

## **Facilitator's Guide:** **Communication Square Dancing: Developing a Pitch**

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### **Background:**

As a former square dancer and competitive clogger, I found that some of the more successful elements of that experience matched the needs of the students in my Business Presentations class, an introductory speech course offered to students entering IU's Kelley School of Business. Both experiences, dancing and presenting, require participants to have patience with learning and practice, flexibility in situations, stamina, precision while working in teams, and a great deal of replication. I began to think of how these two genres could intersect in the classroom to benefit my students and then developed this approachable, easy to do exercise that would creatively challenge participants while also unlocking some of their abilities and the potential of their ideas.

### **Theoretical Foundation for the Exercise:**

I consistently want my students to reflect on audience experiences, expectations, and needs as they get comfortable delivering and sharing their ideas in front of others. One way to achieve identification with audience members is rooted in what Burke wrote in 1950, in that, "you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his" (p. 175). While we can certainly update Burke's gendered quotation for today's welcoming classroom, it still holds true that audiences relate through persuasion. This does not mean that students sacrifice their own identity while relating to others, but it does mean that they should consider an enhanced audience centeredness in all communication and particularly for presentations. At the same time, I find that Monroe's five step sequence on persuasion to be helpful for team members wishing to quickly develop their ideas into a persuasive, audience-centered presentation or pitch. This exercise requires participants to develop a pitch using Monroe's five-step sequence of Attention, Need, Satisfaction, Visualization, and Action; offering that pitch to several different peers in a repetitive process, and adjusting that pitch based on the audience-centered feedback they receive.

### **Learning Objectives for Participants:**

1. Use of Monroe's Motivated Sequence (Monroe, 1951) of Attention, Need, Satisfaction, Visualization, and Action to develop and offer a persuasive pitch.
2. Utilize conversational delivery from an outline with their pitch, rather than written manuscript or notes.
3. Display and practice critical thinking skills while offering, receiving, and incorporating meaningful feedback in peer partner exchanges during the exercise.
4. Exhibit greater presentation confidence while students work repetitively with their pitch, Monroe's sequence of persuasion, and each other.

## Tools Needed:

- Two outline sheets per participant listing the steps of Monroe's persuasive sequence: Attention, Need, Satisfaction, Visualization, and Action (a sample outline sheet is attached in exercise materials). You can print on two-side paper to conserve.
- Timer (can use phone clock, stopwatch, or even a timer available on YouTube)
- Room or outdoor space for two large circles (you may want to move chairs to outside or inside of room)
- Music is optional, but some good bluegrass instrumentals may be helpful to lightly play in the background and are available through many music streaming sources. Music does not need to fit a particular genre but can be complementary to the taste of the room.
- This exercise works best with at least 45 minutes of class time and as many turns for participants to offer and refine their pitch.

## Facilitator Instructions:

1. Determine a subject of persuasion that you would like for your students to develop into a pitch. The pitch can be a shorter version of a larger presentation, but for the purposes of this exercise it should be about a minute and a half of material or less. Pitches could include, but are not limited to, selling an idea, solution, object, or even an individual selling themselves as a teammate, professional, or new hire or organization member. You may find this exercise fits well with an established persuasive assignment or deliverable that is currently in use for your class.
2. Participants may already have an idea in mind but brainstorming for material or subject matter may be necessary before or during class. This is optional and depends on class needs or your preference.
3. Distribute outline sheet containing Monroe's Motivated Sequence. Review the steps with the class or discuss for the first time (the sequence is simple to understand and student's generally catch on quick).

**Attention:** Get audience's attention related to the pitch (use a story, startling statistic, question, or other method of identifying with the audience)

**Need:** Discuss the problem to be solved and the pain it causes

**Satisfaction:** Offer solutions to relieve the audience of their angst over the problem

**Visualization:** Explain what life will look like when the solution is implemented and the problem is solved, allow audience to dream about the solution by seeing it through your words

**Action:** Tell audience specific, concrete steps to get started on implementing the solution

4. Now, ask students to take their persuasive pitch and fill out their Monroe's outline sheet. In keeping with best practices for outlines, encourage them to use short words or phrases to help guide them talking through their pitch instead of reading it from a manuscript or

notes. Here is an exaggerated example that may be familiar to many instructors (and students):

**Attention:** Lost my voice two minutes before a presentation due to laryngitis!

**Need:** Presentation is 99% of my grade (or at least it seems this way)

**Satisfaction:** Next week has an alternative time when I can present better

**Visualization:** If granted an extension, I will give the best presentation ever!

**Action:** Please grant extension, excuse me from class, and do not notice my beach towel

5. Now that students have their pitch, divide the class into two by having them count off by twos around the room (1, 2,1,2,1,2,1,2) until every student is either a 1 or a 2. Remind them to remember their number. This may be an appropriate time to have students help you place desks either to the side or the very middle of the room.
6. Then, have the 1s form a circle around the outside perimeter of the room and face inward towards the center of the room or group.
7. The 2s can then form a circle on the inside of the 1s circle and face outwards towards the walls or outside of the group. Every 2 should be facing a 1, every 1 facing a 2. If there are uneven partners, you can simply have a participant sit out a turn on a rotating basis.
8. If using music, you can start it at a light volume at this time to help participants with their anticipation and anxiety.
9. The “caller,” a traditional square dance term for the leader (and a great role for the instructor), will give all instructions to participants and tell them when to move. Tell the class that the order will be:
  1. 1s offering a pitch for a minute and a half
  2. 1s receiving feedback from that pitch from the 2 for another minute
  3. 2s offering their pitch for a minute and a half
  4. 2s receiving feedback from that pitch from the 1 for another minute
10. Instruct 1s to begin their pitch for a minute and a half.
11. Ask 2s to offer feedback to 1s for a minute.
12. Then reverse, instruct 2s to begin their pitch for a minute and a half.
13. Ask 1s to offer feedback to 2s for a minute to complete the exchange between partners.

14. In this exercise, 1s will always move to the right after both the 1 and the 2 have given their pitch, received feedback and completed their exchange. 2s will stay in place but receive a new 1 partner each turn. This said, instruct the 1s to move one place to the right and receive their new 2 partner.
15. Repeat the previous exchange process outlined above, again.
16. After this next exchange is completed, ask 1s to move one more time to the right and to do one more pitch with 2s following by offering feedback, then doing their pitch, and receiving feedback from 1s.
17. After three partner exchanges have been completed, allow all participants to take a quick break to return to their outline and make adjustments to their Monroe sequence based on feedback they have received or changes they have implemented while live pitching. Usually, three minutes is sufficient time to catch their breath and document changes.
18. Begin this process again after the break. In a class with 24 participants, it would be ideal if at least six partner exchanges occur so that students receive an optimal amount of feedback from as many in-class partners as possible.
19. At the end of the session or last exchange, ask all participants to return to their original Monroe's sequence outline and make final changes based on feedback that they have received. Then ask them to turn over the current, messier draft of the outline to a new blank outline for Monroe's sequence and document a final version that reflects all their work and changes.
20. Last, but most importantly, have students reflect individually, then in groups, and later in class discussion. You might start with the following sample questions:
  - a. How did your pitch start out? How did it change? What are the noticeable differences?
  - b. What did you learn, if anything, about audience members during this exercise?
  - c. What was helpful with delivering this pitch so many times?
  - d. What did you appreciate most about this experience? What was the most frustrating part?
  - e. How might you incorporate aspects of this exercise into future persuasive pitches or presentations?

### **Works Cited:**

Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969.

Monroe, Alan Houston. *Principles of Speech*. Rev. brief ed. Chicago: Scott, Foresman, 1951.