CHAPTER 1

THE ESSENTIALS

You present more often than you think. It does not have to involve you standing up in front of a seated audience … although in business that is the scenario that causes the most anxiety for most people for most of the time. In fact, in the workplace and beyond, you present every time that you attempt to change someone's viewpoint by using spoken words.

Presenting is an every day activity for everyone. Those that do it well are likely to get to the top of their chosen profession. It is such an important activity that it should not be left to chance. In the 2010 UK General Election, it was the unexpectedly brilliant presentation performance by Nick Clegg in the televised debates that propelled the Liberal Democrats from Oblivion to Government, as well as securing for himself the second most powerful job in the country. The techniques contained in this book can make excellent personal communication a certainty instead of a lottery, whether you are a Prime Minister, product director, preacher or primary school teacher.

This book deals with the wide variety of presentational scenarios. For some people, these situations may occur regularly. For others the invitation to speak may come

unexpectedly and demand a huge amount of thought and care in preparation: for instance when asked to give a eulogy. However, I suspect that you are reading this book because you want to improve your performance in the 'you-in-front-of-more-than-five-people-in-the-audience' sort of situation. Accordingly, the first six chapters focus on this scenario, which I will from now on call the *Formal* Presentation. Once you've mastered this scenario, you can master any of the other situations that I cover in later chapters.

To help you achieve this success, the **Bare Knuckle Method** uses a **Preparation Pipeline** that you can walk through with the maximum of speed and the minimum of angst.

This step-by-step methodology is tried-and-tested and will allow you to get results you will be proud of every time you present. You may not always get a Knockout, but you can always win on points, facing every speaking challenge in the knowledge that Bare Knuckle techniques give you the best possible chance of success.

Why Bare Knuckle?

I use the term because you need to fight constantly for the privilege of your audience's attention. You are not fighting *against* the people in front of you….but you are fighting against all the other facts, figures and opinions in their minds at any given moment. For a few minutes, it is your information and attitude that must gain the ascendancy.

The Bare Knuckle Fighter uses a vast range of unconventional combat techniques to get the results he needs, without being bound by a restrictive set of rules. In the same way, the Bare Knuckle Presenter is not confined by the stiff Marquess of Queensbury style of Death by Bullet Point.

This is why the central aspects of my coaching have always embodied a rather *driven* attitude. This idiosyncratically assertive approach involves asking you to go through a Preparation Pipeline every time you need to speak.

The key characteristic of the Pipeline is that it forces discipline on you without stifling your creativity.

The methodology may not be a total guarantee (I have to leave some of the responsibility with you!), but it will definitely take the pain out of the process and make you a real contender.

The Challenge

You may well dread giving presentations. But always bear in mind that audiences dread *listening* to them even more. They fear that their time is going to be wasted. They worry that they are going to hear material that they have heard many times before. More than anything else, they worry that they are going to be bored.

So, why bother with a presentation? Why not just send the information by e-mail?

The difference must come from you, the presenter: *you* must provide the reason why.

In a century where executives frequently receive more than 100 e-mails a day, information on a screen can never be totally compelling. A presentation is real communication, with life and breath and flesh and blood. It is the human element that makes the difference. Only a live presenter can provide information with inspiration and impact. The words are merely ammunition … you must be the weapon.

But there are too many presentations. Most of them are too long, whereas the human attention span has never been so short. **I strongly believe that very few presentations should ever be longer than 20 minutes, no matter how brilliant the presenter.** In fact, some of the most popular business presentations in the world are given at TED conferences (see www.TED.com). They have assembled dozens of the world leading thinkers in virtually every discipline to share their ideas, inventions and interpretations. The main reason that the presentations are so compelling is that they strictly enforce a time limit of **18** minutes.

Knowledge and intellect are useless without the power to communicate. There are certainly more communication tools available than ever before, ranging from PowerPoint to the marker pen. However, the best tool remains *you*. The main

problem you face now is a lack of time: time to prepare and time to deliver.

