

SPEAKING & PRESENTATION TIPS

If you were to do a survey, you would find that most people hate to speak in front of a crowd. It is said that most people rank it right up there with a root canal for stress. Here are a few tips to help make it a little less stressful or at least allow you to "look" like it is less stressful. The trick is to make people "think" you are enjoying it the next time you give a speech, presentation or tour.

1. KNOW YOUR SUBJECT & PRACTICE OUT LOUD

Know what you are talking about. Be the authority by being prepared. Start your presentation by telling your audience the reason for your speech and something about yourself. Personalize your speech.

And, don't forget to practice your speech. Reading it is much different than saying it out loud. Speak clearly and loud enough to be heard by everyone in the room. Practice reciting your speech in front of a mirror until you are comfortable then, ask someone who really "likes" you, to be your audience, while you recite it out loud. Repeat this until you feel comfortable (at least 10 times). Always practice MORE than you think you need to!

2. BREATHE DEEP AND SLOW

Stress causes a person to breathe in short, shallow breaths. A slow, deep breath can work wonders to reduce anxiety. Take in a deep breath through your nose to a slow count of 10. Force your abdomen out while breathing in. This extends your diaphragm and allows your lungs to fill to capacity.

Then slowly breathe out through your mouth while pulling your abdominal muscles in. This will empty your lungs and allow the stress to float out of your body. Repeat several times until relaxed.

Breathing slowly helps to prevent that light headed feeling caused by hyperventilating (rapid breathing that causes too much oxygen in the blood).

3. NO IFs, ANDs or BUTs

Stumbling through a sentence is, one of a speaker's, worst fears. If you lose your place or get nervous, just pause a second, take a breath and start your sentence over. Don't worry about the brief silence.

Avoid filling the silence with "Um", "Er", "Ahh", "Uhh" or "You Know". We seldom realize when we are using these "fillers" words that are extremely annoying to hear.

NOTE - If you wonder if you are using some of these "filler" words, ask a friend to help you see where you are having the most problem. Keep in mind that your spouse would probably enjoy this little exercise way too much!

Stand or sit facing each other and start talking for one minute (you can use your speech, talk about yourself or talk about your favorite subject). Have your partner be silent but, clap their hands every time you say one of these "filler" word. You will be surprised at how many times you use these words without knowing it. Repeat this exercise until you are thoroughly aware of your "problem areas". You CAN break this habit but, you first must realize that you are doing it.

4. WHAT IS YOUR BODY LANGUAGE SAYING

Without even knowing it, you could be shifting your weight from side to side or using your thumb to fiddle with a ring on your finger. Not a big problem when you are standing in line at the grocery store but, NOT what you want to be doing in front of an audience. A mirror can show some of what you look like but, to really see exactly what you are doing, set-up a video camera and tape yourself. Dress like a professional, stand straight with your shoulders back but, relaxed and keep your hands open. Don't fidget!

5. TIME YOURSELF

When you practice your speech, set a timer so that you know how long your speech will take and remember to S-L-O-W- D-O-W-N. Try to speak slightly slower than what you normally do. When you are nervous, it is easy to speed through a speech making it difficult for your audience to understand you.

6. MAKE EYE CONTACT

Several times during your speech be sure to look up and make eye contact with someone in your audience. Eye contact helps to keep people interested in what you are saying. Pick a friendly face in the front row and another in the back row and look directly at them several times throughout your speech. You will seem confident and it will make you look professional.

7. SMILE ! - SMILE ! - SMILE !

Act like you are enjoying it !!!!! Smile when you make eye contact. Smiling is contagious. There is nothing like looking out at a smiling audience to encourage you. Your smile will make you feel more self-confident.

8. INDEX CARDS

Few of us will ever make a speech using a Teleprompter so, you may want to have a few notes with you when you make your speech. If you will be using index cards to keep your speech on track, here are some tips for you to use:

- a.) Number the index cards in case you drop them or lose your place.
- b.) Attach them together with a metal ring.
- c.) Write clearly and BIG enough to read them easily.
- d.) Don't forget to look up while you are speaking to make eye contact. DON'T just stare at the cards and read your presentation.
- e.) Abbreviate but, not so much that you forget what you were trying to say.
- f.) Only notes to remind you of what you want to say should be written on the index cards. Don't write your entire speech, word for word, on them.

9. EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Whatever happens, take it all in stride. If there is a sudden loud noise you could say, "That's going to leave a mark!" If a child or baby starts to cry during your speech, you could laugh and say, "Everyone's a critic!" OR... just smile and continue with your presentation.

And, don't forget, even when things don't go as planned... Keep SMILING !!!!! Most people will not even realize that anything unplanned happened.

10. SUMMARIZE YOUR SPEECH

Finish by repeating your most important points. If you finish early, this would be a good time to ask for questions even if you hadn't planned on it. Just remember to keep SMILING !

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