I

Why Others Welcome Your Ideas *And Why They Don't*

Ideas are not truly alive if they remain locked in a single mind. Our need to transfer them to others forces us to consider why and where we want them to go, and how we want them to get there. This demands orientation toward the audience. "Audience" in its narrow sense, of course, assumes a *hearing* of the message. While the human voice is the most powerful method of communication, we will use "audience" in the broader sense, as the group aimed at regardless of the form used. Our objective is to get an idea accepted, and usually a mixture of methods—letters, memos, or reports as well as talks, conferences, and formal presentations—will be necessary if the idea is to have more than a trivial impact. The same principles and approaches are applicable to all forms, and the over-all plan should use whatever combination best does the job. We will go into the strategy and tactics involved in some depth later.

Ideas that call for drastic changes in the current handling of affairs, large amounts of money, or new allocations of manpower

are certain to require an oral presentation—usually at the highest level of approval. Requirements for this ultimate oral presentation should dominate the campaign from its earliest stages. At the other end of the range of human affairs, small changes or suggestions are handled almost entirely orally. Thus the crucial point in decisions—large and small—is an oral presentation, because the people who have the power and responsibility to say *yes* or *no* want a chance to consider and question the proposal in the flesh. Documents merely set up a meeting and record what the meeting decided. All the kings of yore listened, questioned, and judged (those wary of change or usurpers listened even more), but only a minority could read and write. Their lordly seals were devices to make up for missing clerical skill—which only clerics were expected to have. Old ways linger on. Garden clubs, faculty conferences, boards of directors, town meetings, and legislatures share a common origin in the councils of primitive tribes. A chief of the Sioux could grasp the idea of a city council meeting quickly, even though he'd find the furniture uncomfortable. Anyone serious about an idea welcomes the chance to present it himself—in person. We wisely discount proposals whose authors are unwilling to be present at the launching.

Audiences are not made up of homogeneous units. Every individual member of an audience brings his own unique mixture of background and temperament. As Alfred North Whitehead pointed out: "Each human being is a more complex structure than any social system to which he belongs."

What we call an "audience" is a group of individuals who at some moment have only one thing in common: They are listening to the same message. Each listens for a different reason, and each expects to carry away something different for his own purposes. A few years ago, the Metropolitan Museum acquired a Rembrandt painting, *Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer*, at a cost exceeding two million dollars. On the first day of public showing, twenty-five thousand persons, after long waits, filed by its easel in the main hall with hushed, religious demeanor. For months the picture continued to attract enormous crowds. Busloads of school children, women's clubs, and fraternal groups made their pilgrimage to the Fifth Avenue shrine. Today, this painting hangs in a second floor gallery along with a dozen others from Rembrandt's hand. It is now viewed by the normal run of visitors, who distribute their attention about equally to each canvas in that Dutch-Flemish collection.

A painting is an idea involving peculiar and complex techniques for its own presentation. (These techniques offer many useful lessons for our purpose, and we will discuss them later.) But consider what was happening. A man's silent idea, conceived over three hundred years ago, was presented to hundreds of thousands of people, who went to a great deal of trouble to see what he had to say. Every one came for a different reason. Some to see what two million dollars worth of property that had dubious value to them looked like hung on a wall, others to enjoy a trip to town, but most were in search of an uplifting experience —though they'd probably be embarrassed if pressed to explain. Few came to reason why Aristotle was contemplating the bust of Homer; or why Rembrandt was compelled to immortalize this highly unlikely moment in Aristotle's life; or why he put him in the costume of a wealthy Dutchman. For some it was their first visit to any museum, and attitudes toward art began their growth in new minds. Some latent talent began its first stirrings in a schoolchild, and contemporary artists measured their own attainments with unaccustomed modesty. Not one will be exactly the same as before; not one took away the same message as the others. Other pictures of equal merit were there before, but crowds did not press to see them. Humans often do the right things for the wrong reason, and if publicity brought some who otherwise wouldn't go, we should be grateful, not patronizing.

This incident furnishes an accurate way to view an audience: as a long line of individuals who listen to your idea from their own point of view. Some see more than you meant, a few see exactly what you want, some are interested for the fleeting moment, and some couldn't care less. Only an unthinking spectator would lump them together as "that crowd at the Met on a culture kick," as one did to me.

Motivations of individuals are as varied as their number, and the experienced presentor knows and expects this. People volun-

tarily expose themselves to the stimulus of an idea either to damn it or to satisfy various needs: self-education, curiosity, social climbing, topics of conversation, erudite knowledge for future use, orders from superiors, ideas to spring on friends, milder forms of snobbery, or just to be "in on things."

Accept them on any terms they like, but how they feel when you've had your chance depends on your skill. Robert Ardrey in his book *The Territorial Imperative* says that all of us seek three things: identity, stimulus, and security. We avoid: anonymity, boredom, and anxiety. Success of an idea depends on how well it satisfies these drives.

At this point we may have a feeling of uneasiness, because we seem to be pandering to the baser motivations of an audience. Perhaps we feel that our integrity requires us to give the truth as we see it and let the audience take it or leave it on our terms. This attitude implies that we are absolutely certain our views are correct and inviolate, and that any deviation or negotiation on others' terms diminishes the purity or validity of our message.

Many have taken this attitude, and their failures litter the history of thought. Adherents of this self-righteous approach to their fellow man confuse certitude with certainty. Certitude is the *belief* that we are absolutely right; certainty is the eternal, unattainable truth, which has not the least possible chance of being proven wrong at any time, in the past or future. There is no room for any compromise or negotiation on something that is certain. It should only be communicated in edicts, orders, or pronouncements. There is no room for discussion or dissenting opinion, and there should be none. However, we are hard pressed to list even a few ideas that meet the tests of certainty—timeless, and equally true under every conceivable set of circumstances. The greatest minds have never felt certain in their fields of competence. Albert Einstein was congratulated on the results of an experiment predicted by his theory of relativity: "It must give you a great deal of satisfaction to have been proven right," an admirer said to him as they received the news. Einstein mused, "No amount of experimentation will ever prove me completely right, but one new fact can prove me completely wrong."

