

- » Grasping the basics of public speaking
- » Writing your script
- » Learning to practice

Chapter **1**

Getting Started with Public Speaking

You may have picked up this book because you've been told you need to give a speech. And, if like the vast majority of people, you're really scared. And maybe you have good reason. Maybe you saw a video of yourself and can't believe you move around so much.

Time for a reality check. When you give a speech or presentation, it's all about your message to the audience. It is not really about *you*. Some of the smartest and the most accomplished people tend to forget about the message and focus all their anxiety on themselves as speakers. "Should I have cut my hair? What if I forget the most important point?"



TIP

First things first: Live in the present. And when you're speaking, the present means delivering your message to the audience.

You may have no idea what you're going to do before you read this book. And there may times when you feel out of your comfort zone. I get it — it's my specialty. But isn't being out of your comfort zone supposed to be a good thing? It's a big part of how you grow as a person.



TIP

Something else you need to be prepared for to really get what I'll be teaching you: You need to learn to feel comfortable with discomfort.

Dealing with Issues That Stand in Your Way

Whether or not you have a good idea of what your specific problem with public speaking may be, many issues can arise while preparing for and during your speech. It's important to have a good sense of them. You may be afraid, your body language may be making you feel less than confident, you could have a vocal problem, you could be running out of breath and not getting to the ends of your sentences. There are many possible reasons for these things.



REMEMBER

Here are a few things to remember:

- » Performing requires effort — but you don't want the audience to see that effort.
- » A powerful speaker is relaxed and comfortable.
- » Your public speaking voice should be the same one you use when talking to your family, friends, and colleagues. (I have a client who is a politician, who told a friend that he was working with me. "Whatever you do," his friend said, "don't turn into one of those fake-sounding politicians." You need to have your own style and sound like yourself.)

You may just need little tweaks — or you may need more work.

Fighting the fight, flight, or freeze response

You've probably heard the statistics. People rate public speaking up there with *dying* on the all-time fears list. It should be no surprise then that during public speaking, the automatic response that we usually see when facing a life-threatening situation kicks in: It's sometimes called the *fight, flight, or freeze* response. This was first described by physiologist Walter Bradford Cannon in his book *The Wisdom of the Body* in 1932. It's a physiological response to fear that traces back to prehistoric days. A Cro-Magnon was always on guard, looking out for danger — because danger was real back then, and it came from everywhere. We aren't cavepersons anymore, despite how you may feel some days behind the lectern, *but we still feel the fear*. It's built in to us.

Let's get something straight right off the bat: It's okay to be nervous, because that shows that you care. When you're presenting, adrenaline (often triggered by fear) courses through your body. That's a good thing. That adrenaline is doing you good — it's giving you an extra boost during an extraordinary time. When your body is stressed for a long time, as when a prehistoric ancestor was fighting off a herd of saber-toothed cats, the stress hormone cortisol is also secreted. And that's

when we have problems. When you're scared, your voice reflects it. You may sound shaky, or you speed up, or you speak so quietly that you can't be heard, or you blank and can't think of what to say next.



TIP

Here's something you're going to hear a lot about in this book. The best solution to conquering fear and anxiety is proper breathing technique. Breathing slowly — as opposed to the short little breaths you take when anxious — stimulates your brain to activate the calming rest and digest parasympathetic nervous system. Basically, proper slow breathing shuts off the tap that's supplying you with stress. As I argue in future chapters, by adopting a positive attitude, changing your body language, and saying yes instead of no, you can actually change the way you feel about yourself. And that translates into better public speaking. I talk more about this in Chapters 2, 5, and 15.

Affirming your worth with affirmations

Do you say no before you say yes? People are hard-wired to say *no* first, thanks to our ancestors the aforementioned cave dwellers. Is your own mind getting in the way of success? You can get positive about presenting by adopting a better attitude.

That all starts with affirmations. *Affirmations* help to kick-start belief in yourself. “I am a great speaker,” “My message rocks!” and “I am the expert!” Say these things to yourself and before you know it you'll start believing them — and believing in yourself.

One of Stephen Covey's Habits for Highly Effective People is to begin with the end in mind. What do you want to happen *after* the speech? What do you want the audience to *do*? Put your focus on the audience and the message you want to impart on them. I discuss more about this in Chapter 11.

