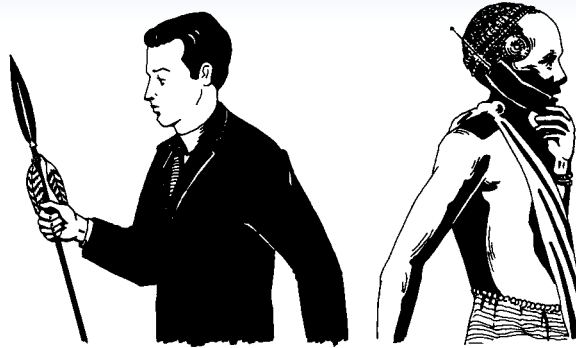


Insight 26

The Interactive Image



“You can learn a lot from people who view the world differently than you do.”

Anthony J. D'Angelo

The Interactive Image

When using the image as an illustration, the presenter assigns a meaning to the image. In contrast, when using the ‘interactive image’ method the audience assigns a meaning to an image. There are three methods of the interactive approach:

1. Presenter’s Image—Audience’s Meaning.
2. Audience’s Image—Audience’s Meaning.
3. Common Image—Audience’s Meaning.

The strength of these forms of the ‘interactive image’ is involving the audience because asking an audience to assign meaning to an image does four things:

- gets them involved in the content of your presentation.
- develops their understanding of your content.
- helps uncover issues.
- enables the presenter to understand and direct discussion.

For the interactive image approach to work, the presenter must assure participants that they will not be judged for their choice. This simply means saying, “Any image can mean anything to anyone. So just pick images that you believe represent the topic. We will not judge you for your choice—but we will be curious to hear the reasons behind it.”

1. Presenter’s Image-Audience’s Meaning

In this first method of the interactive image, the presenter chooses the image and asks the audience to assign a meaning. This approach is useful for priming an audience to receive information, such as, the company’s policies or a customer service model.

There are many possible interpretations of images, but there are usually several obvious ones. Consider the following example; You have been asked to present your company’s 5-point customer service charter to a group of new employees.

<p>You begin by holding up a poster-sized image of:</p>	<p>A young man in a supermarket uniform smiling as he kneels down to pick some loose groceries up off the floor of a shopping aisle. Beside him stands an older person watching him and smiling.</p>
<p>You deepen the interaction by asking the audience:</p>	<p>“What may have led the young man to help?”</p> <p>The group responds with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A call over the speaker system from the floor manager. • The old man asked for help. • Another customer told him about it. • He may have immediately stopped what he was doing in the aisle and run over to help. • He may have anticipated the event from the other end of the aisle. • The old man waited, unnoticed for several minutes, until the young man, who is actually the store manager, came to his aid.
<p>Now direct the conversation to the customer service charter:</p>	<p>“As you may know, our company has a 5-point customer service charter. At the top of this list is Exceed customer expectations. Thinking about this point, let’s look at our hypothetical list and rank them in order from those most likely to exceed expectations to the least likely to exceed expectations.”</p>
<p>You then proceed to anchor the best of these behaviours to this point of the charter and the image.</p>	<p>“It is obvious from our discussion that as that famous author and speaker Cathy De Vrye always says, ‘Good service means good business.’”</p>

While the charter is not changeable, the audience has an opportunity to get involved and to apply their ideals. This increases retention, and increases the probability the audience will recognise the real-life situation and act appropriately.

2. Audience's Image-Audience's Meaning

In this second method of the interactive image, the Persuasive Presenter allows the audience to select their own images for their own reasons. A simple way to do this is to hand each person a magazine or a wad of postcards and scissors, or CSS Cards© (as explained in detail later). Give them a topic, such as, "What do *you believe* are some of the characteristics of a good leader?" Ask them to go through the magazine and to find images that they believe represent the characteristics. Get them to cut the images out and place them on the table. When they finish, have them talk about their choices.

This method suits a workshop format because it will produce plenty of interaction between the presenter and the audience and among the audience. Like the first method of the interactive image, this second method is useful for preparing an audience to receive information.

When Persuading For Results, this method is particularly valuable when the presenter is raising issues and ideas that everybody is likely to have a strong opinion on, or when there is not necessarily a 'right' answer. It helps an audience to realise there are many different answers and gives them a richer understanding of the issue. Most importantly, it connects them directly to the issue with a meaning that is relevant to them.

The Persuasive Presenter recognises that most of what the audience needs to know, they already know—they just do not always recognise or apply this knowledge. This approach provides audience members with an opportunity to reflect on their own thoughts about a subject, and to compare these with the ideas of others.

It also primes people to *want* to hear what you have to say about the subject. After selecting images for their own reasons and articulating their choices, individuals want to assess their thinking against your expert opinion. You will need to be thoroughly prepared because each member of your audience is now looking for evidence that they have the 'most correct' understanding. In addition, audience members may be emotionally attached to their choices.

3. Common Image-Audience's Meaning

The third method of 'the interactive image' is the 'common image'. This special method has several features and benefits that warrant separate discussion.

