

 Barbara Seymour Giordano, ACS, CL:
From the Heart

Speaker coach uses storytelling to make connections.

BY LINDA ALLEN, ACS, CL

“Everybody has a story. And there’s something to be learned from every experience.”

— Oprah Winfrey

Chances are you know Barbara Seymour Giordano, maybe not in person, but through her work as a speechwriter, presentation coach, public speaker, producer, director, writer and Toastmaster. She has appeared as a national spokesperson for Lands’ End, Neiman Marcus and TJX Companies, Inc. The benefits of her coaching extend to speakers that include Fortune 500 executives, entrepreneurs, students and TED presenters.

A Global Reach

Seymour Giordano’s career began during the Gulf War, when she worked as an assignment editor in the San Francisco bureau at CNN. She learned how to choose and write local stories that resonated with both local and international audiences. Sharing these stories that had global impact became her primary focus. When the war ended, she moved to Los Angeles and changed direction to focus on entertainment at E! Entertainment Television’s Emmy-nominated *E! News Daily*.

Her entrepreneurial spirit and energy led her to strike out on her own. She began producing and directing internal videos for global sales meetings and events for high-profile companies like Amgen, Cisco Systems, GlaxoSmithKline, Intel Corporation and Nike. Spurred on by success and experience, Seymour Giordano expanded her services to include the roles of storyteller, pitch doctor, spokesperson, corporate event director and producer, and TED writer/presentation coach.



Barbara Seymour Giordano coaches Ph.D. candidates preparing to present their dissertations at the University of California, Los Angeles, California.

The TED Connection

As a TED and TEDx coach since 2011, Seymour Giordano has worked with a select group of TEDxOrangeCoast speakers. TED—an acronym for technology, education and design—is a nonprofit organization devoted to spreading ideas throughout a global community. (TEDx events are independently organized.)

A range of speakers—from recognized experts to high school students—present innovative, problem-solving ideas on a variety of topics. Due to the organization’s strict, focused format, talks are limited to 18 minutes. And they are posted online where you can view them for free.

Seymour Giordano describes her involvement with TED as “sheer luck.” For

three years she worked with the investor group Tech Coast Angels (TCA) to prepare entrepreneurs who present their business start-up stories to investors in 90 seconds or less. The president of TCA extended an exclusive invitation to her to attend a TEDxOrangeCoast event.

“While I appreciated the offer, what I wanted was the opportunity to write for speakers the TED way.” She asked the TCA president to introduce her to the organizer, and “the rest (as they say) is history,” she says.

TED presenters share their ideas with passion, personality and the essential Toastmaster skills of vocal variety, gestures, effective pauses and storytelling. Seymour

self with your audience,” she says, “you will make a connection.”

Transitional Storytelling

At the heart of Seymour Giordano’s work is what she calls transitional storytelling. She helps experts, such as professors and doctors, speak about their work to make it understandable to a diverse audience which may be unfamiliar with their area of expertise. “My main objective is to take the facts and cloak them in story so that the audience can understand their data, research or life’s work, and will want to leave the theater and share their story,” she says.

“By sharing your authentic self with your audience, you will make a connection.”

— Barbara Seymour Giordano

Giordano uses her experiences on both sides of the camera to coach her clients in behind-the-scene details to make their live, on-camera performances authentic and engaging—from the first word to the last.

Through Seymour Giordano’s coaching, she tells her clients to take time to craft a cohesive, heartfelt story. Preparation is the most important step in the process of creating any speech or presentation, she says. “To me, vocal variation, gestures, pauses and a conversational tone are all inspired by the words on the page.”

Sharing Emotions

Not only does she advise speakers to get to the “why” of a story, Seymour Giordano also encourages speakers to include emotion, to add authenticity and credibility to their talks.

“Audiences are starved for even the smallest of emotions because emotions are in high demand—and in short supply,” she says. “Great stories can build an instant bridge of connection between the speaker and the audience. Therefore, when we share stories that genuinely matter to us, the odds are that they’ll matter to the audience as well.”

Being emotionally connected to a story, she says, and actually feeling the meaning of the words we’re saying, increases the likelihood that the audience will become transfixed by it. “By sharing your authentic

self with your audience,” she says, “you will make a connection.”

She recently used that strategy with Ph.D. candidates at the University of California, Los Angeles who were challenged with turning their dissertations into 10-minute talks.

“When we listen to a speaker deliver dry facts and figures, our immediate reaction is to search for holes in the data or, worse yet, to tune out. Studies [by psychologists Melanie Green and Tim Brock] show that when we relate to a story, it has more influence on our hopes and fears than straight facts or persuasion tactics can ever have. Unlike facts and figures, a great story defangs us, opens our hearts and allows emotions to pour in. We are transported by the twists and turns of a compelling story, and we’re deeply influenced by its profound meaning,” she says.

Seymour Giordano credits her involvement with Toastmasters with her success and creativity as a communications professional.

“For me, speaking is like a sport, and Toastmasters gives me the chance to exercise my speaking game every week. Whether I’m acting as Ah-Counter or grammarian, or giving a speech . . . every single role makes me a better player and team member in business and everyday life.”

Her website tagline, **storieswithheart.com**, reflects Seymour Giordano’s passion. In addition to helping speakers share their ideas and dreams through stories, she

welcomes opportunities to talk about the art of business storytelling and the importance of visual communication in the age of branding. She says she might eventually write a book that encompasses both topics. Her mission, as listed on her website, is clear: “Making the world a more connected place...one story at a time.” ■

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On-camera Tips

Communications coach Barbara Seymour Giordano is as confident and comfortable behind a camera lens as she is in front of it. From her experience as producer and director, she offers the following tips for a professional on-camera presentation.

What may look good in a mirror can be a disaster on a video. Avoid wearing busy patterns or the following colors:

Black: Avoid wearing a black shirt, blouse or sweater (black pants or skirts are OK)

White: Avoid white because it bounces light, making it difficult for the camera to adjust brightness

Red: This color has a bleeding effect on camera

A point that many speakers may not consider is the importance of staying hydrated. Seymour Giordano recommends drinking eight glasses of water throughout the day before you present. “On the day of your presentation, continue to drink water, but make certain it is at room temperature. Ice water tightens vocal cords. Minimize your consumption of sugar, caffeine and alcohol the day before and the day of your presentation. These dehydrate and can give you the cotton-mouth blues.”