

X FACTOR

UNLEASH YOUR PRESENTING SUPERPOWER



FROM BESTSELLING AUTHOR

YAMINI NAIDU

THE WORLD'S ONLY ECONOMIST TURNED
BOLLYWOOD-DANCING BUSINESS STORYTELLER

X FACTOR

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PRESENTING SUPERPOWER**

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YAMINI NAIDU

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*In loving memory of Rita Agati,
who had more smarts, sass and
X factor than anyone I know.*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Yamini Naidu, CSP*, is the world's only economist turned Bollywood-dancing business storyteller. She pioneered business storytelling in Australia and co-founded Australia's first business storytelling company. She is rated among the top three business storytellers globally. Her clients include Google, Atlassian, Ford Motor Company, Tiffany & Co, Adidas, ANZ and Goldman Sachs. She works at board and CEO level across the world, moving leaders from spreadsheets to stories.

She has authored several books, including *Story Mastery: How leaders supercharge results with storytelling*, published in 2018. *Power Play: Game-changing influence strategies for leaders* and the bestseller *Hooked: How leaders connect, engage and inspire using storytelling* were both published internationally by John Wiley & Sons.

A global citizen, Yamini was born and raised in Mumbai (formerly Bombay) in India. She is a gold medallist from University of Bombay and a scholarship winner and postgraduate from the London School of Economics.

Yamini is a voluntary guide at the National Gallery of Victoria. She has been guiding for over ten years and is proud to be part of the NGV, a Melbourne icon.

Yamini has lived, worked and studied in India, Asia, Europe and the Americas. She now lives in Melbourne, Australia, with her large extended family and a crazy, all-humans-adoring, geriatric cavoodle named Ace.

* A CSP designation is the highest honour awarded to speakers across the globe by both Australia's National and Global Professional Speaking bodies. In Australia there are approximately 150 CSPs, only 50 of them female.

WHAT OTHERS SAY

I have been privileged to have a long association with Yamini. She brings a positive spirit and infectious energy to her work and always leaves behind a lasting impression. More than 10 years on, people from my old team still comment on Yamini's engaging educational sessions, with great content and challenging fun exercises that have made a real difference to their ability to connect with people in their lives.

John Burgin, Chairman ICT Committee,
ANZ India Business Chamber

Yamini's ability to help leaders unlock the power of storytelling in a fun and authentic way is inspiring, insightful and transformative. I am forever grateful that our paths crossed many years ago. Yamini has had such an impact on me, and I am sure on many others.

Edweena Stratton, Chief People Officer, Culture Amp

Our Executive Team at Dental Health Services Victoria had the privilege of a Story Telling Masterclass with the amazing Yamini Naidu. The team came away inspired and able to tell their stories in their own voice. We have been putting our new skill to good use to help join the dots for our teams and create authentic connections. The team rated it the best workshop they have done in decades. Thanks, Yamini.

Susan McKee, Chief Executive Officer,
Dental Health Services Victoria

Yamini attended our all-company meeting and showed us not only the importance but also the impact of storytelling. She engaged the whole group from start to finish. She did it in such a wonderful way that had us all thinking hard about how we could tell our own stories; after all, we all have an interesting story to tell!

Allison Rossiter, Managing Director
Roche Diagnostics Australia

I've yet to meet a person who hasn't called themselves 'Yamini's #1 fan' after seeing her speak. She is breathtaking in every way. Authentic and professional, hilarious and insightful, big on inspiration but even bigger on practical value. Audiences don't just learn a few things or feel good for a few hours after seeing Yamini on stage. They find the courage and clarity to make immediate changes in their work, life and relationships, resulting in a tsunami of positive impact in their careers, families, organisations and communities. If you want a speaker who doesn't just nail the brief, but leaves your audience enthralled, pick up the phone and call her agent ASAP!

Mykel Dixon, award-winning speaker and Creative Leadership Expert, author of *Everyday Creative: A dangerous guide to making magic a work*

Yamini led our leadership team on a storytelling journey which was remarkable in both its insight and impact. Her ability to identify and distil the key elements of a situation, and package these into an engaging narrative, drawing on emotion and instinct as well as logic, is unique in my experience.

Yamini transforms the mundane to the inspiring, thereby bringing to life both the story and the storyteller.

Grant Kelley, Chief Executive Officer,
Vicinity Centres Limited

The 'Storytelling for Impact' professional development workshop conducted by Yamini Naidu is essential for anyone aspiring to excellence. 'Telling stories is one of the most powerful means that leaders have to influence, teach, and inspire' (Boris, V. 2017, What Makes Storytelling So Effective for Learning? Harvard Business Publishing, Dec. 20). Yamini effectively demonstrated this through her interactive teaching of the mechanics of visual communication through structuring stories for impact (her compelling 'two bites of the apple' story is just the start), through modelling best practice, and transforming participants through guided activities. She is the powerhouse of the narrative! I rate this as one of the most transformative workshops I have attended.

Dr Margaret Heffernan, OAM, Senior Lecturer,
School of Management RMIT University

Yamini presented an engaging and impactful storytelling masterclass to hundreds of members of our Business Chicks community. She delivered her unique presentation with passion, commitment and beautiful storytelling. The feedback from the audience was overwhelmingly positive — she truly captured people's hearts and minds.

