

Michelle Day: [00:00:00] Good afternoon everyone, and welcome to the Fletcher Group Rural Center of Excellence's webinar series. Today's session is scheduled to run from 2:00 PM to 3:00 PM Eastern Standard Time. My name is Michelle Day and I'm your moderator for the session, along with Janice Fulkerson and Erica Walker. A couple of brief housekeeping items and then we'll begin.

You entered today's session on mute and your video was off and will remain so for the entirety of the webinar. Your chat feature is located at the bottom right of your screen. Use the drop down feature to communicate with either the panelists only or panelists and attendees. Please direct all questions regarding the webinar content to the Q&A section. Be advised that this meeting is being recorded and will be available to you on our website once it has been transcribed. You can access our website at www.fletchergroup.org. Also, at the [00:01:00] conclusion of today's session, there will be a short survey regarding the webinar content. Your participation in that survey is greatly appreciated and will only take a few moments to complete.

Today's presenter is Fletcher Group's own Matt Johnson, Director of Faith Based Initiatives. Matt works to help faith based organizations grow their impact within the recovery ecosystems in their communities. Previously, he worked as a pastor who empowered his congregation to engage in recovery work in their West Virginia community. Matt founded the Abundant Life Recovery Housing Network, a non profit recovery residence organization in West Virginia. As an experienced founder and operator of Recovery Housing, Matt is a sought after public speaker. Matt, the floor is yours.

Matt Johnson: Well, thank you for joining us today on this webinar as we think about communication and public [00:02:00] speaking and storytelling. As Michelle said, my name is Matt Johnson, and I've worked for Fletcher Group as the Director of Faith Based Initiatives for a little over two years. And it's a phenomenal honor to work with our team of folks and my colleagues who have a variety of superpowers. When I came on the team, I started to ask, what's everybody's superpower?

Because I've learned that so many of our folks have just phenomenal areas that they understand and help communicate. But it's also always a phenomenal honor to work with you and to work with the clients that we serve because you're doing such tremendous work in communities, bringing hope and healing and being agents of transformation and change. And the work that you do changes and impacts so many, and so the opportunity to walk with you in that process and to see those stories happen is a, is an incredible thing. Part of what I hope that you'll get out of today is an [00:03:00] opportunity or a better understanding as to how you tell. Those stories of hope and change and life that you get to share.

There are opportunities as operators and as recovery coaches and as individuals to share these stories in powerful ways. Whether it's with a local group, or a faith community, or a government entity, um, or just with a potential funder. How you tell the story of the work that you do is a significant thing. And I hope today you'll have a little bit of, uh, a few more tips in your toolbox that you can use as you tell these stories. So when I was 15, I lived in, um, Appalachia. I lived in, in rural Pennsylvania and, uh, I got certified as a, as a, as a United

Methodist Lay Speaker. And so. I'm not sure what churches are going to let a 15 year old come in, but they let me come in and they let me preach.

Part of the reason that they let me preach was because my dad was their preacher, and [00:04:00] so he had numerous churches, and sometimes he needed help, and I would, I would go. So one of the first Sundays that I was preaching, I had prepared, I had worked, I had developed what I thought was going to be a really, life changing, powerful message.

And as I stepped into the pulpit of this little church and began to preach, somebody in the front row fell sound asleep. Looked very similar to this. Somebody was just out cold. I was devastated, right? I had to watch this. I watched this person, like, sleep the whole way through this thing that I had worked so hard on. And I thought, maybe I'm not cut out to do this. So I went home and I sat down at my table for lunch. And my dad said, how did things go? And I said, not great. Um, so and so in the front row fell asleep. And dad said, Oh, she does that every week. It's her medications. That wasn't you. That happens every single Sunday.

Don't feel bad. And that was one of those moments where I was like, you should have told me this before, [00:05:00] you know, this would have been helpful information to have before I started, because that's kind of my worst fear. is getting up in front of a group and not being able to share in such a way that allows me to communicate with impact. So since then, I've, I've studied and I've worked and I've learned to try and become a better public speaker and hopefully today we'll get to share some of that. Now, I know that for a lot of folks, public speaking is one of those things that we Fear. It's one of those things that we do not enjoy. And when people say that they're going to have to do some public speaking, immediately the nerves start.

And I'm going to tell you, anything I share with you today is not going to take the nerves away. In fact, if you don't get nerves when you're public speaking, you're probably not doing it right. Because there should be some energy, some nerves, something that kind of bubbles up inside of you and makes you say, I want to do this well. I want [00:06:00] to make sure that what I'm communicating matters, but 75 percent of Americans, as I've looked at some studies, 75 percent of Americans say that public speaking is one of their greatest fears. That's a pretty big number. 36 percent of Americans say that they are more afraid of the dentist. And so most people would rather have someone drill into their head than speak in front of a group of people.

25 or so percent of Americans say they're afraid of bugs and spiders. And 8.5 percent of Americans say that they're afraid of zombies. So as best as I can tell, most people would rather have a zombie dentist working on their teeth in a room full of bugs than they would stand up and make a presentation. I don't know if that's how the numbers work. I'm not on the research team. We can, we can verify that later, but it does seem like there is some, some concern and some fear that we have when we have the opportunity to speak. [00:07:00] But the thing is, we have to see these opportunities to speak as a true opportunity.

