

THE PRESENTERS' BLOG

ALL THINGS PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Jason Womack Interview

Transcript from our interview with Jason Womack, on The Presenters' Blog
February 8th, 2013

Peter:

Welcome to the first Presenters' Blog interview. I'm Peter Watts and for the next 15 minutes, we're talking with Jason Womack. Jason's the author of "Your Best Just Got Better", and during this talk, we're going to explore how some of the productivity approaches that Jason describes in his writing, in his coaching, and in his public speaking, can be applied by presenters. So welcome to the blog Jason.

Jason:

Peter, thank you so much for having me, and thank you so much for sharing your book review with your community. It was really special to read.

Peter:

It was an absolute pleasure, and this, as I mentioned in the review, was one of the first productivity books that I've picked-up that really worked for me. So many of the ideas just leapt out of the page, and what I'd like us to go through today, is a few points about how those ideas can be applied to the world of the presenter.

Now, as a presenter yourself, you've presented over 1,500 seminars. That is a lot of presenting. I really look forward to sharing some stage time with you, to find out how people who want to become accomplished presenters can learn from some of your ideas.

For people who haven't met the book yet, would you care to share a few ideas about what's the key philosophy behind it.

Jason:

Well, you know those 1,500 seminars that I've done, on this topic, came after five years of teaching public education. So I really have been very fortunate, very lucky. I've had lots of opportunities to stand in front of audiences. Now that's going to be the theme Peter of our presentation, and at the end of this, we are going to offer everybody listening, a very special, unique gift just for them because, would you agree with me, that to become a better presenter you have to present more?

Peter:

Absolutely. It's all about getting out there, making the opportunity to present, and having that experience of stage time.

Jason:

So the book, "You're Best Just Got Better" is what I consider a manual for someone who has taken ownership of her or his professional development. You know, whether or not you run your own small business, or if you are a speaker yourself, or if you work within an organization, the chances are that in the next 24 - 48 hours, you're going to have a conversation with somebody! And what this book does, is it lays out, in three distinct areas, how you can make your best, just a little bit better. So, a very quick overview. I'll do this in about three breaths so that in that way, we'll keep the conversation going.

The first part of the book is called "Work Smarter" and that's where I deal with efficiency, with things like time management, and traditional productivity training. There's a chapter in there, chapter one, which you can download for free from my website, which gives the best tool that I know of for that topic, "When are you at your best?" and I walk the reader through finding out when she or he is at their best.

Second part of the book Peter, is called "Think Bigger" and there's four chapters on this theme. And that's where I talk about casting your vision out into the future. One tactic that I can give everyone right now, and I know those of you listening are familiar with MindMapping and brainstorming. The best MindMap I make, and I do this continually, is that I'll put a MindMap together, and in the centre of the page I'll put my name, in a circle, and then what I do Peter, is around that circle, I start writing other people's names who I want to influence me more over the next two to four to eight months.

Third part of the book is called "Make More", Now hold on a second, this is not about making more money, that may or may not come. What I'm talking about, is giving of the overflow, giving of the abundance, the contribution that you make. Peter, when you and I get a thank you note from a participant in a workshop, or a speech, that's when it really comes to home. That's when it really feels special.

Peter:

It absolutely does, in fact I keep the thank you notes that groups have given me occasionally. And they do give you a buzz, they give you a lift as you go into future sessions.

Jason:

So lets go through a couple of the topics because I know that the people listening are short on time and long on wanting ideas that matter.

Peter:

OK. Somewhere that I thought we could begin our discussion was looking at the area of barriers and overcoming barriers. I meet so many people in the training room who would love to be presenters because they can see it's going to help them in their careers, and help them in their community lives as well, but there's a fear that holds them back, and actually stops them from taking those first steps. Now, from your experience, what would you say are some of the key ways that when you can see the goal ahead of you, when you can see the thing that you want to move towards, how can you get that motion started?

Jason:

You know, it's great, I'm going to jump all the way to the end of my book, chapter ten, and for chapter ten, the subtitle is "Practice". And one way I've found that I can overcome that barrier, that fear. And by the way, a great acronym for "fear" is False Expectation Appearing Real.

So what I look at is, where can I practice, and this is the key: where can I practice on the small things so that when it's time to really perform, it seems second nature. It seems normal. So when I say things like "practice on the small things", for example, get your own little flip video recorder camera, or your iPhone, or your Android, and have a friend of yours stand maybe two or three feet, or one yard or a meter away from you.