Olivia Ruello, CEO, Business Chicks

We recently used Yamini for our premier client event, where she toured Australia's capital cities presenting to hundreds of our clients. Yamini has a compelling story to tell and one that resonated extremely well with our business clients. Yamini's style is highly engaging and in many ways enchanting, as she shares the secret power of storytelling through practical examples. I would highly recommend Yamini to anyone thinking about how to create greater engagement with their clients or employees.

Don Sillar, Head of Sales, ANZ Private

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GRATITUDE

‘Ring of fire’ is how I would describe the journey of writing this book.

At midnight on May 1, 2022, I had a near-death experience. I ended up in ER. The doctors, nurses and some of the best health care in the world saved me. Apart from giving birth, I had never been to hospital. I know, I have been amazingly lucky to have enjoyed good health all my life. Knock on wood. Looking back at what happened, the storyteller in me has one tiny regret. My NDE was not accompanied by an out-of-body experience, damn it — that would have made a brilliant story!

I am totally fine now, but at the time the experience was traumatic for both me and my loved ones. For a week I was immobile in bed, unable to use a screen or to read. But I had the trees and street view outside my bedroom window, and my own thoughts. What helped was the love and care of my family. And, most importantly, my work. That I couldn’t physically do any work didn’t prevent me from busily creating, ideating and writing in my head. Without the fuel for my mind and imagination provided by my work, I would have gone stir crazy. Thinking about and planning this book kept me sane, kept me motivated and kept me going.

The idea for the book was sparked a few years ago. At the Professional Speakers Australia (PSA) Convention in 2020 the amazing Vinh Giang shared a life-changing model. His positioning of the word X factor set my imagination on fire and gave me a new way of looking at my practice. This spark would be on slow burn for two years, fuelling everything I did. Vinh, I am forever indebted to you for your inspiration. *Sashtang Pranam*, Vinh. In India this entails prostrating in thanks before a teacher, honouring their talent and what they have taught us.

Then the wonderful Warwick Merry invited me to present to the Victorian chapter of the PSA. I grappled with how to best serve my fellow speakers. I focused on what I had been obsessing about and designed a presentation on the X factor concept. My audience's overwhelmingly positive response was like champagne for my soul. That 45-minute presentation grew into a keynote, a masterclass and now this book. Watch out, there may be a musical, a documentary and a Netflix series on the way!

While writing this book, what freaked me out was discovering that there is not a single other book on the market for X factor presentations. That means the idea is either brilliant or rubbish. But my clients encouraged me and loved the keynote, the masterclasses and the process. 'It works, hallelujah!' responded one client. The confidence of my clients and my determination to serve my readers kept me strong in the face of the buffeting winds of self-doubt.

But none of this would have been possible without my writer's group, Sandy McDonald, Di Percy, Carolyn Tate and Kath Walters. From conception to the completed book, you were with me every step of the way. The best book birthing partners in the world. Thank you for your generosity in testing the ideas, for allowing your own experiences to be used in the book and for your tough love. All done with

humour, kindness and commercial smarts. Seeing your bright faces every Monday morning, sets my week up with sunshine. My one wish for every writer on the planet is that you are lucky enough to find a writing group like mine.

My thanks to Tracey Ezard, Mariam Issa and Sandy McDonald, who let me feature their case studies in my book. Thank you for pure gold. All three of you and your work make the world a better place. And if anyone wants to nourish their soul, do please visit Mariam's open garden in Brighton, Melbourne, Australia.

My safe harbour in all life's storms is my family, my friends and my work. I love my work and recognise and am grateful for the privilege it offers. I often pinch myself that this is work, not my best dream! And my clients make this dream work possible. You book and rebook me and then recommend me to others. I am honoured, humbled and grateful. Your heartfelt word-of-mouth recommendations trump any social media shenanigans. Five stars!

To my friends, especially the GIF Girls (Anna, Kim and Linda), for supporting me wholeheartedly in the roller-coaster ride that is life. Thank you for putting up with my outpourings, random rants and endless GIFs, and for the life advice, love and laughter. Between us it always feels like nothing is too small (bad hair days), too big (life experiences) or too much (BMI and other catastrophes) to share.

To my friend Ila Sachdeva, who showed up in my darkest hour with love, wisdom and homemade *alu parathas* and *rajma chawal*, Indian comfort food and saved me. You are always just a phone call or cup of chai away. Thank you.

But most of all to my family. Your support grounds me and your love gives me wings. Without you, my life would be empty. Because of you my life has love, meaning and endless requests for hot dinners.

Finally, thank you, dear reader, for choosing this book and for taking this first step towards discovering your X factor. I have only one wish for this book — that it serves you well.





PART A

**X FACTOR
REDEFINED**

X FACTOR REDEFINED

What are the first images that flash into your head when you hear the words *X factor*? Maybe it's a glossy TV show, a panel of judges, a gold statue? On the podium stands a clear winner and two other finalists (trying to pretend they're happy for the winner and fake smiling for the camera through their tears). An hour later no one can remember their names. Soon after that, in the sea of other reality TV shows, even the winner's name is washed away, and apart from the occasional Kelly Clarkson or Guy Sebastian we seldom hear from them again.

Or you might think of global superstars like Madonna or RuPaul whose X factor rests on their talent and fame. There's a chicken and egg quality here. You can't tell for sure if their X factor made them famous or fame came first. Either way, their X factor is so great that they are mononyms, known by a single name alone. Traditionally, our X factor lens has been set on zoom. What we see is mega stardom and the debris of reality TV shows.