Humility of this order in the crystalline world of exact science suggests that a pose of certainty is even less appropriate in the inexact world of human affairs. We can only achieve half-truths. Unfortunately the rules of arithmetic do not apply; two halves do not equal the whole.

If we accept this, then we see why dialogue is needed on almost every subject. Exposure of ideas and proposals to other minds allows many other facets to be seen from different points of view. The total experience of an audience contributes insights denied you (since no two lives are exactly the same), and if a presentor is wise, he welcomes them for two reasons. First, the members of an audience have identified themselves with the idea enough to examine it through their own spectacles; and more important, you may even learn something new yourself. Hammer and anvil *both* shape the red-hot horseshoe—only the naïve believe the hammer does it all. The similar interaction between a teacher and his students underlies the old advice: "If you really want to learn a subject, teach it to others."

Teaching, discussion, or other methods of presenting an idea demand the use of symbols—words, letters, numbers, shapes, colors, sounds—by which our message is perceived through the senses of the audience. When we present an idea with such symbols we are engaged in art, and art is *not* nature in the fullness of its reality.

The essence of any art is *selection* of pieces of the real thing, and then putting the pieces selected in some new *order* or arrangement so that the imagination of the audience is stimulated to see what the artist saw. But no two people see the expression in exactly the same light. Consider the Mona Lisa and her smile. What is its inner meaning? What does the smile portray? Probably no two viewers have identical impressions. Some may contemplate and see in it unspoken or unspeakable gratification. Others see the smile that a palpably guilty poisoner might turn on the prosecuting attorney after hearing a "Not Guilty" verdict. Art puts nature in the form of a code, the audience receives the coded message, and if their experience and imagination are affected, their minds sense the original idea or uncoded message. There is plenty of room in this process for a number of

things to go wrong. The final message in the audience's mind is always garbled to some extent, for it is distorted by one individual's reaction to another's mental vision. Selection, arrangement, or transmission may be faulty. The experience of the audience may not let them recognize the symbols (as in a foreign language), and if they do recognize the symbols, their imagination may be such that they cannot combine them in their minds in the same way as the man who worked out the new order or arrangement he calls his idea. Ideas do not really *begin* in the mind. We first collect a great deal of information through all of our senses and store it in the form of memory or sets of pictures. We began the selection process before we were born. We never *forget*, but often we cannot *remember* at a given time. By imagination we mean the rearrangement of these pictures in our minds in many ways—most of which never existed in what we saw originally. Sometimes we hit on a combination of old pictures which lets us see old things in new ways. We call this understanding or creativity. We have then created a new vision or idea of how things *can* be from what we found them *to* be. William Hazlitt, in *Lectures on the English Comic Writers*, said: "Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are and what they might have been."

If we shift slightly from "what might have been" to "what may be," we penetrate to the heart of what an idea is. It is a picture of what can be *made to exist* in the real world, or a different way to *interpret* the pictures we already have of the real world. The first we call "programs" or proposals, the second we call "theories" or explanations. If a man observed the Hudson River and saw that people on both sides had little to do with one another, he might get several ideas, if he felt things should be otherwise than as he saw them. His ideas could take the form of imagined pictures of ferries, bridges, tunnels, or cable cars. As he sat on the bank and examined the pictures of his mind, he would then imagine all the different things that would happen if the first idea of bridging the river came to pass. An engineer "sees" different ways of construction; a land speculator "sees" a fantasy of price changes; a conservationist "sees" a loss of

natural beauty; a social worker "sees" new ways for relieving unbalanced population pressures; and so on and on. There are at least as many sets of ideas as individuals who "thought" about it. Yet the Hudson flows on, undisturbed by all the mental image-juggling going on at its bank. But some of the ideas, when accepted, can cause all sorts of activity in the real world—bond issues in Wall Street, orders to steel mills, ultimatums to utility companies, enrichment of lawyers, and protest meetings of nature lovers. Thus, the program or proposal type of idea acts as the igniting spark for explosion of human and material resources. It is generally related to that of someone who wants a hook on his wall to hang up his coat—a picture in his mind precedes the search for hammer and nails. The picture is often incomplete, like being oblivious of such possible side effects as mangled thumbs or irate neighbors.

The theory or explanation type of ideas are different. They take all sorts of observations by others and constantly rearrange them in the mind, relating them to one another until a new pattern or meaning is discovered.

Consider the two ideas of the "true" motion of the planets. Up to a few centuries ago most everyone believed that the earth stood still and all the other planets, the sun, and stars, went round it. This idea was a picture of whirling balls all going in circles. Why circles? Because everyone knew they were the only *perfect* figures. As observers became sharper eyed, little discrepancies came up, so Ptolemy of Alexandria placed little circles on top of big circles and had them all revolving like Ezekiel's wheels. But through all this whirling uproar, the earth still remained fixed in the mental picture of the universe.

Copernicus imagined a different picture. (Notice that the planets kept going as they had since their birth, in spite of what men thought about them.) He visualized the sun at the center of the whole arrangement, and then calculated what people should see if he were right. Galileo went out looking for what Copernicus said might be there—and found it (though he never convinced some powerful thought leaders of the day, and almost got burned for his trouble). But even Galileo's great mind still clung to the perfection of the circles. To continue the story, Kepler

visualized the paths as ovals tied together by a force like the Holy Ghost, after a Dane named Tycho Brahe had already stirred up everything again with his set of observations. Newton finished the whole thing by showing that falling apples and moving planets were all part of the same great design. This picture satisfied everybody for a few hundred years, until Einstein questioned the fundamental relations between measurement, space, and time. But that is another story and is not yet settled.

Not one of these people ever touched the things he was explaining or met the other members of the great search party to compare their ideas. The phenomena explained remained untouched, even after the explanation filtered into everyday knowledge. In spite of all this work, it is interesting to hear our acquaintances say that the sun "comes up" and "goes down" as though all this never happened.

