

# PRESENTATION MATTERS

Members and guests of the American Business Council-Kuwait (ABC-K) were treated to a lively, entertaining and thought-provoking presentation on effective communication at November's General Meeting, which was held in the Al Murja room at the Crowne, Plaza Hotel, Farawaniya.

Attendees were welcomed at the start of the evening by ABC-K Chairman, John Hoholick, who started by announcing some items of business, including the launch of the ABC-K shopping guide and, more significantly, the scheduling of the ABC-K Tradeshow for the end of March.

Mr. Hoholick then introduced Mrs. Sherril Mairza, founder of the charitable organization, Operation Hope, whose mission in Kuwait is to try to provide adequate clothing for the country's menial workers, most of whom simply cannot afford to buy it. Operation Hope's target for this winter is to clothe 3,500 men and women and seemed well set to do so, having already delivered 2,000 bags to the needy by the time of this meeting. As yet, the organization has no corporate sponsorship and relies heavily on individual donations. Mrs. Mairza urged ABC-K members to continue with their support so that her stated target could at least be reached, if not exceeded.

The key speaker for the evening, Ms. Susan Macaulay of Strike Communications, was then introduced to members by Mr. Hoholick, who listed some of her impressive achievements. An experienced and skilled business communications professional, Ms. Macaulay has worked for a range of companies in Canada and the UAE, primarily as an adviser and trainer in the fields of presentation skills and public speaking. Her clients include American Express, Dubai Duty Free, Dubai Industrial City, and Volvo, in addition to UAE government ministers. Ms. Macaulay has also ghost written the autobiography of a prominent UAE businessman.



*Susan at her best*

Before proceeding to explain some of the main features of an effective communicator, Ms. Macaulay asked audience members to rate their own performances as presenters by raising colored cards to indicate their assessment of their effectiveness. In an impressive show of self-confidence, ABC-K members generally accorded themselves high levels of competence. Ms. Macaulay responded wryly by quoting a recently published statistic which indicated that 87% of company Executives rated themselves as effective speakers but only 17% of their audiences agreed with them.

Then, using the name of her company as a rhetorical device, Ms. Macaulay emphasized the need for presenters to strike the right chord with their audiences to help ensure that the right sort of impression is created. To do this, she argued, a combination of strategies and approaches have to be adopted.

Chief amongst these, she contested, is the need for clarity, something that is achieved not through burdening audiences with jargon but through communicating with them in their 'own' language. Audiences are also kept interested, she argued, if presented material is organized clearly and effectively, visual aids are used sensibly and material is delivered persuasively.

Ms. Macaulay then went on to identify the key features of effective delivery. Maximum impact, she pointed out, is achieved through a combination of positive body language, effective use of the voice and good content.

To help define more precisely what she meant by some of these things, she incisively analyzed the use and misuse of slides in presentations, and then demonstrated the qualities of an effective speaker by showing the audience an excerpt from a Bill Clinton speech entitled *The Struggle for the Soul of the 21st Century*. His use of stories and examples to illustrate arguments clearly demonstrated the usefulness of anecdotal material in a speech.

In the lively question and answer session that followed, Ms. Macaulay offered more tips and closed her vibrant presentation by pointing out that the ideal length of any speech is "as short as possible." With that pithy piece of advice, she neatly and succinctly concluded the formal part of the evening.