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# The Panic **Button** is not for Pushing

by Katherine L. Beal

## EDITOR'S NOTE:

*As a research assistant on the National M. S. Staff, Kathy Beal works primarily on engagements and projects. To have her write about a "usual day at the office" seemed somewhat difficult, since she does a variety of things. But to have her write a human-interest, behind the scenes account of one aspect of her job—that of helping prepare and making arrangements for conference presentations—did seem appropriate.*

*We witnessed, one day, a great deal of activity involving Bob Stevens, National Director of Banking Services, two managers and Kathy. Speeches were being written, scripts were being cut and edited, slides were being re-arranged from the full-day Bank President's Conference into a two-hour Seminar for executives of a New York Bank.*

*While talking with her a few days later, we asked if she would write an account of how a presentation evolves; better still, of some of the amusing situations that are encountered in the preparation and set-up for these meetings. This article and the accompanying pictures tell that story.*

I find it increasingly difficult lately to describe "my job" to someone at a party. It just isn't a clear-cut, 9 to 5 situation. But I wouldn't want it any other way.

Each day is so unpredictable; a variety of situations and circumstances pop up all the time. Yet, it is this very lack of routine that makes my job what it is.

Take presentations for instance. One Monday evening

last December, I was coming into my apartment about 6:30 with groceries in one arm and an umbrella on the other.

The phone was ringing as I put the key into the door. In my hurry, of course, the key stuck. I reached the phone on the sixth ring to hear a familiar, but long-distance, voice say: "Hullo there, (pause), it's me."

"Oh! Mr. Sprague. Just a minute while I put some things down."

He asked what my schedule was, and could I come to Detroit tomorrow? I explained that I was in the midst of preparing scripts and slides for a two-hour banking seminar, and that I was meeting Bob Stevens in Philadelphia on Wednesday.

As if I had said nothing, he continued that he had been requested to show the S.A.V.E. speech to the M.S. Partners and Managers' meeting. "We don't have a script for the new version, so you'll have to come."

I didn't know how I would produce a new script . . . our duplicate set of SAVE slides was in Los Angeles, and Bill Johnson had taken most of our main presentation to Puerto Rico just last Friday. Mr. Sprague calmly said that that shouldn't be a problem; "He's back and here at the meeting."

Without going into details, I asked to talk with Bill Johnson. Yes, he was in Detroit but he'd left the slides at home in New Jersey. I asked if there was any way to get them into New York, somewhere I could send a messenger? He said he thought his neighbor, who

teaches at Columbia, could bring them in with him in the morning, and suggested that he call Mrs. Johnson to make the arrangements. An hour later, when she called to verify our plan, I thought that THAT situation, at least, was under control.

Needless to say, I was at the office early the next morning. First, I made an airline reservation to Detroit and then I began to finish arranging the slides for the seminar. At about 10 o'clock, I dispatched a messenger to Columbia University, the name of Bill's neighbor and the proper building in hand.

Shortly after, I telephoned Columbia to say that a messenger would arrive shortly to pick up the box of slides. That was when I learned that our precious slides had been left in New Jersey . . . on the kitchen table! Just then, Mrs. Johnson called to tell me what I already knew. Our slides were in New Jersey. It was now close to 11 o'clock. I had to leave the office at 1:30 to make a 3 o'clock flight. I was getting a bit nervous!

She said that she would bring the slides to the office herself. So, I finished mounting Bob Steven's seminar, tech'ed it to be sure that everything was in sequence, put the six trays and four scripts into the case. At 12:30, Mrs. Johnson arrived.

I began to fill the "holes" in the new SAVE presentation. Some major diagrams were missing . . . were they in the seminar? In the old version? How had we done it ten days ago when we used the new outline? Pressure being what it was, I went to the cabinet where the banking slides are kept and picked up every SAVE slide we owned.

As I was throwing them into a small carrying case and putting on my coat, my name came over the intercom. I picked up a phone and the same familiar, long-distance, voice said: "Hullo, (pause), how's the weather?"

You've got to be kidding!

"Well, look out the window. Is it snowing yet? I just thought I'd call to say that I might not be in Detroit when you arrive."

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*Miss Beal has been with the firm almost two years and has been involved primarily with the Advanced Business Systems Office. In working with the national MS directors, she performs in a research-writing functions on banking, government, and personnel projects and lately has taken an active part in the preparation of material and visuals for presentations.*

Should I laugh? Cry? Since I learned long ago not to panic, I said nothing.

Mr. Sprague told me that if it started to snow severely, he would leave Detroit for Boston — by train, if necessary — to attend an important meeting there early Thursday morning.

Not going into the details of the activity during the past few hours, I said that I was on my way out the door and that I would get there!

I left the office, and asked Roz Majewski to re-confirm my reservation with American, and to make a later one if necessary. In the cab on the way to the airport, I relaxed for the first time in about six hours and made a mental calculation that I had with me an Executive Seminar, a SAVE presentation, and an "emergency kit" of miscellaneous slides that might be requested at a stroke-of-genius late into the evening. And, I realized I was hungry . . . I hadn't eaten all day!

A usual day? For me, quite often . . . but not by many people's definition of "usual."

I'm not really sure how all this presentation activity got started for me. But last September I was called into Bob Stevens' office where I learned of a speaking engagement he had accepted for the National NABAC Convention. As he talked, he told me of a two-hour session he was planning and that he wanted to put together the profit planning section of the Presidents' Conference, the return on shareholder's equity figures from the "Cincinnati" presentation, and pieces of the Dimensions of Change, also from the President's Conference.