Creating reality with visualization

Most people are very good at imagining themselves doing something negative. Why not turn that around and visualize a great presentation? Picture the audience nodding in approval. Your mind plays tricks on you all the time through negative thinking. Well, two can play at that game. The brain is plastic. You can consciously change it to think more positively.

I talk about two kinds of visualization: *External* visualization is where you're looking at yourself as if you're in a movie, and *internal visualization* is where you see yourself actually performing the task from your point of view. Elite athletes use both kinds and find them very beneficial.

If you're using external imagery, you can watch yourself sitting in the audience, rising when the host calls your name, calmly striding up to the lectern, taking three breaths, and beginning your speech — which will be great. The audience is giving you appreciative nonverbal reactions. Your visual aids are all in place. You end your speech to genuine applause.

With internal imagery, you simulate giving the speech in your own body. When you go through your speech, how are you feeling? What are you seeing and hearing? More about this can be found in Chapters 2 and 20.

Getting rid of tension

We all need some amount tension in our bodies. If we didn't have tension, we wouldn't be able to sit or stand. So, it's not tension in general that we need to think about and get rid of, but rather, *misplaced* tension.

Proper alignment is the first step in relieving unnecessary tension. The spine, as you know, is crucial to alignment. It's the mast of your ship. If you have unnecessary tension, it starts with your spine. And that makes it harder on your muscles to just keep you standing. Then everything else gets out of whack. Your breath will be impeded, your shoulders and neck may be tight, and your vocal energy may be low. The audience mirrors you, so if you're feeling tense, they will too. Chapter 4 describes vocal problems and exercises that can help.

So what can you do about it? You have to get physical. Working out relieves tension. Go for a walk or run, dust off your bike, hit the pool, or practice some yoga. I talk more about this in Chapter 10.

Progressive relaxation is a tension and release exercise that was developed by American physician Edmond Jacobson in 1908 to help patients overcome their anxiety. This is an exercise where you tense all body parts individually and then release to feel the difference. You start by lying on the floor in a quiet place. You learn to tense and release all parts of your body. Then if you feel tense before or during a presentation, you can tense a part of your body, like your toes, and release. See Chapter 3 for a full description of this exercise.

Improving Your Body Language

Body language can be even more important than your voice in delivering your message to the audience. Body language is crucial in exuding confidence in yourself and showing trust in your audience.



TIP

Believe it or not, changing your posture can actually change your mood and, ultimately, how you perform.

First things first. You need to stand up straight — not like you're waiting for the sergeant to inspect your barracks, but in what I call an *up and out* position. You feel your bones stacked up on top of each other, your head is directly over your shoulders and on top of your neck, your chin is neither tucked in nor jutting forward, your chest is out, your feet are planted, and you have energy surging through your body past the crown of your head and up into the sky.

The opposite is the *down and in* position. When you slouch and gaze at the floor, it doesn't show confidence in you or your audience. Averting your eyes and looking down send the message to the audience that you'd rather be anywhere else. If you're not properly aligned, down and in also impedes your breath. You won't be able to drop your breath deep into your body like you should. In Chapter 15 I discuss this in more detail.

Here are some other body language tips:

- » Handshakes are part of body language too. Give a firm one if you want to make a good impression. Don't be a limp rag, but don't squeeze and hang on for dear life. That may make a lasting impression, but not a good one.
- » If you'll be presenting sitting down, such as in a boardroom, have both feet firmly planted on the floor and don't slouch into your chair.
- » Crossing your arms while talking to colleagues at the water cooler may feel natural for you, but what impression does it give to your listeners? Defensiveness, that's what. Crossing your legs may feel comfortable, but to some it looks like you are in a closed-off position. Crossing your arms and your legs doesn't make you look very approachable.

Gesturing

You don't know what to do with your hands? Try moving them. Practice doing that and see how comfortable it becomes and how it activates your parasympathetic nervous system.

The autonomic nervous system consists of three parts:

- » The *enteric* system controls the stomach and intestines.
- » The *sympathetic* nervous system activates the “fight or flight” response.
- » The *parasympathetic nervous system*, or the “rest and digest” system.

In Mark Bowden’s book *Winning Body Language* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2010), the author states that moving your hands in a horizontal plane extending out from your navel has a calming effect and activates the parasympathetic nervous system. He calls this the *truth plane* because you look and feel more genuine when your hands are in this position.



