



4 Helps to Better Enjoy Your Puppet Performance

By Tim Brown

Nerves can greatly reduce the quality of your presentation. One of the first teams we were part of had a puppeteer who was so nervous his arm actually shook during practice and when performing. The problem didn't last long, but his first few performances were interesting.

You show your best quality puppetry when performing in a relaxed, but focused manner. When you enjoy yourself during the presentation, you're more likely to perform to the best of your ability. My suggestion is to have a great time while doing your presentation and don't worry about the audience's opinion.

"How can I do that?" Great question. Here are some suggestions:

Right Motivation

For Christian puppeteers, remember who you are doing the presentation for—the Lord Jesus. The scripture teaches us to do all things in the name of our Lord Jesus, for His glory. God doesn't ask for perfection; he just asks us to do our best. If you do your best for the Lord, it doesn't matter what others think. If God is pleased, then you should be too.

One of the first times I got to preach, a pastor told me that nerves are a sign that your focus is on yourself and not on the Lord. Your trust is not in him, but in your own ability. That was great advice which I've taken to heart. Now the only time I get nervous is when I've failed to properly prepare for the puppet presentation.

If you are a secular puppeteer, remember the purpose of your presentation. You have a message to get across and do your best convey it. You can't please everyone so there's no sense in trying. If your message comes across, you've had a successful presentation.

Proper Preparation

Make sure you are properly prepared—your entire presentation, not just your puppet play. The key word here is practice. Run through your presentation from start to finish over and over again. While practicing, have someone out front critiquing—giving comments and suggestions for improvement in an encouraging manner.

While practicing, focus on the fundamentals of proper entrances and exits, lip movement, and posture. Once those are set, begin to add other things to enhance the performance like hand movements and actions.

The better prepared you are, the more confidence and the more fun you'll have. While performing, trust God to use that practice to enable you to present a quality show.

Ministry Mentality

Look at your presentation as a chance to minister or teach an important, timeless truth. Don't just seek to entertain, but look for a way to minister to the audience. Even if your presentation is for purely entertainment purposes, you can still share an important message through the use of humor.

I've had times where my presentation was judged or critiqued by others, either in a contest or part of a training program. During those times, I didn't focus on how I would be judged but on the message I wanted to share. Even if it was a classroom situation and only a couple of people observed, they could still benefit from the message.

After a performance, I'd much rather have people mention how well the message hit home rather than how good my puppetry was. If the key principle is conveyed, but my puppetry isn't quite up to par, I still count it as being successful.

If you have a great play with a solid message and it's presented with proper puppet skills, the whole presentation will flow. The audience won't focus on the puppets, but on their message. You can relax and have a great time doing what you enjoy.

It's Not About Me

Remember, the key to relaxing is to get the focus off yourself. When I'm performing and my thoughts are self-centered there's no joy in the presentation. When my arm gets tired and that's all I think about, I can't wait for the play to end and it's no longer fun.

When my focus is on the audience and the message they're hearing, I have a great time. It's during those times that you don't want the presentation to end.

One year, we did a thirty minute musical called *David the Chosen One* and put in a lot of time and preparation. The play had a great message and we booked it in several churches. We were properly prepared, so during the presentations we were able to relax and really enjoy ourselves. As the play drew to a close, we wanted it to continue. There was a joy and excitement in doing something that we loved and we had a great time.

Also, don't beat yourself up. If you have a bad performance, don't get down on yourself, but make a commitment to do better next time and not allow it to happen again. Strive to do your best, but have fun.

To sum up: make sure you have a solid message to communicate. Drill on the fundamentals until they are second nature. Then, when it comes to performance time, relax and enjoy yourself. You'll find that if you are enjoying yourself during the performance, the audience will tend to enjoy themselves more as well.