

Eye The Jury

By Malcolm Fleschner

Effective eye contact is critical to delivering presentations to groups of nearly any size. This is why you'll never see one of the great presenters step in front of an audience wearing a blindfold. But there's more to good eye contact than simply opening your eyes and looking around. In *I've Asked Miller to Say a Few Words* (ExecuProv Press, 1995), author and professional communications expert Cherie Kerr offers the following suggestions for sharpening your eye contact skills.

1. Make a big intro.

Whenever you meet someone new, make sure you have good eye contact during the introduction. Then hold eye contact for at least five seconds, even if it seems like an eternity. This will disarm the person immediately and give you the opportunity to build a genuine connection.

2. Bridge the gap.

If you begin feeling self-conscious or intimidated when speaking to someone, instead of breaking eye contact focus your gaze on the bridge of the person's nose. The other person won't know the difference and you'll have the opportunity to regroup.

3. Keep strangers in your sight.

Make a point of engaging strangers - bank teller, waiters, other people in line with you - and work on making good eye contact. This is a safe, easy way to develop your eye contact skills.

4. Pay attention to other eyes.

Begin to pay attention to other people's eye contact with you. How do they respond to your gaze? Do they appear engaged or do they shrink away? Try to soften your approach based on how others react to you.

5. Work the room.

When you make presentations, try to let your view wander so you make eye contact with every audience member. If the audience is too large, divide the audience into groups and pick individuals within each group to make eye contact with. Your audience will respond by feeling more in touch with you and your message.