It's an opportunity for us to engage, to connect, and to tell the powerful story of the good work that we're seeing happen, or things that need to change and invitations to be part of that conversation. One of the things that I always encourage people to think about is when you have an opportunity to speak to a group of people, you want to speak for engagement and speak for impact.

You want to speak for engagement and speak for impact. And at the core of any kind of public presentation that we make, we have to know kind of the purpose behind it. And I think there is an underlying purpose behind many presentations, behind many opportunities for public speaking. I think that the purpose of much of our public speaking should be to engage, to [00:08:00] inspire, and to transform. To engage, to inspire, and to transform. I say all the time that we need to speak for transformation, not information. We need to speak for transformation, not information. Because we don't just want people to know something different when they leave. That's going to be beneficial. But we want people to begin to think about the world and the work that's happening around them in a new and different way.

We want people to begin to understand things that go beyond facts, that go beyond numbers. Because often, while those numbers and facts can be impactful, they're not quite enough. This is a quote from Luigi Pirandello, and he says, A fact is like a sack. It won't stand up if it's empty. To make it stand up, first you have to put in all the resources and feelings that caused it in the first place. Now I'm not telling you that you shouldn't do your research. You should. [00:09:00] You should do your research. And you should have the facts, and you should have the ideas, and you should have the data to back up what you're saying. But just presenting the data, or the research, or the numbers, or the facts isn't going to move anybody.

It's not going to be enough. You need to be able to surround that with the conversations, with the compassion, with the energy, with the reasoning and the resources that you understand, that you feel, so that you can communicate clearly to folks that want to hear it. Don't just give facts. Communicate for transformation, not just for information.

Also, when you think about this and kind of the way that you engage people, the goal in this is a deep sense of audience engagement. You want people with you. You want people to, to track with you and to connect with you and to be engaged with [00:10:00] you. Because when your audience is engaged, they can envision ways the world might be different based on what you share.

When the audience is engaged, they can envision ways the world might be different. based on what you share. See, this is one of the powerful things that comes from public speaking. We have this opportunity to stand in front of people and to begin to create a new reality, a new hope, a new idea. Rabbi, Rabbi Abraham Joseph Heschel says that words create worlds.

And so the words that we speak can begin to create these new Ways of thinking about things in these new ways of doing things. When you have an opportunity to speak, you are engaging your audience and you're inviting them to join you in this deepening reality. You're inviting them to participate with you in the work that you are doing that you know [00:11:00] deeply matters to your community, to your residents, to the people that you meet, to the families that

they touch. You are inviting folks to say, we can do this together. And so a lot of what you want to begin to do in this process is to engage your audience and to do that well, so that they can begin to dream with you of a new and different reality. I don't necessarily see a lot of public speaking as teaching opportunities.

I think teaching is important. I think there are opportunities for it, but public speaking in many of our ways, in many of the presentations that we do, it's this opportunity to engage folks and to bring them along with us into this new vision of what we're creating. So in order to do this, in order to do this well, you have to know why you're talking in the first place.

What is it that has brought you to this point that you [00:12:00] think you've got something to share? And one of the things that I really encourage people to do when they begin to prepare a presentation or to prepare to speak in front of a group of folks is to know the one thing. Know the one thing. I often ask folks, what is the one point, or the one idea that you want your audience to carry with them after you've concluded? What do you want them to rethink, or better understand, or begin to question? What do you want them to begin to think about in a new and different way? It's really important to identify that one major idea that you want your folks to better understand because often we can stand up and start throwing this idea and this idea and this idea and this idea and when people hear us it feels like we're drinking out of a fire hydrant.

Many folks I know who are doing this important work across our nation are energetic and excited and they've [00:13:00] got ideas and they've got a vision. And if there's not just one thing that they can bubble or boil it down to, it's going to be too much for most people to absorb. What's the one thing that you want your audience to walk away with?

What's the one thing that you want them to understand? Maybe if you think back to a powerful speech or presentation that you heard, you can point out two things. One thing that continues to stand out, one thing that the rest of that was shaped on. So when you sit down to start to prepare, when you sit down to start to come up with what you want to say. Know the one thing. Know what it is that you want your folks, the folks that you're sharing with, to know. The question you need to ask yourself then is not just, what do you want your listeners to hear, but what do you want your listeners to feel? What do you want your listeners to feel? [00:14:00] Um, do you want them to feel a sense of, of hope?

Do you want them to understand the challenge, the despair, the difficulty? Do you want them to, to feel a sense of, of compassion? Do you want them to feel a sense of joyfulness? What do you want them to feel? It's not just what we want them to hear. Because we're not just trying to communicate with someone's way of thinking, we're trying to communicate with their, their way of understanding with their hearts too. Uh, and so we want to know, what is it that you want your listeners to feel? And when they leave, what is it that you want them to have experienced? In order to do this well, you need to know, and care about your audience. You need to know and care about your audience. When you think about the people that you're going to be speaking with, whether it's a Rotary Group, whether it's a group of [00:15:00] County Commissioners, whether it's a group that has come to your, you know, event where you're going to talk about your, your organization, whether you're sitting to talk to your

Board of Directors and you're telling them about the work that's happened in the last month or the quarter, know who they are and, and care about them.

And begin to think about why they came. Why did they show up? One of the things that we have to realize, and I'm sure you've realized this, is that one of the most valuable things that most people have is their time. And so when you have an opportunity to speak to an audience of people, why did that audience take their time to show up? Why did you take your time to show up today? What is it that made you say, I'm going to take an hour out of my day on a Thursday afternoon to attend this webinar and hopefully walk away with something? I want to honor your time, but I hope that you are going to get something out of it.