This zoom setting on our X factor lens distorts our view. The conventional idea that X factor is only for a handful of exceptional people is bullsh%, done, finished, over. In this book I will blow that myth wide open. There is now a modern X factor, and everyone, *everyone*, has X factor potential. More on that shortly. (Cue suspenseful music.)

But first, let's talk about you. Why did you pick up this book? Perhaps:

- the idea of X factor intrigues you, and you're keen to learn more and to discover *your* X factor
- you want to scoff — *X factor*, you were *born with it!*
- you want to compete on *The X factor* reality show

If you are a presenter, whether novice or master, and you are keen to discover and unleash your X factor, I welcome you with open arms. I also warmly welcome you if you're a scoffer. I love a sceptic. I've thought about you as I wrote and tried to answer your questions. But do challenge the ideas here and play devil's advocate. All I ask is that you keep an open mind and give the book a fair go. The results may surprise you.

This book is for all of you, though not so much if you're hoping for an entrée to the reality TV show *The X factor* or its latest avatar. Stop looking for distractions, go off now and practise your talents, and good luck.

WHY X FACTOR?

For high level business professionals, the ability to present persuasively is an essential part of your job. But do you present, or do you create an audience experience? Hand on your heart, with every presentation do you:

- connect, engage and inspire your audience
- move people to action
- achieve personal and professional impact?

In my experience only the top professional speakers hit these goals consistently with every presentation. If you want to guarantee this outcome, investing your time, money and energy solely in traditional presentation skills is NOT the answer. So what do you need to do better, smarter and differently? You need to unleash your presentation superpower. Excuse me, you may say, superpower? Yes, *superpower*.

I speak professionally for a living and have been doing so for over 15 years. That's like 150 years in ordinary time! I'm an economist by training. Imagine how boring my training made me. All those years ago, when I started my speaking career, I was a very serious speaker, a serious economist (a classic stereotype), and I was living the stereotype (apologies to all my fellow economists). One year I was giving a keynote speech at IBM and as I looked out at the audience I saw a sea of Indian faces, and I thought perhaps my audience would relate to my Indian mum's story. So I took a leap of faith and began: 'I'm an economist by training, and yet I co-founded a company that does business storytelling. I was so excited that I raced home to tell my mum: "Mum, I'm going start a storytelling company." And she replied, "Is that a job? Why can't you be a doctor or something in IT". The audience roared with laughter. The room lit up and in that moment my audience and I became one. We connected viscerally.

That day I stumbled onto something important. For me at that time my X factor was *sharing funny stories*. That's what I called it, I didn't use the words X factor. One of my clients even refers to me as 'a funny story speaker'! It never occurred to me that what I was doing lived in a larger context, or was something that could be taught and learned.

Flash forward to March 2020. I was in Adelaide, South Australia, for the PSA Convention. That’s an industry event where professional speakers meet and share trade secrets. Vinh Giang, a keynote speaker who commands the international stage, inspiring audiences globally (and is a wonderful human being), said that every presentation should consist of:

- 30% *content*. As experts, you have this.
- 30% *delivery*. Delivery creates the audience experience.
- 30% *inspiration*. Storytelling and humour — yesses. Hooray, happy dance! I have spent my entire career working with leaders on this.

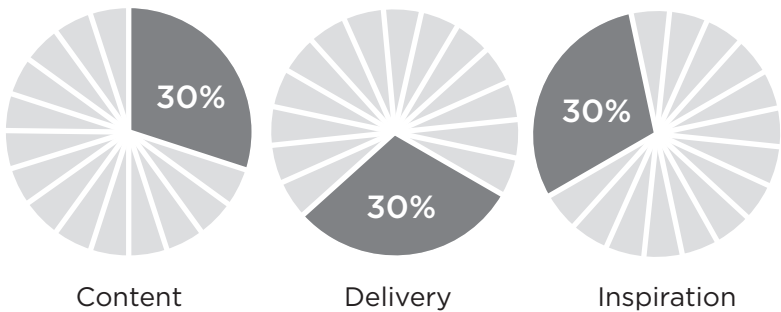


Figure 1.1 The model

What makes up the remaining 10%? This is *X factor*. Vinh’s X factor is that he uses magic as his metaphor on stage. He performs magic and card tricks on stage to illustrate some of his messages. It’s immersive and captivating to watch.

But why focus on 10%? This 10% is critical for you only if you want to be more than just another presenter —if you want to be a *presentation leader*. A presentation leader achieves personal and professional impact and business results with every presentation. They don’t just present, as I said before, they create an audience experience. With every presentation they transform people, organisations and

what's possible. Presentation leaders know this 10% is where their competitive edge lies. The 10% X factor unlocks your presentation magic and:

- creates and cements your reputation as a brilliant presenter, inside and outside your organisation
- transforms every presentation so you connect, engage and inspire
- wows peers, clients and boards
- wins that pitch, promotion or business result
- guarantees you are mistaken for a professional speaker (someone who speaks for a living, is paid to speak and speaks full time for their job).

In chaos theory, the butterfly effect refers to the way one small change can kick off a very large variation. A butterfly flapping its wings in Melbourne triggers a tsunami in South America. That is the power of your X factor. Unleashing this butterfly effect can create a new future for your clients, for your organisation and, most of all, for you.

