Successful as a Trainer and Speaker With NOPA – Networking, Openness, Participation, and Agility

by

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SUCCESSFUL

Tools & Techniques With Strategy –
Reaching the Destination Safely
as an Entrepreneur & a Company

Hint:
We address people of all genders, even if we only use the masculine form of address for the sake of readability.

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In this article, I present **NOPA** as a success strategy for trainers and speakers. NOPA stands for NETWORKING, OPENNESS, PARTICIPATION, and AGILITY. This strategy plausibly illustrates that only those trainers and speakers are able to outgrow themselves who properly network and make sales pitches, let participants take part in what is happening, flexibly switch back and forth between roles, accept feedback and reflect on themselves, and regularly leave their comfort zone and work on themselves. NOPA opens up the possibility for such trainers and speakers to distinguish themselves from those colleagues in their field who all do the same thing wrong and display the worst possible performance: they move in the expert role 80 % of the time and forget to involve their participants. Then there is no need for live events because in this case they hardly differ from monotonous YouTube videos.

Trainers and speakers who internalise the NOPA principle and apply it to themselves not only stand out from the crowd but are equally interesting to participants, clients and customers and know the necessary strategies for well-deserved success. Since groups of people such as managing directors, executives, and entrepreneurs also regularly give presentations in their daily practice, NOPA is just as relevant for them as it is for trainers and speakers. For better readability, we will mostly refer to trainers and speakers in the following, without wanting to exclude the other groups mentioned – unless there is an explicit reference because certain models or formats cannot be transferred.

1. Networking

»Your network is your net worth.«

1.1 Giving Is the New Taking

To be successful as a trainer and speaker in the short-, medium- and long-term, you need a network with good connections. You can build, maintain and expand such a network by obeying an unwritten law: people feel the need to give something back when they receive something as a gift. In this sense, it's *nice to be important but it's more important to be nice.* So, don't hold out your hand when approaching your network, but first, give something that adds value to your counterpart. It doesn't have to be monetary or material. You can also give recognition and praise or simply listen to your counterpart. So, first, check what you can do for your network, then something will surely come back. Your gift must be unconditional, i.e., without any

expectation of something in return, otherwise, your fellow human beings will sense this and avoid you.

1.2 Network Setup

If you don't have a network yet, there are two proven ways to build one: by participating in training with colleagues from the same field and by attending events with potential clients in the field. At this point, it should be noted that access to networks always costs money – regardless of which format you choose. You should consider the costs as an investment that is always worthwhile because participating in a training or an event is a much more favourable variant of network building than introducing yourself to each corporation individually – in this case, the time required and costs for travel and accommodation are added.

1.2.1 Participation in Training With Colleagues From the Same Field

Training with colleagues from the same field can be, for example, a train-the-trainer or speaker training. There you meet people who are driven by the same "why" as you are and who support each other so that positive energy is created. In addition to teaching content, training also gives you access to a network of like-minded people, which is enormously important for your success. In French it is said, "Qui se ressemble s'assemble." In English, it means something like, "What is alike gathers." This also applies to the trainers who support you and ideally pursue a similar dream. My team and I therefore not only offer various trainings that opens up access to networks. We also take advantage of various opportunities to train ourselves and in this way continuously expand our network. So, our message to you is: always surround yourself with people who have the same dream as you.

1.2.2 Participation in Events With Potential Customers on Site

Fellow trainers give energy – orders come from clients: a colleague does not pass on orders that he can handle himself. Therefore, you should focus on proven events that open up access to potential clients, such as speed dating or competitions. At speed dating, ideally, various HR directors are present as company representatives who have a budget for training in the company. You as a trainer sit opposite them and present yourself. The representatives can choose individual providers depending on their needs. Speed dating is particularly suitable for coaches and consultants because they present themselves one-to-one, similar to the service format they offer. In competitions such as our European Speaker Award, various coaches and speakers present their performance on stage. In a time-limited setting, they ideally give a talk on their absolute favourite topic. Company representatives who are also present experience the

performances live and then have the opportunity to commission the trainer or speaker they consider to be the best. Compared to speed dating, competitions are very time-efficient because the speaker only presents himself once on stage and various company representatives see him at the same time. Events of this kind are particularly suitable for trainers and speakers who want to deliver a sample of their work that matches their service.

