

Could You Say A Few Words?

How to Take Advantage of Speaking Opportunities

By Marilyn Moran Townsend

Public speaking. Scientific tests would confirm your heart rate just increased and your body temperature went up a degree or two with the mention of those two words. Most people dread the thought of publicly speaking to anyone. So when someone says, "You are on ... the agenda," here's how you can be on top of your game when delivering a presentation.

Prepare

There's no substitute for preparation. Practice your speech in front of a mirror, or better yet, when I'm coaching an executive, we video tape the speech and review it together, looking for ways to improve. You can do the same at home.

Practice with a stopwatch or clock, making sure you can deliver your message in the time allotted for your presentation.

Arrive at your destination early enough to check out your surroundings and ensure you will be speaking under optimum conditions. Here are the four do's and don'ts for audio visual aids:

1. Unless confined to a permanent microphone, do move! Don't separate yourself from the audience with furniture.
2. Don't count on everything working perfectly. Approach technology failures with good humor and a Plan B ... backup microphone, backup projector, backup phone number to call, etc.
3. Do make certain your projection equipment matches the room and audience size.
4. Do give all the audiovisual equipment a test run.

Speech notes

While it is preferable to memorize your speech, always have a copy with you and check to make sure your pages or note cards are in the correct order prior to your presentation.

Note cards or visual aids with key

words are recommended so that you won't be tempted to hide behind your papers and read your speech.

Relax

A couple of minutes before your speech, take three slow, deep breaths; then yawn. This relaxes your throat muscles and removes the tension and breathlessness from your voice. It also gets you in the habit of breathing deeply so you won't run out of air before completing a long sentence.

The non-verbal advantage

Dress in clothing that makes you feel like a million bucks. When you feel you look good, you will be good in your presentation.

When speaking, maintain an open body approach ... indicating you are open to audience interaction and that you are friendly. No clasped hands, hands in pockets or behind your back.

Direct eye contact says, "I am speaking to you." Throughout your



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Speak clearly and distinctly. Use word pictures to make your presentation more interesting. Vary your pacing and volume for audience interest. Employ the pregnant pause, booming voice and stage whisper. And if you wish to interject humor into your presentation, the following rules apply:

- Always clean and tasteful
 - Never cutting or degrading
 - Always tied back to a point in your presentation
 - Best if it can be adapted to sound like a personal experience
 - Never set up a joke or funny story with "I heard this joke/funny story..."
- You and your audience will be embarrassed if you're the only one who thinks it's funny.

Follow-up

Follow the presentation with a thank-you to the person/group that afforded you the opportunity to speak. Also follow-up any specific questions, comments or requests that came from your presentation. To make certain you don't drop the ball, make notes to yourself immediately following the presentation.

Public speaking is your opportunity to inform, educate and/or persuade a group of people. With sufficient practice, the means to accomplish your objective will become second nature, freeing you to concentrate on the message.

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speech, pick out different members of the audience and speak directly to them, making one-on-one eye contact.

If you are speaking to a large audience with bright stage lights that make it impossible for you to make eye contact, look in the direction of the audience, dividing the seating area into thirds.

Delivery

Begin with appreciative remarks for being afforded the opportunity to speak.

INFORMATION LINK

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