To Sit or to Stand? That is the Question.

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Have you ever wondered if it is better to sit or stand when you give a presentation? Maybe you have a personal preference.

I can tell you that this came home to me not too long ago when I had a very palpable gut reaction to speaking that I didn't anticipate. While waiting for a class to gather at the Midwest Genealogy Center, I took the opportunity to sit at a bar-height chair and chat with one of the staff members for a few minutes. While the staff member was very nice and the conversation light and friendly, my stomach tightened, my pulse quickened, my hands started to shake. I got very nervous *before the class had even started*. I quickly stood up, gathered myself, and began the class no worse for the wear.

So, what on Earth happened?

I don't profess to know the physiology behind the reaction, but what I've read leads me to believe I impeded the natural flow of energy—already heightened by adrenaline—through my body by sitting. And what would naturally come out as enthusiasm leaded out as uncontrolled, nervous energy.

Andy Eklund of Creative Streak says that when speakers sit down, their natural dynamism is cut in half. Their gestures are more restricted because everything (the whole body) is more restricted. It's more difficult to breathe, your voice is weakened, and your eye contact tends to focus more on the near-distinct script than the full audience. The body isn't able to project with the power and force standing enables. He recommends when delivering a lecture, acting as an authority, or rallying the troops that standing may be the better approach.

Does that mean it's bad to sit? Eklund says, "No." His view is that both postures have their place. Where standing is better in a preaching-type environment, sitting has its place in a more intimate dialog. If you're in a small group, speaking on a panel, or doing a Q&A, where making a one-on-one connection is more effective, then by all means sit. The opportunity to make a more personal connection is much greater. Further, you won't need the broad gestures, power voice, and center-stage authority that standing commands.

As for me, I like to stand. I like to gesture. I like to show off reference books like new-found treasures. And I like to profess the "good news" to the stadium-filling masses (okay, maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration) that have come to see and hear what I have to offer. It's good energy that is well spent.

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