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The Stars You Meet Along the Way -

The top 99 presentation dynamics which will be engraved in your memory (for the wrong reasons)

[Special 2017 edition - Including bonus entries]

Ariel Ezrachi and Maurice E. Stucke*

This empirical study aims to catalogue 99 (now 112!) characters one is likely to meet in leading (and not so leading) conferences, whatever the scholarly field. The study is the result of days of observations in conferences around the world. Our taxonomy employs a qualitative standard to identify 99 core irritants – also known as the ‘spirit breakers’™ – that are likely to lead you to question why you ever agreed to attend the conference, whether the evening banquet will serve alcohol, or whether you should skip the banquet for whatever attractions the town offers, such as the world’s (or country’s) largest Burger King restaurant.

We acknowledge our study’s limitations. While some speakers may be clearly identified as fitting one or more of these classes, others may only exhibit limited traits. No doubt categories can be further refined. Further research and analysis are required. Still, the study, in its present form, may enable one to reflect on his or her presentation style and skill. It may also facilitate bonding among the conference attendees, who can, for example, identify and tweet as many traits as they can for each presentation they must (or feel obliged to) attend.

The study has been referred to as being ‘uplifting, without being pathological -- an original window to our understanding of the human spirit’ and as a ‘critical, much needed addition to the existing literature on the human mind’.¹

* Authors have written many important articles and books, and teach at really good universities. This work would not be possible without our own training for better than.

This special edition includes recent innovation in the field and builds up on our earlier research and ground-breaking methodology. We are in debt to those who assisted us in refining our views.

In what follows we explore the leading dynamics:

1. *The Squeezer* –
For them the time limitation always comes as a surprise. ‘I prepared slides for 30 minutes, but was *just* told that I have 15’ (as we care). So instead of focusing on some elements, he will try to do it all. All 45 slides, in 11-point font. 50 minutes later it is clear that he has failed.
2. *The Exasperated* –
Like the *Squeezer*, but spends the balance of the presentation complaining of the lack of time.
3. *The Reader* –
‘My slides are all that I know, my life boat. If I deviate from them, I will sink. Literately. So let me read them. All 30 of them.’
And indeed he does so, in the most monotonous voice he can muster.
4. *The Dishevelled* –
‘I know the speech is somewhere . . . why are the slides in this order? . . .’
5. *The Outsider* –
Always bring the outside perspective. That’s his role. Even when the subject is about life . . .
6. *The Anarchist* –
What is time? Just a concept that does not apply to him. Yes, 5 minutes, he says looking and the chair who helplessly is drilling on the podium as lunch was served 30 minutes ago in a nearby room. The audience has long left the room to roam the buffet.
7. *The Ambulance Chaser* –
Uses the conference and his speech as an opportunity to get clients for his consulting business, peppering the talk with outrage over the unfounded enforcement action against the prospective client.

8. *The Loose Cannon* –
Offends the host by displaying his incompetence through two opening questions, only to continue with a question to the audience with the same result.
9. *The Discussion Triggerer* –
His aim is simply to trigger discussion. Under this shield he feels free to insult everyone.
10. *The Saboteur* –
Presents on his subject as well as the issues on the following presentations to steal the thunder from everyone (while questioning their competence).
11. *The Oil Driller* –
'My work is still in progress. I am looking for feedback and for ideas. Any ideas. Anything. Just save me.'
12. *The Self-Referencer* –
'As you might have read the *New Yorker* article which discusses the *Guardian* book review of my book . . .'
13. *The False Innovator* –
'I want to present a new idea to you.'
What follows is nothing but old news, and bits of your own writing, which is not properly acknowledged.
14. *The Name Dropper* –
'First I would like to thank all the [important people] who helped shaped this work and the prior [more prestigious institutions] that hosted my presentations that enabled this work to come to fruition. As [leading scholar in the field] told me . . .'
15. *The Ass Kisser* –
Like the *Name Dropper*, but whose aim is to get invited to other [more prestigious] conferences or get that consultancy contract from the target ass.
16. *The Children Analogizer* –
To establish his credibility with the younger generations, uses anecdotes from his teenage kids, nephews, and nieces, possibly marching them in front of the crowd for sympathy vote.