Thus, a theory differs from a program, but they share one common aspect: Both are ideas and live only in the mind. One triggers the search for new facts the theorist thinks exist, the other triggers the search for resources to turn a picture into reality.

We have singled out only two major types of ideas, but there are, of course, many more. A melody is a musical idea, a novel or play is an unfolding of ideas about human character, a philosophical system or religion is an idea for the conduct of life, a cooking recipe is an idea for taste and smell, and so on. All of these, like the program and theory types, start in the mind, perhaps as imaginary sounds and odors as well as pictures. Their variety is endless.

For our purposes it is only important to realize that every person's mind carries two basic types of material—old impressions and memories of events actually experienced, and imaginative rearrangements of parts of these actual experiences which never really existed. Recollections of incidents that took place during a vacation are of the first type; dreams, which are subconscious rearrangements of old incidents, are of the second; and remembrance of a character in a novel or movie is a mixture of both. These all exist at various depths of consciousness, like all

sorts and sizes of fish in a deep pool. When you present an idea to someone, it causes effects similar to those produced by casting a baited hook into a pool. The hook causes some fish to scatter, attracts others, and is ignored by the rest, but it rearranges the total pool into new patterns. What happens depends on the place the cast is made, what's on the hook, and the style or skill used in placing it. The temperature, time of day, and season of the year also play a part, as well as how hungry the fish are. Each has its counterpart in the presentation of an idea.

Skilled presentation—like skillful fishing—requires a knowledge of what's in the mind, how to attract what you want, and how to reject what you don't. This brings us to the concept of resonance—the most powerful mechanism for transference of an idea from one mind to another. It is the basis for all advice and techniques of ideas communication.

In his autobiography, *From Immigrant to Inventor*, Michael Pupin tells how his early life as a herdsman in the hills of Serbia gave him the two ideas responsible for his scientific fame. Both involved an ear to the ground and an eye to the future. The first was the "loading coil," which made long distance telephoning possible before vacuum tubes, and the second was the concept of "tuning" electrical circuits, on which radio, television, and radar depend. Both are varieties of "resonance," which has its roots in Newton's law of action and reaction. (Pupin considered this the most important of nature's laws.) Serbian shepherd boys all carried identical long knives with wooden handles and used them to communicate with each other during the night. Each pushed his knife into the earth and, by striking the handle, sent messages to his colleagues who had stuck their own knives into the ground. By putting their ears to the "receiving" knives, they heard the taps of the "transmitting" knife over distances much greater than they could shout. A physicist today would say that the identical knives were in resonance, i.e., vibrations from one caused the other to move in sympathy. Its own natural vibration rate was triggered by waves just exactly right to produce maximum response.

Pupin's other boyhood experience came from hearing those

aristocrats of mountain music, the bagpipers (yes, in Serbia!) tune their pipes to one another, by adjusting each one until it vibrated in sympathy with the note sounded by another. (String instrumentalists still do this today.) When Pupin adjusted his electrical circuits to respond to certain incoming waves, he used the word "tuning" to describe the process. Every time we try to get a radio program, we say that we "tune it in." What we do is make our receiver resonate with a specific radio transmitter. As we move along different numbers on the dial, we make our receiver resonate differently, like hitting different keys on a piano. The "channel selector" on a TV set does the same thing. Many cases of resonance exist. Tenors shattering glasses with a certain note; a bridge vibrating so wildly that it crashes; stained glass church windows quivering at certain notes of the organ; pictures and china rattling from record players; an orchestra sounding its A; and the characteristic sounds of individual human voices all demonstrate resonance effects.

Everything in the physical world can be stimulated to excessive response if a disturbing force is "tuned" to it. Archimedes of Syracuse said that if he had a place to rest his lever (the fulcrum) he could move the world. If we know the natural vibration of an object, we can make it quiver without touching it. Resonance in the physical world is the way to get a maximum transfer of energy. In the world of the mind, it is the way to get a maximum transfer of idea content. What is the connection? It has its roots in sympathy. The word *sympathy* is derived from two Greek roots—*syn*, meaning "together"; and *pathos* meaning "feeling" . . . feeling together.

Sympathy, then, is the analogue in the world of feeling to resonance in the world of materials. Send out messages tuned to the feelings of the audience, and they will almost quiver with response. The analogy can be carried a little further. As people respond, they send back messages to the sender, setting up a kind of feedback which amplifies the original message. When carried to a high pitch, enthusiasm is generated, which later may be almost embarrassing to the participants. Veteran actors and concert performers are so sensitive to this two-way communication

that they count on it to take them to their peak performance. They are often unable to do their best in the hollow environments of television and motion picture production, where audiences consist of preoccupied technicians. For the eminent, producers will often furnish a live audience, whose purpose and function are usually not perceived by the great mass of viewers, but who nevertheless play an essential, creative role in the performance. A cellist once told me when I congratulated him on an especially fine concert that, "This audience made me play better than I know how."

Those experienced in presentations, at some time in their careers make a profound and happy discovery: most audiences are eager to receive a message. Even when they disagree violently with its content, they like to see good temper and politeness shown to the speaker or performer by their fellow members in the audience, if the speaker has shown them himself. For the tiny fraction of presentations that must be made to audiences known in advance to be definitely hostile, there are many approaches, and we will treat them at some length later. But we have all been in groups where the hostile behavior of someone in the audience so irritated the rest that we eagerly awaited the boor's comeuppance, whether delivered by the speaker himself or by one of our more courageous colleagues. Often the greatest applause occurs at these times, and the energy expended acts as a purge of collective embarrassment. Many public performers have built their reputations around their ability to handle hecklers, and proposals have often been accepted with enhanced enthusiasm when they have been opposed vigorously by the wrong kind of people, or with the wrong kind of manners. As Maupassant pointed out, audiences cry to the message-givers: Comfort me, Amuse me, Touch me, Make me dream, Make me laugh, Make me weep, Make me shudder, Make me think. They still do so, and appreciate those who try—even those who fail in the trying.

Today, more than any time in the past, people of all conditions are eager for ideas. They are more willing than ever to listen to those who offer the slightest chance of satisfying their

needs for change, education, amusement, inspiration or, at the least, relief from boredom.

