

Public Speaking Tips

Public Speaking 101
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Anyone who's ever experienced stage fright has at some point been told to "just imagine the audience naked." Whoever started this bizarre myth? By taking this advice you'll either crack-up laughing imagining the fat, bald guy in row two wearing nothing but a smile or get so distracted by the potential six-pack on hot guy in the back of the room that you may never actually begin speaking. Take it from someone who battled those butterflies and won the war! Use the following top 10 tips to become a perfect 10 communicator.

10. Look Professional.

People believe what their eyes tell them to believe. If they see a polished, professional young woman come to the front of the room, they assume you're a credible speaker. You'll also FEEL more confident when you look your best. So before your next presentation, go get a hair cut, polish your nails, and pullout that "interview" suit from the back of the closet. Regardless of the age of your audience, if you dress to impress, you'll at least get their attention. (The hard part is keeping it!)

9. Breathe.

Most people start getting the most nervous the moment before they take control of the room. The heart starts racing and the brain starts blurring. Believe it or not, the quickest way to control your nerves is to breathe. It sounds simple, but most people forget to take deep breaths before taking the stage. As you're being introduced, take ten long breathes from deep within your gut. For maximum relaxation, be sure your stomach is moving in and out and that your shoulders aren't rising up and down. You want to breathe from your diaphragm.

8. Stay on Message.

I'll never forget the best writing advice I ever received; it came from my freshman English professor. He said when you're developing an essay, "Tell em what you're gonna tell 'em, Tell 'em, Tell 'em what you told 'em". Basically this means, use your introduction to preview your main points, use the body to explain the details of your points, then review your points in your closing. This holds VERY true for speeches or interviews. Sometimes you'll feel like you're banging your message into your audience's head-GOOD! If they can walk away and can regurgitate your main points, then you've succeeded as a speaker.

7. Control Yourself.

The nerves and excitement that come with being the center of attention as a public speaker tend to make us jumpy! Your vocal rate and gestures can quickly

discredit you as a speaker. Force yourself to take a pause/breath after every couple of sentences. Take this opportunity to look around the room at your audience. Also, rest your hands in a steeple position about belly-button level. This ensures your hands won't fly around as you're speaking and helps keep you from fidgeting.

6. Eye Contact.

Another myth in public speaking you might hear is "Look at a spot in the back of the room and the audience will think you're using eye contact." Baloney! Audiences are much smarter than that. You absolutely must look individual people in the eyes. If for no other reason, when you gaze directly at them, they feel obligated to listen to what you're saying! But more importantly, you'll receive important feedback that will let you know whether you're connecting with your audience.

5. Verbal Visual Aids.

As a novice public speaker, nothing can give you more confidence than well-planned visual aids. They work for several reasons. First, the attention is drawn off you exclusively. Next, they help drill home your important points. Most people are visual learners. Know the old saying, "A picture's worth a thousand words"? It's true! Use your language to depict a graphic illustration of what you're trying to convey and the audience retention multiplies exponentially.

4. Interact.

Don't be afraid of the audience. Unless they're a captive audience (i.e. gagged and bound and forced to listen to you!), they want to hear what you have to say. And usually, they have feelings and opinions about your points. Don't be afraid to let them speak up or ask questions. People want to be involved in the experience and they'll actually consider you a more powerful speaker if you allow them to participate.

3. Smile!

Generally, audiences must like a speaker before they'll accept anything she says. If you genuinely smile as you're speaking, the audience will be more drawn to what you're saying. Remember, a smile truly is contagious. If you can get the audience to smile and nod along with you're saying, the likelihood they'll believe your position increases.

2. Relax.

Do you remember when you were a child anticipating Christmas morning? The excitement you felt was probably nauseating, right? The same feeling you have when you're excited or overjoyed about something is physiologically the same feeling you experience when you're nervous. This means you can turn those nervous butterflies into a positive energy that enables you to perform. When you start to feel those butterflies flapping around in your tummy, just conjure up a

happy memory where you were really excited and had a positive experience. This mental exercise helps transform your nerves into excitement. From now on, just relax and think of Santa Claus and you'll be fine!

1. Prepare.

Practice does not make perfect. PERFECT practice makes perfect. If you want to succeed as a public speaker, you absolutely must practice this skill. Even the most talented communicators started off with a few embarrassing moments. The fact is, very few people actually started off as amazing speakers. Public speaking is a LEARNED skill. However, the only way you'll improve is do it. So find ways to practice. Force yourself to give a toast at your cousin's wedding or introduce a substitute teacher to the class. Just remember, Katie Couric wasn't built in a day...