

# Tips, Insights & Tactics

## Public Speaking's Sturdy Little Secrets

It's undeniable. Strong presentation skills are a key differentiator, a fast track to building awareness of your skills, talents and leadership. The investment you make transforming your public speaking skills now, will pay off handsomely over the course of your career.



### Attention Deficit

Why fear public speaking? In the mobile era, the challenge is not so much fear of being judged, it's the fear that no one is looking or listening to you. Today, it's harder than ever to compete for the attention of your audience.

### Get Your Game On

#### Ground Yourself

What's your reaction to a request to present? Is it "have to" or "want to?" Your audience will very likely be able to tell. The place you want to get to is enjoyment. How can that ever happen? Practice. The better you know your material, the more at ease you can be. And the more at ease you are, the better your chances of actually enjoying presenting. When you're enjoying yourself your energy, enthusiasm and joy becomes infectious.

#### Appear Successful

We judge people based on how well we know them. When we don't know them at all, we use the only information we have, our first impression. Hence, appearances count. Do you look your part? If not, why undermine your opportunity for success by appearing less than sharp and fresh, with a hint of personal style to help you stand out?

#### Understand Your Audience

Invest time and effort up front for research. The better you understand the challenges and opportunities of your audience, the better you're able to help them. A deeper understanding builds your confidence and belief in what you're saying—and it will shine through your presentation.

#### Sound Definitive

Listen closely to a favorite announcer or newscaster and take note of their diction. How does yours compare? Make a short list of any words you stumble over and practice saying them clearly and crisply. Say them aloud over and over again until you can say them perfectly without even thinking about it. Imagine the impact of sounding great rather than simply good or adequate.

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### **Pose No Doubts**

Another key aspect of appearance is body language. Your posture and gestures say at least as much—and possibly more—than your words. Your body language is the context of what you say. Are you confident, energized and relaxed? If so, whatever you say benefits accordingly.

### **Turn Inside Out**

Fear of speaking in public can be crippling. When our main focus or worry is what others are thinking of us, our anxiety continues to build. Think instead, outside of yourself. Focus on your audience. How can you help them? What information would be most useful to them? How can you deliver it in a memorable way so it sticks?

You can take this a step further. Your audience is giving you their time and attention. Be grateful for their gift. In your thoughts, be appreciative, thankful and focus on being as useful as possible. The more mental energy you give to your audience, the more it will come back to you in the way you're perceived.

### **Prepare for Success**

#### **Share Yourself**

Nothing connects the space between us like a story. Use stories to illuminate key points and make them unforgettable. Scour your past for relevant stories. Think about lessons learned with family and friends, success and failure, risks taken, memorable characters in your life, and even those embarrassing moments you'd rather forget. Second-hand stories are also useful, but there's nothing more powerful than sharing a true story that happened to you.

#### **Reveal Yourself**

Don't stifle your emotions. Emotions reveal personality, vulnerability and help us connect with others. If you're stiff, lighten up and let some of your personality shine through. If you're the class clown, use your theatrics judiciously when it benefits, rather than detracts, from the thrust of your presentation.

#### **Make a Smile**

Some experts advise against it, but humor is a great avenue into connection. Humor is captivating. It's a great way to set an audience at ease. It's entertaining, and helps grab and maintain attention. If you're good at delivering jokes, do it. If not, tap humorous incidents or experiences relevant to your topic and turn one into an amusing story.

#### **Start at Speed**

Professional storytellers are well acquainted with the phrase "in medias res." It means "in the midst of things." When speaking don't warm up on-stage, start with the level of energy, enthusiasm and volume as if the audience suddenly appeared in the middle of your presentation.

When you start as if you're in the midst of things, you grab everyone's attention from the get-go.

### **Cut to the Point**

Visuals, when used correctly, add depth to your presentation. Visuals should complement your delivery, not compete with it. Use visuals to "anchor" a topic or intrigue your audience to hear your words. The best slides are succinct enough to read at a glance. Think of them as billboards. If your audience has to study a slide, they're no longer listening to what you're saying. Use the six-by-six rule. No more than six bullet items per slide, and no more than six words per bullet—and that's the upper limit! For visuals, less is always more. Challenge yourself to see how few words you can use on your slides.