TIP

When you’re giving your presentation seated at a boardroom table, gesture away. Just make sure to keep your hands up where everyone can see them. If you drop them under the table, no one knows what is going on down there. Chapter 15 talks more about this.

Moving

Some speakers just want to stay put and stand motionless behind the lectern. That may be fine (unless they’re gripping the thing with white knuckles). Others feel the need to move constantly. Both are individual choices and are up to you.



TIP

When you do move, make sure you move with a purpose. Choreograph where you want to move and when. The movement should make sense in combination with what you’re talking about. Through practice, movement will soon become second nature.



WARNING

Swaying side to side or back and forth is fine for rocking a baby. When you’re speaking, though, you want the focus to be on what you have to say. Plant those feet and imagine roots growing down from them into the earth. Chapter 15 goes into more detail about this.

Making eye contact

The audience is your friend, and they want you to succeed. Believe it or not, they’re not planning to throw rotten fruit at you the moment you falter.



TIP

Find someone in the audience who is giving you nonverbal cues that she’s listening and is interested in what you’re saying. Look her directly in the eye for about five or six seconds. Then move on to someone else. Look at the same person for too long, and she’ll start to feel uncomfortable. And the rest of the audience may start wondering why that one person is getting a solo performance.



TIP

If you're really that scared when you speak, find that friendly face and look at that person. Sometimes you may feel that it's easier to look above and over the audience's heads. That way, you don't have to connect with them. But the audience can tell that you're not looking at them. If your eyes are the windows to your soul, the audience is never going to get to know you if they can't engage with you and your message. Practice when the stakes are low — look your colleagues in the eye, the delivery guy, your kid's basketball coach.

You'll can read more about this stuff in Chapter 15.

Adjusting Your Pace

One of the most common problems I see is speakers speeding up their speeches as they progress through them. It's obvious they want to get their speech over with as soon as possible.

If you find yourself speeding up, but you don't feel particularly scared, maybe you've practiced it so much that you're just going through the motions. Think of the way you absentmindedly murmured the Pledge of Allegiance as a kid, or the Lord's Prayer. Congrats on being prepared — but you're doing it wrong.



REMEMBER

When you deliver your speech, that's the first time the audience will hear it. A speech is a performance. When you watch a play, the actors don't do everything faster than they did on opening night just because they know their lines better. Be clear and slow down so that the audience has time to register what you just said. Practice saying one sentence slowly. Then take a breath.

I talk more about this in Chapter 9.

Perfecting the pause

What is that little dot at the end of a sentence? Right, it's a period and it represents the end of a thought. Use it to pause and take a breath. When speakers pause, it shows that they are confident and that they have control of their presentation.

A pause can also create suspense for the audience. What is the speaker going to say next? As a speaker, you may feel as if your pause is sooooo long. Actually, you're really just taking a breath. The audience doesn't see it as taking a long time.



REMEMBER

When you pause to take a breath or allow a thought to land and take hold of them, it shows the audience you're confident. You've got this under control.



WARNING

Often, people use *filler words* in place of breath pauses, like *um* and *ah*. Some people feel as if they must constantly keep talking. Don't do this. Yes, it may give you time to gather your thoughts for your next sentence, but you're taking away the opportunity for the audience to do the same.

When you tell a joke or a humorous story or even say a line that the audience laughs at, pause and wait for the laugh to subside. Otherwise, they'll miss what you say next.

I talk more about all of this in Chapter 9.

Supporting Your Breath



TIP

If you take away only one thing from this book, let it be *the importance of breath*. Breath is your fuel. It's the stuff that runs your speech. Breathing deep and slow helps you relax, and when you feel relaxed, you're less stressed. It's a perfect feedback loop.

Your *diaphragm* is a cone-shaped muscle attached to the lower edges of your ribcage. When you breathe in, the abdominal and pelvic muscles relax, the diaphragm flattens, the ribs expand up and out, and the breath enters the lungs. When you breathe, I want you to visualize your breath dropping deep into your lower abdomen. Chapter 14 covers breathing in detail.



TIP

To find out if you're breathing correctly, put one hand on your upper chest and the other on your lower abdomen and inhale. Pay attention to which hand moves first. If it's your hand on your upper chest, then you are not taking full breaths. Imagine filling your lungs up like a balloon. Balloons fill up starting at the bottom. When you exhale, your balloon deflates, and your navel is pressed toward your spine.



