



# STUFF

## PRESENTERS

# LIKE

BY **SCOTT SCHWERTLY**

THE **TOP 50**

**GOOD, BAD & LAME**  
STUFF PRESENTERS DO EVERYDAY



"Our third-quarter earnings are truly  
**WHACK, YO!**"

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# Introduction

I've spent years dealing with presentations in my role as CEO of Ethos3, a presentation design and training agency. In that time, I've come to believe that the study of presentations is the study of motivations—of audiences, of speakers, of society at large. Humans are deploying presentations (loaded weapons, really) all over the globe, at events big and small, with every level of proficiency from great skill to profound incompetence. Like the universe, it is staggering, frightening, and awesome.

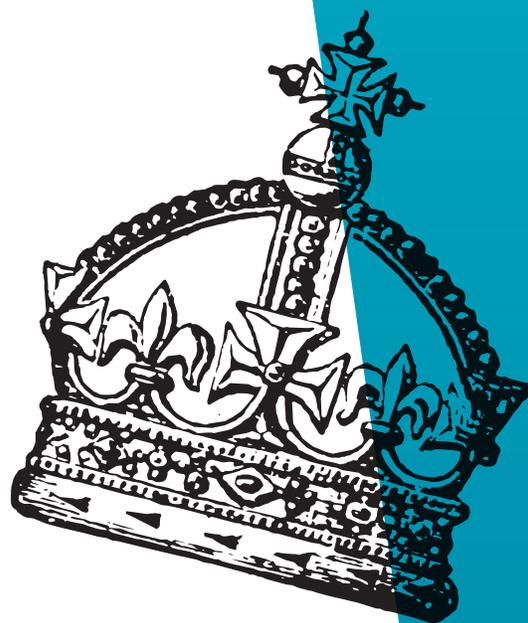
We live in a world that bears almost no resemblance to the one our grandparents lived in. Everything is available, always, no matter what. We communicate through interactive social media outlets like Facebook and Twitter; we do business with partners in Asia, Europe, and South America—all from the comfort of a rural country home in Alabama (sometimes; I've heard of it, at least). Yet, when it really counts, we step on stage, the lights go down, people 'shh' each other, and we get down to business. When it counts, we present.

Like print, TV, radio, and the Internet, presentations are a means of communicating. The corresponding concerns, then, are the same: what do they want to hear, what do they want to see, how do they want to feel, and so forth. At best, such conjecture is exploration, like mapping the sea floor; at worst, it is witchcraft. As public speakers reach blindly in the dark for answers, and audiences for anything of worth in what they're saying, funny happens.

The fact that the presentation environment, at its core, has not changed in the last 50 years (let alone 10,000) speaks to the enormous weight of this scenario in our society. Despite so many technological advancements, we still fundamentally value this in-person, in-depth approach to information. No other form of communication can make that claim. Plus, as Jerry Seinfeld points out, people are more afraid of public speaking than of dying. Indeed, the study of presentations has more in common with deep-sea exploration than marketing or mass communications. Who knows what makes audiences tick? For that matter, who knows what makes presenters tick, or think those clip-art adorned slides are perfect for a roomful of staunch financiers?

Some of the happenings in the presentation realm are astonishing, but they happen over and over again, every day. It's my business, and I see a lot of presentations, so over the last couple of years I've started collecting some of the cardinal sins, as well as the sainted virtues and purgatory-entombing half-baked ideas, that plague, bless, or sideline presentations, respectively. The following 50 terms define the hilarious occurrences happening on stage and in audiences every day. Because it would be rude not to, I've also included easy-to-implement steps you can take to bring your presentation game to the next level. I hope you enjoy; in fact, I hope you, too, become a curator of presentation hilarity. If you do, send your observations my way—[scott@scottschwerty.com](mailto:scott@scottschwerty.com). I'd love to hear what you're seeing.

THE  
**GOOD**



# 1

## THE CLINTON THUMB

**[KLIN-TN THUHM]** Popularized by former President Bill Clinton; a sincere and persuasive hand gesture characterized by a subtly protruding thumb.

