

Culture club:

Tips for speaking with international audiences

By Karen Friedman

Every culture is different, so what works in the United States doesn't always work overseas. For example, Europeans tend to want more detail than Americans. Their attention spans aren't quite as short. So, your key points may require more explanation, numbers and background than what you would include in a typical presentation at home. Here are some other things to keep in mind when speaking to international audiences:

Colors can color impressions

Colors give different messages to different cultures. In Japan, white symbolizes death. In Venezuela, yellow often has negative meaning. Do some research when you're putting your slides together so you use cultural-friendly colors.

Put on the brakes

Often, a translator will be used so everyone can understand the presenter. In some cases, the audience is composed of people who speak several languages. While their primary language may be Spanish, it's possible that they are listening to the translation in English. It will take them a bit longer to process the information even when it's being translated at a slower pace. Additionally, if you're talking too fast,

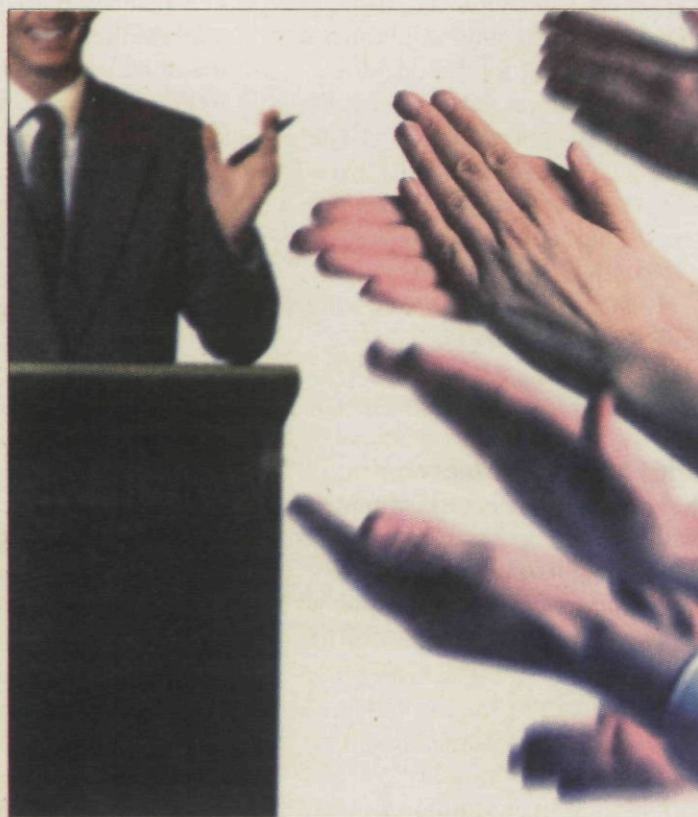
the translator may be working so hard to keep up, that he or she may not be able to reflect your tone, speech variation or give emphasis when you do. It's best to build in additional pauses. Not only will this help you slow down, but it will also help audiences digest the material.

It was funny when I told it here

Jokes and stories don't always translate well. And, in some countries, jokes that worked here might be insulting. If you aren't sure, tell your story, joke or anecdote to someone in advance. If you don't know anyone from that country, ask an organizer, meeting planner or someone who travels there regularly. They are often quite helpful.

Gesture accordingly

Americans gesture big. We wave



our arms, open our mouths wide and step forward to make our points. This isn't always welcome in other parts of the globe. In Japan for example, people take offense if you get too close and invade their personal space. Others find big motions distracting and distasteful.

Watch your words

Not too long ago, I spoke at a conference represented by people from a

variety of countries. As they became comfortable and a dialogue ensued, I too became comfortable and lapsed into a much more conversational tone. While that made everyone else comfortable, unknowingly, I used a few slang or American words that are fairly standard here. Many audience members didn't understand the meaning and had to interrupt to ask me to explain. Remember, expressions that are common in one culture translate differently or not at all in another culture. For example, if you're invited for dinner in Britain, after you're satiated, don't say, "I'm stuffed." It means: "I'm pregnant."

A universal code

There is a technique that works in every part of the world. It's easy to master — smile. A smile translates everywhere. It relaxes your audience, invites them to listen and positions you as approachable. A smile can cut through even the toughest of cultural differences to help make your presentation or meeting a success. **T**



Karen Friedman brings 20 years of on-air TV experience to media training and consulting. Her Philadelphia-area company, Karen Friedman Enterprises, Inc., prepares people for media interviews, presentations and public appearances. www.karenfriedman.com.

in print

Speaking the truth

PRSA member Edward J. Barks, president of Barks Communications in Berryville, Va., recently saw the publication of his first book, "The Truth About Public Speaking: The Three Keys to Great Presentations."

Barks, who teaches professionals and executives how to deliver presentations, has a simple message in his book: to make public speaking pain-free.

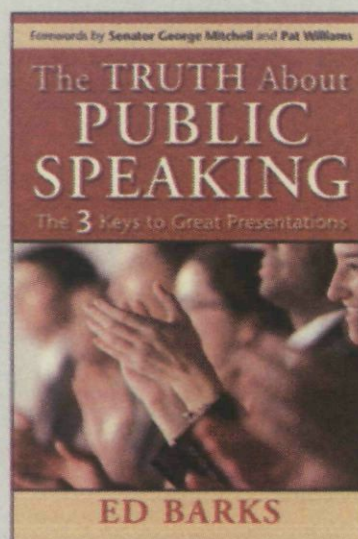
"I make no promises that you will become a great orator. You would be better served by investing in a pair of magical ruby slippers than in a book that guarantees to transform you into a star," Barks writes in the book's foreword. "The only way to become a bet-

ter speaker is to speak — a lot. You should leap at the chance to deliver a presentation whenever and wherever a sensible opportunity presents itself."

As the title suggests, Barks discusses his three keys to great presentations: preparation, performance and assessing feedback.

"Here is the bottom line: You will not get better if you fail to prepare," he writes. "And you certainly will not get better if you fail to learn the value of assessing feedback routinely."

Excerpted from "The Truth About Public Speaking: The 3 Keys to Great Presentations," by Edward J. Barks. Ogmios Publishing, P.O. Box 132,



Berryville, Va., 22611. 248 pages. \$24.95. Softcover. For more details: www.TruthAboutPublicSpeaking.com. **T**

in brief

Virtual reality, except for the coffee and bagels

Are you holding a virtual meeting? Publications Management recently offered helpful tips. Among them:

- Distribute an agenda to all participants beforehand.
- Remember to consider time zones when scheduling and informing participants of meeting times.
- Prepare visuals for the meeting with the video camera in mind.
- Remember: Although you are not there in person, they can still see you. Be aware of your body language, facial expression and gestures at all times.

Details: www.pubmgmt.com. **T**

Copyright of Public Relations Tactics is the property of Public Relations Society of America and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.