WARNING

Taking the time to breathe deeply will help you sustain your breath to the end of your sentence. If you run out of breath before the sentence is over, you tend to drop your volume and mumble your way through the end of the sentence. When you do that, the audience can't hear what you said. You lose your impact, and your message is lost.



WARNING

If you hold your breath because you missed something in your speech or you look out at that audience gripped with fear, your brain won't get the oxygen it needs — and you may blank. So keep breathing! I discuss this in further detail in Chapters 9 and 14.

EXERCISE: SAYING DIFFERENT SENTENCES, TAKING DIFFERENT BREATHS

This exercise can improve your lung capacity and how much breath you need for each sentence.

Different sentences require different amounts of breath. Speak each of the following lines on one breath:

- I read *For Dummies* books. (breathe)
- I read *For Dummies* books because they give me so much information. (breathe)
- I read *For Dummies* books because they give me so much information that I can use every day. (breathe)

Each sentence requires more breath. Your breath should sound as free and easy on the last sentence as on the first. For each, try to take in only as much breath as you need. Try not to lift your shoulders when you breathe in.

Boosting Confidence through Preparation and Training

You've been asked to present and you're thinking, *Why me? I'm not worthy!* Sure, you may look snazzy and dressed up, but inside you're screaming, *I'm an imposter!*



TIP

Get rid of self-defeating thoughts. Let them go. You *are* good or you wouldn't have been asked to speak.

Perfection doesn't exist. And if it did, it would be boring. You don't want to strive to be perfect. How about striving for excellence instead? Be the best you can be. That is what the audience wants — to see your authentic self, flaws and all.

Think of your presentation as a learning experience. I know, your dad told you that all the time through school. You didn't listen? Well, listen now. Analyze how you did afterward. Have a checklist of things you did that you felt good about and things that you could improve. The more you present, the more your list of improvements will shrink.

Do you try to wing a speech? How did that go? Winging an important presentation doesn't work for most people. Even if you manage to fill up the allotted time,

you may have missed important facts. You probably rambled on because you had no idea where your speech was going. You were grasping for what to say next, what you wanted to remember, what you were forgetting. Recall that the audience mimics what they see — if you look and feel befuddled, so will they.



TIP

It all comes down to practice, practice, practice. It takes years to go from amateur to master in any field of endeavor. The thing about learning a new skill is that you just don't learn it and forget about it. What makes people great at anything is that they always learn it more from doing it over and over. Even if you give the same presentation 20 times, each time will be different. So take the mistakes and learn from them to get better.



TIP

Never look in the mirror when practicing your presentation. You look in a mirror to make sure that your shirt is tucked in, that your hair is parted correctly, or that the piece of spinach is off your teeth. And these are the things you're doing when you look in the mirror while practicing. You're not in the moment. It's much better to record yourself on video — or record your voice on your phone or other device to hear how you sound. Chapter 9 talks more about this.

Breathing (your own) life into speeches

For writers, it's all about finding your voice. It's the first step to becoming confident in your work. The same can be said for writing a speech. I don't care if your speech is about fractions or septic systems or deodorant sales. Get some personality into your speech.

A speech is a great opportunity to give the audience a real treat. You want to show the world that you're an intelligent human being when you present. You're not writing a technical manual — you're allowing your audience to look deep into you.



TIP

After you've written your speech, practice it out loud. Did you write it in your own voice? You'll discover what words fit for you and the audience. More on this in Chapter 6.

Planning out your speech

As you write your speech, ask yourself:

- »» What do you want to say?
- »» What does the audience need to hear?
- »» Why are you speaking to them?

In the public speaking world, speeches have three main purposes:

- » **To entertain:** That's the speech you give at a wedding.
- » **To persuade:** That's when you're selling something, an idea, service, or tangible object.
- » **To inform:** You're giving information. Think of a college lecture.

I believe you need *all three components* in your speech. Doing that will make your speech a lot more interesting.

How should you begin your presentation? With a rhetorical question that the audience doesn't have to answer but that gets them thinking? A statistic or cool fact? A provocative or inspiring quote? A comment about an event that happened locally, a compliment to the audience, or a personal story?

All of those have the same objective: to get the audience engaged right off the bat. There's more about this in Chapter 6.