1.3 Conscious Selection of Interlocutors – the Three Stones

No matter what kind of event you are at, coffee breaks, lunches, or dinners don't give you much time to talk to everyone on site. It is therefore all the more important that you consciously use these times to recharge your batteries and make positive contacts. The latter also applies to other contexts. All people in your environment and network are stones – the question is what kind. The first group is the millstones. These people are the worst kind. They are negative, constantly nagging, spreading their negative energy, and thus dragging others down emotionally. The rule is: stay away. The second group is the touchstones. These are people who are not always fun to be around, but for whom we often have a responsibility, e.g., care recipients, relatives, or a colleague whom you did not choose yourself. For touchstones, think about what you can learn from them to grow. The third group is gemstones. These are people who energise. A few minutes in their presence and your heart will open. After the conversation, you feel better than before. The rule here is: stay in contact with them regularly so that they do your soul good. Conclusion: never sit next to a millstone at an event. Choose a gemstone if possible. If there is none present that day, take a touchstone to learn from.

1.4 OPIS Method for Discussions With Potential Clients

Situations in which we enter into conversation with potential clients arise time and again. The quality of the conversation decides whether or not an order is placed. Many make the mistake of telling too much about themselves, their company, and their topics instead of first meeting a potential client with small talk on a human level, listening to them, and asking questions. Most people sound like record players playing memorised company presentations. This is fatal because the potential customer wants to be perceived individually. The **OPIS Method** makes it possible to conduct an appropriate conversation. This method succeeds in transforming an implicit need into an explicit need: the **O** stands for ORIENTATION QUESTIONS, the **P** for PROBLEM QUESTIONS, the **I** for IMPLICATIONAL QUESTIONS, and the **S** for SOLUTION QUESTIONS. The orientation questions help to understand what the company is currently doing in a specific sector. For example, for a company like BMW, the first question might be, "What issues are interesting in the automotive sector right now?" Problem questions are used to find out where the shoe is

currently pinching. One such question might be, "What is the most pressing issue for BMW right now, in the COVID-19 crisis?" The implicational questions aim to make people aware of what the consequence is if the interlocutor does not book the trainer, i.e., "What happens if nothing happens?" The solution questions are about paraphrasing, mirroring the interlocutor's statement by repeating it, and checking its content for accuracy. Like this: "So, it would benefit you if you had leadership training that ensured you had lower turnover and that further strengthened your employer branding? Did I understand that correctly?" If the potential client answers the solution questions in the affirmative, the next step is to talk about an offer: "Yes, good, then we agree. How do we want to proceed? Do you need a written offer now? Can we do it with a handshake? Or should I just put it in an e-mail again?" A huge advantage now is that the potential customer's language can be used in the offer. He has talked a lot, so his words can be used to formulate an offer precisely. And this is the secret of success: the potential customer has the feeling that he has been understood and that he has received an offer that has been developed specifically for his needs or those of the company – highly customised.

1.5 Network Maintenance and Customer Loyalty

Existing networks and customers need care. Often this is neglected or approached in the wrong way. Even if it sounds a little striking, I often observe the following in practice: "Dear customer, I have turnover burnout. We understand each other well. Please give me an order sometime. We do like each other." Such an approach harms the relationship more than it helps. As a general rule, you should only ever nurture when there is something that adds value to your contact. The easiest way to do this is by following up on previous conversations or interests. There may be a recent article, post, blog post, or YouTube video that relates to your last conversation: "Have a read of this", or "Have a look at this, it might be interesting for you." Or maybe a new book of your own is a good gift or an invitation to an event of yours – the latter not to earn money, but to open up your network for contacts. Here, quality comes before quantity. It may take a while before you make contact again to cultivate your network. But if you offer real added value, the joy about the gift will be all the greater and your gesture will not be forgotten so quickly.

