

Notes On The Basics of Public Speaking

prepared for SA Inventors Association

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From time to time most of us need to be reminded of some of the basics that need to be thought about and implemented by all public speakers.

If you are not a member of Rostrum, or another speaking group, all of this may be new to you. Hopefully tonight's presentations will have encouraged you to consider developing your speaking skills. You will find these skills invaluable in both your business and personal life. The skills you develop will give you a lot of self-confidence in everything you undertake.

The opportunity membership of Rostrum offers is one no one should miss.

Read through these notes and ask yourself if you follow these basic principles of good public speaking. Chances are that some of them come naturally to you when you prepare and deliver your speeches. Others you may have consciously decided to ignore or perhaps have just forgotten about as time marches on.

Constructing your speech

Most speeches, especially those under eight minutes, should have a simple foundation. It should consist of an opening, body and conclusion. The main reasons for this are:

- It will make your speech easier for your audience to follow.
- It may stop you from getting side-tracked.
- It can encourage you to adopt a chronological approach.
- It will encourage you to link the three sections.
- It will lead to logical thinking by the speaker and the audience.

Opening

You only get one opportunity to grab your audience's attention! Keep it short and uncomplicated. Make them want to listen to your entire speech. Consider a different approach. Try using a telling but easily understood statistic or injecting some drama into your opening. Your opening provides you with an opportunity to set the scene for the main body of your speech. Use your opening as an entrance or front door.

Body

Here are a few ways you can structure the main body of your speech. Try developing your main points chronologically. Use the points you wish to cover in decreasing level of importance or work from minor to major points. Draw on your personal experiences and relate them to your audience. Try to support your speech with opinions, quotations, facts, figures and examples. Don't try to cover too many points and, above all, **keep it simple**. Aim to have your audience remember at least one central idea or message and always try to lead smoothly to your conclusion.

Conclusion

Make your conclusion brief and to the point. Use it to encapsulate your speech, referring back to your opening if possible. Know it by heart so you can deliver it with conviction. Consider using it to summarise your speech or try using it to urge your audience to take a particular course of action or hold a particular view. Leave the audience in no doubt as to your opinion. It is a good idea when giving an informative speech to tell your audience where they can obtain further information.

Choosing your words

Words are the building blocks speakers use to create their speech. Give careful attention to selecting the right words. Consider these points:

- The words you use may need to vary depending on the age and knowledge of your audience.
- Simple words are often the best. If technical words must be used they should be explained.

- Slang and bad language usually have no place in public speaking.
- Correct pronunciation is essential.
- How words are delivered can vary their meaning considerably - i.e. pace, volume, pitch and stress.
- Practise eye contact by slowly moving your head to encompass your entire imaginary audience.
- Be interested in your topic - it will be infectious.
- Gesture must be relevant to the words being used.
- Consider using a tape or video recorder. By playing your speech back you will be able to identify and correct problems such as, speed of delivery, poor diction, incorrect use of pausing and the tendency to use fillers such as ums and ers.

Use a firm and strong voice. Why?

- If you are to succeed as a speaker the entire audience must be able to hear you.
- It will give you confidence as a speaker.
- It will create the impression that you know what you are talking about and that you mean it.
- It will discourage others from talking whilst you are doing so.
- It is important to remember to project your voice. (This should not be confused with yelling.)
- When we speak our body should be relaxed but we need to have firm control of the head, neck and chest.

That extra polish

Other things that can make you a cut above the average speaker include:

Enthusiasm - If you are not interested in what you have to say it is unlikely your audience will be. If you appear interested in your topic and behave enthusiastically your audience will respond accordingly. If you are not enthusiastic expect to lose your audience quickly!

Empathy - Make sure your audience is 'on side'. When you are preparing your speech think of your audience. What do they know? What do they want out of your speech? Put yourself in their shoes.

Commitment - Continually remind yourself of the purpose of your speech during the preparation stages. Usually it will be to entertain, inform, persuade or a combination of these purposes. Commit yourself to achieving your purpose.

Timing - Discipline is important in speaking. See that your five-minute speech **is** a five-minute speech. Allocate your time carefully between the opening, body and conclusion of your speech.

Imagination - Lack of imagination can destroy your speech. If you must speak on a mundane topic at least do it in an entertaining way. Think of interesting examples to illustrate your views. Present the unexpected; look for a different angle on your topic.

Observation - Feedback from your audience should be observed and acted upon. It will teach you when to vary your presentation, delete material or introduce another viewpoint. Learn to read your audience and act accordingly.

Naturalness - We are all different. Don't try to be something you are not. The audience can spot a fake. Be sincere in what you have to say and your audience will warm to your presentation.

In conclusion

Perfection may be beyond our grasp, however we can strive to give the best speech of which we are capable. Occasionally we may find that we have lost our way. At those times every speaker needs to consider '**getting back to basics**'!

Ron Johnson