Both Clinton's friends and enemies alike report a unique mental phenomenon while listening to him speak: a gentle pressure that builds in the frontal lobe of the brain until the entire head begins to nod up and down in agreement, regardless of what is being said. That pressure is Bill Clinton's thumb.

The Clinton Thumb exists in a rare class of human hand gestures--indeed, the only comparable alternative is the Jedi hand wave--that seem to endow the presenter with temporary mind control capabilities. As such, its use should be very much limited to communicating the most crucial elements of any given presentation. The Clinton Thumb never points, nor does it enumerate mundane lists. It is never a fist, nor a thumbs-up. If the thumb turns white as the blood drains from a nervously clinched hand, cease use immediately. As demonstrated by its namesake, the Clinton Thumb pairs nicely with your most sincere face.

Clinton Thumbs should be practiced prior to use at the podium. Do you have kids? Try saying, "Making your bed is important," with your best Clinton Thumb. If they believe what you say and do it, you are ready to wield the Thumb on stage.

### THE TAKEAWAY

**You'll get a lot of mileage out of natural, sincere hand gestures that emphasize key points without distracting your audience, or yourself.**

## VAN GOGH

# 2

**[VAN GOH]** A perfect presentation or masterpiece, particularly one with universal appeal; a succession of slides that that inspires, uplifts, and advances humanity.

You know when your presentation is a Van Gogh: maids, janitors, and facility employees line the back wall of the room, misty eyed. A canvas sheet has to be pulled off the projection screen. Bidding placards are flying up in a frenzy during the presentation: \$100,000! Do I hear \$150,000? Your quota for a 30% increase over last year's sales is met with the sale of the presentation about your quota for a 30% increase over last year's sales.

There is some debate as to whether a Van Gogh presentation is any more effective than a regular presentation. Recent studies show that 93% of presenters giving Van Gogh presentations were carried off stage at the end on the shoulders of exultant audience members. The other 7% reported a fear of heights and warded off the advancing multitudes. 76% received raises immediately after their Van Gogh, while the other 24% received only bonuses. The research is clear: if you like money, you should be presenting Van Goghs.

Of course, everyone wants to present Van Goghs. But not everyone is willing to endure the absinthe stupors, mental illnesses, prison terms, self-inflicted otectomies and untimely death that are part and parcel of the artistic process. That is why it is always better to pay someone for a Van Gogh presentation rather than attempt one yourself.



### THE TAKEAWAY

**Only this: the student has become the teacher. Use your powers for good, not for evil.**

# SPIELBERG



[SPEEL-BURG] a presentation master who, plucking the masses' heartstrings as though they were a golden lyre, creates presentations that alter the course of peoples' lives, of history, and of the very laws of nature itself.



Let me disappoint you: the Spielberg is an ideal that is aspired to; it does not yet exist. All presentation attendees are sitting in firmly padded chairs, breathing manufactured air, and writing with hotel pens as they wait for the Spielberg to appear. The Spielberg, it is said, will change the world: whales will be saved, raises will be given, the world will crumble to the ground, etc. The Spielberg will motivate you to give up your substance, and emotional appeal will be able to walk away from a

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## THE TAKEAWAY

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Sometimes, it's  
be nerve-wracking  
emotions. You can do  
authoritative; give conc  
it all with visually arresting s  
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Of course, it isn't just alcohol that has  
a hot beverage sound through a lapel  
sports drinks (you've got bigger prob  
somewhere, but the podium is simp  
an express biological purpose, such as  
sound out of the loudspeakers.

So why water? Because it's clear, odorless, and tasteless. It is so naturally nondescript that audiences will fail to notice your drinking at all. You've spent a lot of time preparing a fantastic presentation, and you don't want anything to distract from the important message you have to give.



... about pleasure: it's  
... comfort and compassion  
... nce. Use water to speak  
... and save your pleasure  
... ges for breaks.

... risk of absolute failure.

... In the past. There's coffee (how does slurping  
... (?), 7/11 slurpees (need I say it?), and  
... efficiency). All are acceptable beverages  
... on. Any beverage drinking should serve  
... that awful peanut-butter-smacking

... it is so naturally nondescript that  
... why what you want, because you've spent  
... you don't want anything to distract from the