Several factors have produced this hunger for intellectual stimulus. Perhaps the greatest of all is the shrinkage of our world —squeezed by the two forces of rapid communication and transportation.

Intellectual activity is now a universal phenomenon. It is the cliché of our time that the sum of facts and knowledge increases at a pace that leaves us out of breath if we try to keep up. We have had our era labeled without serious dissent as the Age of Anxiety, which is no more than the polite name for the Age of Floating Fears. And the mass media of printing, television, and radio continually deliver blows to the eyes and ears, clamoring for our attention to more and more facts, news, or problems. Our innate need to understand our changing environment demands that we form attitudes toward this overwhelming flood of information.

One aspect of the speedup in communications is that everything happening, however ephemeral or trivial in the long run, is presented to millions within hours of the event. We cannot comprehend the state of affairs where news of a military mutiny and massacre of British residents by the Sepoys in India took weeks to reach London. This occurred in 1857. Imagine the difference in reaction if it were on the TV news the evening it happened!

In the Western World the three unshakeable beliefs that allowed us to put new knowledge in its place have not only been shaken, they are in ruins. Nothing has taken their place. (At least nothing that enjoys universal acceptance.) The beliefs are national sovereignty; production geared to small-scale enterprise; and the idea that democratic discussion at all levels of government can administer to society's complex needs of today. They exist today only in the oratory of national holidays—a dying form of dubious art. Affairs are not guided by these principles any more, yet leaders dare not admit it publicly. We treat harshly those who strip away illusions, unless they substitute something else. The fairy tale of the *Emperor's New Clothes* does not record gratitude to the children who saw the king in his naked reality, and said so.

All of these stimuli—undifferentiated in importance—have

caused in many a sense of numbness toward any general information that is not directly applicable to the way they make their living, and an intensification of sensitivity to any knowledge and training that is.

Shifts in the age-groups of population, urbanization, minority groups, and increased levels of living have produced strains on traditional modes of thought and behavior.

While automatic progress as an evolutionary principle has been abandoned since World War I, everyone still seems to feel that he has an obligation to "improve" himself, his family, and their condition of life. Since it won't take place automatically anymore, he must intervene and exert efforts himself, or attach himself to some area of life that has already caught the escalator for a free ride.

In all this yeasty, confusing ferment, it is hard to separate the froth and scum from the wine. The pressures of time prevent reading for depth and foreclose guidance from schools. There is an almost nostalgic, primitive urge to trust our ears and eyes in discourse with a wise person—in person.

Yet for all our sophisticated pessimism, we vaguely feel that in order to cope with the fallout of past ideas, advances, and progress, we do need new ideas. We are eager to listen to someone who looks as if he might have one that will work.

In the last few centuries children could follow the paths of their parents, grab a little more education and advance a short distance beyond, and so on, generation after generation. They set down roots in specific places, accepted the same values, and gave similar loyalties to institutions that existed in childhood. Not so today. Both young and old want new answers to the new problems. The young eagerly, the old reluctantly.

This commingling of problems and opportunities is characteristic of those periods historians call Golden Ages. They are great periods to contemplate from a tranquil study, but they are, in many ways, hells to live through. Elizabethan England, Renaissance Italy, Revolutionary France, and Pioneer America still captivate our interest. Old modes of life and thought were crashing down, and ideas and thinkers found wonderfully manured fields for rapid growth of their various seeds. So it is today.

Listen to William H. McNeill in his conclusion to *The Rise of the West,* a comprehensive history of world civilization.

> The burden of present uncertainties and the drastic scope of alternative possibilities that have become apparent in our time oppress the minds of many sensitive people. Yet the unexampled plasticity of human affairs should also be exhilarating. Foresight, cautious resolution, sustained courage, never before had such opportunities to shape our lives and those of subsequent generations. Good and wise men in all parts of the world have seldom counted for more; for they can hope to bring the facts of life more nearly into accord with the generous ideals proclaimed by all—or almost all—the world's leaders.
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> The fact that evil men and crass vices have precisely the same enhanced powers should not distract our minds. Rather we should recognize it as the inescapable complement of the enlarged scope for good. Great dangers alone produce great victories; and without the possibility of failure, all human achievement would be savorless. Our world assuredly lacks neither dangers nor the possibility of failure. It also offers a theater for heroism such as has seldom or never been seen before in all history.
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> Men some centuries from now will surely look back upon our time as a golden age of unparalleled technical, intellectual, institutional, and perhaps even of artistic creativity. Life in Demosthenes' Athens, in Confucius' China, and in Mohammed's Arabia was violent, risky, and uncertain; hopes struggled with fears, greatness teetered perilously on the brim of disaster. We belong in this high company and should count ourselves fortunate to live in one of the great ages of the world.

The lyrical and sober tone of this excerpt encourages anyone who sees new ways either to arrange affairs or to interpret present phenomena. If you can relate your idea to the larger issues of our day, you will be guaranteed a hearing. People are ready and eager. However, they are easily bored, and while the temper of our time brings them to the theater, what they see and hear determines how long they stay and *what they tell their friends.*

If you are not to have your audience leave with a sense of having wasted its time, suitable care must be given to the manner and content of the presentation beforehand. Whether your audience includes the most powerful or the most humble, each considers his time worthwhile, for it is an irretrievable slice of his life.

