



ACOEM Teaching Academy Videos: Helping Presenters Go from “Good” to “Great” to “Outstanding”

Just about everyone has experienced the jitters when giving a public presentation, and for many it's much worse than that – a gnawing fear that can border on panic.

According to surveys, the anxiety can get so intense that some people end up fearing public speaking more than death.

If you are in the latter category, you may want to take advantage of a new 5-part video series offered by the **ACOEM Teaching Academy**, whose mission is to help everyone improve their presentation skills – and enjoy the process of public speaking a lot more.

Titled *“Presentation Excellence,”* the video series is the brainchild of Kent Peterson, MD, and Constantine “Dean” Gean, MD, Fellows of the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine (ACOEM) and passionate teachers of presentation skills.

Drs. Peterson and Gean are the hosts of the video series, which offers hands-on training in everything from neuroscience and learning-theory to the use of body language and voice modulation – all presented with lively dialogue, visual aids, and a healthy dose of humor.

The new videos, which are available on ACOEM's website at www.acoem.org/TeachingAcademy.aspx, include learning modules on “The Speaker's Journey to Excellence,” “Organizing your Presentation,” “Designing your Presentation Materials,” “Delivering your Presentation,” and “Engaging your Audience.”

Included in the videos are tips and advice from a variety of other ACOEM presenters, who serve as faculty in the Teaching Academy.

What does all of this have to do with occupational and environmental medicine, you may ask?

Plenty, according to Drs. Peterson and Gean, who say the prime target of the Teaching Academy's video series and other tools are faculty who conduct ACOEM educational programs and give presentations at other special events.

“Our goal is to help speakers advance from being ‘good’ speakers to ‘great’ presenters to ‘outstanding’ teachers,” said Dr. Peterson, who notes that by improving the quality of instruction, ACOEM's course content will be more impactful. “ACOEM wants every presenter at every ACOEM educational activity to

study these videos to improve their teaching skills.”

That said, Drs. Peterson and Gean note that the videos and the other Academy resources, which include in-person training sessions during the American Occupational Health Conference (AOHC), are suitable for anyone who wants to be a better communicator — not just course instructors.

“In our specialty more than many others, presentation skills are a critical skill set,” said Dr. Gean. “Over my career in OEM, I have often needed to give presentations as a part of my work.

“Presentation Excellence: What You Need to Know”

- ACOEM's five-part free video series offers comprehensive training in presentation skills
- The series, developed by the ACOEM Teaching Academy, is free and can be used by both beginners and veteran presenters
- AOHC presenters are encouraged to visit the course as they prepare for their sessions
- The videos are available at: www.acoem.org/TeachingAcademy.aspx
- Course presenters: Kent Peterson, MD, and Constantine Gean, MD

“This project and those planned for the future make the Teaching Academy a resource for the self-development of individual physicians as well as strengthening our profession and raising its visibility,” said ACOEM Executive Director Barry Eisenberg. “It's an exciting concept.”

To learn more about the video series and Teaching Academy, visit:

www.acoem.org/TeachingAcademy.aspx

ACOEM Teaching Academy Videos:

Helping Presenters Go from “Good” to “Great” to “Outstanding” — A Q&A with Drs. Peterson and Gean

We caught up with Drs. Peterson and Dr. Gean recently to learn more about the Teaching Academy’s work and the new video series, “Presentation Excellence.”

How did the ACOEM Teaching Academy get started?

DR. PETERSON: I was bored to tears at an AOHC (American Occupational Health Conference – ACOEM’s annual meeting) in which I was experiencing session after session of what I call “Death by PowerPoint.” The presentations were not nearly as effective as they could have been. After that I vowed to put together some kind of a workshop to help people become better presenters. So I developed an experiential learning workshop that was offered for three years in a row at AOHC, to help presenters hone their skills. That was the beginning of the Teaching Academy, and in 2014 ACOEM staff suggested the work of the Academy be developed into a video series. A three-year effort ensued to design, script and record the series.

How did the two of you go about creating the content for the “Presentation Excellence” video course?

DR. GEAN: The first step was intensive research – which required diving into a lot of books and other materials on effective presentation. We then combined what we found through research with our personal experiences as presenters and input from other members of the Teaching Academy. And we ended up with 300 items that could go into the course – jotted down on a long sheet of butcher paper.

DR. PETERSON: The next step was to move this list to post-it notes so we could move ideas around as we began to outline the structure and flow of the course. We ultimately decided on five sections, touching on more than 80 key factors in becoming an outstanding presenter. In the end, we had to leave out about 80 percent of what we had collected – that’s how much material we had. But as a result we culled it down to the absolutely most important information.