17. *The Thinker* –
Speaks very deliberately. Seems to be leading to a profound point, only to remain on the precipice.
18. *The Thief* –
Attended your presentation last month and now repeats it. The first slide has his name, the rest has your brain.
19. *The Bismarkian* –
Always seems to identify factions within the audience (or field of study), while aligning his views with the dominant faction.
20. *The Mainstreamer* –
Views other panellists, who are also *Mainstreamers*, as anarchists, and cautions the audience that to be taken seriously, must adopt a more nuanced, prudent approach.
21. *The Promoter* –
All his books are on display. Leaflets on the seats. The presentation include links to the publisher's site, to his site, and to his eBay shop.
22. *The Self-Important* –
Like the *Promoter*, but without the books. Me, me, me, and me. During the Q&A, quickly interjects with 'Let me tackle this question as it relates most to my work.'
23. *The Challenger* –
Challenges every assumption, including 'Why was I invited?'
24. *The Independent Spirit* –
'I was asked to speak about X, but let me discuss Y, which frankly I find more interesting.'
25. *The Anecdote* –
You are thinking, 'The first one is funny, the second is also funny, . . . the thirteenth one seems to relate to the fifth anecdote, I think.'
26. *The Twitterer* –
Starts by telling everyone that he already tweeted what was said, reads comments from the outside world and only then realises that his tweets included confidential information. During the other presentations he will tweets about this mishap and about the food he had for lunch.

27. *The Back Stabber* –
Like the *Twitterer*, but worse. Tweets snarky comments about co-presenter, organizer and other panellists.
28. *The Mishap Disclaimer* –
'I was delayed . . . got locked in my room . . . didn't have any sleep . . . My PC broke while I was strip searched.'
This disclaimer provides the trigger to one of the more painful presentations, to the *Back-Stabber's* delight.
29. *The Failed Technologist* –
'What happened to the screen?' 'Why is the video not working?'
Much of the 20 minutes is trying to get the video to work which 'ties everything together.' Concludes: 'If only the technology cooperated, you would have fully understood the idea' behind his multicolour extravaganza.
30. *The Surprised One* –
Not recognising his own slides: 'Oh, this was not supposed to be here.'
Often leaves the first slide with details of another event attended a week ago [in acute cases, with details of presentations delivered a year ago].
31. *The Attention to Detail* –
Spends 29 minutes about sub paragraph F in subsection Z and how it can be distinguished from subpart E of subparagraph Z.
32. *The Janus Effect* –
Criticises empirical work as lacking cohesive theory, just 'nice anecdotes'; criticises theories for lacking empirics.
33. *The First Principles* –
'Before we can delve into [relevant issue], we must first ask a more fundamental question: "What does the term [any basic term] even mean?" ...'
Twenty minutes later, we still don't know.
34. *The One Who Failed to Read the Invitation* –
Provides a basic introduction to the field at a conference dedicated to technical support analysis.

35. *The Pit-Bull* –
Attacks everyone, including the conference organizer. Leaves no soul alive.
36. *The Co-Presenters* –
Spends double the time, passing the baton to one another, saying half as much. Usually begins with an appeal for more time since there are after all two of them.
37. *The Repeater* –
Usually presents toward the end of the conference. Everything he prepared was already presented (thanks to the *Saboteur*). But pretends that it is all original.
38. *The 19 Minute Intro* –
Spends 19 minutes introducing the first slides and providing all the disclaimers. Spends 60 seconds on the rest.
39. *The Ted Talk Hopeful* –
Cannot be constrained by the podium; insists on wireless microphone.
40. *The Script Reader* –
No slides, no eye contact, no engagement. Let me just read my notes. These were not written as a speech, but that never seems to be an issue.
41. *The Jokester* –
Aspiring stand-up comedian; uses conference to try out his new and old material.
42. *The Linguist* –
Peppers talk with key phrases in his native language. No translation provided. At times also sprinkles a few phrases in Latin, just for fun.
43. *The Social Climber* –
Looking to leverage to a better university. Directs comments to the near deceased professors in the audience. Follow up with a chat over the coffee break and a string of emails.
44. *The Early Departurer* –
‘The panel will have to continue without me as I have another [more pressing] engagement.’ Usually has his roller bag behind

him. Sometimes, to connect with the audience, will mention the difficulties of flying business class around the world.

45. *The Stealth Presenter* –

Shows up late for the conference, leaves early, only speaks at the podium, and leaves behind a trail of invoices from questionable sources for the conference organisers to deal with.

46. *The Super Relaxed* –

Shoes off. Mindfulness. Tapping into the seven chakras.

47. *The Innovator* –

‘This is not a presentation. We will all go through a process together. Everyone stand and hold hands.’

48. *The Ideologue* –

Sees the debate as aligning the forces of good against evil, no matter the subject.

49. *The Aperitif* –

Extremely engaging, but no added value, no content, no context, nothing. But highly engaging.

50. *The Dismissal* –

Rejects out of hand any questions underlying his or her presentation. Creates an atmosphere of fear which helps reduce any challenge from the audience. Those who try are personally attacked in his next paper.

51. *The Paternalist* –

‘Let me explain You might not understand what I am about to say, but I will say it nonetheless.’