Reliable and referrable

But what about that remaining 90%? In Giang's model, content, delivery and inspiration matter. Content, delivery and inspiration matter. Good content and delivery make up 60% of the job and create *reliable* presenters. Who doesn't like reliable? You value a reliable watch and phone and service provider. In the presentation game, reliable earns permission to sit at the table. It's the baseline.

Inspiration (storytelling and humour), the next 30% in the model, creates *referrable* presenters. Inspiring presenters build a great reputation inside and outside organisations. As

an inspiring presenter, you generate excellent word of mouth. People want to hear you present. They always mention your name in the line-up for business-critical pitches, and clients want to do business with you.

You can become the face of your organisation. With good content and delivery, clients will *like* you. Add inspiration and clients *love* you.

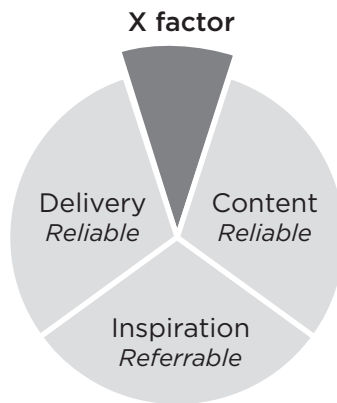


Figure 1.2 X factor model

Raving fans

X factor creates raving fans. Your clients don't just like you or love you, they can't live without you. You are their first port of call. Clients don't even consider your competitors. Whenever your area of expertise comes up, yours is the first, often the only, name on their lips. Clients might say something like, 'Yes, there are many people in that field, but if you want to work with the best, then there's only [*insert your name here*]'. Take a moment to savour that feeling.

Content plus delivery plus inspiration makes you an inspiring presenter. You absolutely need this holy trinity.

But to be a presentation leader, you can't stop there. It's like planting your flag at Mount Everest base camp because you didn't know the summit was still 20.5 kilometres away.

It's also deeply uncool to plant your flag at base camp. And unless you are a comedian, a classic couch potato or making an ironic TikTok video, no one is interested in your struggles to reach base camp. X factor is the difference between reaching base camp and planting your flag on the summit.

In addition to the holy trinity of content, delivery and inspiration, you need X factor, because X factor makes you an unforgettable presenter. In an age when anyone can find anything they need to know with a Google search, just providing information, even in an inspiring way, is no longer enough. Audiences don't just want infotainment. They want presenters to enthrall them. To be enthralled is to be temporarily spellbound. When you enthrall them, the audience forgets everything else; they are completely in the moment, connected, listening and absorbing your messages. And your X factor can do this heavy lifting for you. If you know how to use it.

Carla Harris is the Vice Chairman of Wealth Management and Senior Client Advisor at Morgan Stanley. She is a Wall Street heavy hitter. I came across the terms *performance currency* and *relationship currency* in her book *Strategize to Win: The New Way to Start Out, Step Up or Start Over in Your Career*.

Harris explains how you build performance currency when you get your job done, when you deliver results; but when you connect with people, when you invest in relationships, you build relationship currency. As a professional you need both. Early in your career, your performance currency has a higher value. As you take on more senior and leadership roles, your relationship currency has a higher value. Your X factor is a superhero that helps you build your relationship

currency. People want to connect with you, seek your advice and recommend you. Clients rave about you. Relationships become easy, effortless and rewarding.

Why else is this 10% X factor non-negotiable?

Reference points

Imagine winning an Olympic medal. How would you feel? Ecstatic, over the moon, the happiest person on Earth? Sadly, this doesn't always seem to be the case. The gold medallist's smile can be seen from the moon (they have deservedly made a place in history). What's surprising is that bronze medallists smile just as widely. They are as happy as the gold winners, if not happier. The silver medallist looks the least happy and feels worse off than the bronze medallist. Behavioural economics uses *reference points theory* to explain why.

Reference points help you assess your accomplishments. Of course, silver medallists have their eye on gold. Their reference point is higher, on what could have been. Bronze medallists feel, phew, they won a medal, beating so many other competitors. Their reference point is lower. They are spared the fate they narrowly missed, not getting a medal at all. Consider swimmer Fu Yuanhui's reaction at the Rio Olympics. Shock, surprise, delight when she found out from a reporter that she had won a bronze medal in the women's 100-metre backstroke, when she thought she had missed out. This delightful moment went viral. Fu Yuanhui won the world's heart and she has become one of China's most popular sportspeople. All without winning a gold medal.

But sadly, for silver medallists the pain doesn't stop when they step off the podium, and sometimes it never ebbs away. They often feel gutted over this loss for the rest of their lives. In the 1912 Olympics, Abel Kiviat, an American

middle-distance runner, lost the 1500-metre race by one-tenth of a second. In an interview with *The Los Angeles Times* many years later, when he was a 91-year-old, he said, ‘I wake up sometimes and say, “What the heck happened to me?” It’s like a nightmare.’

You don’t ever want to wind up in the land of *if only* and *why didn’t I*. You never want to lose to a competitor by a tenth of a second, when that’s all that separates second best from best. Your X factor holds the magic key. In presenting, X factor separates entertaining from enthralling, silver medallists from gold medallists, your competitors from you.

