



# free-range THINKING™

free-range thinking™ is a monthly journal of best practices, resources and generally useful stuff for public interest communicators who want to reach more people with more impact



## The One Word That Can Improve Your Next Presentation

Yes or no: when you attend a presentation in the public interest sector, do you usually learn something valuable? When we presented this question to public interest professionals across North America as part of the research for our book, *Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes*, 66% replied no. Take a moment to let that result sink in: that's two-thirds of the audience reporting that, more often than not, their time is being wasted.

More than a decade has passed since that survey was conducted, but if my travels across the United States of Boredom are any indication, we still have too many colleagues exiting speeches, panel discussions and workshops feeling that the only thing they learned is to never attend that conference again.

Why is this still happening? There are several possible explanations - unskilled presenters, lackluster content, and PowerPoint would be the usual suspects - but if the essence of this particular question is *why aren't people learning*, the answer may have more to do with how they are being taught. And that's why one word to consider before preparing your next presentation is *andragogy*. [Read more.](#) *Please note: Apple Mail users may need to scroll down manually.*

## A Podcast for Presenters

If you design or give presentations on a regular basis, "The Presentation Podcast" is for you. Co-hosted by Troy Chollar, Nolan Haims and Sandy Johnson - three design experts who discuss every aspect of presenting from the biggest ideas to the smallest details - episodes are published on the first and third Tuesday each month. I was thrilled and honored to serve as guest expert on their March 5th episode, and if you'd like to hear our conversation and get a taste for this entertaining and informative podcast, click [here](#).



## A Moving Story

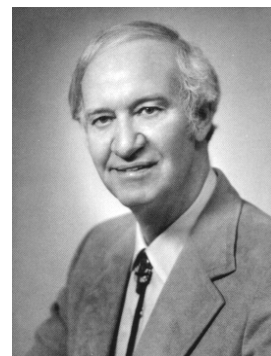
Once upon a time The Goodman Center worked out of an office on Larchmont Boulevard in Los Angeles. Then we moved. The End. Okay, admittedly not a "moving" story in an *emotional* sense, but after thirteen happy years in our old location, we have a new address and phone number and wanted to bring it to your attention. As of March 1st, The Goodman Center is located at 251 S. Norton Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90004. Our new phone number is 323.272.4737. Thanks for updating your records!

# The One Word That Can Improve Your Next Presentation (Cont'd)

You are probably familiar with the word "pedagogy," which Merriam-Webster defines as "the art, science or profession of teaching." The word is a derivative of the Greek *paidagogia*, which literally translates as "to lead a child."

The word "andragogy" is attributed to Alexander Kapp, a German educator who first used the term in 1833. It combines the Greek *andr-*, meaning "man," with *agogos*, or "leader of." So while pedagogy means leading children, andragogy means leading man, and Dictionary.com defines it as "the methods or techniques used to teach adults."

In the 1950s, Malcolm Knowles revived Kapp's term and popularized it in the United States. Knowles served as Executive Director of the Adult Education Association of the USA from 1951-1960 and wrote several books on how adults learn, including *The Adult Learner* (1973) and *Self-Directed Learning* (1975). Knowles believed that adults learn differently from children and, consequently, should not be taught with the same techniques.



Malcolm Knowles

Knowles espoused four principles of andragogy. For anyone who presents to adults and wants to foster an optimal environment for learning, these are clear guidelines to follow. Here are Knowles four principles with examples (in italics) of how we have adopted them in Goodman Center presentations and workshops:

## 1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.

Adults tend to be more self-directed learners than high school or college students. If you can build flexibility into your presentation allowing your audience members to shape the content to their needs, they will be more engaged from the beginning.

*In our online storytelling classes, we begin the first session by asking each participant what they hope to learn from the course. We use this feedback to customize the succeeding three sessions more specifically to their needs.*

## 2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities.

Adults bring a greater range of experiences with them to learning situations than children, so facilitators of adult learning who consciously attempt to leverage those experiences will find a higher level of engagement.

*When we teach story structure, we ask participants to tell personal stories based on the prompt, "Think about a time in your life when you really wanted something." After they share stories at their respective tables, we then ask them to identify the elements that were common to all their stories. In this way, participants draw on their own experiences to identify the essential elements of story.*

## 3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.

Our audience research for *Why Bad Presentations Happen to Good Causes* told us the same thing: *relevance* was among the three most highly desired aspects of a presentation. Adult learners want to know, "How can I use this today?"