I, as I've designed this presentation, I keep thinking, what is it that people are going to want? Why [00:16:00] are they going to show up? Why do they want to be a part of this? Not only do we, do we kind of begin to think about that? But we have to learn to respect their time and their life experience. Do not talk down to your audience. Do not talk down to your audience. Respect their time and their life experience. I don't, I don't know if you ever had anybody talk down to you as if you don't know what you're talking about or as if you don't have an idea. Or, as if you don't understand, but that is one of the most, uh, can be one of the most infuriating moments, can it?

And it just turns us off from any further conversation. Respect your audience. Respect their time. Respect their life experience. Respect where they're coming from. And so part of what you're doing as you're beginning to shape a presentation or shape, uh, shape an opportunity is to think about, um, is this a group of folks that is familiar anything in the recovery sphere? Or am I the first person to talk [00:17:00] about it? Is this a group of folks that understands, uh, business or community leadership or community, civic and community engagement? Respect what those folks bring to the table and treat it as an opportunity for you to learn from them as well. This isn't just a one sided conversation.

After you present and share, there are going to be questions. There's going to be time for you to chat and to learn and to talk. And there are things that you can grow from. Respect the experience, the time, the things that they've done. And then work to make that connection, uh, through the words you use, through the stories and through your actions. And that's what we're going to talk about here in a second. Make that connection with your audience that makes them, that engage that makes them feel understood and that makes them want to come along with you. I don't think very often that public speaking changes the mind or the opinion of anyone in the audience.

Um, I've, I've spoken in, in, in [00:18:00] big settings. I've spoken in small settings and I'm not sure how often I've ever changed somebody's mind. And I think that's particularly true in our world right now where there's a lot of, um, of disagreement and a lot of polarization and a lot of challenges. I don't think that our goal should be to change someone's mind. I think our goal should be to create curiosity and interest and to get people thinking. So maybe when they leave, after hearing your presentation, they're going to be more curious, they're going to be more thoughtful, they're going to be more interested, and they're going to be willing to start to engage in a different way.

Um, I'm going to, I'm going to, before I jump into all this, I'm going to pause for a moment because I've talked now for 19 minutes straight, and that's, that's almost too long. That's almost against one of my rules. And I'm going to say, Janice, is there any, is there any questions or anything that you think [00:19:00] would be helpful for us to address now?

Janice Fulkerson: Matt, we do have a question. Someone was surprised when you said, our goal is not to change somebody's mind. That created a little pause. So it was, um, you know, that thought about creating curiosity and maybe some follow up was, um, a surprise to one of our listeners.

Matt Johnson: And again, it's not that we're not going to engage in more conversation, but often when we're in those, public speaking moments or those presentation moments, um, if someone has a deeply held belief, anything you say about, about to them in the front of the room is likely to, it's not likely to change their mind. At least that's, that's been my experience. I think what is, is, is an invitation or a willingness to have more conversation. And so when you're presenting, part of what you're doing is you're creating opportunities for deeper [00:20:00] engagement and you're creating opportunities for, for additional conversation so that there can be, uh, some, some better connection and some better conversation.

So there can be some listening that goes both ways. Um, I think that's an important part of this whole thing is to, is to make sure that we're listening and learning in these settings. And so creating that curiosity and that interest and that opportunity is important. If you're speaking at a, at a Rotary Club or, um, to a group of county commissioners, don't just speak and run off, uh, stay around to engage the conversation and to engage the individuals so that your audience can, can learn from you so you can learn from your audience and so they can know you care. And that's an important thing.

Janice Fulkerson: One other question, uh, came in and it is, how do you get to know your audience? If it's an organization that you're not deeply involved in, how do you get to know them?

Matt Johnson: Yeah, that's a great question. So it depends on, on, uh, one of the things I would start with [00:21:00] when someone asks me to come speak, um, if I get invited someplace is to say, well, who, who's going to be there? Who's going to be invited to be there? How are people finding out about this gathering, about this opportunity, and where are they coming from? So is this a regional thing? Is this a larger gathering? What kind of groups do they represent? And so you can start to think about that to some extent as you, um, as you talk to the folks that are in Charge and the folks that kind of have helped facilitate this opportunity, as you think about the kind of groups that they represent, as you think about your experience with those groups previously, or if you have an opportunity, and this is really a great opportunity, if you're, if you know you're going to be speaking somewhere and in a month or six weeks and you can go and listen and learn, that's really helpful.

You can also do a lot of research online and [00:22:00] kind of learn about the groups that are meeting and who's going to be there. Um, I was speaking at a, at a Rotary Club a year or so

ago, and I thought, well, I wonder who's going to show up. And so I went on their Facebook page and I found the folks that were commenting and that were engaged in the conversation there on the Rotary Club and said, okay, that person works here and that person does this and that person does this. And I know that person. And so that's going to, you know, The next thing you know, I've, I've developed a little bit of an idea as to who's going to be there. And so a lot of those questions that you ask ahead of time can help direct the conversation and direct where you're headed, uh, so that you know who to expect and, and who to be there.

So, you know, is this a group of, of peers? Is this a group with lived experience? Is this a group that has no idea what I'm talking about when it comes to any of that? And we can start to have that conversation.