Tell us about your own background as presenters.

DR. GEAN: Well, I was a very bad presenter when I first began. I remember wanting to squeeze as many bullet points as I could into a presentation because I thought it was my job to provide information – when it was actually the opposite. The point of presenting is to provide value to your audience and connect with them – not overwhelm them with information.

DR. PETERSON: I started out as a very terrified public speaker. I would be awake virtually all night before a presentation, working on it. And I wrote things out rather than trying to engage with my audience. I think Dean and I both had to unlearn a lot of what we did in our earlier years as presenters.

What is the most common complaint people have about presenters?

DR. PETERSON: Something we hear a lot is “the presenter included too much detail, which quickly became boring.” All you have to do is go to any medical conference and you will see speaker after speaker reading bullet points from a PowerPoint presentation. When that happens, the presentation is all about the presenter – not all about the audience, which is what it should be. And our message is that your job is to deliver value to the audience.

DR. GEAN: It has been said that some presenters are “givers” and some are “takers,” and that has resonated with me. The givers try to find out what the audience really wants and needs, and then delivers that, while the takers focus on themselves and take from their audience rather than give. They usually end up losing the audience as a result. You really have to start by knowing your audience, and asking, “How am I going to interest them? How am I going to help them improve their lives?”

What is the most common fear people have about giving presentations?

DR. PETERSON: Probably fear itself. They know they are going to be fearful, because they have experienced it before, and their fear manifests itself in many ways that undermine their ability. To calm themselves down they look at their notes or read directly from their PowerPoint slides, or focus on things other than engaging with their audience.

DR. GEAN: I think one of the biggest fears is of embarrassing oneself by not offering enough information. Physicians are very compulsive about details and they want to qualify everything – this is part of being an effective practitioner. When you are treating a patient those skills matter, but the skills that make you a great physician can actually hurt you as a communicator. Overwhelming an audience with too much information is a result of being fearful that you are going to leave something out. We encourage speakers to have the courage to not become overly reliant on information but rather, to engage with the audience in an effort to help them truly learn.

DR. PETERSON: That’s very true. You have to offer emotional content as well as intellectual content and that means connecting with your audience. This is the “Theater of the Presentation.” In the video series we offer a lot of advice on how you can break down barriers and get your audience engaged on an emotional level, which is key if any real learning is going to take place.

If you had to offer just a few tidbits of advice for presenters, what would they be?

DR. GEAN: Take the time to think about the one thing, more than anything else, that you want your audience to remember. What is the most important takeaway—your Great Idea? Once you have that in mind, you will find that it's much easier to build a cohesive presentation. If you don't take this step, your presentation will wander.

DR. PETERSON: I would say preview and practice. I take the time to really learn my presentation. In the days beforehand I'm previewing it in active memory so it is really filling me. That way I can walk in on the day of the presentation, smile and know exactly how I'm going to start, with a strong opening. I know what's going to happen, and that makes it possible for me to relax and be more effective. Preparation is key.

DR. GEAN: Another suggestion is to share an outline of your presentation with someone whose opinion you trust before you give it. Very few of us seek feedback beforehand and this can be very valuable in making adjustments that might be needed.

There is a lot of humor in this video series – why is that?

DR. GEAN: The use of humor is strategic. Neuro-cognitive research shows that at every 10 minutes of a speaker's presentation to a group they go through a process of converting short-term memory to long-term memory. If you don't introduce some kind of stimulus at that point, the learning process becomes like a glass that is overflowing. You need what's called an "emotionally competent stimulus" every 10 minutes to get people to "re-set" their minds and hear new information. We have found that humor is a great way for speakers to provide that stimulus, and so there is a lot of it in the videos.

DR. PETERSON: Light heartedness is at the heart of our work with the Teaching Academy. All of us need to have humility and relax in order to learn and improve. Too many speakers take themselves too seriously and would do much better adding a touch of humor.

How do you see the videos being used in the future?

DR. PETERSON: In the short term, we hope every presenter at each year's AOHC will watch some or all of the videos. We believe strongly that the quality of instruction at the AOHC – and at all ACOEM educational events – will improve as a result, and that's good for everyone – instructors, students and the profession overall.

We also are hopeful that ACOEM affiliates will encourage their speakers to study these videos to improve their effectiveness. And we believe that they will be useful for OEM residency directors, some of whom have expressed interest in using the videos to help young physicians start early in cultivating their ability to communicate effectively with any audience. They will also certainly be useful as ACOEM continues to create enduring distance-learning materials.

The videos can help ACOEM create more consistency in the quality of the presentations in various courses it will be offering. We're very excited about their potential uses.



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