*Prior to our workshops on presentation skills, we solicit sample PowerPoint decks from the host organization so we can see how well (or poorly) the presentations are structured or individual slides are designed. Rather than simply offering broad principles for structure or design, we'll redesign parts of the sample presentations to demonstrate exactly how they can be improved.*

#### 4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

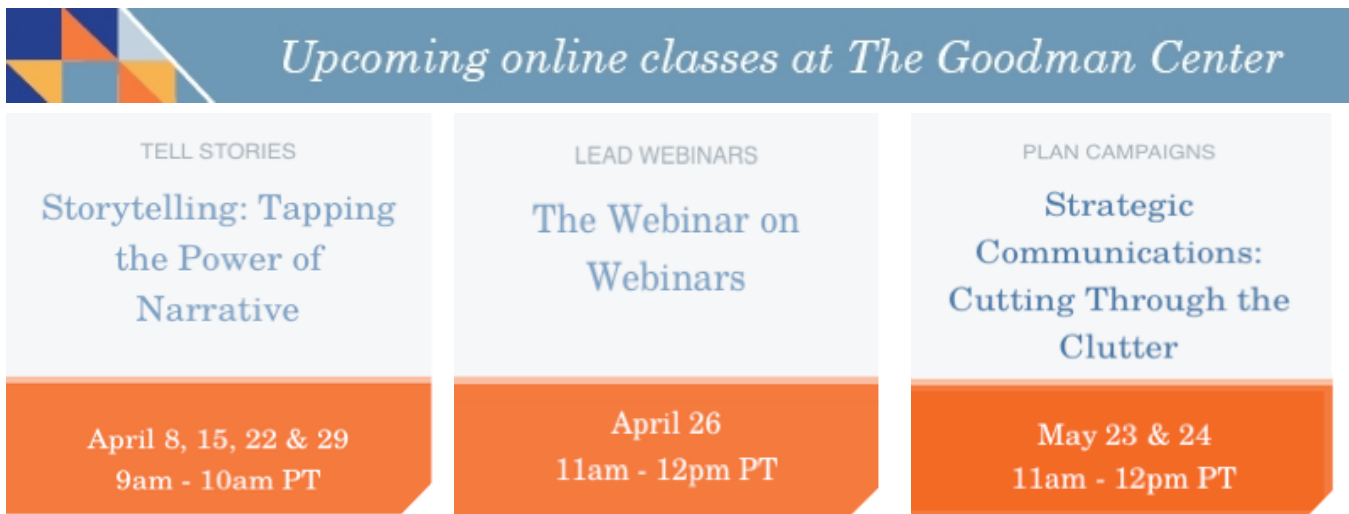
Adult learners prefer to cut to the chase. Get to the heart of the problem, show them how to solve it, and then let them take a crack at it. This can lead to a discussion of the broader principles at work, but don't start with the abstract concepts.

*When we teach organizations how to have better meetings, we go directly to the single greatest source of problems: poorly prepared agendas. Workshop participants bring samples of their organization's agendas with them, and we show them point-by-point how to transform what is often little more than a list of topics into a reliable road map for a productive meeting.*

Among those who study learning styles, not everyone is convinced that adults and children learn in distinctly different ways. As Wikipedia notes in its section on andragogy, "There appears to be a lack of research on whether this framework of teaching and learning principles is more relevant to adult learners or if it is just a set of good practices that could be used for both children and adult learners."

Knowles himself acknowledged late in his life that andragogical techniques might work with children, too. But what does not appear to be in dispute is that the core principles of andragogy can help create a more productive learning space for adults, and if that's the audience to whom you are presenting, it may be one word that makes a big difference.

[^ back to top](#)



*Upcoming online classes at The Goodman Center*

TELL STORIES	LEAD WEBINARS	PLAN CAMPAIGNS
<b>Storytelling: Tapping the Power of Narrative</b>	<b>The Webinar on Webinars</b>	<b>Strategic Communications: Cutting Through the Clutter</b>
April 8, 15, 22 & 29 9am - 10am PT	April 26 11am - 12pm PT	May 23 & 24 11am - 12pm PT

### About Us

*free-range thinking* is written by Andy Goodman and edited by Celia Hoffman. To read back issues, download free publications, and to learn more about our work, please visit [www.thegoodmancenter.com](http://www.thegoodmancenter.com).

To reach Andy directly, please call (323) 272-4737 or send an email to [andy@thegoodmancenter.com](mailto:andy@thegoodmancenter.com).

To subscribe to this newsletter, [click here](#). To unsubscribe, [click here](#).



FOLLOW ME ON TWITTER