2. Openness
»Your mind is like a parachute. It only works when it opens.«

Among the most important factors for success are openness to feedback and actively seeking regular feedback. Basically, as the receiver of this feedback, you are free to change your

behaviour accordingly, e.g., because you have received this feedback before, or to discard certain aspects, e.g., because there are good reasons to assume that the sender was angry about something else and projected his anger onto you. Either way, however, as a trainer, take every opportunity to get specific feedback – preferably at the end of each sequence. And take it seriously! Feedback can be given on paper, face-to-face, or online. To conduct online feedback, tools such as Mentimeter can be used, which offers participants the opportunity to give feedback virtually and anonymously in real-time. Important to know: the larger the company where in-house training is conducted, the more likely it is that internal feedback forms will be used. In this case, make sure that the participants do not receive a second sheet from you. There are several reasons for this: At the time of the feedback, it is already late, and the participant is not happy if he has to fill in two sheets before he can finally leave. In most cases, one of the sheets is then only processed stepmotherly. Accordingly, this one has no significance and even distorts the overall picture. The participant is annoyed because of the poor organisation, which can also lead to a poorer evaluation. In any case, make sure that the results of the in-house feedback are made available to you. This is usually okay for the HR department but usually requires not only a request but also a reminder, because otherwise your request will be lost in the company's daily routine.

By the way: oral feedback is by far the most positive because it takes place directly at the end of a training session and the principle of social desirability applies. Written feedback comes in second place. It is also quite positive because everyone is still euphoric at the end of the training. If you want to get critical feedback, you should make sure that the survey is anonymous. It is even better to wait for one to two weeks before asking participants to fill out an online questionnaire. The result from this is often much more critical because the participants have returned to their everyday lives and have already tried out which training contents can be applied in practice. Feedback like this sometimes hurts a little. But it is only this approach that enables you to determine what really works well or doesn't work well in your training. If participants with the necessary distance and anonymity still increasingly say that a method is brilliant, then you can rely on this statement.

2.1 Four Stages of Learning Show Relevance of Feedback

Feedback enables growth. The relevance of feedback stems from the four stages of learning or competence development. A trainer does some things well. Other things he does badly but does not know it. He has a so-called blind spot. An example: he always has his hands in his pockets. That is the lowest level of learning, unconscious incompetence. So, the trainer does things wrong because he doesn't notice them. The feedback he gets makes him aware of his

behaviour, i.e., the unconscious incompetence becomes conscious incompetence. He still has his hands in his pockets, but now he is aware of it. The stage of conscious incompetence opens up the possibility for him to change something about his behaviour. This is exactly why openness to feedback is so important: it brings the trainer to the stage of conscious incompetence. In the next step, the trainer can now work on himself and practise taking his hands out of his pockets. In this way he reaches the level of conscious competence, i.e., he performs the desired behaviour correctly, but it is exhausting because he has to keep consciously directing his focus on it so as not to forget it. If he nevertheless stays on the ball for quite a while, then he reaches the highest level of learning, the unconscious competence. At this level, he has become accustomed to the desired behaviour and no longer spends energy on getting it right. It has become a routine. The goal of every trainer is to reach the highest level of learning again and again. He achieves this through regular feedback. This in turn requires him to be open to feedback to initiate a new learning process again and again.

2.2 Ways of Obtaining Feedback

So, the question is, how do you manage to get as much feedback as possible? The obvious answer is lots of practice. The more training you do, the more feedback you get. Sometimes it can make sense to take on a slightly lower-paying job – to get feedback. Another option is to participate in speaking events such as the European Speaker Award. Here you can compete with other speakers and exchange ideas with company representatives. The prerequisite is that there is a feedback round at the event. You can also record your performance on video and watch it afterwards. You will most likely notice behaviours and phrases that you were not aware of during your presentation. Do you like going all-in? Publish your video on YouTube! This is where very critical viewers move around. The feedback is authentic, honest, and often contains really good advice. Even with a video with thousands of likes, critical comments are never absent.

2.3 TTT Rule for Signalling Openness to Feedback

The presence or absence of openness to feedback is reflected in a trainer's body language. Many trainers continue to speak while turning away from their participants, e.g., to point at something on the flipchart, signalling the lack of openness. The **TTT rule** helps you as a trainer to remember to signal openness through body language. The acronym stands for **T**OUCH, **T**URN, **T**ALK and reminds you that you only ever talk when you are making eye contact with your participants and remain silent when you turn away, i.e., Touch: you show something. Turn: you turn back to your participants. Talk: you speak again. While you are talking, always

keep the tips of your feet pointing towards the audience. You should also make sure that the palms of your hands are visible to the audience when you interpret or touch. While the palm is interpreted as a gesture of concealment because it is usually visible when something is hidden, the visible palm signals a gesture of being unarmed. In this way, you underline with your body language that you are open to your audience and interested in the people in the room.