In the higher courts of law and the lower houses of legislatures, rigid time limits, majestically enforced by venerable officials, are prescribed for making a presentation, or argument. (Alas, we cannot include that august body, the United States Senate.) University lectures take generally fifty minutes—strangely identical with the *Fifty Minute Hour* of the psychoanalysts. Plays run two to three hours, uninflated motion pictures a little less, and most TV shows get less than a full hour. Press conferences of world leaders (except those of newly emerging nations) rarely last beyond an hour, and sermons had better not. Thus, most of the ways in which important ideas are presented suffer the strictest constraint of all: time. Without constraint, there is no need for art. In fact one definition of art is that it is the method of presenting an idea under constraints. A painter has just so many square inches and just so many pigments. Sculptors must respect the limits of their material or it rebels. Musicians can play only a limited set of tones and in a narrow range of speeds and volumes. Poets confine their selection of words to a small fraction of a language's dictionary—for their appeal is through the ear. Books can be made only so thick, and even German philosophers produced a finite set of volumes. The recognition of limits is the beginning of real competence in any art—including that of presenting an idea. You must do the best you can with what you have. Ignorance of relevant limits—of material, time, and audience knowledge—accounts for more failures than any other single factor. Genius expands these limits, but only after mastery of existing possibilities. Advancement does not come by accident, nor by that random sloppiness which calls itself free inspiration. Remember, Shakespeare had only twenty-one thousand words from which to fashion his poetry and plays, but he fashioned them with immortal effect.

Trying to accomplish something when the things you need are

limited or unavailable stimulates a quest for efficiency. How can you get the most out for what you put in?

We feel that some kind of optimum is possible, but how to achieve it? Variables abound: the ideas themselves (existing as thoughts in the mind); their number, difficulty, and novelty; background required for full comprehension; characteristics and size of the audience; the over-all environment in which the idea is presented; action you want the members of the audience to take when you finish; your personal knowledge and character; and the time available to you. Judgments must be made to adjust those variables within your control to those which are not. Such judgments lead to the concept of *design*, which is the relationship of one variable to the others in creating an over-all effect. Like design in buildings, machines, paintings, utensils, tools, or interiors, a presentation can be clear and elegant, or confused and tasteless.

Again we encounter aspects of art, not science—certainly not mathematical theorems and proofs. Some of the worst presentations are designed like a lesson in geometry, and you can almost hear the *QED* at the end, if you are still awake. Other failures leave you with no idea of what action the advocate wants you to take. Inadequate attention to the physical environment and the hazards of irritating distractions dispose of some; and unskilled reading of text in monotone takes an even heavier toll. The inexperienced are also trapped by assuming that the audience is enthusiastic and convinced of the importance of their idea before the presentation. These unfortunates mistake the invitation for acceptance. Use of a style inappropriate to the subject creates effects ranging from low comedy to disgust, and inept use of visual aids enhances unintelligibility.

Presentation of an idea is similar in many ways to fighting a battle. Only fools underestimate an opponent and think they can give odds. First-class intelligence can make up for lesser numbers (witness the Arab-Israeli War of 1967). Clear objectives focus energy and give each part its job to do. Imaginative and unexpected deployment unbalances the opposition. Planning for contingencies absorbs counterattacks and makes for flexible ripostes. Appreciation of the mental habits and doctrine of the

leaders of the other side lets their attacks be predicted and parried with a minimum of nail biting. There are, of course, rules of strategy and tactics that fill shelves of books, but mere knowledge of rules does not win wars. There are rules for painting, harmony, and architecture, but mere application of rules does not make an artist—or even a craftsman. The rules themselves come from studies of great battles, pictures, music, and buildings. Breakage of such rules by those *who have not mastered them* constitute the history of human failure.

Training teaches the rules, experience teaches the exceptions. In the remaining chapters we shall examine several aspects of the art of presentation of ideas and try to extract those guides, hints, and directions that lead to success through efficiency and design. We will, on the way, take note of the perils and snags that await the rash, unwary, or naïve. At the end, if your nerve is not equal to using this kit on real trips, it will at least set you up as a pretty fair critic—and many have made a good thing out of that.

We resent help from others if they either diminish our own sense of importance or show no sympathy for our problems.

Physicians prove this every day, as patients flee professionally good intentions when by indifference, irritation, impatience, or fatigue the doctor shows that he has no sympathy for them or their ailments. In dealing with many doctors, of course, this is the highest wisdom, for we sense in the most primitive part of our minds that if they have not taken the trouble to understand us and our conditions, then their suggestions and treatment are probably off the mark, and we had better run for our lives.

Faith in our sense of importance is the polite and quiet form of self-preservation. Insult it, and you send mobilizing messages for retaliation to every cell in your victim's body.

If wounded self-respect can drive a sick man away from the medicine he needs, imagine how much easier is the flight from suggestions of less importance.

When we say that we "have an idea" for something or other, we really mean that we want to change the world in some way. We call fanatics those who seize on an idea and who insist on lighting up the world with the blinding glow of their own vision.

They, of course, are pathological victims of their own particular brand of home-brew, but any reading of history shows that they produced some noteworthy events. Every sucessful fanatic had a first-rate grasp of human nature, and never diminished the sense of importance of his potential converts. Instead, the fanatics exaggerated it to wonderfully pleasant fantasy. Rather than showing no sympathy for the assorted miseries, doubts, and fears afflicting their followers, they evidenced such overwhelming compassion that millions stampeded for a chance to place their lives at the service of those who "understood" their problems.

Even the most cynical product of our own skeptical culture identifies with the handful at Thermopylae, Crusaders in Palestine, archers at Agincourt, or stonemasons at work on Notre Dame. How else explain our excitement as we share in the last charge of Napoleon's Old Guard at Waterloo, all grizzled, nononsense types, with every illusion gone, walking to music into a blizzard of flying iron, chanting "Long Live the Emperor" as they slog on to certain death?

Few of us would call these people stupid, but was their behavior rational? Probably not, but man is not only a rational animal. Emotions and beliefs are masters, reason their servant. Ignore emotion, and reason slumbers; trigger emotion, and reason comes rushing to help. At the least, reason excuses; at the most, it restrains its master. Examples from the past show how ideas have ruled the world. Ideas build, use, and destroy armies. Christianity, socialism, capitalism, imperialism, liberalism, democracy, and other creeds have their real life in the heads of their adherents, not in the real estate involved. Colored maps mislead us badly. Great institutions begin in the mind and are developed by other minds that embrace an idea at various stages. The fanatics of history are diseased cases of men whose ability to present ideas outstripped their capacity to control the forces set loose by their success. Santayana described a fanatic as someone who redoubles his efforts after he has forgotten his aim.

