

**HUMAN ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATION AND PERSUASION:
FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND SUBTEXT**

A rump session presentation at [IMS 2012](#)

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SUMMARY

When confronted with delivering a public speech, making a technical presentation, attending a job interview, or appearing in front of a panel of judges, apprehension is normal. This is not only because of valid concern over a first impression. Once into any communication/persuasion event, subtext—an underlying and often distinct theme—comes into play. The very nature of empathetic communication dictates that sensitive human issues have to be addressed, either consciously or unconsciously. For example, an unexpected negative (positive) word/gesture about a person or situation may take years to put into perspective; a first impression seems to have a life of its own; the notion of an open (impression-free) mind may be a myth. Mastering impressions and subtext may be keys to landing a job, getting promoted, being inducted into a prestigious society, making an effective technical presentation, and more. Traps and hidden agendas include perceived respect, believability, conflicts of interest, even simple attribution of the contributions of others. Any presenter must be aware of the subtext carried by his/her slides/speech/mannerisms. My proposed talk will acknowledge ideas by such figures as Malcolm Gladwell, R.J. Sternberg, and Robert McKee. It will draw on personal contributions and experiences (with humor) in both the technical and non-technical domains, and should enjoy wide interest. It will not only identify certain subjective perceptions during, for example, a technical presentation, but will also suggest ways of controlling and/or correcting perceptions. It seems essential for all of us (particularly aspiring professionals) to be aware that others will make life-altering decisions about us, of which we may forever be unaware.

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