During Q&A, usually prefaces his response with, ‘You clearly misunderstood my thesis,’ and thereafter confuses those few who thought they understood his points.

52. *The ‘Because it Happened to Me, It Must Be Interesting’ Panelist* –

Anecdote which no one cares about but on which he will spend 25 minutes out of 15 minutes allocated for the presentation. The story, needless to say, evolves around the speaker.

53. *The Multi-tasker* –

Checks smartphone and sends emails and texts during the other panellists’ presentations (and perhaps his own).

54. *For Whom 'Everything Is Personal'* –
Any comment or question is seen as a personal attack which requires a long answer. Sometime answers with apologetic tone. At times, when combined with a *Dismisser*, innovative passive-aggressive behaviour emerges.
55. *The Back Room Brawler* –
Like the person above, but whose response is akin to 'Do you want to take this outside?'
56. *The Shamer* –
Points out that the earlier speakers completely misunderstood the complexity of the issue.
57. *The Filibuster* –
I will not move from this podium.
58. *The Owner* –
Presents himself as the owner of the debate – will decide where to take it, will assume that you will follow.
59. *The Appeaser* –
Views the current debate as counterproductive and advocates for building bridges. Usually the first to be attacked during Q&A.
60. *The Trademark* –
Prides himself in coining a term and pushes hard to promote the trademark.
61. *The Trademark Infringer* –
Claims other people's terms as his own.
62. *The Disappointed One* –
Cannot understand how the discussion focused on [relevant] issues and not on his presentation's [irrelevant] issues.
63. *The Lobbyist* –
Presents his ideas as objective and independent. His presentation is typically compassionate to the sorrows and plight of a powerful firm, which ironically is funding his articles.
64. *The Hipster* –
Presentation attempts to appeal to the younger generation: #Starbucks, memes, emoji, Follow me on Facebook . . .

65. *The Explorer* –
His scholarship brings insights from distant fields, like printmaking in Bulgaria.
66. *The One That Doesn't Want to Be Between You and Lunch* –
30 minutes later he still speaks despite saying he will be brief.
67. *The One That Doesn't Want to Be Between You and Coffee* –
As above, but with reference to coffee.
68. *The Stalker* –
Challenges someone who leaves the lecture room.
69. *The Punctualist* –
Challenges someone who comes late to the lecture room.
70. *The Hub and Spoke* –
Spends 20 minutes linking his empty presentation to all other more interesting presentations.
71. *The Apologiser* –
Falls on his sword – why his presentation will be un-compelling. And fulfils.
72. *The Visual Artist* –
Sees his PowerPoint as a way to express his creativity, with words flashing and disappearing...
73. *The Inappropriate Referencer* –
Visually or orally mentions very uncomfortable issues; misinterprets social cues as benign ('thought they were all going to the bathroom') or supportive ('they seemed very engaged').
74. *The Questioner* –
Rather than presenting, seeks to engage audience with rhetorical questions. Presentation deftly moves from one question to the next, before audience can respond.
75. *The Nodder* –
This panellist actively shakes his head to indicate attentive listening. This convincing method continues regardless of the substance or irrelevance of the presentations. It tends to intensify when virtual ass kissing is deemed appropriate.

76. *The Stoic* –
Despite alarming personal medical emergency, insists on continuing the presentation while being supported by two assistants. Disregards the risk that an ambulance and the police will have to be called and the audience will be forced to spend the rest of the day giving evidence on the circumstances leading to his demise.
77. *The Cancellor* –
Proposed the conference, got you into this mess and cancels at the last moment.
78. *The Bureaucrat* –
Prefaces comments that his innovative comments do not present the agency views, only to follow with carefully written speech vetted by the agency which repeats its formal guidelines.
79. *The Elephant Spotter* –
Always see an elephant in the room that everyone else in their presentation somehow missed.
80. *The Comatose* –
No one knows and no one dares to ask.
81. *The Focused Repeater* –
Same point, again and again. Previews his point, elaborates, summarises, and repeat. With so little substance, this presentation, you think, must surely end early; seldom does.
82. *The Digestive Interpreter* –
Basically presents someone else's paper and digests it for you. Not deterred that you and the other participants have already read the paper. Instead, this represents an opportunity to showcase his interpretation skills.
83. *The Double Dealer* –
Promises to deliver answers to important questions and twenty minutes later is still promising.
84. *The Scraper* –
Mission is to summarize everything we have heard so far at this (and other) conferences. When two *Scrapers* follow each other, an infinite black hole may emerge.

