, confirm accountabilities, record follow-up actions, review how you worked, agree changes for next time, etc.).

There are many ways to achieve each of these steps. Challenge yourself to create a coherent process for your audience and then brainstorm more than just the first method that comes to mind.



## Work on the message



Even once your strategy is clear, you often will need to deliver an impactful statement to frame your meeting or introduce your section or your proposal. The words you choose need to support your strategy and careful preparation of these words can yield powerful results.

Things you can do:

- Know what you mean to say and why you are saying it
- Tighten and craft your message
- When needed, break down the point you try to make into a multi-step process instead of a one-time event
- Practice your statement. Ask someone for honest feedback or record yourself saying it. Try different styles then pick what works best.
- Practice tough Q&As
- Be your own devil's advocate

The thoughts in your head are often not what you end up saying. Preparation and practise help.



## Work on your emotions

Sometimes the obstacle to your best performance is yourself and because of emotions you haven't been able to manage or digest yet. Your interpretation of certain dynamics, often power dynamics but also fears, concerns, resentments, ambitions, issues of identity and inclusion, envy, guilt, shame, etc. Some emotions have the potential to lock you into a repetitive pattern of behaviour with certain people.

This is the hardest section to give tips on as this is better addressed in a coaching session. Still, here are some methods you can use on your own:

- Journal all your emotions about the meeting, events. The first ones to come up will be familiar. Keep writing down all emotions until there is nothing left to emerge. Does anything surprise you? Is one emotion now clearly impacting you more than the others?
- Emotions are usually present for good reasons. They point us in a certain direction. E.g. anger can be there to encourage us to protect ourselves, etc. If your emotion(s) were trying to be useful to you, what would they be telling you to do?
- An image-work exercise to access your right-brain intelligence:
  - o 1. Draw the situation you find yourself in (quickly without thinking too much)
  - o 2. Now become a neutral third party and write what a stranger would see in the image. What is the drawing saying about the emotional dynamics at play?
  - o 3. Draw a second version of the same situation but now representing a more desirable yet realistic outcome. How do you feel about the solution highlighted by the image?
  - o 4. Again, become a neutral party, what do you learn/discover?
- An imagination exercise: Close your eyes and imagine arriving at the event. What do you feel in your body, what thoughts go through your mind? Now make a choice about how you want to feel instead and close your eyes again and imagine arriving in this new state. Does it feel feasible? If not, explore why not. What's the main thought in your head that keeps returning? Imagine that thought is not true, how would you feel then?



These types of exercises which I often design on the spot for clients can inspire small but crucial tweaks that start unlocking the situation in meaningful ways. They work when they neutralise emotions without denying them. This is however much easier done with within a coaching session.

## Work on your delivery

Finally, what you say is not the same as what get from you. Sometimes, your style of delivery gets in the way of your best performance. Once again, this is most easily done in a coaching session but here are some tips you can use to self-coach:

Record yourself delivering your main statement (e.g. using Zoom or your phone but make sure you don't need to hold anything in your hands). Notice what characterises your style of delivery. Some styles that often get in the way are:

- speed (often too fast)
- energy level (too high or too low)
- contact (usually too little)
- posture (too relaxed or too anxious)
- smiling (too little, too much)
- power differentials (too controlling or too meek, too superior or too humble)

Raising awareness of your style in this way is a start, but it is also useful to explore how you experience things on the inside and why you need to act as you do.

- Why do you do the things you noticed doing? Is it based on a concern, a habit, an assumption about the audience, etc.? Once again, write down all the thoughts that come up until nothing new comes to mind. Can you challenge some of the assumptions or beliefs you have identified?
- Try changing one or two elements and record yourself again. Does it change your impact? Does it feel authentic on the inside?

As you come to the end of this self-coaching article, what insights have you gained, do you know that you need to work on? How will you go about it?

