

Before We Begin

- Gene Monterestelli, Master Coach

One of my favorite hypnosis trainers, Jerry Kein, would talk about using DRTs (Dirty Rotten Tricks) when presenting.

Jerry would always say DRTs with a twinkle in his eye and wink. It was more of a joke than something that was actually underhanded, but they are all useful.

My personal favorite is the phrase "before we begin".

Usually whenever we have a conversation about something important, the parties to the conversation already have an agenda in mind. We have all given the conversation some thought and we have in mind our desired outcome.

This could be a decision as simple as choosing a restaurant for dinner, as complicated as a long-term planning meeting, or a high-stakes choice about whether or not we are going to buy something expensive.

Because of this, on some level, everyone has their guard up.

A easy way to encourage everyone to let down their guard is to start with the phrase, "before we begin".

When we say this everyone who is part of the conversation thinks "Oh, we haven't started yet so I don't have to be on guard."

We can use the space created by "before we begin" in a few ways.

First, we can use it in a conversation simply to have our point heard. Imagine you are having a sales conversation with someone. You have already talked to them a number of times about the service you are selling, but they are still hesitant. When you have the next conversation you say, "Before we begin..." they relax, "I really think this program is the best investment for you because of x, y, and z."

They will hear you in a different way.

Second, we can use this in meetings where a group has come together to make a choice of some sort. Everyone HATES meetings. When you say "before we begin" they relax because they don't want to be in the meeting either. It is almost a little mental break before the work starts.

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So it goes something like this, "Before we begin...I wanted to make sure everyone was on the same page in understanding how important it is that we consider [insert your main concern]."

The third (and perhaps my favorite) way I use this is when I am speaking in front of a group. Often when we are presenting to a group we are speaking to people we've never met before. Whatever they know about us was in the introduction that was just given and, let's be honest, introductions aren't usually very good.

I will step in front of the group and say "Before we begin" and notice the whole audience relax just a little and pay closer attention because I am not doing what they expected.

Now that I have their attention I tell them something funny that happened on the way there, give them a piece of biography that was missed in my introduction, or talk about something off topic that is important to me.

Once this is done I will follow with, "Good, now that we have that out of the way, are you ready to begin?" I give a big smile, nod my head yes, and make eye contact with as many people as possible. Then I say, "Great, let's do this!" take a deep breath and start my presentation.

This achieves two things. First, it has given me the chance to share something important that is heard in a slightly different way. Second, and most importantly, it gives me the opportunity to build rapport with the audience before I begin my presentation.

Because I said "before we begin", in the audience's mind I have not yet started presenting. I now have a few minutes to help them to like, know, and trust me a little more. Then when I say "let's begin" they think the presentation has started and I have the benefit of the goodwill I have just established.

Is that really A Dirty Rotten Trick?

I love the NLP presupposition that "all communication is judged in the response". Meaning that communication is not what we say, but what is understood. I am simply making sure that I am understood. Whoever I am talking to can still make the choice that is best for them.

You might be thinking that I am just rationalizing so that I can sleep better at night, but that is not the case. I believe what I am communicating is in the best interest of the people I'm talking to, I am just making sure they understand where I am coming from so they can make the best choice for themselves.