But why do so many presenters feel this 10% is out of reach? Possibly they don’t know about X factor’s role in presentations. Maybe they have believed the myths about X factor, or maybe they have never thought about their X factor before.

REDEFINING X FACTOR

The monstrous barrier that limits most professionals is their traditional, narrow view of X factor and the notion that it is accessible by only a handful of people. Time to redefine X factor.

Shaking our tail feathers

The X factor concept has been hijacked by reality TV shows with their slick, exuberant showmanship, their super-sized, glamorous ‘stars’, wannabe aspirants, sequins flashing, shaking their tail feathers. This is something, you imagine, they are born with. X factor is presence. When someone with

this quality enters a room, you expect the earth to tremble; when they smile the light glints off their teeth, dazzling you.

This conventional, old-fashioned view of X factor is dated. It is time for us to take it back and redefine it, as this view is distancing for an audience and has little relevance in our professional context. When you zoom out from this myopic view, what you see is a whole new world of possibilities.

For professional presenters, X factor can be one uncommon or special thing. It can be a talent for remembering the names of people when all the rest of us forget. Or being empathetic to the point of almost channelling other people's feelings. Or being able to do complex calculations in your head effortlessly. For Danielle Dobson, a lifestyle photographer based in Melbourne, Australia, photos are 'the closest thing to real-life magic'. Dobson connects to her craft as an expression of something magical — that's her X factor right there. I have never heard any other photographer describe themselves like this. It is distinctive and memorable and born out of the way she works.

For professional speakers, X factor is their advantage, a skill they have honed. It could be the quality of their ideas, or it could be their stage presence or theatrical delivery that rivets their audience through funny storytelling. Dr Shefali Tsabary, a *New York Times* bestselling author and international speaker, is 'a clinical psychologist and a wisdom teacher specialising in integrating Western psychology and Eastern philosophy'. Her marriage of science and ancient wisdom, east and west, is pure X factor for a professional speaker.

Then there are show-biz performers. X factor isn't just 10% of their job, it's their *entire* job. Comedy superstar Trevor Noah hosts *The Daily Show*. In the sea of American late-night TV shows, Noah stands out. He is biracial (born to a white father and a black mother), a migrant from South Africa,

and young. His blend of storytelling, satire and comedy is alluring and refreshing, winning him global cult status.

In geometry, a line extends infinitely in both directions. The X factor spectrum is also infinite, and you can find your own place, whether as a presenter, a professional speaker or a show-biz performer. The X factor spectrum isn't just limited to celebrity performers like Noah. I have shared examples above where professionals and speakers also have X factor.

What unites all presenters, professional speakers and show-biz performers is they all bring something special to the table and are committed to *serve* their audience. Your X factor is something you do *for* rather than *to* an audience. And there, you never thought you would feature on the same continuum as Ricky Gervais. Group hug. This is a moment!

As a presenter, you have the opportunity to discover a new X factor. A different kind of X factor that has been pretty much invisible to you until now. Here's a contrast table that compares the old and the new.

Traditional X factor	Modern X factor
All about me	Serves my audience, message and purpose
Show-stopping sauce	Special sauce
Sequins, tail feathers, glitter	Optional, and only if it serves my audience and message
Big, bold; can intimidate	Can be quiet, small, intimate; creates connection
Innate — you have it or you don't	Complex but definable and teachable
Exclusive — only for a handful	Everyone has X factor potential

Figure 1.3 Traditional versus modern X factor

Without overstating this point, discovering X factor today is comparable to how Sir Isaac Newton must have felt when he ‘discovered’ the universal theory of gravity, which revolutionised how humanity viewed the world.

This new view of X factor can revolutionise your world and what is possible for you. You are no longer chasing after it or terrified by its absence, seeing it as this elusive, impossibly distant goal. It’s not about winning a talent show or becoming the Beyoncé of business, and it’s not the reward of a tiny, exclusive elite. Rather, it’s something that is immediately achievable and applicable in your context. You haven’t done it yet, but it is doable. It is your edge.

And the magic doesn’t stop with your presentations and professional life. It can spill over into your personal life. It can help you dazzle your date and wow friends at dinner parties.

But wait, there’s more. X factor is also your safety net. It’s like a loyal, trusted friend who never lets you down. It is your hammock on a bad day when you feel like you can barely stand, let alone present to an audience. Even on your darkest day you can say to yourself, ah, but I do have my X factor. I always ask insightful questions or I connect empathetically with clients, or I create high-value models. So what stops us from stepping into this bold new future?

Risky business

According to the Himalayan Database, as of January 2019, just 5,294 mountaineers have successfully summited Everest. I was gobsmacked by that number, expecting it to be much higher. It makes sense, though, as the risks are significant, but then so is the reward.

Finding, owning and being known for your X factor is hard. Let's not shy away from this. **But finding and unleashing your X factor will forever change how you present, the impact you have and the shift you can create in your world.**

Finding and unleashing your X factor in business can be risky, but only if done badly by drawing on the old stereotypes. What is far riskier is going through the rest of your personal and professional life without discovering and implementing your X factor, thereby condemning yourself and your audience to more of the same. Presentations with messages that sink without a trace; opportunities for impact, sales and revenue — lost; your professional reputation unfulfilled. Lack of X factor will reduce a presenter's opportunities for promotion and for shifting client relationships from transactional to transformational.