Have them point the video camera at you and for 60 seconds, tell the video camera why your idea matters. Your friend then hits stop. They don't get to watch the video, in fact, don't share the video with anybody. Go back to your house, go back to your sofa, sit on your couch, and watch that 60 seconds of you. One of the reasons that people are fearful of standing in front of others is they're not completely comfortable with what they would look like in front of others. And by the way, practice does not make perfect, as much as practice makes comfortable.

Peter:

Absolutely, and Jason, I think you've hit something very strong there. Certainly you're reminding me of the words of Sir Winston Churchill. He once mentioned that in his rich life he'd had many many fears, most of which never happened. People do allow mantras to enter their minds about "what will happen? It will all go wrong" and as you're saying: False Expectations Appearing Real.

Do you think possibly, you mentioned about "why your idea matters", could many people have doubts that their idea do matter? Could they have an inner voice saying "Heh... this is wrong. I shouldn't be talking about this." Is there a certain amount of people not getting belief in what they're thinking or feeling?

Jason:

You know Peter I'm many thousands of miles away from you right now, and you're totally free to hang-up the phone after I say this if I offend you. If someone is not a little bit curious as to whether their idea matters, I would worry. The biggest, the best, the most life altering happenings in our lives were scary, they were big, they were doubted. And so for me, if there's a little bit of concern that other people may or may not resonate with my idea, I'm actually on course.

Peter:

Very very interesting. That is a very strong confidence building thought to take with you into a presentation; to actually help people over that initial fear point.

Jason:

You know, by standing on the stage, the assumed affirmation is that you've earned the right to be there. How have you earned the right to be there? You've done the research, you've done the reading, you've done the writing, you've done the coffee or the tea talk conversations. You're friends are the ones that will e-mail you late at night or early in the morning, or on the weekend, asking for your opinion about your thing.

And you've established yourself, you've earned the right to be there, and quite frankly, by earning that right to be there, the message to the audience is: "Audience, you're brilliant. You're smart, you're educated, you're experienced, but, I'm the expert in this thing! In this one thing, I'm the best you've got today."

Peter:

Some great advice. Some very strong points in that.

Talking about somebody identifying what it is that they want to say, and where that core knowledge is. Now within any piece of public speaking, it's essential to have a key message. To have a very strong clarity about what is that one thing you want everybody to have heard, and understood, by the time they leave the room. Now I see a lot of presenters struggling to establish what that key message is. There's a lot of flipchart time goes on, and a lot of MindMaps. I'm a huge believer in MindMaps. In order for somebody to come into contact with what their key message is, what would be some of your ideas on that topic?

Jason:

You know Peter, there's a freedom in creating boundaries. And this is going to sound hypothetical, maybe even a bit contradictory, but one of the most interesting things that happened to me was an unanticipated consequence of my joining Twitter. One of the most amazing things that happened when I joined Twitter is that my e-mail subject lines got better. My leaving voicemails got better. My 30 second elevator pitch, got better. Because all of a sudden, I had this boundary that I was confined to. And within that boundary, I had to share as much as possible.

So if someone is identifying, or Peter, can I include, refining their key message, there's one activity that I will come back to over and over again, and it's paper and pen, and boundaries. And play around with it. You know, some people like to do four words or less. In four words or less, what would I tell someone I do for a living, what would I tell someone I do for a loving, what would I tell someone I do for an interest, for a passion, for whatever.

Another thing that people can take a look at is if, and by the way, the best people at this, are the non-artistic people, and amongst which I put my hand high in the air. If I'm in front of an audience and I try to draw a picture, then they're trying to figure out what hieroglyphic I'm using!

Peter:

It certainly is quite an art.

Jason:

But, by not allowing myself to put words on a page, and only speaking if you will, or only writing in diagram, in picture, sometimes something will pop that will really let that key message come to the surface.

And then the third thing that I'll share, is to find a mentor who is a little bit busier than you are. Invite them out for a coffee, or a tea, or a walk, or something. You want to get about 30 minutes of their time, every four to six weeks. What you're going to want them to help you with, what you're going to ask them for their advice on, is in refining that key message. Now, why would I suggest a mentor who is busier than you? It's because when you sit down with them, it takes away the excuse: "I didn't work on my key message because I didn't have time."

Peter:

I'm fascinated with what you mention about Twitter. I've experienced the same thing myself. When you start having to put together micro-messages, it does give you a lot more discipline about making your thinking precise, and that is a huge asset in presenting.