### **Give Key Takeaways**

Handouts are an excellent extension of your presentation. Print them in color to provide another opportunity to stand out from the crowd. Pass them out before you begin, so your audience can follow along. Include extra space on each page so there's room for notes. Make the content as useful and professional as possible, but keep it short and focused. Add your contact information, additional resources and close with an encouragement to send comments or questions. Print your handouts in color and staple the corner. Better yet, if your budget allows, bind them with a cover.

### **Stand and Deliver**

#### **Give Yourself a Head Start**

Imagine yourself going to a presentation. As you enter the room, the speaker introduces herself, shakes your hand and welcomes you to the proceedings, as she does for everyone else. When the presentation begins, will you be more or less likely to receive the speaker with a positive outlook?

#### **Start Strong**

A presenter's first words are the first and best opportunity to grab all the attention in the room. Don't waste them on a standard opening the audience has heard many times over. Open with content that demands attention and more information. Build on it until your audience is giving you their undivided attention. Slip in the standard thank you for being here, etc.—briefly and crisply. Then, get straight back to your topic and keep delighting your audience.

#### **Pause and Affect**

A speaker can often have a different sense of time than an audience. A pause that seems quite normal to an audience may feel like slow motion to the speaker. Yet, intentional pauses can add emphasis and even drama to a presentation. Practice using pauses effectively before you take the floor.

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### Make it Personal

A great way to maintain or recapture attention when you feel your audience drifting, is to make your topic personal. For example, if your topic is communication overload you might say, "Corporate email and instant messaging continue to grow. If you had 100 messages a day last year, expect to have at least 110 next year. How are you going to deal with it?"

### Read the Signs

The more comfortable you are in front of an audience, the better you're able to read them and make adjustments. Laughter, smiles, head nods or other positive feedback indicate you're connecting. If your audience is silent, look deeper. Do people appear engaged or bored? Excess movement, shuffling papers, etc. indicates people disengaging, perhaps even preparing to leave.

### Re-establish Rapport

If you find yourself in front of a tough audience, or one that's simply tired, there are several techniques you can use to reconnect. Invite participation by asking a question. Move closer to the audience. If it's late, cut to your summary to review the key takeaways of your presentation, then wrap up with Q&As.

#### Related Tips:

- 19 Cures for Fear of Public Speaking
- Do's and Don'ts of Presentation Design
- Make Color Your Strategic Advantage

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#### Related Templates:

- PowerPoint Templates

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### You Are What You Print

When presenting, always give a handout—printed in color—to your audience. Over 90% of SMBs<sup>1</sup> agree that color prints help attract new customers, improve their image and make a memorable impression.

A few benefits of printing in color<sup>2</sup>

- 82% better recall
- 80% improved readership
- 70% more effective communicating data

In PowerPoint® print your presentations as handouts (2 slides per page) or as notes (slide image with script below).

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<sup>1</sup> 2010 Xerox and International Communications Research survey of 1,013 U.S. small businesses.

<sup>2</sup> Studies: Loyola College, Maryland, U.S.A., by Ellen Hoodley, Ph.D., Laurette Simmons, Ph.D., and Faith Gilroy, Ph.D. Case & Company, Management Consultants. Bureau of Advertising, Color in Newspaper Advertising. Maritz Motivation, Inc., Southern Illinois.

**Published material:** The Persuasive Properties of Color, Marketing Communications; What's Working in Direct Marketing. How to Use Color to Sell, Cahners Publishing Company. Grasp Facts Fast with Color Copying, Modern Office Procedures.

<sup>3</sup> After 30 days and your second supplies order through the program, Xerox will provide free extended service coverage over the normal supported life of eligible Xerox products, as long as you continuously place your supplies orders through the Xerox eConcierge service. The average cost of extended service coverage for four years when purchased separately is \$ 1,280. Prices vary per model. The coverage will be the same as what was provided when the device originally shipped—quick exchange, depot repair or onsite. Xerox reserves the right to discontinue the service reward for a specific model at any time.

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