We are so repelled by the horrifying fallout of the fanatics that we often swing to the other extreme in our ceaseless quest for the proper conduct of life. "Hard facts and cold reason should be our only guides; scientific method our only instrument; utility our only measure." This is the path of a particularly virulent fanaticism and proceeds from the Inquisition, through the Terror and its guillotine, on to the totalitarian barbarities of our own time. Saint-Just, apologist for the French Revolution's terror, encapsulated this attitude in his remark: "We must impose the yoke of liberty on the necks of the people."

The neutrality of reason as to whom it serves was chillingly confirmed when the emotions of the people used Saint-Just's cold theory to put his own neck under the blade.

Reason operates by deciding (in some occult way) that a single aspect of an object, an event, or a person is truly representative of the entire thing itself. This accounts for our habit and need to put a label on everything. Since we feel that we know what other things or people with that label are like, we can then "logically" go on to the conclusion that the thing we have labeled shares the properties we "know" all other things of that kind and with that label have. Logicians and philosophers since Arisotle dignify this trinity of uncertain truth with the unlovely name of syllogism. For example: All Russians drink vodka; Ivan is a Russian; therefore, Ivan drinks vodka. Or as Saint-Just might have put it: All enemies of the Revolution must be killed; aristocrats are enemies of the Revolution; therefore, all aristocrats must be killed.

Notice the assumptions we have to make in reasoning. First, we must have a faith in our ability to detect a characteristic and label it. We then need to have a program ready-made to generate an attitude to things or people with that label. Once we have these, logic then merely connects our two statements. The trick is, of course, to select statements *ahead* of the logic, if we want to have it come out our way. We could just as easily have picked a more profound, if not a happier, property of Russians, as in: All Russians play chess; Ivan is a Russian, therefore, Ivan plays chess.

How do we initially select the property we want to reason on? We do it by picking those aspects of things that serve our purposes. We pick our purpose by what we want, and what we want has its roots in our own feelings and emotions—though we

seldom tell ourselves so, and never tell others. We use reason in this way every day. All speeches, plays, trials, and arguments have a syllogism buried somewhere in their heart. They use many more words only because the logic breaks down if the hearer does not accept the first two statements, called the premises. The emotions must be addressed in every way possible within the limits of art available in order to get agreement on premises. Here, then, is the linkage of emotion to reason: Agree-ment, with the selection of properties pertinent to both our indi-vidual case (Ivan) and to the class to which we assign it (Rus-sian), can only be relied on if the hearer *feels* them to be valid. If his feelings are on the other side—and perversely remain there —logic is useless. It cannot work without a set of agreed-on premises. Witness the reluctance of some juries to come to unan-imous decisions in seemingly open and shut cases. This could be caused by boredom, indigestion, dislike of another juror, or dis-belief in the whole jury system—especially if one resented being ordered to serve. If agreement on premises exists, and the an-cient rules of logic are used to connect them, then the conclusion is valid—but only to those who accept the premises. They will all happily agree that "it stands to reason." A subversive Ivan, who drinks kvass but avoids vodka, could not possibly agree with the conclusion, regardless of immaculate logic. Disagree-ments, whether between nations or father and son, have their roots in premises—not in logic. As Justice Holmes said, "You cannot argue a man into liking a glass of beer," or, for those who remember their Latin, *De gustibus non est disputandum.*

What has all this to do with getting your ideas accepted? Simply this: Do not master textbooks on logic and then think that others are either ignorant or unreasonable if they do not agree with you. They may be just as reasonable as you are if *their* premises are correct. Sometimes, of course, they are not even aware of what their premises are (they could be prejudices imbibed with their mothers' milk), but if they resist your idea (conclusion) you can be certain that their premises (beliefs) don't jibe with yours. Ambrose Bierce put it neatly in his *Devil's Dictionary*, "Infidel: In New York, one who does not believe in the Christian religion; in Constantinople, one who does."

Once one sets up as an idea monger, it will not be long before he encounters those shrewd and practical opponents who fight under banners blazoned with the motto "Common Sense." These are tough customers. Men of genius over the centuries have met them and often lost. But when won over, your idea then enters the body of knowledge known as common sense, and opposition rapidly melts away. Victor Hugo had this kind of idea in mind when he said in *The History of a Crime* that "more powerful than armies is an idea whose time has come."

But it's up to you to get the idea, to know that its time has come, and to present it under *three* flags; Emotion, Reason, and Common Sense.

What is the nature of Common Sense? It is, first, all knowl-edge that floats in the public mind and requires no proof for it to be believed. Second, it is an appreciation of over-all causes and effects that agrees with everyone's everyday experience. The minute, detailed sequences between events which lead up to an over-all effect are considered unimportant. If ever thought of, the details are often wrong in a scientific sense, but common sense *does* somehow get the beginning and end straight! Consider the frozen surface of a lake. Everyone in its neighborhood knows that it freezes in winter. They have skated on it, known of drownings in the past as persons went through thin sections of ice, and so on. Countless generations observed it, walked on it in winter, and swam in it in summer. How many could tell you why it freezes on top, but not on the bottom? How many would know that water is heavier at 39 degrees than at 32 degrees when it freezes? How many ever heard of density or specific weight? And if they had, they would still cut a hole in the ice and go fishing in midwinter.

A physicist's answer to the question "Why does the top freeze first?" might need pages of formulas, and a thick book of ex-planation before he felt satisfied. Even if he spent a lifetime elaborating, testing, and patching up his theory, the inhabitants of the lake region would pay scant attention.

They might be amused at the foolish eccentric who put himself to such agony proving what everybody knows, but they would hardly change their daily lives after the book came out—and

they probably shouldn't. It is enough to link events like this: Winter causes the lake to freeze; ice forms on the top; there's water below. That's common sense. Was Newton the first man to have an apple fall on his head? Of course not. Apples have fallen down since Eden. But because one particular apple fell on the head of one particular man, the incident has since been viewed with gravity.