To quote Super Mario, same is lame. Same sets us up for a losing streak into the future. The greatest risk with regard to X factor is if it's never discovered. On the plus side, **X factor can attract blue-chip clients, deliver massive impact, boost sales, lift revenue, and create a lasting personal and professional legacy.** And exploring and experimenting with your X factor is fun and an adventure, I promise.

In his 2022 bestseller *The Power of Regret*, Daniel Pink argues, '... we are much more likely to regret the chances we *didn't take* than the chances we did take ... It doesn't matter what the forgone opportunity is, whether it's our education, our work, or our love life, the regret lingers in the same way'. Don't let that be your regret with your X factor.

A wish list

You may worry that finding your X factor will take years and years of hard work and talent. What if this book is part of a trilogy, a year-long festival or eight seasons on Netflix?

As my reader, I know you are sophisticated and smart (yes, blatant flattery). So you already know that unearthing an X factor that serves your audience and message and keeps people on the edge of their seats will require hard work. But help is at hand.

I have made some assumptions about you. I know you are, like my clients, time poor and juggling complex priorities, and you want results. You know X factor is important but you cannot dedicate endless time to skilling. Perhaps you are sceptical because you have invested in many presentation skills courses in the past and you know any change is slow. If you are like the professionals I work with, you also want to be authentic. You're not looking for an extreme makeover. You have a hunger to stand out but are unsure of how to channel that in your next presentation. Most of all, you want to be memorable.

This sounds like a giant wish list, but it can be done. In this book I have compressed my 15 years of X factor building expertise, my 10,000-plus hours of work and decades of deep practice at the coal face with clients just like you. This book provides the answers, the steps and the shortcuts, so you can experience X factor success fast while staying true to who you are. It sets you up for great results and shows you how you can do this safely and smartly. More on this in later chapters.

Now let's dissect *X factor*.

ANATOMY OF X FACTOR

Your X factor is born from your own unique set of skills, talents, lived experiences, quirks, hobbies and interests. In later chapters I will show you how you can discover this special combination for yourself. My work has uncovered that X factor has both a surface structure and a deep structure. Our audience experiences only the surface structure, what happens on stage. It is like the magic a magician creates.

Meet me at the intersection

As a presenter, you unearth your X factor by understanding what's beneath the surface, the deep structure that creates the magic, the behind-the-scenes process, which has four key sources that anyone can tap into.

1. What gives modern X factor its depth is your intent —your *purpose*. It could be to make your message memorable, resonate with your audience and help people understand your content. I teach some of my content through Bollywood dancing. My clients tell me this helps people remember key messages, because they associate them with the dance moves and have fun at the same time as learning
2. Modern X factor must help your audience understand your message. This is often referred to as being *in service* of your audience. Ask yourself, 'Does my X factor serve the room?' You might love belting out a tune, or wearing a kooky costume, or rattling off rhyming couplets, but will any of these serve your audience? That is the litmus test for any X factor. Service keeps you grounded and sets you up for success in any professional context. It

also stops you veering down endless rabbit holes and helps you make the right decisions around choosing your X factor.

3. Does your X factor make your presentation better, richer, deeper? In other words, does it *add value* to your presentation for your clients and for your business? If you removed your X factor content from your presentation, would this reduce the value or impact of the presentation? Would its inclusion improve attention, retention and results?
4. Most importantly, X factor challenges you to find and share *something that you love*. It must pass the heart test. Rumi, the thirteenth-century Persian poet, mystic and Sufi, tells us, 'Go into the heart to touch the sky'. There you'll find something that lights you up. As I have said, it doesn't have to be big. It can be something as small as colour. Naomi Simson is an Australian businessperson, entrepreneur and the founder of RedBalloon. Simson only wears red; it is her signature look. She says the colour is her public uniform and helps identify what she stands for.

Pulling these ideas together, figure 1.4 illustrates this modern X factor. It is multidimensional and lives at the intersection of purpose, service, value and uniqueness, which gives it distinctiveness, depth and richness.

Think of these concepts, not as straitjackets, but as guides.

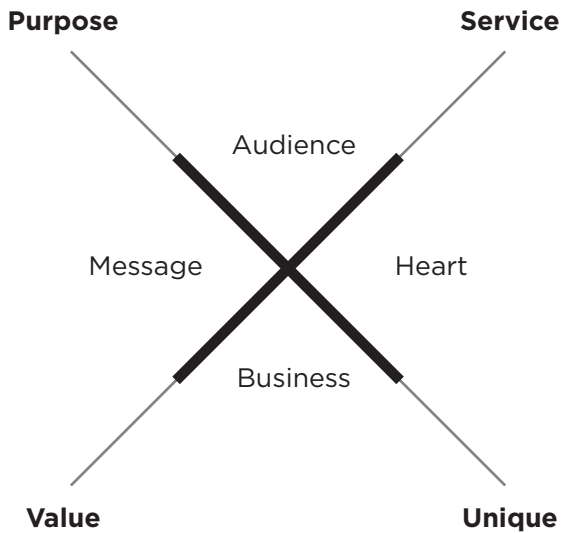


Figure 1.4 X factor — the intersection

Creating the magic

While these guides are universal, they are also personal. What creates the magic in your X factor is that you discover what makes you different from everyone else in a warm and relatable way. Figure 1.5 suggests what you might find when you zoom in to unique — your deepest self.