Janice Fulkerson: Thank you, Matt.

Matt Johnson: Yeah, absolutely. Thanks for the questions. All right, I'm going to keep moving. You keep throwing questions in the, in the, [00:23:00] in the, in the chat or telling me the ways that you think I'm wrong. I'm very open to that. So here we go. So when we think about how we make this connection with the folks that we're speaking with, uh, we want to do it with a, with a great sense of authenticity.

And, and being authentic and true to ourselves is really important. And so making sure that we're not just trying to copy somebody else, that we're not trying to be the best other person that we can be, but we're being authentic about our experience, about our time, about our resources. That's a really powerful thing. If we are not being authentic, people can sniff that out pretty quickly and they don't want much to do with us. Um, I think about The great writer of our time, Dr. Seuss, who says, "Today you are you, that is truer than true. There is no one alive who is you er than you." That's of course in his [00:24:00] opus, Happy Birthday to You.

Um, I think that for you to be you, And for you to own your story, and for you to own the things that you have to share, and for you to do it in your way, is the most valuable and powerful thing that you, that you've got. The story that you tell, uh, about who you are, and just being yourself, really, really matters. Um, be authentic, be true, tell your own stories. There is very little that bothers me more than when I hear a canned story. Tell your own stories, tell your own experiences, tell your own things. Those carry a lot of power, a lot of weight. You often, as you're speaking, want to change your vocal variety and to be mindful of your pace.

This is more of a technical point or a technical tip, but it's one to be aware of. I have a deep memory of one of my professors in grad school who'd walk in, [00:25:00] put his papers down in front of us and just start like this. "This is the day that we will begin to talk about the theology." And that was it. He didn't look up the whole time. He didn't make eye contact and he never changed his variety, his pace, his cadence. Now you want to think about all those components. While you design your presentation, that's, that's important, but then you have to start thinking about what you actually present and how you're going to do the presenting.

Um, keep the attention of your audience by managing your cadence, by managing your pace and your tone, and by creating excitement with your voice. One of the most important tips that I give folks that maybe are not seasoned public speakers is when you are in front of a group, talk slower than you think you need to, because the likelihood is you're [00:26:00] nervous. You're feeling the jitters and your heart's pumping. And so you get up and you're ready to say things. You're ready to go fast. You're ready to kind of get through your notes and to keep things moving, to talk slower than you think you need to, because you know the information in front of you. The people that are there listening and learning from you don't.

And so that pacing is really important. Manage that cadence, that pace. Manage your tone. You can, you can bring your tone down. You can bring your tone up. You can change your excitement. You can change your focus. You can bring things to a pause. To give people a chance to think. Managing all of these components keeps people engaged with you and allows them to continue to hear what you have to say. So think about where you're going to put a pause. Think about where you're going to speed up or, or slow down. Think about [00:27:00] where you're going to allow your voice to get more excited and less excited so that people can engage. You, you can draw those things into your notes. If you need to, you can write in the page, the blanks and the, and the pauses, you can put that there so that there's clarity around how you do that.

One of the things that's going to be the most powerful tool that you have in public speaking is your ability to make eye contact with folks and to see folks and that is why this particular presentation right now that I'm giving you is a little challenging because I have no idea what you're doing. I don't know whether you're sending an email while you've got this in the background or whether you're petting your dog or whether you're talking to somebody in your office or whether you're just daydreaming about the nice day outs. I don't know. I don't know what's happening. And it's so hard when you can't make eye contact. It's so hard for me as a presenter to keep up my energy and to keep up my flow and to keep going because I just, I can't see what's [00:28:00] happening in the room. And part of what I do when I present is I become so familiar with my material that I can work to read my room and to pay attention to the people and to make that eye contact so that people know

that I'm engaged with them and they can be engaged with me. Um, one of the, one of the, the, the best things I ever did when I was learning to public speak and becoming a, a, a better presenter was I took the No Notes Challenge. I took the No Notes Challenge. Uh, I had a, a, a professor in grad school who used to say, if you bring notes with you, you're speaking to the notes and not to the people. By the way, in case you're curious, these aren't actually, these are just blank pieces of paper because I took the No Notes Challenge and so I don't have any notes. I think it's so important for us to become confident and practiced [00:29:00] and able to stand in front of a group and to speak from our heart and to speak with the passion that we bring.

Now again, this is, this doesn't mean that you haven't done your work. By the time you stand in front of a group, you've done your research, you've done your writing, you've thought through your presentation, you know how it's going to flow, you know what's going to happen, but you, you know, it's so well, and it's become part of you that you don't need your notes. You don't have to write it down. This is probably wild and daunting and you think I'm

crazy for bringing it up, and that is fine. You may not want to try a 20 minute presentation without notes, but you may start with five and begin to build that skill and that ability to not communicate to the paper, but to communicate to the people.

Can you take the No Notes Challenge? I think it's worth it. I promise. What's always funny is sometimes you take the no notes challenge and you, you have an opportunity to present. I used to have this [00:30:00] happen all the time. Somebody come up and say, did you just, did you just make that whole thing up? No, this is probably the seventh time I've said it out loud. You know, I've, I've practiced it and I've rehearsed it and I went over it and I've tweaked it and no, it wasn't just made up, right? It took the, it took the time and the effort and the energy to prepare. Uh, but the, the lack of notes makes it so much more impactful because it allows you to make that eye contact with your audience.

