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– Joe Yazbeck



The Performer’s “Whisperer”

By Gretchen Cain Wells

As an entrepreneur with a plan for improving your business acumen in the New Year, you may decide to step it up a notch and set performance goals that involve public speaking or leadership projects. Joe Yazbeck, president and founder of the Largo-based Prestige Leadership Advisors, has the wisdom and willingness to help you succeed. He offers a template on how to organize and build a speech that is unscripted and fully expressed.

Yazbeck describes himself as an artist with a lifelong quest for improvement. A jazz vocalist, actor, public speaker and leadership coach, he is no stranger to performance anxieties and understands many factors contribute to the degree of one’s comfort level in front of a group. Yazbeck could be called the performer’s “whisperer,” because with each client who seeks his assistance, he has a strategy to identify and build on his strengths, and annihilate any weaknesses.



Using what he calls his “open and flow” method of coaching, Yazbeck concentrates on correction, not criticism, in order to preserve the individual’s self-respect and instill trust. Yazbeck majored in drama at Notre Dame-affiliated King’s College, and utilizes his knowledge of creativity and self-expression to patiently open the client’s talent and let it flow out. “Together, we devise a workable plan. Our joint-exploration and discovery are the keys to learning and success,” he said.

Yazbeck admires performers such as the legendary Michael Jackson, whom Yazbeck said perfected the art of making an action look effortless. “If a dancer isn’t making the correct moves, the choreographer says, ‘Let me see that again,’” said Yazbeck. “I work on the same principle, by watching the client and eliminating what doesn’t work.” Yazbeck choreographs his clients into perfection through the repetition and rehearsal of customized scenarios, leaving nothing to chance. Yazbeck often videotapes the client, so later they both can critique the performance, always with the goal of getting closer to

mastering the components. “We stress the progress made which is a great motivator to continue and achieve,” he said.

“Part of performing effortlessly is identifying potential distractions for the performer and having a plan to eliminate them,” said Yazbeck. “We systematically remove mental and physical barriers, including resistance, one of the biggest obstacles to success. With a heightened awareness, the performance begins to feel natural,” he said. “There seems to be a turning point, an awakening, where the performer ‘comes of age.’”

For him it happened with the Shakespearean theatre-coaching of Carl Wagner, whom Yazbeck describes as a “phenomenal mentor and professor.” “Wagner was a great proponent that acting is a craft, like sculpting; there is an action, product and presentation. Presentation is an artful science; there is a sequence and order, and the discipline is a beautiful, integrated art form. Wagner also taught us acting can be created from any concept and involve others,” said Yazbeck, even a “street audience.”

Tom Morgan, another coach, taught Yazbeck to relate to the colorful characters at London’s Hyde Park by delivering speeches from a soap box. Yazbeck advocates taking advantage of as many speaking opportunities as possible to perform live. With wife Elisa as his creative muse and public relations expert, Yazbeck said he has given 3,700 speeches in 30 years.



Yazbeck said often he will take clients to a movie theatre, and between shows, position them up front, where they can watch people coming in to take their seats. This experience helps them to get used to commotion and interruption. Again, practice and thorough subject knowledge are the best preventative measures to becoming distracted and losing one's place. For a public speaker it is essential to refine the subject to "talking points," but to have the confidence to give more detail, if asked.

Yazbeck said ultimately a speech should be a conversation with the audience and a call to action. "Be respectful of other people's time and use it well, since they have 'elected' you as their leader for the duration," he said. "Timing is everything, don't force your performance or rush it. With proper training the client will learn to move the audience toward emotion, which is why they are there. A serious artist will know how effective he is by how long the applause is," he said.

Yazbeck is much sought-after for his own presentations and likes to incorporate music, often closing with an inspirational song. Working with Broadway composer and writer Norman Thalheimer, Yazbeck has two CDs on the market, "Jazz'd About Christmas" and "Streets of Your Heart." Yazbeck has been studying and varying rhythm, tempo, pitch and other aspects of music and communication since his childhood in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. He grew up amid "joyful noise," an only boy with four sisters. "I had to have a leadership strategy to get a song or a word in," he said.

Yazbeck has fond memories of Sunday dinners spent with a couple of tables full of very inclusive Lebanese relatives, sometimes as many as 30, all trying to express themselves in English and their second language. Yazbeck's mentors were his own parents: George, a musician, and Jane, an astute businesswoman. They taught Yazbeck to surround himself with people of integrity and character, such as his CEO, John Patrick, a former banker and business management consultant.

Yazbeck's parents also taught him to avoid the "starving artist" stigma by setting financial objectives in order to keep doing what he loves, an ideal he has passed on to his clients and his own adult children. His son Tony has starring roles on Broadway, and daughter Angela is a singer who has a day job running a holistic wellness center.

Those visiting Yazbeck's offices at 2600 East Bay Drive Suite 230, Largo, on the second floor of the Bank of America Building, will see family photos decorating the walls of the recently expanded space, which is perfect for leadership performance classes. For more information go to: www.prestigeleader.com.

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