

[Competency Connection](#) [Audio/Visual Resources](#) [Speaker Magazine](#)[Professional Expert Group Newsletters](#) [NSA Marketplace](#) [NSA Gear](#) [Shopping Cart](#)**Subject:** RX for Technostress**Date:** May 2003**Competency:** Managing the Business

Technology is clearly changing the way we live, and affecting the way we relate to others and ourselves -- but not always for the better. Technology can cause stress for those who use it, as well as for those who fear it. Our use of technology can also create the experience of a safe haven or wreak havoc for members of our audience.

More than ever before, people crave the human touch. As professional speakers, our greatest success comes when we profoundly connect with the audience, clearly touching them with our message. Technology can be a true asset or it can become a roadblock to creating this wonderful experience.

The downside result is what I call TechnoStress. We need to understand not only what technology can do for us, but also what it is doing to us -- and how to remedy the unforeseen difficulties it brings.

This article offers you tried-and-true ideas and information about how to live and work with technology's software and hardware while preserving your irreplaceable "human-ware."

These life-enhancing ideas will bring you to a new level of success and wellness, help you keep your focus and let your confidence soar. Your message will reach your audience with greater punch, and your TechnoStress will decrease. You are worth it. So are they.

Stay High-Touch in the Age of High-Tech

My work over the last two decades has demonstrated that even in the 21st century, a substantial proportion of your audience will be hesitant toward technology. Recognize this and plan accordingly. If you have technology problems during a presentation, don't show your own TechnoStress. Remain calm, and in a very human way, involve the audience in the solution.

During one keynote, my PowerPoint slides kept having bizarre, visually-disruptive and unreadable display problems. I jokingly asked, "Is there a doctor in the house?" Then lightly muttered, "Oh! I am a doctor! So, how about a tech guru?" I quickly worked the mess into my speech on "Overcoming TechnoStress" and used it as an example of how to expect the unexpected.

Now, I was both the expert on TechnoStress and "one" with those in the audience experiencing it. I told them my intent was not to give them a headache and suggested they simply stop watching the projection screen. I humorously told them this was a great time for them to practice, "just say no" to technology and keep their focus on me, as I continued my presentation. It worked smoothly, and in the meantime, the techs fixed the problem! I literally "walked my talk," and the audience loved the realism.

Stop the Multitasking Madness

We live in a world of technologically-created beeps, buzzes, flashing lights and hums. We try to live with them, but believe me, there's a price we pay. For example, are you startled by techno-sounds? Do you find it difficult to concentrate? Are you interrupted with worries or distractions? If you awaken at night, do the unfinished items on your "To Do" list resurface?

These are just a few of the effects of "Multitasking Madness."

Your computer is a terrific multitasking machine. It can simultaneously track your e-mail, handle word-processing, Web surfing and more. Humans can multitask too, but the more we do, the less efficient we become. This is when we exhibit the signs of Multitasking Madness.

It is imperative to stay sane in this overly complex world, and to learn to stay focused and feel fulfilled while reducing your body's physiological and psychological overload.

Dealing with computers, communication tools, and other "time-saving" technologies can actually backfire and add more work, rather than saving time. More than two decades of research on the "Psychology of Technology" point to the reasons why your "To Do" List never gets "Ta-done."

When using technology, we forget to consider the time it takes to: learn it, re-learn it, de-bug it, ask for help on it, restore it, rebuild it, upgrade it, answer it, e-mail a message back about it, fax it, copy and paste it, grab the graphic, and on and on and on. You get the picture.

Living on Human-Time, Not Techno-Time

We must accept the fact that there will always be more we want to accomplish than time permits. Technology *can* run 24-7. We cannot. Technology can have memory enhancements and be upgraded to work at a greater speed. It never needs a break, sleep, or even a piece of chocolate, but we do! We can replace our hardware and software, but not our "human-ware."

It is essential to remember to live on human time. Certainly make work priorities, but also give yourself rewards and breaks. Focus on what really needs to be done and what is realistic to achieve in a certain amount of time. If you are not sure, or think you are expecting too much of yourself without realizing it, get someone else to look at your "To Do" list.

Treat yourself to fun activities, and build these into your everyday life. Write them on your "To Do" list! Take your dog for a walk. Go have that lunch with a friend. Go buy a new pair of shoes. Schedule a whole day for play. Often. *Imagine that!*

You will then be constantly refurbishing yourself, reminding yourself of your human-ness and enhancing your ability to give more to each project. Your body, mind and spirit will be happier, and this will show in your professional presentations. Your audience will encounter a more balanced, calm speaker who is truly present for them, and this will help them emulate this important life message. Your personal world will thank you as well.