Getting ready for the big day

It's the night before your speech. You've gone over your presentation enough times to feel really comfortable with it. What now? Make a list of things you need to be a success. For example, do you have your speech printed out or your cue cards? Do you have your USB stick or any visuals handy? Where's your water bottle? Will the hotel supply you with a water glass? Will they give you some food beforehand? Practice in the clothes you plan to wear, because you never know if that tie is too tight or those heels too high.

On the day of the event, get to the venue early and meet your organizer or the person you've been in contact with. Talk to the technician or the person responsible for your visuals. Walk on the stage if you can — it will help you feel more comfortable when you do it for real. Meet the early birds and have a good chat. That's another good way to feel more comfortable. It's also a good way to feel out the tone of the conference or meeting. Did they just listen to a speaker who told them that they will need two million dollars in the bank to retire? That would be good to know.



TIP

Don't take yourself too seriously. Yes, you need to do well when you present. You want to get your message across. But there's no need to put undue pressure on yourself. I talk about this in detail in Chapter 16.

Eating right to feel good

Think you can run off to your early morning presentation after skipping breakfast? Maybe you're experiencing butterflies in your stomach and can't keep anything down but coffee. Unless you've been living under a rock, you must've heard that breakfast is the most important meal of the day.

Any meal is important before giving a speech. You need something in your stomach — and I'm not talking about a donut and coffee. That will make you jittery and you'll crash and burn. Eat some protein and complex carbs.

Turn to Chapter 10 for more detail.

Honing Your Delivery

Warming up is vital if you want to give a great speech. You're a *speech athlete*, and all athletes warm up before they compete. Remember, you are using your body. Speakers, just like athletic competitors, need to warm up physically and vocally. There are samples of warmups in Chapters 10, 20, and 22.

Articulating

What's that you say? You might be passionate about your speech, but if you don't open your mouth and pronounce your words clearly, know one will care. *Articulation* helps you communicate your ideas to your audience. That starts with your mouth.

You need to open your mouth to be understood clearly. Many speakers hardly open their mouths. Perhaps they're mirroring other people around them who have shut their traps. Or mumbling is a habit. Or they're scared. Your *articulators* include the tongue, lips, jaw, and the soft palate.

You may feel self-conscious about your accent. By the way, we all have accents — we all sound different depending on region of origin and other factors. If you're from New York, your *accent* or how you pronounce words is probably very different from a Texan's. All you Canadians out there, don't be thinking that the only people with accents are from Quebec and Newfoundland. Every community says words differently. So embrace your accent. You don't need to get rid of it — in fact, you can't. You just need to be clear in your pronunciation.



TIP

If you're told constantly to speak up, you don't have to push your voice. Just make sure you pronounce the endings of the words. Don't think your microphone will be your savior. Yes, a mic will amplify your sound so the audience will hear you at the back of the room. But they'll also hear your vocal problems, too.

Resonating

Your whole body resonates and amplifies your sound. The most important parts are the head, throat, mouth, and chest. Think of yourself as an amplifier. If you hold tension in your body, you won't be able to resonate fully, and your sound won't be as rich and vibrant.

Using the right tone

You express meaning through tone. Yes, *express*. Speakers often have trouble with this because they don't want to exaggerate and look foolish. But if you feel excited that the stocks have grown in the company portfolio, shouldn't you show it? Yes — make sure you show it.



REMEMBER



TIP

When you speak, you need to use vocal variety. The speaker who sits on one note is boring and loses the audience's attention.

Be mindful of what you're saying and how you're saying it. If you're selling a group of seniors a new retirement package, don't be condescending. Remember your message and what you want the seniors to do. You don't want them to write you off as some young whipper snapper who just wants his money.

You can find more about all of this in Chapters 12 through 14.

Adding visuals

Visuals like slide shows *can* help enhance your message. But make sure they really add to your presentation and don't just give you something you think you can hide behind.

You definitely don't need to put a whole bunch of words on slides and proceed to read them. Boring! Your slides or other visuals should only relate to main points or provide context for what you're saying.



TIP

Answer this question: Do your slides truly complement your speech or did you just stick them in because you felt your words weren't enough? If you took the slides away (which could happen — machinery has a tendency to fail at the worst possible moments), could you still give your speech with full confidence? Your answer should be yes.