One of the things you're going to do as you speak is you're going to about your body language and the gestures that you use. Um, when you walk up to present somewhere. Walk up with confidence. Believe that you actually have something to say. People invited you for a reason or you have come because there is something pressing on your, uh, on your heart, on your mind that you want to make sure people understand. Walk up with a sense of confidence that says there is something here for me to say. Don't be [00:31:00] timid, don't be arrogant, but walk up with a sense of confidence and hold your body as such. Hold your body as such, as someone who has something to say and people can listen. You'll see, and I've been doing it, as we've talked throughout this whole presentation, I talk with my hands.

And sometimes those gestures are good, and sometimes they're distracting, and now that I'm bringing them up, you may be distracted by them. But one of the great ways to practice how you hold your hands, whether you, so it's not just putting them in your pocket or crossing across your body or whatever it is to do this. And you can do this with me. Okay. I want you to hold your hands out and I want you to imagine that in your hands. That in your hands is a, is a, is a, is a, a beautiful present, maybe a ring, maybe a, maybe a thing of great value that you are going to give to someone you love. And when you do that, you're going to hold, hold it out to [00:32:00] them as a, as a way to offer it to them.

And in doing that, your face is going to read this sense of, of compassion and love. Your hands are going to read that, right? That's a beautiful thing. Now hold your hands, continue to hold your hands like that. What if you're holding this guy in your hands, right? All of a sudden things are going to change. Maybe it's, maybe it looks different. Maybe your face is going to respond differently. There's a big difference between holding a toad and holding something of value. Both of them are important. And so you can practice your hand motions, your body language, your gestures by using your imagination, because that immerses your whole being in the presentation, rather than just your words, it invites people to participate in a new way.

So making this connection. means being authentic, changing your vocal variety and watching your pace, making [00:33:00] eye contact, taking the No Notes Challenge, being aware of your body language and gestures, and then watching for bumps and landing the plane. Watch for bumps and land the plane. Uh, in my role with the Fletcher Group, I travel a fair amount, and I, I live in Morgantown, West Virginia, and Morgantown, West Virginia is not a hub of

air travel by any stretch of the imagination. And so for me to travel, I have to get to Pittsburgh, but sometimes getting to Pittsburgh is difficult. You've got to get there, you've got to park, the security lines in Pittsburgh are, are a nightmare. And so I've recently realized that it's probably cheaper for me to fly from Morgantown to Pittsburgh and then fly from Pittsburgh, where I'm actually going, than it is for me to drive and park and deal with all the hassle.

So the first day I went out to get on the plane at the Morgantown Regional Airport, and I don't know what I was expecting, but I wasn't expecting this. This is a Cessna 208. It's an old cargo plane that has [00:34:00] one propeller on the front. And, uh, when we got there, it had, I think I had 10 seats. And the pilot, the pilot met us, we walked out on the tarmac.

I got on the plane, he told me where to sit, told me what seat to sit in. I sat down and he said, "Hey, can you close the door?" And I thought this is a different, a different kind of flying experience when I am, when I am securing the cabin for takeoff. Right. That is a, that is not something I ha I was gonna expect to do. So we, we get, we, he starts the propeller, he starts taxiing down the runway and he says, "Listen folks. It's hot. It's July. There's lots of thermals. There's going to be bumps. Watch for bumps, and you'll know when we're going to land, okay?" I think this is such a phenomenal thing for public speakers to hear, because we have to be ready for bumps in that presentation.

We have to practice our transitions. And one of the things I say to folks is, if I'm going to write, anything down and take it up with me, it will be the sentences that allow me to [00:35:00] transition from one topic to the next because that is where you can quickly lose people. Those are sentences that I carefully craft and make sure that I know like it's my job because that's where I can lose people.

Practice those transitions so that you bring people along with you and they don't just kind of drift off into into, into their own thoughts, right? Practice those transitions so that people stay engaged and connected. And so that people kind of follow the flow of your conversation and always, always, always know when to land the plane. Know when to land the plane. Have you ever heard someone make a presentation and you think this is it, they're going to finish, they're going to wrap it up, and they don't, and they just keep going, and after they do that about the third time, you're thinking about the thing you were supposed to do, and the thing you thought you were going to do when you get done, and you're thinking about all, and you're not paying a bit of attention.

Know when to land the plane and [00:36:00] respect people's time. Um, this is an ironic thing for me to say, But I'm going to say it anyway, the, the, the, the, the attention span of, of most folks is not as long as we think it is, particularly, particularly as we're seeing people start to absorb clips and TikToks and YouTube videos and that they just kind of find quickly. I think that the attention span of most people is about 22 minutes. The reason I think it's about 22 minutes is because that is the length of a sitcom. Um, if you really want to stretch it, maybe people can do 44. At 2. 20, I stopped my presentation and asked for questions because I thought we needed a break.

Because I had almost talked 22 minutes straight and that's too long. Know when to land the plane. Know what is going to make the most impact in the right amount of time. It doesn't have to be a long, drawn out presentation. It doesn't have to be hours and hours. [00:37:00] A story that you tell in just a few minutes can make a great impact. And know when to stop. I will also tell you this. I think that one of these little tips that people can always use whenever you're making a presentation is never to say the word, Finally. Or, my last point. Or, I'm wrapping up. Because as soon as you say that, people's brains turn off. Finally, they're like, okay, I'm off to somewhere else.