Now, you've been out on the road a lot during your career. I imagine you couldn't even guess how many nights you've spent out there on the road. When I'm in a training room, coaching people, I'm often struck by how rare it is that an individual, when you ask them how they performed, what is their perception of how they did during a presentation, will reflect on what went well. People are far too ready to think about all the things they perceive that they did badly. And that very often is where the objective coach comes in, bringing somebody to the realization of all the stuff they did good, because that's what builds confidence up.

When you're out on the road as a presenter, by yourself, and you've not got an objective coach or a colleague with you, how can you ensure that you're giving yourself the positive feedback that's essential to confidence and growth?

Jason:

That's a great prompt Peter. I'm so glad that we're talking about this. You know, I studied at university, my second Masters Degree was in psychology and I studied self-talk. And for two years I studied the impact of the self-talk, the conversation, the voice in my head. And one of the things that I discovered, no, I didn't discover this, I realized this, because someone else discovered it and wrote about it, is that the way the human brain has been designed and then wired and then re-enforced, makes it a dissonance-seeking organ. It's focused on finding out what's wrong, what's not working, what's out of place.

Now thank goodness for this right? Because when I'm in London, when I'm visiting the UK, because my mind is so hard-wired to notice dissonance, I will look the other way when I'm crossing the street. Here in America I have to look the wrong way, when I'm there, I have to look the right way. How's that? So for many years, and this is one that you can test and experiment with, when I check into a hotel, or when I'm preparing for a presentation, I will write down on a sticky note, or a 3 by 5 notecard, or even in my notebook. I'll write down the two or maybe three things that I hope the audience gets from me. Now I'm trying to make these as objective as possible, but there's still subjectivity because I'm writing it.

Well, I write those things down, and then I'll leave them on my desk, or I'll leave them in the notebook, or I'll leave them on the hotel table there. I go do the work, and when I come back Peter, I push myself through the filter of how close did I come to achieving what it is that I set out to do?

Let me go one step further, I know we're running short on time, so we're going to have to do a "to be continued", but one more thing is, if it's a client that I've served before, or I've worked with in the past, or we've had a good working relationship, I'll often share those goals with them, and I'll give them this request:

"Would you look for, while I'm speaking to the audience today, at when or if I address these three goals?"

At the end of the seminar, they'll come up and they'll say "You know what Jason, out of your three goals, you really made this one work, this one was a little soft, and next time, why don't we make sure to get number three."

And that is very objective, but the other part of this, and I say this with a big smile, is that I've just bought them into my team. They're now not just a vendor, they're not just a client, they're a partner. And people like to do business with people they think are partners.

Peter:

And that is an incredibly powerful tip. It's helping the customer or the audience by bringing them in as the coach.

Now Jason, do I have time to sneak in one last question?

Jason:

Let's see what we can do.

Peter:

Thinking about training presentations, and sales presentations, in fact, thinking about myself; I'm about to set out on a four week trip around Africa and the Middle East starting from this week. How do you keep it fresh? When you're up on your feet, day after day, and delivering presentations that can be kind of similar. How do you keep each session as fresh as the first one?

Jason:

The best teacher I have on this is theater. An actor in a live theater, as well as they know those lines, as many times as they've performed that act, as many hours as they've spent practicing on the stage, they have to present as if it's the first time.

And suffice it to say, those actors who have been touring with the Lion King, as many times as I've spoken, they've done it more than I have, and yet, when I watch them on stage, it looks like they're doing it for me, for the first time. So remember, you are theatre.

Peter:

Yes, there's a strong theatrical aspect to successful presenting. As you say, you have a responsibility to that audience to play it just for them, and to keep it fresh and to keep that energy going.

Jason it has been such a pleasure speaking with you today, and I truly hope and believe that this short podcast we've recorded together, which will also be up as a transcript on The Presenters' Blog in the coming days. I hope that this will give some of the readers of the blog, some of the folks who want to get out there and present, I hope that our time together today will give them the energy, and some new ideas to get out there, spread their wings, and take to the stage.

Jason:

Me too, and good luck everyone, and Peter, I know we talked about leaving a little gift for anybody who made it this far. We'll both include in our posts a link to a little .pdf, and there are three things you can do this week, to get another speech, to build your business a little bit, to get a couple of ideas about where you could go next, in this amazing journey of being a public speaker.

Peter:

Absolutely, and it is a journey. It is a very very rewarding journey. So folks, thank you for listening today, and Jason, thank you for taking part. We're going to go off, and get you a free gift, mounted up, on the web.

Thanks everybody.

Jason Womack's book is called "Your Best Just Got Better", is published by Wiley, and can be purchased in a variety of formats including e-book and audio