A presentation is not about building a lifetime relationship. You should treat it like an *affair* that is short but memorable. It should have some great highlights, but be over quickly.

The prayer of the 21st Century audience is:

'Let me hear something new that makes listening worth the effort. Please don't let him make me yawn.'

The mantra of the 21st Century presenter should be:

'Say it. Support it. Shut it.'

This book shows you how.

The Method

I can summarize the Bare Knuckle content preparation methodology very quickly. It is based on the conviction that every piece of spoken communication should have a **Micro-Statement** at its core. A Micro-Statement is what you would say to a given audience if you only had 10 seconds in which to say it. It is the shining jewel that you hope will dazzle and persuade them to think and do what you want them to do.

This is the five-step **Preparation Pipeline** I mentioned earlier that you must hard-wire into your psyche:

1. Know your audience (through thorough analysis)

2. Decide where you want to take them (by getting to understand what they really need to hear)

3. Create a Micro-Statement (which will propel your audience along your chosen path)

4. Support the Micro-Statement (to provide the evidence for the case you are arguing)

5. Spike your beginning and your ending (so that the words with which you started and finished will still be going through their head long after you left the room)

At the start of the next six chapters, you will find a sequence of headings which makes up the detailed sections of the Pipeline, so that you always have a clear idea of exactly where you are in the process.
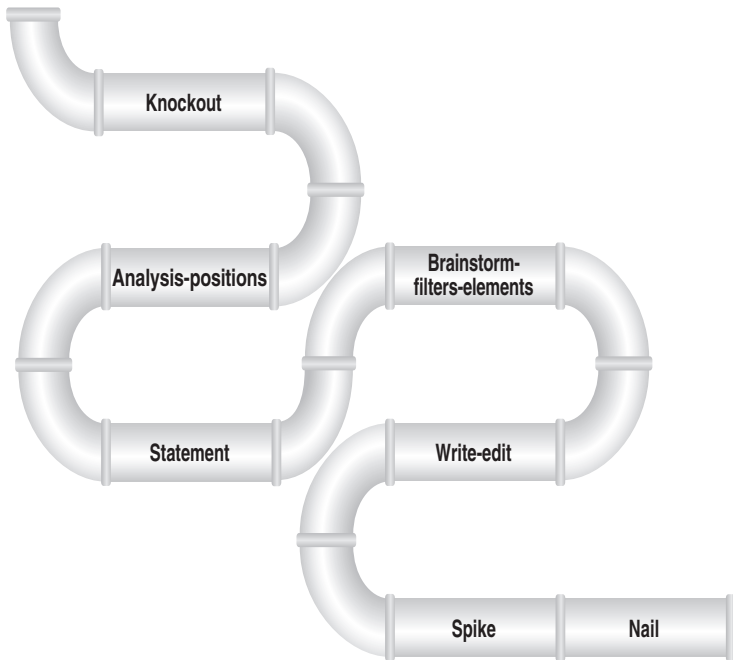
I am sure that you are looking forward to finding out what a Knockout Result is, but I am going to leave that until the next chapter. You are probably less excited at the prospect of Audience Analysis, because it does sound as if it might be rather … *anal*. But it does not have to involve a spreadsheet or a tedious computer programme. For the largest conference audiences, you may have rather too much information potentially available from the organizer about every single individual. You cannot hope to cater exhaustively for every audience member.

But when you are talking to three people around a table, personal information is much more desirable for you.

Even audiences at weddings and funerals can be effectively analyzed, so that your speech contains the most compelling material from the life of the groom or the deceased.

Remember that, for the audience, the prevailing atmosphere is one of sickly dread, not just dislike. You need to constantly fight against this negative mindset. But you strike the first effective blow in this struggle when you overcome the overwhelming desire to tell everybody everything.

A presentation that includes *everything* usually achieves *nothing*.

An audience is only interested in the part of your presentation that makes their lives easier, so brutal editing is a fundamental courtesy. They will always be grateful for the time you have spent cutting out the stuff that they don't need to hear. If you want to speak for an hour, you could probably start now. If you want to speak for a minute you may need an hour just to edit. Audience Analysis and its role in deciding exactly where the audience should be taken is covered in detail in Chapter 2.