Stay the Driver, Not the Driven

Audiences want to hear you, your story, your message, your way. They want to get to know you as a person, not just a professional. So don't let yourself get hidden behind the smoke screen of available software, audio, video, sounds, colors and techno-gadgets.

Over the ages, visuals have always augmented storytelling, but they can't replace the message. Unfortunately, technology can be a great temptress. As professional speakers and humans, we can get lost in its abilities to promise a better, quicker, greater, more professional and intelligent "us" and product.

Technology *is* a great tool. However, technology does not *make* you a better speaker. This is imperative to remember. The issue is to find your balance.

Here are some helpful hints to enhance your presentation with technology, rather than detract from it.

If you are using PowerPoint or similar presentation software:

« Follow the 6 x 6 rule -- Use no more than six lines of text with no more than six words on each line. Use the text to bullet your main points to keep the audience looking at you, not your slides.

« Make sure that the background and text colors provide the best visual contrast for the viewer. The best slides are light text on darker backgrounds.

« Avoid complex backgrounds, which make the slide more difficult to read and take attention away from your speech.

« Bold all text and use at least 44-point font for titles and 36-point font for text. Believe me, the people in the back will appreciate being able to read your slides!

« Do not use fancy fonts, and limit the use of italics. Additionally, it is best to use the same fonts or backgrounds from slide to slide.

« Limit the use of the available sounds, bells and whistles. They can jar an unsuspecting audience rather than entertain.

Remember: Overuse of technology can confuse, irritate and frustrate your audience. You are the show, not your technology.

Have an Emergency Techno-Crash Plan

Begin your crash plan at the time you book your speech. Make it clear in your contract what technology you intend to bring with you and what you require from the site. Do not forget to request appropriate cables and connectors for your specific system. Even if you personally do not know the specs for your techno-toys (computers, software, remote controls, etc.), have someone who does write them into your "Technology Requirements" sheet so the tech support staff at the site can have compatible technology, and know how to troubleshoot should a challenge arise.

Early in the day of your speech or the day before, meet with the technical specialist and do a dry run of your presentation to ensure that your technology works with their technology. Hook up everything to check projection, microphones, speakers, your personal placement, your computer placement, etc. This also gives the technological support staff time to fix any unanticipated difficulties and make your "show" a success. You'll also sleep better the night before your presentation!

During one speech I made, the technology check immediately proceeding my talk. Even though I never like to cut it this short, we could not get into the auditorium until one hour before my audience arrived! The tech check unfortunately showed that their cables were not working correctly. They

brought replacements, but even those didn't work.

Regardless, it was "show time." During the first part of my keynote there was actually an engineer under the raised platform (on his tummy) working on the wiring to the electrical socket! Luckily, the audience was unaware, and I did my professional best to ignore the grunts and crawling noises directly under my feet! Remember: Expect the unexpected! Plan ahead.

Thriving in the New Millennium

Radio took 38 years to reach an audience of 50 million. Television took 13 years and the personal computer took 16. The Internet took only four! As technological advances spiral into the new millennium, we will witness unprecedented growth in new technologies only dreamed about today. With such rapid changes, make a commitment to yourself to do more than *just cope* with the changes.

Today, since many professionals have home offices, setting personal boundaries with technology and people becomes even more essential to our success.

Use these helpful technology hints to keep your personal TechnoStress low and enhance yourself!

« When you need to think, clear your head or work creatively, turn off all techno-distractions around you. Turn off phone ringers, pagers, cell phones, etc. and don't check incoming e-mail.

« While on an important phone call or when giving an interview, do the above plus anything else to make your surroundings quiet and uninterrupted.

« Make certain your cell phone and pagers are not on when you give a presentation.

« Schedule time out of the office with your loved ones. Know when you are done for the day, and don't go back into the home office.

Remember: These ideas let you stay focused and centered on the activity at hand and lead to greater personal and professional success!

After examining people's reactions to technology in the U.S.A. and more than 30 countries over the last 20 years, I believe we can develop a unique attitude that will leave us feeling uplifted and empowered by technology rather than TechnoStressed. By using the ideas in this article, I believe we can manifest "Better Living Through Technology."

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