Keep them guessing. When you're ready to land the plane, land the plane. But don't kind of make a big to do out of it, or they're going to miss the whole landing. And sometimes, the landing is the most fun. I'm getting better flying on Cessna 208s. I get less nervous. I still get kind of nervous, but I get less nervous and I'm better at securing the door. But I'm figuring out how to watch for bumps and land the plane. All right. These are just some of these tips that you can start to use as as you think about the actual presentation [00:38:00] that you're going to give. But I also want you to think about the stories that you're going to tell when you stand in front of the folks that you're going to, to share with.

Remember, we're not just sharing facts. We're not just sharing stats. There is something that a story can communicate about That a fact cannot. And so as you gather in front of, uh, in front of these different organizations and different groups, here are some kind of ways that you can shape story that's going to give life and impact to what you have to say.

One of those stories is a, a who, who am I story, because if you don't know the people that you're standing in front of. If you're in a room with people you don't know, they may have their arms crossed and they may be real cynical of what you, of who you are and what you're going to bring to this conversation. And if you can tell a story about who you are that helps people kind of catch for a moment who you are and some of your life experience, [00:39:00] they're much more likely to trust you. They're much more likely to trust you. Um, telling us a personal story helps to address that cynicism and an uncertain audience.

And often it reveals something about you that otherwise would be invisible and that people might not know. Now, this doesn't have to be a deeply vulnerable story. It doesn't have to be oversharing, but it does begin to give people a picture of who you are. And it leads into the next kind of story, which is the kind of story that says, Why am I here? Why have I stopped in front of this group or stood in front of this group of people? Why have I been invited? The stories that you tell people about why you're here, help them to know what you're doing, why you've come. Are you educating? Are you asking for money? Are you sharing a story of success? And it helps people understand why you are engaged in this kind of powerful work.

Um, part of the story that I often tell when I'm presenting at a, at a new place is I, I tell the story of, [00:40:00] um, realizing that in the community I lived in, there wasn't enough housing, there wasn't enough recovery housing, and I tell the story of seeing people come into, uh, the 12 step recovery group, faith based recovery group meetings that, that my community had started and watching them be there two or three weeks and then not see them again and hearing, oh, they went back out and thinking, I, I don't want to see people die.

I don't want to see people die. I want to see people live. And so for me, I have this kind of burning desire, uh, to see people have a transformative, life changing experience. And so I poured my time and my energy and my life into that. And often when I would stand up in front of a group to talk about that, I would say, I'm here because I want you to know that there are opportunities for us to make a difference in this community when it comes to housing. Why are you here? What are you going to ask them for? What are you going to draw them in with? Why did you get into this [00:41:00] work? What is it that pushed you to get into the work that you're doing that's transforming communities and changing lives?

One of the stories that you need to tell is a story of the vision or of the work that you're doing. Um, when I was an operator and when I was working as an, uh, as an operator regularly, whenever my residents, we'd have kind of an all house meeting and about 25, 27 residents, we'd have a kind of a, a, a weekly meeting where everybody would get together and we'd have a 12 step meeting, and I share important information, but I, I tried for a while, um, each week handing out a paper. And on that paper, the resident got to write their name, and then it got to write, I asked them to share two or three things that they were grateful for, and so they'd write those things down. And then I would say to them, What is the best thing that happened to you this week? Please feel free to brag.

What is the best thing that happened to you this week? Please feel free to brag. And [00:42:00] I would get stories of new jobs and new opportunities and milestones in recovery and reconnections with family. And you know the stories because you hear them too. You get to see those miracles up close and personal, just like I did. At the bottom, I would ask them, would you allow me to share this story, uh, with a group, with a, with a different group or on social media and then have them check yes or no and sign it as kind of a release so that I knew that by telling a story that a resident had shared with me, I wasn't overstepping my bounds.

Um, gather that information and gather the stories that you're allowed to tell so that you can tell the stories of success and of, of impact and of the work that you're doing so that you can make sure that people know the good work that's happening in your organization and in your community. Like I said, um, be willing to de identify that story. And so you're not going to use somebody's name. You're not going to, I mean, you're still [00:43:00] protecting their confidentiality. You're still protecting their, their, uh, their reason for being there, but you have been had permission to say this week at a resident, tell me a phenomenal story about getting to see their kids for the first time in six months.

And what that was like for them. And I got to share those stories because not everybody gets to see the miracles like we do. So tell those stories and help people understand the impact that you're making. The other thing that you can do as you're telling these stories is you can tell stories that speak to value. And that demonstrate the values and action that you see. One of the stories that was told in my women's recovery house, um, by our, by our female program staff, and it's told pretty consistently about every two years, excuse me, about every two to three months, not every two years, but every two to three months, there's a story about elephants.

And I don't know if you know this, but, but elephants [00:44:00] are a matriarchal group. And so the, the leaders of the elephant herds are, are the matriarchs. And, um, the elephants, when one of the other elephants is sick or having a baby or struggling, they, they take her out of the herd and they take her away from all the chaos and they surround her in a circle. And they kick up dirt to make sure that no predators can come through, to make sure that no predators know that she's there. And they protect that elephant, uh, while they stand and repair and heal. And, uh, one of the stories that's often told in that women's recovery house is, we want to be a place where we are elephants for each other, where we protect, where we encircle, where we surround each other.