The encapsulation of presentation content in a relevant, concise and compelling sentence dramatically increases a key possibility: **that the audience will remember what you want them to remember.**

Everything in the presentation must relate back to the Micro-Statement. If a piece of content does not support it, then that material must be summarily culled. The Micro-Statement is both the transport and the guidance mechanism that will take the audience to where you need them to go. It is also the highly valuable gift that you want your audience to take away with them. How to create this legacy will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 3.

Although the Micro-Statement is crucial, it rarely thrives on its own … hence the need to support it.

Just because you have said a particular thing does not mean that the audience will remember it. A presentation should not be a sequence of lists for memorization, like a conveyor belt of prizes in a game show: if they remember three key points that support the message from a 20 minute presentation, then

you have done very well indeed. If you are absolutely determined to include 17 key points, then you have a problem: the audience may have stopped listening before you have stopped talking. It is your duty to edit for *impact*. You will find guidance on structure and editing in Chapters 4 and 5.

Many times I have heard a client utter this heartfelt cry:

'I'm alright once I get going, but I just don't know how to start.'

Imagine that a presentation is like your steamiest love affair. The moment when it began should be unforgettable. I am sure that you didn't waste any time with pleasantries like

'It really is a great pleasure to meet someone as attractive as you, and I look forward to the opportunity of getting to know you better, but before we start, let me show you this organizational chart so that you can see where I fit into the Davies family....'

Or maybe you did and you still find the Internet a more forgiving place to conduct romance. Nobody has time for fluffy pleasantries.

How to Spike the beginning and end of your brief encounter with the audience is passionately described in Chapter 6.

The Preparation Pipeline described in the first seven chapters is the paramount source of comfort that you will find in this book. I urge you to get into the habit of using it to decide on what to say in every speaking situation. It is vital that you absorb the concepts in the Preparation Pipeline so at the end of Chapters 2 to 5, you will find a list of Action Steps which summarize how to use the Pipeline to create your Core Content.

When you learned how to drive, the sequence of steps in a hill start probably seemed awkward at first. But now it is a manoeuvre that you can do almost sub-consciously. In the same way, the first few occasions that you walk through the pipeline, it may feel a bit awkward … but the way will become smoother and more lubricated each time, so that it

eventually becomes an automatic thought sequence whenever it needs to be.

Chapters 8 to 10 deal with both the high-tech and low tech tools that can be used to back up the gorgeous content you have forged. Very few 'normal' people have the inclination or ability to be actors. Attempting to learn content as if it were the script of a play is as unrealistic as it is frightening. But it is still necessary to keep your words on track somehow. Chapter 7 discusses the merits and methods surrounding notes, paper scripts and teleprompters.

Chapter 8 asks you to make a seismic shift in thinking. I want you to accept this piece of corporate heresy:

> 'It is possible – and often highly desirable – to make a compelling formal business presentation without using PowerPoint.'

I have made this statement many times in the boardrooms of Fortune 500 companies. It is often greeted with the same angry stare that the Vatican must have given to the first chap who told them that the world is round.

The idea that a presentation should be carefully and powerfully phrased right from the outset goes against most mainstream practice. Traditionally (i.e. over the last five years), when an executive is asked to make a presentation, his first reaction is to reach for his laptop and turn up the PowerPoint to warp factor 10. The 'presentation' becomes a numbered sequence of slides, which form a corporate collage of bullets, numbers and charts. He feels no need to prepare what he is actually going to *say* because he thinks that he will be magically guided by what is on the screen. He can 'talk to the slides' like a digital Dr Doolittle.

The purpose of Chapter 8 is to give you a supremely practical methodology and show you how to adapt it to get the result you need … even when you *are* using PowerPoint.

