

10 Steps to Better Public Speaking

You know the feeling. Your mouth dries. Your palms moisten. Your heartbeat pounds in your ears. Butterflies swoop and soar in your stomach. What's the cause? You're about to give a speech. Several studies report that public speaking ranks top among people's fears. Yet, public speaking also affords you the opportunity to promote your brand, your company and yourself. It enables you to expand your circle of influence. More importantly, public speaking remains a powerful communication tool for your strategic business messages. Here are 10 steps to help you become a better public speaker.

- 1) **Have something to say.** Sounds simple enough. Yet too many speakers merely present encyclopedic reports of facts and figures. **Take a stand. Express an opinion.** Put your facts in context.
- 2) **Use gentle humor.** No, this is not the time to practice your stand-up routine. Try, instead, to use humorous stories and anecdotes. They can evoke smiles that relax your audience and make them more receptive to your message.
- 3) **Share your personal experiences.** You've been invited to speak because of your knowledge about a subject. Your experiences – both the successes and stumbles, as well as what you've learned from each – **adds an important human touch.**
- 4) **Stay within your allotted time** – or even shorter. On the subject of speech making, Franklin Roosevelt once advised, "Be sincere; be brief; be seated." Your audience will appreciate your consideration of their time.
- 5) **Allow your personality to shine.** Everyone has a personal style – especially you. Allow your manner of speaking to reflect the real you. Are you soft spoken with understated wit? Then don't try to imitate Carol Burnett or Eddie Murphy. Are you an extrovert with lots of pizzazz? Then it's a mistake to take on the persona of Queen Elizabeth or Mother Teresa. Make sure it's your personality that shines in the limelight.

- 6) **Engage your entire body.** Use hand gestures, eye contact and facial expressions to get your point across. Whenever possible, move around the stage. Vary your voice with stage whispers or muted yells. Your speech must be more than a dry recitation of facts and opinions. Effective public speaking is a **performance that engages the audience**. They will appreciate your efforts to keep them entertained.
- 7) **Research your audience.** Why is your subject important to them? How will the issue affect their lives? Knowing the answer to those questions enables you to **tailor your presentation to the audience's specific needs**.
- 8) **Understand your goals.** How do you want your audience to feel after your conclusion? Speeches have the **power to persuade, inform, inspire, entertain or move your audience to action**. Tailor your remarks to meet both your goals and the audience's.
- 9) **Practice, practice, practice.** Whether you use a full written text, talking points or brief notes, rehearse your remarks. Mark Twain explained that it took him more than three weeks to prepare an impromptu speech. Don't just read it silently. Speak it aloud. This gives you the opportunity to time your talk and to change words or phrases that trip you up. An added bonus: Practice enables you to transform your anxiety into a poised high-energy performance.
- 10) **Enjoy yourself.** Your attitude determines whether public speaking presents stumbling blocks or stepping-stones. Have fun. **The more speaking opportunities you accept, the better you'll become**. Like any roller coaster ride, public speaking provides both chills and thrills. Climb aboard. The experience is worth the trip.

WordStorm Communications, Inc. specializes in helping executives define, refine and convey their strategic communications messages. We help business leaders hone their public speaking skills by offering speech writing and speaker coaching services. We will also help executives book speaking opportunities for their business messages. Want more information? Contact Dawne Simmons, WordStorm Communications, Inc., (847) 675-1060 or via e-mail at simmarch@aol.com.