And if you walk into that house, there are elephant statues here and there, there's pictures of elephants, because that's one of those values. [00:45:00] How do you tell stories about your values? So that you can communicate clearly to people the work that you're doing and what you believe. These are the kind of stories that when you're in front of a group you need to know and you need to have. Who am I? Why am I here? What's the vision? What are we doing? And what are the ways that we're putting those values into action? As you have those stories, that's going to be a really powerful thing. Once you kind of know the stories you need to tell, you can begin to do the work of crafting your stories.

And we've talked about a lot of this. This is just a really slick little graphic that illustrates that you understand your audience, you know, their, their target, you talk about their needs and their interests, the pain points, and begin to tailor the story accordingly to that. Not tell a different story, but tailor the story differently to that. You craft a compelling narrative. So you develop a clear, structured, emotionally engaging narrative that captures your audience's attention and effectively conveys your [00:46:00] message. You invite them into the story and invite them to be part of the process. You incorporate details that are appropriate so that it brings your story into the real world.

We're not just telling the story of somebody else way off in the distance, but we're telling a real story. And you highlight the significance. Why does this matter? Why is this story relevant? And help the audience resonate with it. And when you've done that, you practice, you rehearse, and you refine so that the story that you're ready to tell is ready to be told in an impactful way. The best way to improve your public speaking. Is to practice, to listen and to find feedback. When I would, when I would speak, you know, weekly or more often, I would, uh, have a mirror in my office and I would practice in front of that mirror. And so I would, uh, write and write what I was gonna talk about and develop my, develop my presentation.

And then I would stand in front of the mirror and I would practice so I could practice my facial gestures, so I could practice my [00:47:00] hand motions, so I could practice what I have to say. Practice in front of a mirror and watch yourself so that you see how you are presenting to the world around you. Listen to yourself. If you want to get really good at this, Record yourself doing this and listen to yourself. This is something that, that I've learned that really good storytellers, stand up comics, some of the greatest storytellers that we have in our country do. They listen to their, they listen to their set, they listen to their stories so they can understand what works and what doesn't so they can get better.

Um, when I was, when I was working in a church, I would preach every Sunday. Monday morning I would come in and the first thing I would do is listen to myself. I don't know that anybody likes the sound of their own voice, but it became a powerful way to, to make sure that I was growing as a public speaker. If you want to grow as a public speaker, listen to yourself. Find the recordings, listen to them over and over again and think, I'm going to do this different or better next time. And then find feedback. Find people that will actually give you real life advice. Honest [00:48:00] to goodness feedback, because in a most public speaking settings, folks, aren't going to do that for you.

They're going to walk out and they're going to shake your hand and say, that's a great story you told, or thanks for sharing. And they're going to move on. Find somebody that will actually help you become better at what you want to do. Uh, and, and one of the things that I love to do, and I, I do it for some of our colleagues at the Fletcher Group, and I'd be willing to, to work with some of our, our rural clients. If you've got a presentation that's gonna be important and you want to, to have somebody give you feedback, um, you can reach out to the Fletcher Group and I'd be happy to, to set up a meeting, to kinda hear what you're gonna do and to offer some feedback, if that would be helpful. These are these tips, right?

This is me landing the plane. These are the tips that we that we're going to think about as we create the stories, as we learn to communicate well, and as we tell the stories that people can hear so that we can make sure that the message of hope and healing and life that we have to give gets told in ways that are [00:49:00] impactful and meaningful. Questions? Comments? Thoughts? What do we have, Janice?

Janice Fulkerson: Oh my gosh, Matt. We have lots of questions. And so, um, the first one, um, you answered because it was really about do you practice in front of the mirror, in front of others, in front of videos? So you answered that one. Um, another question is about your process. Do you use the same process every time for all your presentations as far as preparation?

Matt Johnson: I do. And I am not a, I am not a manuscript writer. So I don't write a manuscript. Um, I am a, I'm much more of a vocal processor and I, I, so I talk out loud. Um, You know, if you would have, if you would have had a camera on my office this morning, you would have seen me pacing around giving this presentation.

So I, I, I have a tendency to, to maybe write an outline and to begin to fill that in, to make sure that the, [00:50:00] the transitions that I have from one thing to the next are pretty set. So that I can keep my audience with me in the midst of that flow. Uh, and then I, and then I continue to practice vocally over and over and over again until I feel confident with what I have to say. Again, I'm not a manuscript guy because I don't think reading something to somebody benefits them a lot. But I do think that having that outline so you know where you're going in that process is beneficial.

Janice Fulkerson: Thank you, Matt. Um, one of the things I do, and this is kind of a, a weird one, is I put up a flip chart in one of my hallways. So when I'm walking around the office or the house, or I'm doing something and a, a di idea pops into my head and I, and I think, oh,

when I do that presentation, I wanna make sure I do X put it on a flip chart, and then as I'm walking around, it's always a visual, uh, reminder of what I'm gonna try to accomplish.

Matt Johnson: I do a lot of, do flip charts or mind mapping, any of those kind of [00:51:00] things where I just kind of throw it, throw information on the page and start to draw lines and swiggles. And it looks like one of those murder boards that you see on, on, uh, you know, on a, on a crime scene television show, but yeah, this and this, and this connects to this, and I want to make sure to say this. And then that kind of mess of that visual mess goes to an outline. That outline goes to vocal practice and we get there. Absolutely.