Chapters 9 and 10 are based on the viewpoint that your delivery skills must be as sharp as your editing. There is no point in spending millions of dollars on the development of state-of-the-art skis if they are only going to be worn by Eddie the Eagle. I totally disagree with the view expressed by Jerry Weissman in *Presenting to Win* (2003)*:*

> **'When the story is right, the delivery itself tends to fall into place, almost magically so.'**

This is a very dangerous attitude, which runs the risk of wasting all the hard work put into getting the content right. Many times we have seen excellent content delivered very badly indeed, thus losing most of its value. Preparation and delivery should not be seen as different disciplines. They are as inextricably linked as Turnover and Profit … or Plague and Pestilence.

Chapter 9 is about controlling your nerves and honing your delivery skills. Nerves can be a good thing: a natural survival response that sharpens the senses. But for some people they are a horrible barrier to effective performance. Every presenter should seek to control nerves rather than eradicate them. They can be ruthlessly channelled so that they force you to prepare properly and concentrate on the real needs of the audience. Negative anxiety can become positive anticipation

This chapter also shows you how to maximize control over your body and your voice in a way that accelerates you into the presentational fast lane. I will encourage you to have a Bare Knuckle attitude to delivery, which means always getting to the point as directly as possible.

Chapters 10 and 11 show you how to adapt your delivery skills to the demands of the day itself. It is also about controlling the environment in which that delivery is going to take place. This involves knowing what to look for, what to ask for, and what to insist on. And I show how to make the relationship between presenter, audience, projector, screen and microphone as effective as possible.

A monster that lurks in the minds of many present-ers is the thought of having to answer questions in front of an audience. Bleak horror is only justified when you don't possess the right combination of strategic attitude and tactical practicality that awaits you in Chapter 11, without once mentioning bankruptcy proceedings in the USA.

A smiling audience is a receptive audience. However, the creation of laughter is an exact science that requires the use of precise formulae. When used incorrectly, humour can have disastrous effects. Chapter 12 lets you skip through this anti-personnel minefield.

Chapter 13 is about the high wire act of the presentation circus. An After Dinner Speech can be the most deliciously entertaining way to end a meal. It can also be the most appalling torture. Heavily interwoven with stories about my own post-prandial triumphs and disasters, this chapter identifies how to make the experience enjoyable for every-one in the room.

Whether you have been asked, volunteered or required to speak, you must be sure that it is the most appropriate thing to do. Chapter 14 contains the criteria by which you should make the decision. Not speaking at all may be the correct choice if you have identified a more effective alter-native.

The Restrictions

The Spoken Word has dominated my working life, but I am acutely aware of its limitations. A presentation may enlighten, persuade and entertain, but it can never cover the whole topic. A presentation with exhaustive detail becomes a lecture to an exhausted audience. A lecture is designed to cater for the needs of a studious group of people. Even the smallest detail might make the differ-ence between passing and failing an exam, so the academic audience does its best to write down nearly every word that the lecturer says.

However, I guarantee that no audience member in the entire history of public speaking has *ever* made a verbatim note of what has been said in a business presentation.

What's the difference between a Bare Knuckle Presenter and a lecturer?

About 300 grand a year.

Technology both encourages and caters for the microscopic 21st Century attention span. If you are watching television, you know that you can instantly go to another channel if you get bored. Even if you are watching a DVD, your finger will be quivering over the Fast Forward button if the story gets bogged down. When you are surfing the net, if a site takes more than 10 seconds to download, you will probably go elsewhere. Corporate audiences are similarly impatient.

Bare Knuckle presenters must seek to find an exquisite blend of brevity, clarity and impact...or else their presentations will become victims of the 21st Century One-Click-And-I'm-Out-Of-Here mindset.

My own fundamental mindset is that:

A presentation is any spoken communication designed to change someone's point of view.

The key word is 'change'. All effective presentations include an element of challenge to the status quo ante. A presentation should never consist of a sequence of words that merely act as a reminder of what the audience already knows: reminders are never compelling. The definition above uses the word 'someone' instead of 'audience', because many common presentational scenarios involve speaking to just one person (e.g. phone calls).