3. Participation

»Life doesn't just happen – it requires our participation!«

Participation means making events interactive, i.e., actively involving the audience. This applies not only to training but also to lectures. The 4MAT system is suitable for this in combination with gamification. I will present both in the following.

3.1 4MAT System

The **4MAT System** provides a structure for designing training and lectures. It is about designing each event to cover four fields: Why, What, How, and What for.

The Why-quadrant is about getting the participants' attention. Therefore, show why the topic is important to them, i.e., what significance it has for them. This is the "What's in it for me?" in terms of motivation. One formulation could be, "You may also have the desire to be financially independent."

In the What-quadrant, the trainer acts as an expert and provides content. You can introduce this, for example, as follows: "To help you succeed, I have brought you the OPIS Method today. I developed it myself and it allows you to have good sales conversations."

The How-quadrant is about the participants trying out what they have heard in a practice sequence and gaining experience. Role plays, for example, are suitable for this. A possible formulation could be: "Now I have shown you this. The three of you go together. We are going to do role-playing. One member of the group is always the salesperson who uses the OPIS Method, one is the potential customer, the third is an observer and then gives feedback to the salesperson who uses the OPIS Method. We meet here again in 45 minutes. Let's go." People then fan out, role-play and give feedback to each other. It is important here that there is a concrete indication of the duration of the exercise and a command to start as well as to finish.

The What for-quadrant is about enabling the transfer from the exercise sequence to everyday life. A suitable formulation for this is, "Well, now it's 4 p.m. We still have an hour. At 5 p.m. the training is over. Now, I would like to collect what for you need what you've learned. What are situations in your real life where you would like to use what you have learned? Can you just

collect examples? Everyone writes three things on moderation cards and then pins them up here at the front."

The 4MAT System, therefore, offers a structure that can be used to design any training or event. For keynotes with larger audiences, of course, there need to be a few adjustments in the wording or the implementation, but the structure always remains the same. For example, you can design the interaction with a request: "Please, raise your hand, if you also have the desire to be financially independent."

You can outsource the Why- and the What-quadrants if needed in terms of scaling effects, i.e., you record the why and the what on video and make both accessible online. What makes a training is the participation that takes place via the How- and What for-quadrants. This is where live training is needed, preferably face-to-face. Although technically the How- and What for-quadrants can also be conducted live in so-called breakout rooms in an online format, my experience and feedback so far show that participants prefer face-to-face interaction. In any case, as a trainer, pay special attention to interaction.

3.2 Gamification

Gamification is when elements of the game are transferred to a non-game environment. They enable interaction, emotion, and mood. In the context of the What for-quadrant, the use of real-time tools such as the Mentimeter mentioned above is particularly suitable. It can not only be used for feedback but is also suitable for conducting a quiz. Staying with the example given, after presenting the OPIS Method, you can use the tool to check what information was received by the participants: "Good, let's see how well you have listened so far. Now comes a quiz." Now the participants have the opportunity to answer questions prepared for them via their smartphones. The phrase, "What does the O stand for in OPIS?" allows multiple-choice answers. A text entry is also conceivable: "The P in OPIS stands for ...?" Mentimeter recognises whether the word entered is correct. However, not only correct answers count but also the reaction speed. If several people give the same answer, the fastest is rewarded with points accordingly. In this way, a winner can be determined at the end, who receives a prize such as a book, a free ticket to an event, or the like. The result is a virtual competition that creates a good atmosphere and keeps the participants happy. Instead of being slain by PowerPoint presentations and being victims of the lecture, the participants get actively involved, prioritise topics, express wishes, and influence the course of the event.

4. Agility

»Insanity is to do the same thing over and over again but expect different results« – Albert Einstein

Agility means bringing the flexibility to try new things, to test and experiment. The environment is constantly changing, and it is important and right to react to it. However, not everyone succeeds in this in the same way. Let's take the COVID-19 crisis as a current example: the situation is initially the same for everyone. How they deal with it varies. While about half of all trainers resign and stop working because they think they can no longer conduct training, the other half adjust to the new situation, modify their portfolio of offers and realise virtual training. This example illustrates the relevance of agility for trainers.