Janice Fulkerson: Right. A couple more questions. Um, how do you manage distractors? The disruptive or combative audience members who, uh, maybe want to dominate the conversation?

Matt Johnson: Yeah. So when we're, particularly when, when, uh, when you're doing question and answer and what that looks like, if you are facilitating a question and answer process, process. So this isn't if you are the panelist, but if you're the facilitator, you're the person with the mic and somebody has a question in the audience and you take it to them and you hand the mic, first thing I do is I step back, right? Give them some space. Um, [00:52:00] as that person goes beyond the length of time that they need, that they should, or they start to get, uh, combative, um, I just slowly start to step closer.

Uh, because most people don't, you know, we'll start to feel that, that, uh, that personal kind of space and they'll, they'll say, Oh, I'm, maybe I'm out of line. And so I don't often have to just grab a mic or, you know, there are moments when that happens, right? When, when something is so out of line, but just start to step a little closer and somebody goes, Oh, I'm, I'm going too long. And then maybe they'll hand the, hand the mic back. Um, when I'm working with, uh, when I'm speaking to a group and there are distractors or there are people, things that could be a distraction, I often find, you know, depending on the size of the room, three or four or five people who are really tuned in to me and they really want to listen.

And so sometimes, boom, I work those, I work those corners. Those places, and I watch for those [00:53:00] people that are with me, because that gives me energy, and that helps me, uh, make sure that I'm staying on track. Uh, so those are kind of two things that I do when I think about those folks. If there's somebody being distracting, if somebody falls asleep in the front row, I try not to look at them, but I look at the folks that are really kind of encouraging me, um, giving me the feedback that says, Hey, this is something I wanted to hear about.

Janice Fulkerson: And I think a fair response too is let's take that offline and have a conversation afterwards. Absolutely.

Matt Johnson: Absolutely. And if part of what you're doing is creating curiosity and, and conversation with what you present, that's a powerful thing.

Janice Fulkerson: Another question goes back to storytelling. Ashley is asking about how we use stories in our socials and other ways in presentations. When some people feel like if

we're using recovery stories, that it could be [00:54:00] exploitive and maybe put pressure or negative stress on our clients who maybe don't have that success story. So can you talk about using sensitive stories?

Matt Johnson: Often the stories that we try and tell or that I try and tell or have told are, are from folks who are further along in their recovery process. Maybe they're folks that have been, um, at the, at the residence for a longer period of time, and they're becoming senior residents whose stories and examples are, are those that other residents can look up to. Again, I never tell a story unless I have that, that resident's explicit permission to do so. And I would never want to tell a story that in any way, shape, or form, um, embarrasses or, um, humiliates or shames somebody. And so, um, often if I'm gonna use a story, whether it's on social media, [00:55:00] whether it's in a presentation, before I tell it, I run it by the resident and say, Hey, if I, if I say this, is this okay? And sometimes they say, No, I'd rather you not say that. Or sometimes they'd say, Hey, you need to fix that idea or fix that thing.

Or I've actually been here since August and not June. You know, they give you that feedback so that your story can be true and factual. They become fact checkers because they are the experts in their story. And so I think that's part of it. I think part of it is just is, is we don't necessarily want to tell the stories of people that say, can you believe what these people have done? But we want to celebrate the good work that's happening and the good gifts that people are experiencing. And so finding that balance is really challenging. That's why I think it's really important to make sure that we have permission before sharing a story that's not ours to tell. Even better, listen, the best thing that you can do.

The best thing that you can do is to, if they're willing, have that person come with you and tell their own story. [00:56:00] Um, you don't have to tell it and, and they can come share that. And that is a powerful thing. Um, I got an opportunity to watch one of the clients that we work with at The Fletcher Group, um, share her story to a, to a state, um, a state, committee at a, you know, a state house. And it would follow it up all this kind of, she'd followed up all this kind of testimony and stats and numbers. And she's told her story. And when she was done, the committee was visibly moved. It wasn't that somebody told it for her. It's that she had a chance to tell it. So if at all possible, use, bring the folks with you, use their words, allow them to sign off on it so that the stories that you tell or that are told, um, allow that person to be celebrated.

Janice Fulkerson: Thank you, Matt. That is really good feedback, is to really bring the person along and have them tell their own story as possible. It's a great idea. Matt, that concludes all of our [00:57:00] questions today, and it concludes our webinar. We do want to make sure people know that if you go to FletcherGroup.org, all the webinars that we host and that we deliver are recorded and are on our website. They're also on our YouTube channel. And this one will be loaded and available next week, also on FletcherGroup.org. You can search by webinars, and there's lots of other really fabulous information out there. If anybody's interested in Technical Assistance, there's a form out there you can, uh, uh, submit. And if you want to follow up with Matt directly, Matt, are you going to give out your email address?

Matt Johnson: Sure, my email, I mean, it's on, it's on the Fletcher Group website, but I'm happy to give it out. My email address is mjohnson, J O H N S O N, at FletcherGroup.org. Uh, and I'd be happy to, to hear your feedback or your questions or to have further conversation, because again, part of what we're trying to do is to engage and to create that further [00:58:00] conversation.

Janice Fulkerson: Fabulous. Thank you so much, Matt, for being here and sharing your expertise and for doing it with such joy and smiles. The smile is what I'll carry with me the rest of the day. Thank you.

Matt Johnson: Thanks. Have a great day, everybody. Thank you.