



Preparation: the key to a giving a great speech

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It looks so easy and smooth.

The introducer makes her sound competent without sounding like she walks on water. Then she confidently walks up to the platform, takes the microphone in hand, pauses to plant herself center stage, smiles and makes eye contact with her audience.

She appears to own the stage. She begins her presentation with a story that pulls the audience into her message and they stay with her during her entire talk. She's organized, knowledgeable, warm and playful. She talks to her audience, not at them.

Knowing that people learn differently, she includes a list of how-to tips to stimulate the left side of the brain, as well as some inspirational examples and stories to reach the right side of the brain. She's energetic, yet she pauses appropriately and never seems rushed.

She doesn't call attention to mishaps or errors. If the slides don't work, she lets them go and continues her talk without them.

She really listens when someone asks a question. She answers simply and honestly. She makes people feel smart for asking a question and never embarrasses someone because they don't know something.

She ends on time, or a few minutes early, even if the program started late. She praises the organization and its mission and compliments the program planner for a job well done.

She may only speak a few times a year, but she looks like, thinks like, and acts like a pro.

Wouldn't we all like to project that kind of

confidence when we are called to the platform? You can, if you are willing to prepare!

There will be times in your career as a business professional when you will be asked to speak to a group, or make a presentation of your product or service. Here are 8 suggestions that will help you project confidence and getting rid of a few of those butterflies.

- **Be prepared.** Don't assume anything. My friend and earlier role model in speaking, Nido Qubein said, "proper preparation prevents poor performance." So true. If you take responsibility for the success of your presentation and take charge of all aspects of your talk ahead of time, you will be well on your way to assuring its success.
- **Chat with the program planner** to have a clear understanding of her expectations. Ask for a profile of your audience i.e., age range, occupations, size of the group, how long you are to speak, etc.
- **Ask what takes place** before and after your talk. Is there a meal, cocktail time, awards? Knowing this will help you craft your talk. For example, an after dinner speech requires more humor than an early morning talk.
- **Be creative.** Did you know that after dinner speeches don't really have to be "after" dinner! Oftentimes, when speaking at night, you might face a tired audience. If snacks will be served, why not suggest speaking before the meal rather than after? A 20 minute talk before dinner can have more impact than 40 minutes after.

- **As the speaker, you control the environment.**

So don't be shy about requesting the room setup, lighting and equipment that most facilitates your speaking style. Most groups have done away with the head table at meal functions. Informal seating lets you to get closer to and more involved with your audience.

- **Know what makes you comfortable and request it.**

Many people need the security of a lectern to speak, while others are inhibited by it. Remember Elizabeth Dole at the Republican convention a few years ago? She blew them away by walking down into the audience. People loved it and felt connected to her.

- **Prepare your own introduction.**

Keep it short, simple, and tailor it to the group. Don't underestimate yourself, but don't make it sound as though you "walk on water" either. People want to know what qualifies you to speak on the subject and perhaps a personal point about yourself. They are rarely interested in your board appointments or extensive education. Let your talk tell them of your quality as a person and your ability to communicate your message.

- **Still nervous? Arrive early**

enough to meet some of the group and talk with them personally. Ask questions and listen to their concerns as well as their expectations of your presentation. Get out of yourself and focus on them.

So here you are ... you are being introduced, you have microphone in hand, your audience is ready to hear your words of wisdom. Don't worry about the butterflies. The pros will tell you they still get them. Remember, you're not nervous. You're just full of creative energy!

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