4.1 Exercise on Different Playing Fields

Agility is multi-faceted and means that you adapt to a wide range. This includes, for example, adapting your offer to different sectors (e.g., profit and non-profit organisations), different industries (e.g., automotive or services), different company sizes (e.g., large corporations, medium-sized companies), different levels (e.g., managing director- and executive levels), different professions (e.g., athletes, teachers, consultants), different languages and cultural characteristics. From each target group, you learn something about yourself and what works or doesn't work. The more you expose yourself, the more you learn. It's about stepping out of your comfort zone, again and again, to learn how to swim in all kinds of environments and climates without sinking. Also, one goal is to practise different formats such as one-to-one and virtual training or a combination of both, as well as packing your content into different time slots, i.e., shortening a two-day training to a ten-minute lecture and vice versa. It is therefore advisable not only to be a coach, trainer, or speaker but to challenge yourself and learn to move on different playing fields. Over time, this leads to composure and sovereignty, because at a certain point you have already done and experienced so much that hardly anything can shock you. If you organise events in different languages, you will also expand your vocabulary in your mother tongue because you will be more sensitive to language.

4.2 Role Model Based on Satir Categories

As mentioned at the beginning, agility requires flexibility so that you can respond appropriately to changing environmental conditions. Without flexibility, there is no agility. Flexibility, on the other hand, is only possible if you can slip into different roles. This role switch primarily refers to the formats of coaching, training, and speaking. Being an author, by the way, is also such a role, which is highly recommended, because it makes a big difference to deal with your content

in the context of a written work instead of expressing yourself verbally. As a book author, you process your content in a completely different way, enabling you to be an even better coach, trainer, and speaker. Besides, there are four other roles that you need. You should also switch between them flexibly within a format. A role model that my team and I have developed is suitable for this, based on Virginia Satir's categories, with various modifications for the specific case. It applies exclusively to trainers and speakers and therefore only to the formats of training and speaking.

In the expert role, the goal is to communicate content. As an expert, you draw on content and models to explain them. Many think that it is the expert's job to exclusively reproduce his content. Concerning the quadrants already mentioned, you need this role mostly for the What-quadrant, to present figures, data and facts.

The role of the entertainer is about entertainment, humour, wit, and conveying a positive feeling. The aim is to bring the fun factor into the event. Infotainment is created from the combination of expert and entertainer. That's exactly what people want. You need a sense of what is happening in the room and a certain spontaneity, for example, to use situation comedy to your advantage. You need the role of the entertainer especially in the Why-quadrant to pick up people and build a good relationship.

The motivator initiates a behaviour change and is mainly used in the context of the How-quadrant. He is very strict, appears authoritarian, and makes the participants do an exercise. Consequently, he is rather loud and therefore comparable to a drill instructor. This is exactly the role you need to moderate role-plays or exercises.

The moderator is suitable for the What for-quadrant. He is characterised by the fact that he does not bring any content of his own but guides the audience in such a way that the participants develop the content from within themselves. The aim is to activate the participants and make them protagonists.

The role model is agile, as long as you do not understand and apply it in a technocratic way, but rather make a flexible role switch depending on the context. Apart from role switching, combinations of different roles can make sense depending on the situation. For example, the combination of the roles "expert" and "motivator" creates a motivating expert. Here it depends on the weighting of the combined roles.

Conclusion: NOPA is a strategy for success. It is equally relevant for all people who move in similar settings as trainers and speakers. It is important to identify meaningful networks – they should not only consist of colleagues but also potential clients. There needs to be openness

to regular and targeted feedback – written and verbal. For participation to succeed, it needs maximum activation of participants. Agility comes from adopting different trainer roles.

About the Author

Dr. Martin Emrich was born in 1974 and holds a PhD in psychology. In 2019, he was awarded the African Speaker Award in Johannesburg, South Africa, for his presentation of the NOPA principle. As an author, he has published over 50 books and journal articles. Martin is an accredited Systemic Business Coach by the International Coaching Association (ICA) and a Certified Business Trainer according to EN ISO/IEC 17024. He works worldwide and in five languages as a keynote speaker, executive coach, and trainer, mainly on the topics of "Leadership" and "Organisational Development". He is the founder and organiser of the European Speaker Awards. Martin has three children and lives in Stuttgart.

Motto: »Improving people! Inspiring thousands!«

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