

ON-CAMERA COACH

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES
FOR BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS IN
A VIDEO-DRIVEN WORLD



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CHAPTER 1

Why You Need to Read This Book



Gladys and her girls

Don't let the sunshine yellow suit fool you. This is the unapologetically unhappy face of a woman who does not like cameras.

The unfortunate circumstance for my nana, Gladys Mason: her beloved husband was what we'd now call "an early adopter." The movements of my mother's side of the family were well documented on film, and the Martin Scorsese behind the movie camera was my grandfather, Harry.

Gladys was a frequent if unwilling participant in his 8mm films, so consequently, we all became intimately familiar with certain angles and parts of her body—the back of her head, perhaps a quick glimpse of the side of her face as she pivoted away from the offending lens before running rabbit to a faraway glen. If she couldn't dash away, she would try to hide in plain sight by extending her palm toward the

camera, precursor to the paparazzi pose seen on the covers of tabloids the world over.

The good news for Gladys? For the most part, she only had to juke out my movie-making Papa to maintain her credentials as a Professional Camera Avoider. For the most part, Papa brought his camera out only for special occasions: family reunions, the first day of school, holidays. (On Christmas morning, no one was allowed to come downstairs to see what Santa brought until the room was properly illuminated by his own massive bank of lights. True.)

But today, avoiding Papa's lens would be the least of Gladys's concerns. Cameras are everywhere. I shudder when I imagine the levels of panic she would hit today.

THE POWER AND PERVASIVENESS OF VIDEO

Video cameras are no longer just in a studio or pulled out of the closet for dance recitals; they're on your laptop, your webcam, your phone. They invade your personal space through apps like Skype, FaceTime, and Google Hangouts, and they've become as ubiquitous in the workplace as Excel spreadsheets and leftover birthday cake.

So what's driving this video proliferation? The medium itself is powerful and personal.

Consider how much time you spend viewing videos today versus even five years ago. The Age of YouTube has created an expectation that you can always watch rather than read. Need to know how to install a garbage disposal? Well, you *could* follow the directions enclosed in the Home Depot box—but why do that, when you can watch Bob the Plumber show you step by step in his DIY video?

Millennials have upped the ante even more with a penchant for Snapchat selfies and conversations conducted at length through the ever-growing list of video chat apps. For that generation, communicating through a camera is almost second nature.

But even the stodgiest of corporate cultures are making room for video. Corporate YouTube and Vimeo channels, Twitter accounts, and myriad social media opportunities vie with webinars, videoconferences, and Ted Talks for content. If a corporate web site doesn't have a video component, it looks outdated and downright boring. For the

marketing department, it's a virtual video smorgasbord with unprecedented avenues to get your message out there.

But what happens if your messenger is about as dynamic on camera as a ham sandwich?

THE DECLINE OF THE PROFESSIONAL SPOKESPERSON

After a successful 15-year career in television news, I left the business after one too many “team coverage” snow-mageddon events, holidays spent on set and middle-of-the-night phone calls to cover whatever news was breaking. I moved to what I called “The Dark Side”—doing on-camera and voice-over work for any corporation interested in hiring me to serve as its professional spokesperson. I quickly realized how transferable and in demand my skills would be. Video is pervasive throughout the corporate landscape.

However, over the past decade of doing this kind of work, I have noticed a trend. More and more companies are forgoing the “professional spokesperson/actor” and are instead opting to put their “real” employees on camera, people who usually have had no prior experience or training in how to communicate through a camera. To me, that's unequivocally unfair.

I have spent more than 20 years honing my skills in front of the camera and have discovered what works and what doesn't, often through trial and error. My first stint in TV news was at a CBS affiliate in Youngstown, Ohio. Who knows why the news director hired me to be the weekend reporter and weather anchor? Perhaps it had something to do with the fact that I said I would do this for free. (They did pay me, and as a senior in college, I considered it more than adequate. Heck, I lived on Taco Bell.) I was awful on camera initially, but I learned my craft and eventually became a well-respected, award-winning journalist and anchor.

The only training most of these corporate execs have had is a quick reminder to smile right before the red light goes on. And yet hiring someone like me to be the mouthpiece for the enterprise is becoming less and less common.

Blame it on Steve Jobs for helping to create this age of the celebrity CEO, but be aware that the days of sending out the professional

spokesperson are numbered. Your customers, your employees, and just about anyone else who is watching your video will want to hear from the decision makers, the doers, the C-suite executives—and more and more often, that means speaking on camera.

THE GLOBAL COMMUNICATION TOOL OF CHOICE

Video is a vital communication link for a workforce that is often not corralled within the bricks and mortar of the corporate monolith. It's immediate and impactful, and it can save you a ton of money.

Important enterprise-wide announcements are regularly taped and uploaded to an organization's intranet. Training that once was held at the home office is now delivered through video portals. Colleagues can now collaborate across continents with greater ease, albeit with less sleep for those whose time zone received short shrift.