If they see a cat in a dairy barn, most people can figure out that he's hungry. They do not need a deep knowledge of animal behavior to do it. People blessed with great common sense also tend to "reason backward," if they observe or are told something unusual or outside their range of experience. They trust the evidence of their eyes and ears more than deductive chains of formulae. "What I see is real; now what could account for it?" Primitive religions embodied the common sense of their time. Storms and lightning, seasons and earthquakes, day and night, sun and moon, birth and death, famine and plenty, were experienced first hand. "Effects" were everywhere—what was the cause? Nobody knew. So gods and myths were invented by "reasoning backward" from a world where the uncertain and the unpredictable were the only certainties, to a higher world where their lives were created and managed. Since the effects often appeared random and capricious, the angers and benefices of the gods were cut to fit, usually at the expense of some unfortunate goat. We are not so far removed from these ancestors that we have completely abandoned their ways. We still seek a scapegoat or two when things go awry.

In *Conversations with Wellington* the Duke told how he deployed his forces for an early victory in his career: "After dinner we talked of India. The Duke gave an account of his attack at Assaye and of his acting on the conclusion that there must be a ford at a particular point of the river because he there saw two villages on the opposite sides of it. 'That,' he added, 'is common sense. And when one is strongly intent on an object, common sense will usually direct one to the right means.' "

Imagine the difficulty of a staff officer trying to convince the Duke otherwise (he was not known as the Iron Duke for nothing), and you see why ideas that conflict with common sense enjoy a tough reception.

Common sense is the conservative force in human existence, for only the most time-honored knowledge is allowed in its corral. In fact, a good way to visualize it is like a corral, with each animal inside representing an accepted fact or idea. New animals are let in after they have been broken to service, and others die and are removed when they are either vanquished by a new animal or are no longer useful to the community. Hence, the odor of gasoline instead of horse manure around country churchyards on Sundays.

Also, antagonistic animals are tolerated for considerable periods. Every society has proverbs that can justify opposite courses of action in similar circumstances. Common sense does not insist on logical relations among its various pieces of wisdom. The body of common sense thus continues to change and is different for different groups. What is common sense to a farmer in Iowa is the most dangerous nonsense to a peasant in the Middle East—and vice versa.

If your idea strikes your audiences as in line with *their* common sense, you will experience a depressing reaction. First, they will agree much more readily, but this can degenerate to a boredom of "What's so new about this? Why waste our time with the obvious?" However, if the idea is generally of the order of "let things alone," "don't rock the boat," "let's wait until we know more," or other classic delaying remarks, the reaction will depend on the mood of the audience. If they are so anxious that any action is better than none, you lose; but if things are cloudy, and your idea has a respectable wrapping of reason, they will be grateful for an excuse to do nothing. If your idea clashes with common sense, you have both great advantage and a serious disadvantage. You will, of course, not be charged with being obvious, but slightly crazy. However, you will capture attention —at least temporarily—for you have triggered an emotional conflict. You have created a newsworthy event: "Man bites dog." Most newspaper stories have an element of the unexpected or unusual, and years of experience tell editors what grabs readers' attention. Ship sinking, yes; ship sailing, no.

Once you've got the attention, it is the highest wisdom to keep in the front of your mind that it is the attention of a challenge —with roots in hostility—and every eye and ear is alerted to

catch the error in your proposal. Remember, if they do not find error, they must either live with a contradiction and its anxiety, or change their minds. If they change their minds, they must abandon a previous thought or prejudice, and that is like losing an old friend who has stood by you for a long time. We do not abandon friends without pain, but if proof of their faithlessness finally convinces us, we put them out of our mind faster than those to whom we are indifferent. There is no teetotaler like a reformed drunk.

If your proof fails, the anxiety and hostility produced turn back on you, the unsuccessful attack on the old friend reinforces the regard in which he's held (since there's now an element of guilt in that the attack was even temporarily tolerated), and you have made it a little harder for your idea to triumph if it gets a second chance in stronger hands. Your successor will encounter additional missiles labeled: "We've been through all this before, and it's no good."

Common sense is a society's survival kit—and it's value lies in knocking out bad ideas. It washes everything that violates it in skeptical acid to separate the base from noble metal. It enriches itself by taking the noble metal into its own treasury. Good ideas survive the acid—if presented properly. Common sense administers a rough justice, for it knows that the world changes, and it must also change, but it is wary. It prefers original ideas which have stood the test of time. The successful merchant of ideas must be uncommonly equipped with common sense, for it is potentially both his adversary and ally. Which it becomes is determined by his hands alone—their skill and the guiding knowledge beneath that skill.

Now that we have examined a few of the relations between reason, emotion, and common sense, we get a better fix on a familiar acquaintance—resistance to change. Unsuccessful idea-pushers throughout the ages have blamed their failures on the phlegmatic genius of sheer inertia that repelled their assaults on the established order, a sort of nonmilitant, ghostly Marshal Joffre. (Dinner was dinner to the Marshal, even though the Germans were breaking down the gates to Paris.)

In Vermont a few years ago one of its citizens attained his hundredth birthday, and reporters made a pilgrimage to his porch. They got an embarrassing, silent reception. One of the newsmen, unwilling to see the story melt away, tugged at his collar, cleared his throat, and tentatively began the interview on the safest note conceivable: "Sir, you have enjoyed an unusual experience. Your life has spanned the most remarkable century in history. You have seen countless changes in American life, marvelous inventions and progressive improvements brought to everyone. Our readers are interested in your views. Would you tell us what you think about all these changes?" After a great deal of silent rocking the old man shifted his tobacco, looked his questioner in the eye, and grunted: "I been agin 'em all." That worthy celebrity really valued resistance to change—and his dogged longevity was probably just his ornery way of resisting the greatest change awaiting each of us.

Fortunately, such types are not numerous, and his environment changed in spite of his desires. Ideas ultimately win—for good or evil. But let's remember that resistance to change can also be admirable if it is not, like justice, blindfolded.