For a presentation to be a worthwhile experience for both presenter and audience, there must be an overwhelming reason for those words to be said. If you just want to remind someone, don't make a presentation. Send an e-mail instead.

In this book, the words 'speech' and 'presentation' are synonymous, although we accept that the two words are sometimes used to describe widely differing scenarios.

David Cameron addressing the Conservative Party conference would be giving a speech. A finance director introducing his cost-cutting initiatives to the chief executive would be giving a presentation.

In fact, these two situations are at opposite ends of the same communication continuum. There are many techniques that are equally vital for both scenarios. You must decide which techniques are needed for your audience at that time

You will never see Cameron using PowerPoint (hallelujah). Your finance director's presentation will never be preceded by a warm-up from William Hague (again hallelujah).

But the word 'Presentation' does have a particular implication for many listeners: for them, the word implies that the speaker is going to provide something for the audience to *look* at. I accept that this is corporate reality, despite my earlier assault on PowerPoint. But whatever is shown, it must be used sparingly and created with care if it is to have any impact.

Here are some typical requests for presentations in a business context:

'I'd like you to get the team fired up to beat their target.'

'Can you bring us up to speed on your project?'

'Tell us some more about your company.'

'Can you present our product to an interested prospect?'

'Please give us the findings of your research.'

There are countless other scenarios that involve presentation, including:

- complaining about service;
- answering questions under pressure;
- being part of a panel discussion;
- media interviews;
- team pitches;

- delivering a eulogy;
- introducing another speaker;
- telephone conferences;
- wedding speeches.

All of these should still involve selective use of the Bare Knuckle method, and are dealt with in Chapters 15 and 16.

The Result

Every single presentation situation involves the transfer of information. Audiences can vary in size from 1 to 1000. Environments vary from boardrooms to ballrooms. But the same fundamental principle still applies: a presentation should be designed to change an audience's point of view and, ideally, *get them to take an action as a result of this change.*

If information is being presented, the audience must be told what to do with it.

It would be much easier just to 'brain-dump' the information, with this being the prevailing mind-set:

'I've told them absolutely everything. It may have taken nearly three hours … but I've done my job.'

Information on its own is rarely enough. If any change is to take place there must be ideas, enthusiasm and attitude.

To position these components appropriately, you must take into account how your audience feels, and seek to reposition their feelings relative to the material they are hearing. Hanging information on an emotional hook will significantly improve retention: the audience will remember the way that you made them feel long after they have forgotten the facts you have given them.

Unlike the vast majority of presentation books, this one will show you a precise, adaptable, audience-focused preparation process, as well as how to deliver the material created by that process. It is a process that can be used even when the

time available is extremely limited. Presentations are not like Ancient Rome: they *can* be built in a day. Or an hour. Or even five minutes … if the time is used with discipline.

I will show you how important it is to choose the right words long before you say them to the audience. Fantastic slides will *not* make your presentation stand out. Fantastic words *will* because so few presenters bother to think carefully about their words before they actually present them. You will discover that your vocal chords can work unaccompanied by the clicking of a mouse.

Incidentally, I also dislike the idea of telling a 'story'. This is what Arthur Andersen, Enron and Lehman Brothers used to do. It is what Bill Clinton was so good at. The word has an unintentional whiff of embellishment and inaccuracy. I hope that none of your audiences think that you are merely telling them a story.

There is no fictional story-telling in this book. I only give you what you need. And not a word more. No waffle, no chitchat, no platitudes.

There are many presentational habits that are so prevalent that they have become accepted orthodoxy. Sadly, these same habits are actually encouraged by many of the other books on the subject. Throw those books away now. OK, not all of them. I will refer to the tiny minority that include credible techniques. But I will not hesitate to attack outmoded, clichéd nonsense. If you wanted a book that is humbly deferential to its competitors, then you have wasted your money.

This jack-booted approach is absolutely necessary:

'Few new truths have ever won their way against the resistance of established ideas save by being overstated.'

Isaiah Berlin

Many presentation coaches will hate this book. A few will fall in love with it. I hope you do too.