Videoconferencing is not new. It's been around for decades, but for the majority of those years, the technology was siloed in specific rooms, which were hard to book, and usually reserved for the C-suite and senior-level executives. Today, videoconferencing has come to the masses, whenever and wherever they are.

While the teleconference still holds a firm majority, videoconferencing is growing in popularity at a rapid rate. According to a Wainhouse Research survey in 2015, respondents indicated an average of 42 percent of their Web conferences involved video.¹

Additional insight from Wainhouse Research indicates that those who are already active users of videoconferencing are deepening their commitment to it. Of the roughly 170 respondents, 97 percent said they use videoconferencing more now than they did two years ago, and nearly the same high percentage of respondents pointed to improvements in reliability (95 percent) and ease of use (92 percent). According to that Wainhouse report, "Companies around the world are depending on video-enabled meetings to empower their people, serve clients better, and compete on a global basis."²

The advantages of videoconferencing are both tangible and intangible. For employees who are far-flung, virtual video meetings provide an acceptable and often preferred alternative to traveling to a meeting on site. It saves on costs and downtime due to travel, increasing productivity.

Introducing a visual element also has the effect of turning a virtual meeting into one where etiquette mimics that of an in-room meeting. Remember the YouTube video that went viral, showing what really happens during conference calls? (If you haven't, search "Conference Call in Real Life" on YouTube.) Turning webcams on minimizes multitasking. Checking e-mail, playing solitaire, or grabbing a latte at your favorite coffeehouse becomes much more difficult to pull off if your face is constantly visible to all parties. The result? Everyone is forced to focus but rewarded by a meeting that is often shorter.

Video meetings can be more meaningful, too. It's easier to build rapport with colleagues and "read the room" when you can see your audience. Body language speaks volumes but is silent on a teleconference call. Videoconferencing allows participants to pick up on non-verbal cues that would have been missed. In addition, research has shown that the majority of us are visual learners, so teleconferencing as a communication tool puts everyone at a disadvantage by forcing us to be primarily auditory learners.

HIRING BY SKYPE

Video chat applications have completely revamped the hiring process across all verticals.

Corporations can cast a much wider net for applicants now that interviewing over the Web is possible. Apps such as Skype, ooVOO, Tango, and Google Hangouts offer an opportunity to connect with potential candidates who may have been eliminated purely based on geography. If someone hits it out of the park during an interview on Google Hangouts, for example, the decision to bring that person in for a face-to-face meeting becomes a much easier one to make. And if there are still reservations, hiring managers can go back and "review the tape," so to speak. Many video chat apps are capable of recording calls or have plug-ins created by other vendors that give users the opportunity to preserve those calls in a digital file.

Video interviews also have the benefit of immediacy. Scheduling a trip to the corporate headquarters can be much more challenging than simply blocking out a chunk of time to chat online. By shortening the time to interview, a company can minimize the time to hire, allowing

them to fill key positions quicker and potentially with better-quality candidates thanks to the deeper pool of applicants no longer limited by geography.

THE PERILS OF VIDEO

Want to avoid the camera today? That would be nearly impossible—and a potential professional liability. If *you* don't want to leverage the power of presenting to a camera, someone else will and could be seen as a more valuable asset. Self-promotion can be a strategy, and video provides the perfect platform on which to do it.

But there are risks. Often, the messages being delivered on camera are high stakes: vital news for the entire global enterprise or, even more daunting, for an external audience of customers, competitors, and the always-intimidating media. Performing poorly can undercut the credibility of the presenter and ultimately can hurt the corporate (or personal) brand he or she represents.

By contrast, on-camera expertise can be a true differentiator, especially as the use of video continues its exponential growth. Some camera-savvy corporate folks embrace the opportunity to connect with their audiences in a much deeper way than the written word allows. They come across as authentic and sincere, but that's not the norm.

Most people who do not perform on camera for a living would prefer a root canal. Presenting via video combines two things most people hate: public speaking and being on camera. Even those who are very comfortable speaking to a live audience of hundreds can be flummoxed by having to speak to a single, solitary lens.

HOW READING THIS BOOK CAN IMPROVE YOUR ON-CAMERA PERFORMANCE

The goal of any training is to change either you or the way you do something, but to me, the time spent in the classroom is just the first step. It's purely information transfer. The real "learning" is in the doing. This book is structured to give you not only foundational knowledge, but also ample opportunity to try out the techniques you have learned through specific exercises. Sure, you can skip over them,

but your training will only be superficial. You need to practice what you've learned on camera and then evaluate your performance.

It's actually not too difficult to separate the good from the bad when assessing your own performance. Peruse YouTube, and chances are you can easily identify those who have some serious skills in presenting to a camera from those who should have opted for another way (or person) to convey their message. Sometimes, the problems are readily apparent: lightning-fast delivery, distracting gestures, content that is hard to follow. But sometimes, there just seems to be something off. The same can be said of those who are solid performers. You might be thinking, "The camera really loves her," but do you know why? This book will highlight some of the nuances that contribute to performance success and raise your awareness of performance pitfalls that go beyond the obvious.