"Will you take these scripts, a couple of these articles, and write a total thing that four speakers can present; something with a beginning, a middle, and an end. I'll be back on Friday and can look at a draft then."

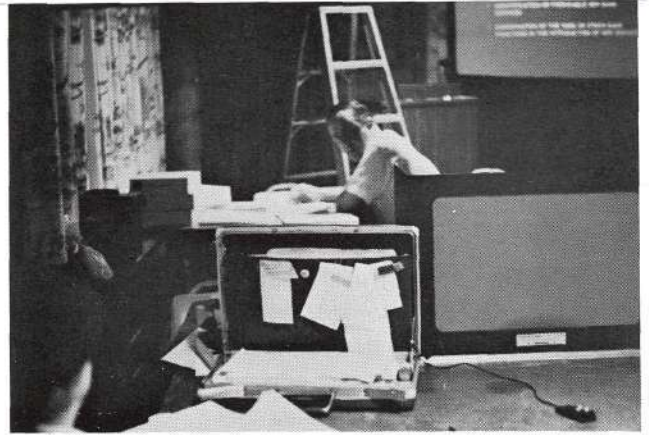
As I was gathering material from his desk, he offhandedly remarked that the NABAC Conference Proceedings editor wanted a paper suitable for publication and that the public relations staff wanted something for an advance release. "Think about those, too. You can set up the slides when the script is ready."

I think that's when, and how, it happened. And I also think that it's these unpredictable things that make a "usual day at the office." The how-to-present a group of ideas, concepts and supporting information; being able to visualize the big picture and to integrate the pieces into a logical, illustrated whole is the name-of-the-game.

And it's fun.



*During a structured break of the Conference, scripts are checked one against the other to be sure of any last-minute changes in cues.*



*Concepts are discussed and ideas are written into scripts—often under less conducive circumstances; often late into the night.*



*Rehearsal time at a smaller screen in a remote corner of the room . . .*



*Dissolve units are synchronized . . . and volume level of a pre-recorded "Dimensions of Change" tape is checked.*



*Once again, to make sure of speaking order . . .*



*Notes are made on scripts during a technical run-through while another section is rehearsed for timing.*

Taking care of production details has come along with the writing and preparing. Yet, because I'd staged a few plays and been in some summer stock productions, things seem to fall into place.

Sometimes, however, the production realities present some situations which—after the crisis has been met—are rather amusing.

In February, Bob Stevens spoke at the American Bankers Association Central Information File Workshop in New Orleans. Again, I had edited the script, researched the material for new visuals and had slides prepared. I arrived the evening before the workshop was to begin only to learn that the rectangular 10' x 20' screen that we had requested was not available, and that a 14' square one had been hung from the ceiling in the far end of a ballroom.

In and of itself, this sounds minor; but our presentation was mounted for split-screen projection . . . which meant that, actually, in placing two images side by side on that screen, the size of the picture would be only 7 feet. And in a grand ballroom, that may as well be a postage stamp!

Bob Stevens had yet to arrive and there was nothing much we could do about it that evening anyway. It was Mardi Gras season, and a dinner-dance was scheduled for that very ballroom. I left a note for Stevens saying that we could rehearse at 7 a.m. In the meantime, I thought through some alternate ways of "living with" the circumstances:

Request a pair of screens? Our presentation was only a part of an entire panel. Other speakers would be using slides, and we could hardly ask them to adjust to a line down the middle!

Use no screen at all . . . project directly upon the wall.

Re-work the script and eliminate the material requiring the split image! Yet that was a bit ridiculous, since the Banking Information Systems build-up was the double screen part, and the Central Information File was the topic of the meeting!

I finally fell asleep but my wake-up call came much too early. I arrived at the ballroom again at 7:30. Bob Stevens came soon after, looked at the screen and said: "The audience won't be able to see the slides!"

As the technical-man began to align the buildup slides, the absurdity of the situation became apparent . . . even at that hour of the morning. What we had planned and what was present were so diametrically opposed, that I began to laugh.

"It's like walking into a debate contest and changing

the entire affirmative case," I said, thinking back to a similar situation and remembering the seeming-crisis. "With some breakfast, I can think better. There's got to be a solution!"

As we sat down in the coffee shop, my alternatives vanished. I found myself suggesting the one thing I really didn't want to do: remount the entire presentation for single projection, using split-screen only for the Banking Information Systems part. This would require about an hour and a half, and a third projector. But somehow that seemed easier than requesting two screens from heaven-knew-where, or from projecting directly onto the wall, since I had discovered a twelve-foot bronze eagle-thing on the wall behind the square screen.

"How can you do that? That'd be a helluva remounting job." As we talked, he decided that we had to "run with it" as it was. While I had a second cup of coffee, he went up to the first session.

At the mid-morning break, however, he expressed some second thoughts on running-with-it. Slides had been used during the first session; if everything were reduced to half-screen size, things would hardly be readable. I agreed.

So, between 11 am and noon, we went over the script carefully and made slide changes from split-screen to single image as much as possible. While he went to a speaker's luncheon, I remounted everything for three projectors.

When the afternoon session began at 1:30, we were ready; things went as if they had been planned that way in the first place. And far be it from me to say that they weren't!

Perhaps, then, it is the very diversity of situations that arise and the juxtaposition of the ridiculous to the sublime that make a usual day at the office for me. It's becoming so that the unexpected seems all-in-a-day's-work.