<p>The term 'common' describes two principal features:</p>	<p>All members of the audience are given a common (identical) set of images.</p> <p>The images are primarily common (of an everyday nature). They are like snapshots from a typical photo album, not the more directive marketing images found in magazines.</p>
<p>There are three persuasive benefits to using common images:</p>	<p>It encourages more heartfelt and natural responses from an audience. People are more comfortable giving a genuine, honest response when the image is common and not a strong marketing image.</p> <p>People find personal and emotional meanings in the images. This increases their commitment to their responses and improves the quality of their participation. Again, a better connection between the audience and the subject improves the presenter's opportunity for persuasion.</p> <p>The images are suitable for many presentations, including business and nonbusiness presentations.</p>

A simple way to use this third interactive method is to hand each person a deck of cards, with each card containing an image. Give them a topic, such as, "What do *you believe* are some of the characteristics of a good leader?" Ask them to look through the deck of images to find the four pictures they believe represent the characteristics. Get them to place them on the table after several minutes. When they finish, have them talk about their choices.

Using common images in this way is fun and:

- reduces tension and encourages full participation. All members recognise that they have the same tool for expression as their colleagues and feel on par with other members, regardless of the levels of experience or rank.
- encourages and simplifies comparisons between group members.
- quickly highlights common choices and unique choices across a group.
- helps the group agree quickly.
- enables discussion about priorities and preferences by individuals placing their choices in order of preference before comparing them with others.
- promotes interest and respect for other people's perspectives.
- It is fun.

To use the ‘common image concept’, a presenter could prepare their own set of images using reproductions of photographs and graphics. However, it is more practical and efficient to use a commercially available system—**The Compatibility Communication System (or CCS)**. The CCS developers coined the term ‘common image communication concept’ and their system provides everything the Persuasive Presenter needs to benefit from this approach in their presentations. You can find out more from their website: www.cccorporation.com.au, and from the case study below.

Case Study: State Street in Japan

When Vicky Karatasas, who is now the Head of HR for the Commonwealth Bank, was at State Street as Vice President, Head of Leadership and Change—Europe, she was responsible for employees’ career opportunities at a Regional level. This role brought many challenges as she managed staff development in a range of business and cultural contexts.

The following story is about Vicky’s experiences presenting to a group of business people in Japan. The story illustrates the power of images to provoke thought, to break down barriers between people, and to promote communication.

Vicky travelled to Japan to run workshops with Japanese State Street employees. She had researched the local business culture in Japan and understood the Japanese are well-known for their work ethic and strong group relationships. She had also been advised that the Japanese participants were likely to be reluctant about voicing their difficulties and frustrations in front of their colleagues. She understood the participants were also unlikely to speak openly about their own underperformance or that of their colleagues. She was concerned because she knew that without frank and open communication, it would be difficult to solve the challenges facing the Japanese teams. Fortunately, Vicky used a creative technique the CCS cards©, involving images, to provoke constructive, open discussion. She tells her story in the following.

A Picture Paints a Thousand Words

The workshops and presentations that I gave in Japan were very important, from a business perspective. So, I developed a backup plan before I went to Japan, in case my initial queries about personal and group performance did not work. In the first workshop, when my questions were met with awkward silence, I realised I had been right to prepare a more creative ice-breaker.

I introduced my creative ice-breaker by distributing CCS cards to all the participants. I asked everyone to go through their pack and select a card that depicted something unique about themselves. After several minutes, I asked each participant to put their cards on the table and stand up and walk around the room, viewing everyone else's cards. I then asked each person to pick a card that had been selected by one of their peers and share with the group what they interpreted it to mean.

One employee had selected a card with an image of an empty baseball diamond. His peer, who was asked to share his interpretation of the card, said the card probably represented the person's love of baseball. As it turned out, the card represented something completely different. The employee who had selected the card explained the image represented his inability to get his colleagues to work together, like a team. Sometimes it felt like they were not even on the same field! As

the employee talked about this, he referred to the image, extending the metaphor to include reference to himself as the coach and his boss as the referee. Other employees commented that customers are actually referees, because the customer has the final say on the success of the team. This provoked discussion about the different pressures and systems of accountability faced by the employees.

As I watched, I realised the metaphor inspired by the image allowed the employee to talk about his work indirectly. It also captured the attention of his colleagues and prompted them to draw comparisons with their own experience.

When I asked this individual to then share with the group what his biggest challenge was with his team, he quickly reached for a different card. It was an image of a marching band. He laughed and said he wanted to have all his team members marching to the same tune. Another colleague laughed and said, "I don't! I am tone deaf, so it would be a disaster." Everyone laughed. One by one, the participants shared their interpretations of the various images in a nonthreatening, constructive atmosphere.

Since then, I have used the cards many times with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. I think the creative use of images can break down barriers more effectively than most other methods.

Vicky comments the cards have worked for her in different cultural contexts. Imagine that you were asked to present to a group of doctors in Poland, or to a group of exchange students from China. What would an audience of Polish doctors expect? What would Chinese students expect? How would you begin preparing for this? Let's look at the lessons we can take from Vicky's story and adapt to your own presentations.

Lesson 1: Have a good understanding of your audience's culture.

Researching Japanese culture allowed Vicky to tailor her presentation. See *Insight 8—Understand your Audience and Insight 12—Consider Culture*.

Lesson 2: Involve your audience. Vicky created a friendly environment where her audience members could share and learn in a non confrontational environment. See *Insight 27—Involve Your Audience*.

Lesson 3: Use different activities to enhance your presentation. The use of image cards stimulated the audience members to think and communicate. See *Insight 27—Involve Your Audience*.