What You Will Need

In order to assess your performance, you need a way to record yourself, but as you know, cameras surround us. You can use your smartphone, a webcam, or a regular video camera as long as you have a way to review the videos you take with it.

Topics to Be Discussed

The book begins with a discussion of what makes presenting on-camera uniquely challenging and why you are your own worst enemy. We will then take a deep dive into what I call the MVPs of Performance Success. In this book, *MVP* stands for the Mental, Vocal, and Physical elements of performance success. You will hear some case studies from former clients and be given exercises to put those newfound skills into action.

Wondering what to wear on camera? This book will help you comb through your closet for camera-friendly attire that will make you look the part. (An early tip: When in doubt, be boring.)

We will talk about content—both unscripted and scripted—and about the importance of organizing for the ear and writing the way you speak. A great script is the secret sauce for excellent on-camera presentations.

Much of what you will learn can be applied to any formal or informal on-camera performance, whether it's shot in a fancy studio

or in your basement. However, I will delve into some tips for specific scenarios like virtual meetings and interviews, formal direct-to-camera presentations, and panel discussions formatted in a broadcast-news style.

Consider this book your on-camera coach: full of tools, techniques, and insight into what works and what doesn't work on camera, no matter where that camera lurks. Many of these tools and techniques can be used in any presentation or performance—whether you can look your audience in the eye or have to imagine them on the other side of a lens.

Feel free to flip to the chapters that best fit your needs, but take note of the topics covered in the other chapters. You never know when you might need to add to your on-camera arsenal.

CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

- Video cameras are no longer just in a studio; they're on your laptop, your webcam, and your phone.
- The Age of YouTube has created an expectation that you can always watch rather than read.
- Everyone wants to hear from the decision makers, the doers, the C-suite executives . . . and more and more often, that means speaking on camera.
- Video is a vital communication link for a workforce that is often not corralled within the bricks and mortar of the corporate monolith.
- Video chat applications have completely revamped the hiring process across all verticals.
- Performing poorly can undercut the credibility of the presenter and ultimately can hurt the corporate (or personal) brand he or she represents.

NOTES

1. Andrew Davis, *2015 Video Conference End User Survey*, September 2015. <http://cp.wainhouse.com/content/2015-video-conferencing-end-user-survey>.
2. Ira M. Weinstein and Saar Litman, *Simplicity in the New World of Video Conferencing*, November 2015. <http://cp.wainhouse.com/content/simplicity-new-world-video-conferencing>.

PRAISE FOR ON-CAMERA COACH

"In today's increasingly video-driven world, all of us need help communicating our ideas in a natural and approachable manner. Karin Reed's *On-Camera Coach* is an excellent starting point for anyone who needs to learn how best to communicate their ideas on video while avoiding common pitfalls that could easily distract from their intended message. Her personal anecdotes from her own on-camera experiences are entertaining while clearly demonstrating techniques needed to prepare and practice for a medium that does not come naturally for most of us."

—**Andrew Schwab**, President, First Flight Venture Center

"Being great at speaking in front of a room doesn't guarantee success on camera. This book reveals many valuable lessons Karin taught me over time when we have worked together. I highly recommend that you read and take heed of her advice before going on camera. You'll considerably improve your performance."

—**Bill Franks**, Chief Analytics Officer, Teradata and author of the books *Taming the Big Data Tidal Wave* and *The Analytics Revolution*

"Video is possibly the most effective media for reaching other people, conveying ideas, and selling products. Karin Reed's training gave me the edge I needed to produce professional quality videos. Whether you want to promote a startup, communicate with colleagues, or apply for a job as a news commentator, *On-Camera Coach* will help you polish your skills for optimal results!"

—**William C. Rawls, Jr.**, MD, Physician and Co-Founder, Vital Plan

"I am an experienced public speaker, but I was intimidated by the camera, until I had the opportunity to participate in Karin's workshop. She provided practical advice to make me feel good, look good (well, better) and do better in front of the camera. I have so much more confidence that I even look forward to on-camera appearances now! She's both professional and approachable, and that comes through clearly in this book. Having this book is like having a private consultation with Karin before every on-camera experience! I will definitely be keeping a copy at my desk—you should too!"

—**Kelly A. McGuire**, vice president, advanced analytics, Wyndham Destination Network

"Karin accomplishes what few authors can—she reaches through the pages to personally connect with the reader, turning what might have been a book about on-camera tactics into a supportive and educational conversation. Her insights are simple, direct, and effective. If you're looking for a guide and mentor to mastering on-camera communications, look no further. Karin is the coach we all want in our corner."

—**Bill Harper**, CEO & Chief Creative Officer, wmHarper



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