85. *The Further Research Is Needed* –
His mission is to raise the ‘ground breaking’ issue, and leave it to others in the audience to empirically test.
86. *The Car Salesman* –
What will it take for you to leave this conference endorsing my work?
87. *The Scope Constrainer* –
‘I am limiting the scope of my talk to exclude [relevant] factors a, b, and c, and will focus instead on [irrelevant] d.’
88. *The Weather Channel* –
Talks about the flood or the sun or the moon, anything to explain why the presentation is brief, and abstract.
89. *The Devil’s Advocate* –
Unlike the *Pit-bull*, doesn’t want to attack. Nor does he personally believe this point. But then goes on and on, just to ‘shake things up a bit.’
90. *The Frank and Honest One* –
‘I know you are all bored,... We all want to go home,...’
His presentation delivers the first, rarely the second.
91. *The Hydrogen Bomb* –
Turns everything to politically sensitive issues. Your inability to see this friction, reflects badly on you.
Our advice: Stay quiet during Q&A and hope for the best.
92. *The Silo* –
Somehow identifies an issue divorced from conference issues.
The desperation in the audience’s eyes is evident. To minimise the pain, no follow up questions are asked, just silence. The panel chair is looking at his shoes with great interest.
93. *The Labrador Retriever* –
‘Just glad to be here. Very excited about this opportunity.
Thank you [organizer]. Thank you [panellists]. Very honoured.
Literally, I cannot believe it.’
94. *The Doublespeaker* –
Prefaces ‘alleged’ for actually perpetrated crimes, and characterize scientific consensus as ‘mixed.’

95. *The Vegan* –
Manages to bring personal beliefs into debate. In extreme cases, may question other panellists', organizer's, or audience's values and integrity.
96. *The Recycler* –
Same presentation as last year, based on the same article he wrote three years ago. With some 'important' updates.
97. *The Optimist* –
Like the *Recycler*, gives the same presentation, but expects a different, more positive response.
98. *The Accuser* –
I asked for there to be handout', and then spends time looking for evidence of a handout. Mumbles something about the incompetence of the host before putting on a brave face.
99. *The Intimatist* –
Manages to inject uncomfortable personal details, like recent divorce or colonoscopy, in the presentation.

**** Bonus Entries:**

100. *The Source of it All*
'While the government report does not mention my research, it is easy to see how my work has influenced the conclusions and recommendations.' Often fails to explain how his papers, which are rarely downloaded, managed to achieve this impressive feat.
101. *The Optometrist*
His slides remind you of your recent eye examination. You can see the title at the top, but the rest is blurry. Luckily you remember from past eye tests that the bottom-line is likely to read 'A K C P O N L' – so probably did not miss a thing.
102. *The Prophet*
The one who wrongly predicts the imminent impact of proposed policy or regulation. Modifies his prophecies continuously from one conference to the next to maintain his credibility.

103. *The Chameleon*

With his advanced senses, identifies the direction in which the discussion is heading and adapts accordingly. Shifting left and right like there is no tomorrow. Also known as the ‘Spineless’ among delegates of chiropractic conferences.

104. *The Crematorium*

Where creativity goes to die.

105. *The slow talker*

Like a British colonialist addressing his subjects . . .

106. *The Golden Fish*

Starts with a brilliant insight. Forgets where he is. . . . pause. . . Then stumbles upon his original insight as though it were a newly discovered insight. The process may repeat itself several times in a single presentation.

107. *The Complementer*

“Your city is so uninspiring, that I actually came to the conference early. Having heard the other presentations, I think I was overly harsh on your city.”

108. *The Rager*

Continues arguing his point from the audience.

109. *The Moderator*

Begins by saying that there is no need to introduce speakers, as the conference pack provides their bios. Proceeds over the next 20 minutes, describing his invaluable contributions to the field. Exhausting the time available, nods at the dumbstruck panelists noting that they would agree that the remaining panels should tackle the important issues their panel (his work) raised.

110. *The Leapfrogger*

A leading academic in the audience challenges the speaker for not considering the second derivative, epsilon. The speaker counters that he has already worked out the implications in the 3rd and 4th derivatives, alpha and beta. No one dares respond, as the speaker continues, even though his slides contradict what he just said.

111. *Open microphone*

Not being aware that the mobile microphone is still attached, the speaker leaves the room and starts criticising all – the host, the chair, the panellists. Then moves on to the restroom, where he complains more about the host country culture and lousy plumbing.

112. *The one who makes you regret it all*

Tries to lure the audience into his cave of irrelevancy.

* Test subjects were not harmed during the research observations, nor was any bitterness involved in the writing of this report. Just pure joy (in procrastinating from our next treatise, which, if our publicists do their job, should be available at the checkout counter of your local supermarket).

** We are grateful for suggestions received from colleagues who shared with us their hard to erase experiences.