Your deepest self is rich and distinctive. This means:

1. You must enjoy your X factor. Fun is compulsory. A sparkle in your eyes, a bounce in your step and a smile on your lips all add magic to your X factor. You can't be intense, hair standing up, a stress bunny with a grim countenance. **Being too serious is kryptonite for your X factor.**

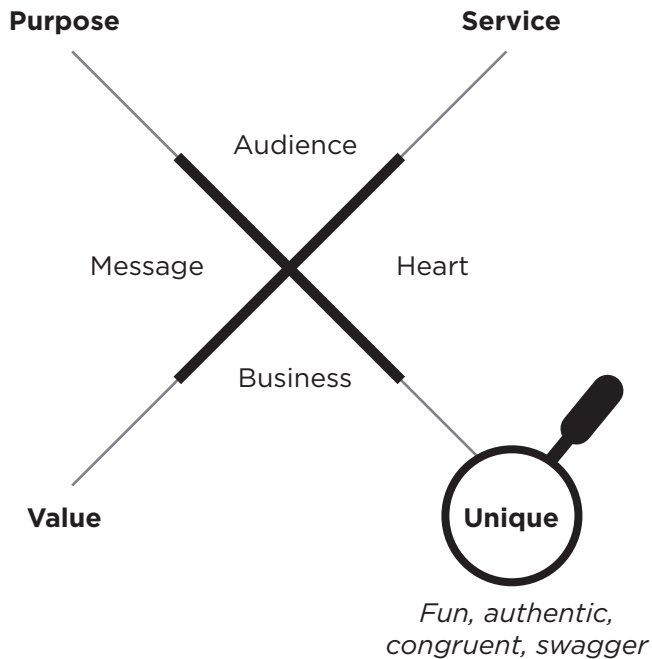


Figure 1.5 Zooming into your deepest self

2. Your X factor must be *authentic*. The difference in value between a painting with the authentication ‘From the hand of Rembrandt’ and one painted ‘in the manner of Rembrandt’ is vast. Your X factor can’t be derivative, contrived or manufactured. You live in a world with a fierce cancel culture; your audiences are sophisticated and very sensitive about appropriation. I’ll show you how to discover and protect your authenticity and know that no one can imitate you.
3. Your X factor must be *congruent* with who you are, demonstrating your integrity. It lets you be the best version of yourself when presenting, but it is something you can sustain on and off stage. It works even if you are

an introvert, naturally quiet or soft-spoken. The light of your X factor never fades, even when the curtain comes down.

4. What puts the X into X factor is some *swagger*. You must own it. No point in trying too hard or being hesitant. Swagger comes from doing the work, road testing what you have and trusting yourself. It is likeable confidence, not arrogance. Ash Barty is a three-time Grand Slam tennis singles champion and 2022 Wimbledon and Australian Open champion. Barty said she won because she was enjoying it. This is a champion X factor move.

When exploring these depths to uncover your X factor, it is like looking closely at thousands of dots of a pointillist image. You can't see the full picture yet. That will take shape in later chapters as you step back and view your X factor with a masterful eye.

Now it's time now to put on your big-person pants.

My inner what?

I'm going to say something that may make you uncomfortable, but it needs to be said (honesty being the best policy). **X factor requires you to lean into your inner artist.** I don't know what this word conjures up for you but I want to assure you this doesn't mean turning into someone you're not. What it means is tapping into something singular, individual and creative that you must bring to your presentations.

Your X factor is an expression of you. In our professional world, where so much is vanilla, now more than ever the world is hungry for the spice of your X factor. Your audience is desperate and you are remarkable; it's a perfect

match. There's only one of you in the world. And you have this book to guide you. You are in exactly the right place at the right time.

To define something, bobbing above the water like a disturbed buoy, is also to identify what it is not. X factor is not about seeking audience approval. When an audience applauds you, when they laugh at your jokes, it feels good. That's natural, you're human. If used well, your X factor will help make both you and your presentations more likeable and memorable. But popularity and audience approval are not the results you are aiming for. They are simply happy by-products of what you do well, which is to serve your audience with your X factor.

Does your X factor help your audience understand, connect with and remember your message? That's the acid test. Everything you do must be in service. Period. On this my research and experience through reading, presenting, interviewing and working with clients at the coal face is conclusive.

Everyone has X factor potential. But don't just take my word for it. Let's do a simple test to establish where you are with your X factor. You could be:

- **Fuzzy.** You aren't sure. Your X factor, like a shy tortoise, has yet to emerge from its shell. That's totally fine. This book was written for you.
- **Finding.** You are bursting with and exploring possibilities. You're mining for gold. Hooray, this book will help you get there faster.
- **Frolicking.** You are among that lucky few: you totally know, own and are known for your X factor. A warm welcome to you too, because you are smart enough to know that even if you are frolicking in X factor, there's always more to learn. X factor evolves, as I will shortly explain.

Take a moment now to mark where you are with your X factor. Do this again when you reach the end of the book. It is the best measure of your progress and success. Once you are clear on your current location, you are ready to set out on your quest to find your X factor.

TREASURE MAP

You'll go hunting for your X factor through your personal and professional experiences and much more. There's no corner you won't poke your nose into, no potential X factor opportunity you don't double down on, no star you don't reach out for in your quest. And this book is your treasure map. Follow it and X factor treasures are guaranteed.