TIP

Try using pictures. When we look at a picture, it evokes feelings in us and carries us into our imagination. That's usually more than words on a slide could ever do. Words on a slide just give the audience a visual version of what you're saying already.

Make sure you're consistent with your message. If you are talking about, say, plumbers and their right to make a choice about striking, and your slides are all about stats on how many plumbers are in the union, the audience doesn't know which to focus on. If they read the stats, they miss what you have said. If they listen to you, they miss the stats. If they read the stats fast and you're still talking they may just zone out completely.



TIP

Be creative. Think outside the box. Try to incorporate other kinds of visuals, such as props. Props can create more impact have more impact than a PowerPoint slide. Just make sure to use a prop that's big enough for the whole audience to see.

Chapter 7 discusses visual aids in detail.

Getting laughs

Getting the audience laughing can be a fantastic technique. But comedy can be tricky to pull off. The audience will smell a phony, so be authentic. Even if you aren't a naturally born jokester, you can tell a joke or a humorous story. You don't need to be a comedian to be funny. The trick is to find your funny bone and add humor to your speech without alienating the audience.

Start by writing what you know. Write about you and your life. Many times I hear my friends talk about funny incidents that have happened to them that they would never share in front of people who aren't their good friends. Well, now's your chance.

Here are some quick tips to being funny up there:

- » Focus on what the audience and you have in common.
- » Try it out on friends.
- » Don't be afraid to be vulnerable and open — audiences love that.
- » Don't say, "Have I got a funny joke for you."
- » Don't assume they will laugh. Appreciate it when they do.
- » Once you start the joke, keep going and stay committed to telling it all the way to the end.

- » Use situational humor.
- » Talk about what's bugging you.
- » Keep it clean.
- » Find someone who is funny and ask that person about your story.
- » Don't be the first to laugh, but feel free to laugh at yourself if the audience does.

There's more in Chapter 8.

Telling stories

Everyone loves stories. Using narration helps to get your message across in a fun way that engages the audience. A personal anecdote helps the audience get into your world and relate to you. You can use part of a story as a hook and then wrap it up in the conclusion.

Chapter 6 is devoted to using stories in speeches.

Dealing with the Audience

As a speaker, there is nothing worse than saying something and getting a groan from the audience — especially early in your speech. Avoiding groans starts with knowing your audience. It's your job to find out the kind of audience that will be listening to your speech.

Here are a few things to consider:

- » Be sensitive if something tragic has happened in the community.
- » Use appropriate language and tone. If you're talking to a group of seniors about their retirement plan, don't be condescending and don't alienate them.
- » If you're telling a joke, don't *ever* be off-color.
- » Don't pit part of the audience against the other. "Women, don't you think that men . . ." That might work for the professional comedian, but you want the entire audience to be engaged and on your side.

Find out more about audiences in Chapter 8.



WARNING

DEALING WITH HECKLERS

Don't take it personally. Heckling is just an obstacle you may have to address. Remember that you're the boss up there. Keep your cool and keep breathing.

Address the heckler and ask an open-ended question. "How do you feel about that?" That may lead him to run into a ditch on his own. If he persists, tell him that you will address his concerns after the presentation. (If you do talk to him later, give him a time limit. You have five minutes and then you have to go chat with the organizer.)

If he keeps going, turn to the audience and say, "I think the audience wants to hear more about what I'm saying."

Excelling in Interviews

One fantastic interview away from a major upgrade? Here are some speaking tips for interview situations to get that dream job:

- » Know thyself. The interviewers already have looked at your CV. What can you tell them that they don't know?
- » Dress like you've already got the job.
- » Know the company that you're interviewing for. Find out who the CEO is and who will be interviewing you. Check out the company's website and find its mission statement. Is there a page that shows events that employees do as a company? Maybe they're all on a baseball team or they clean up local parks every year in the spring. These are interesting tidbits that you can sprinkle into the conversation to show that you've done your homework and researched the company.
- » Convince them you will work hard. Employers want to surround themselves with hardworking employees who are interested in the company and want to do well in their position.
- » Know the answers to some important questions. They will almost always ask you why you want the job. What have been your obstacles in other jobs that you've overcome? They may even ask why you left your previous job, or why you want to leave your present one. Be prepared with answers.
- » Don't throw in any negatives. Never say something like, "The boss hired his brother so there was no room for me." Be positive about your previous work experience. Focus the conversation back to you.