What we call "the world"—or more modestly, "our world" —is the current sum of the ideas of our predecessors on this planet. Look about you. Your clothes, language, furniture, pictures, housing, neighborhood, city, and nation all began as visions in other minds. Your food, drink, vehicles, books, schools, entertainment, tools, and appliances all came from someone's dissatisfaction with his world as he found it, and also as he left it. What you work at, believe in, try to teach your children, and are ready to defend against attack are your personal selections from an immense antique market. It is stocked with the ideas of all human time. Some may be old and dusty, a few new and shiny, most are old and repainted, but each of us furnishes his home as best he can. A few believe in werewolves and witches, some in Yoga, others in DNA molecules, antimatter, or psychedelic vision. Our selections may be unconscious, impulsive, compulsive, whimsical, perverse, or rational, but we all have a full house, and seldom throw anything aside without grabbing something else to take its place.

Our time in the market is as long as we live. The centenarian in Vermont furnished his home early in life and thereafter never saw anything he wanted to substitute; but most of us are always on the lookout for something better. We have an itch to improve our condition. But the eminent vegetarian, George Bernard Shaw, prescribed the scratch appropriate for the itch: "Progress is impossible without change; and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." This is the side of man that makes him eager for new ideas. All lives unfold as a continuous contest between the inertial weight of not wanting to be disturbed and the desire to better their existence; between fear and hope, gloom and joy, resignation and rebellion, satisfaction or discontent. The tension of these opposing pulls underlies Alexander Pope's advice:

> Be not the first by whom the new is tried,
> Nor yet the last to lay the old aside.

Most people find this the behavior of prudence, and ignore the necessity for someone to start the game. When you present an idea to an individual you must see your act as an event in *his* life, as something that will *change* his life if he accepts it, approves it, or supports it. His decision is only one of thousands he will make. Yet if the idea is large and important, you may be asking him to risk his property, reputation, or even his life. Most trivial matters require him to risk at least his judgment. Every decision carries an element of irreversibility in it, for its failure or miscarriage leaves tracks in the memories of all who know about it. You really can't go back again and start over completely. Most know this instinctively. If you realize these implications of what you're about, you will take care to treat your conscience and audience with proper respect. This does not mean servility, but paying attention to their backgrounds and their capabilities, their weaknesses and restraints on their actions, their hopes and worries. When your audience senses this kind of respect in your presentation, you will receive respect in return. When they sense arrogance or obsequiousness, you will get what these deserve —and quickly.

Most of us truly admire intelligence, culture, and leadership when we meet them. But if they arrive wrapped in arrogance, we rightly suspect what we see is counterfeit, and later condemn those who tried to mislead us. There may be exceptions in the case of certain geniuses, but few of us ever meet them. It is possible that what they show is not really arrogance at all, but a frustrated, shy, oversensitivity to criticism which manifests itself in behavior akin to arrogance. Nonetheless, this luxury is paid for in deferred recognition—most likely far beyond the grave. Few of us have that kind of patience.

The man sincerely interested in the successful reception of his idea will not give it this handicap. If he doesn't know better, his proposal will be received as the product of one who's not very smart. If he sells it at all, he does so with a heavy discount on his intelligence. Audiences will often conclude that he stole the idea, especially if they embrace it in spite of the mutilation it suffered in his hands.

A melancholy choice faces a person with great egotism and thirst for personal recognition when he gets an idea: Is he interested more in the idea's success or in the chance it gives him to show off his talents? There is a seesaw effect; the more that personal propulsion dominates, the less energy is available for the idea, and vice versa. It is easy to sympathize with these people, for we often judge a person's worth by his presentations. After all, that is how he communicates to us with unusual concentration on mutual purpose. However, confusion of purposes creates confusion in the audience, and if a compromise is tried "half for me, half for the idea," all shots fall short. Both the idea and the quest for glory suffer. In a long enough run of association, appraisals of personal worth tend to become more accurate as judgment centers more on what the audience gets in the way of instruction, knowledge, or insight, and less on vague, overall impressions.

There are legitimate times when the whole purpose of a presentation is to judge a person; then confusion disappears. The single idea is to display a personal product—the character, talent, and personality of the presentor—and the techniques of presentation are applicable. Auditions for the stage, orchestras,

ballet, and opera occur every day. Interviews for other employment are their brothers, and oral examinations for advanced degrees are first cousins. All belong to the same family. But if acceptance of an *idea* is truly the main object, personal aggrandizement must take a back seat. Oddly enough, a successful idea carries its passenger to the same destination, but driving from the back seat is not the best way for either to get there. William James crystallized this effect in a little ratio:

$$\text{Self-Esteem} = \frac{\text{Success}}{\text{Pretensions}}$$

Most people see something admirable in self-esteem, but abhor pretensions. Basically, a mixed presentation goes off the rails by ignoring the needs of the audience. They pay attention only in return for a chance to learn something—excluding the learning of how fine a fellow you are. Confused aims violate an elementary rule of strategy—concentration on a single, ultimate objective. Diversions are useful, but they should be planned to support and relate to the final objective which must always stand at the front of your mind. We will elaborate this in several places and from different points of view later. It is enough here to state the point that *confusion of objectives* is the most frequent cause of failure to convince others of a good idea. Failures of this type occur everywhere—in scholarly journals and gregarious saloons, in drawing rooms and political conventions. Most failures in presentation are avoidable. I will try to show some ways to success in the following chapters.

2

Presentations *Are* Performances

or

Why There's No Business Without Show Business

Every renowned figure in history, famous or infamous, beloved or reviled, understood the power of drama. Churchill's speeches —uttered word for word by a phlegmatic predecessor—could not have inspired and rallied an entire free world. Sir Winston was a consummate, and not altogether unconscious, showman.

Thus, when you get an idea you must share with others, you will immediately face a hard question. The answer will depend on your character and past life; precepts absorbed from your models, teachers, and critics; development of your taste; your sense of etiquette; and painful memory of failures observed or experienced. As in questions of conscience, each man must fight through to his own answer. The question is simply: "To what extent are you willing to dramatize your idea in making it known to others?" Extremes of response can be: "To hell with all tricks —I'll use facts," or, "The sky's the limit—anything goes." If both extremes are absurd, as I think, there must be some place in-between which is best for a particular presentation and its associated circumstances.