Here I want to make a confession, because I believe it's always good to begin a relationship with a clean slate. I have made the following assumptions about you, dear reader:

- You are keen to learn.
- You don't want me to just talk about X factor; you want practical, how-to steps to follow.
- You'd like examples from professionals like you.
- You also want to learn X factor cautions to help you avoid any traps.
- You insist that the learning be fun.
- You are big enough for tough love.
- You are smart enough to take this, do the work and apply it in your own context.

Ticked these boxes? Hooray! Keep in mind that this book is developed in a linear way. The learning and insights it offers build cumulatively, like maths, expanding on what came before, so reading the chapters in order is the key. You

don't want to be like the kid who skipped school the day they covered fractions and struggles with fractions for the rest of their life. Once you've finished it, you can dip back in and out as you please, revisiting sections when they are most relevant to your own journey.

Sometimes I suggest micro actions to take immediately to help unlock your X factor. Please read these thoughtfully and consider how you might act on them. In some chapters, I recommend specific exercises. These may not always be fun but are not optional. Follow the process I have developed and tested. It works and finding your X factor depends on it.

Below I invite you to accept the multiple ways in which X factor is used in this book. This isn't to be difficult or quirky, but to recognise the multifaceted nature of X factor.

RED FLAG: CONTRARY IDEAS AHEAD

How many shapes are there? This sounds like a simple maths question, but it's something that has puzzled mathematicians forever. The answer is an infinite number.

X factor too can encompass infinite meanings, possibilities, variations. It's a shapeshifter. It can morph endlessly, changing form or identity. Our redefinition is dense and layered to accommodate this. I can't ignore this reality, even though a narrow definition would make life so much simpler.

X factor conventionally can relate to a single word, a phrase, a statement or one of several statements; it can flag the application of a skill or talent, or draw on a story, a song, a hobby. You'll find it expressed as a singular, concrete idea or as a mix of many things (a multiplicity). The possibilities are limitless. This sounds head-bangingly frustrating and throw-book-against-wall exasperating. But don't despair, and

please don't hurl either head or book at said wall, as there is a solution to this predicament.

Developing your X factor

In this book you develop your X factor as a presentation superpower, and I'll help you build your own, singular X factor.

I'll guide you towards crafting your X factor as a statement that embodies three ideas that best represent you, combined to create a portrait or representation that best expresses you — in my case, for example, 'the world's only economist turned Bollywood-dancing business storyteller'.

The simplest way to wrap your head around this is to think of your X factor statement as a personal tag line.

This distilling of your X factor matters. Why? Because it matters to the people you serve. It gives you one way (not the only way) of expressing something that is notoriously hard to pin down.

The process I have developed, researched and tested in this book will deliver on that. I don't claim it is the only or even the best way to get there, but it is simple to follow and effective, and my clients consistently tell me it delivers great results every time. **When your X factor statement combines three things, it becomes a powerhouse that transforms your presentations, your professional life and your identity.** Through this book you will find out how.

Once you have nailed this statement, it can change not just your presentations but your world and your understanding of what's possible. You'll also understand that the work is never done. The difference between the old view of X factor

and the modern X factor is that this X factor is tangible, it is learnable and it evolves. So yes, your X factor is not static and not simply one thing; it changes over time just as you change. It gets more nuanced, richer and more intimate as you become more confident at being you on stage. X factor is something intimate about you that you're willing to share. (Don't let that spook you. I'll show you how to do this safely and elegantly.) For me it's my love of Bollywood dancing.

Your personal tag line is not the only interpretation of X factor, but it is a practical interpretation that allows you to start the journey and keep evolving. I encourage you to keep deepening your X factor statement over time. Never shut the door on new possibilities around how you can express X factor. Figure 1.6 illustrates my journey. Starting with business storyteller, I moved deeper into my authentic self with Bollywood dancing. Later I will share how this evolved and I arrived at Bollywood dancing.



Figure 1.6 Snapshot view of my X factor journey

Iconic American author, F. Scott Fitzgerald, famously wrote, ‘The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposing ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function’.

When you encounter the diverse ways I use the words X factor in this book, instead of feeling frustrated, I suggest

you simply nod your head sagely, think, ‘ah, X factor, you shapeshifter,’ and pat yourself on the back for your keen intelligence.

HELP IS AT HAND

Understand, dear reader, that you are never alone on this journey. Links to a vault of online resources are included throughout the book, and you can download what you need to.

I make the work easy and even exciting, but for this book (like any other such book, tool or system) to produce results, you must do the work. This is the only commitment you need to make.

Know that I am also only an email or LinkedIn request away. So please reach out and let me know how I can help. This is my world and I love it. I offer keynotes, masterclasses and workshops on X factor. I work with leaders, leadership teams and brands helping them find their X factor. I am creating a movement of presenters with X factor!

We are at the crossroads now. If you are ready to do the work with me, I promise you a magic carpet ride into an exciting future. You will laugh, learn and taste success every inch of the way. I’ll hold your hand and make this journey not just possible but easy.

So are you ready to unleash your X factor, your presentation superpower? Group hug. Swipe right. Welcome to a new world.



You can also access rich resources on specific topics you want to know more about by scanning this QR code or going to xfactor.yamininaidu.com.au.