WARNING

- » Be ready to ask questions, too.
- » Have an elevator pitch — a description of what you do in the time it takes for a ride on an elevator. Create a clear, succinct description of your career. Make sure it's relevant. See Chapter 18 for more.
- » Keep your body in an up and out position.
- » If there's a question you don't know, admit you don't know the answer and you'll find out. And then follow up — actually find out and get back to the interviewer with the answer.
- » Be gracious and thank the interviewer for taking the time to meet with you.

You find out much more about acing interviews in Chapter 17.

Mastering the Fine Art of Conversation

A speech is a conversation. You're speaking to the audience, and although they may not be giving anything back in the way of words, their attention and their reception is the other side of the coin. Think of talking to a good friend. You use emotion and vocal variety and you have fun. That's what should happen when you give a speech.

It extends to other areas too. Many think that *public speaking* is something that only happens in a presentation. But to me, public speaking is . . . *speaking in public*. That includes party conversations, giving directions to someone on the subway, or even talking to your Internet provider on the phone. Actually, this is where public speaking starts. And it can be just as challenging as the stage.



REMEMBER

Getting out there and mingling can be hard for some, but don't view it as a chore. Have fun and enjoy yourself. Set an objective for what you want to achieve. Maybe it's making a contact for a future sale, but it can be simpler:

I want to talk to three new people. I want to remember what those three do for a living. I want to find out what they do besides work.

Things can get more complicated when there's an event, but remember: Going to a function still counts as speaking in public. It's still a conversation and you want to be your best and show people that you care about them and what they have to say.

Here are a few tips for speaking when meeting people in a functional setting:

- » When you're introduced to people, look them in the eye and smile. Smiling is infectious. Enjoy meeting those people.

- » Shake their hand firmly — don't do the limp or grip or squeeze so hard it makes them wince. Be in the moment. When shaking their hand or talking to them, don't be looking over their shoulder at the other guy you really want to talk to.
- » It is not all about you. Find out stuff about them. Be interested in what they have to say.

Dropping the Ball and Still Managing to Score

Life throws us curveballs sometimes. Have a backup plan for when something goes awry. Maybe the room has changed, or your allotted time is cut, or there's no screen for your slide show.



REMEMBER

The world doesn't need to end. The audience doesn't even need to know. Unless there's some imminent danger, stay cool.

Don't bother apologizing. "Sorry I'm late. Sorry, my PowerPoint doesn't work. Sorry, the organizer told me 30 minutes, and now we only have 15 because our lunch is early, so I'll just rush through this."

People aren't interested in other people's excuses. Plus, saying sorry just puts the audience on edge. Some may feel sorry for you — others might think it's a cop-out. The audience reflects how you feel, and you want them to feel that you are confident and trustworthy.



TIP

Practice some responses if the PowerPoint shuts off. For example, "I'll tell you the story about that slide."

When a problem occurs, have a plan and a comment ready. Breathing helps you to think clearly. The audience wants you to succeed and they want to hear what you have to say. They'll forgive you.

Wearing Clothes That Spell Success

You don't always have to wear the power suit. Going to the opening of the community league barbecue? You're going to look like a dork in a suit. Dress in accordance to how others are dressing, but dress well.

Some tips on dressing for success:

- » Wear something that's comfortable and makes you feel great. Wear clothes that fit you well, not ones that are too big or too tight.
- » Practice in your clothes so you'll feel comfortable in them.
- » You don't want to lift up your arms and rip a sleeve if you haven't worn that shirt in a while. Make sure those new pants don't need a belt.
- » Don't wear anything that will detract from your speech.
- » Hot pants were cool in the 1970s but not so much now. (But if you can still fit in them, kudos to you.) Big bangle-y earrings that have a mind of their own and sway side to side might be great at a party, but not when giving a presentation. Especially if you're using a mic headset.
- » Big patterns on clothes can be distracting. Shiny fabrics can give you a glow that might be too much for the stage.

So, you've now had an overview of the basics of public speaking skills. If you've read this chapter and are now a competent and professional public speaker, you are a genius. If you're more ordinary, like me, it probably wasn't enough to get you signed to that big speaking contract. That's why I've filled the rest of this book with methods to help you go about getting where you need to be. Ready? Turn the page.

