

## HINTS ON PUBLIC SPEAKING

### General

1. Although very few people have the spark of genius that marks a great orator, yet with study and practice, almost anyone can become a convincing and effective speaker. Command of language, the faculty of presenting thoughts in a logical sequence, clarity of speech and deliberation of manner are some of the pre-requisites of becoming a good speaker.
2. With hard work and persistence a measure of success is assured to everyone. Beyond that everything rests upon the innate and acquired qualities of orator ship of the speaker.
3. **Aim.** To guide Participants in the art of public speaking.

### General Hints to Speakers

4. Speaking is a form of self expression. If the self to be expressed is bumptious, unimaginative and insincere; every one of these voices and defects will be apparent in the talk.
5. Only an earnest participant can become a good speaker. The amount of practice which can make him an orator largely depends on his attitude. Most important is that the speaker should have clearly outlined in his mind what he is going to say. Clear thinking is, above all things, essential to clear speaking; ideas cannot be distinctly conveyed to an audience unless the speaker has them arranged and prepared in his mind.
6. Having achieved this, he must next strive for clear expression. Facts should be stated simply and concisely – simplicity of speech achieves immediate approval.
7. Verbosity should always be avoided, it confuses the audience. Use short sentences with their length varied to avoid monotony. A speaker may know his subject thoroughly, but if the subject matter is new to the audience and the speaker uses long sentences; his audience will find it hard to grasp the meaning and the effect will be lost.

8. Some qualities of a good speaker are :-
- a. Must have command over the language with an exact appreciation of the value of work; this he can acquire by extensive reading.
  - b. Must have a faculty of presenting his thoughts in a logical sequence so that his/ her arguments are convincing; this can be acquired by practice in writing.
  - c. Must have clarity of speech, coupled with deliberation of manner and self possession; this can be acquired by conversation and reading aloud.
9. **Speaker's Position.** Before speaking make a momentary pause and face the audience squarely. Do not move your hands and feet aimlessly during the speech. You should however, turn from time to time left or right so that the entire audience is addressed.
10. **Management of Breath.** A proper control of breath is necessary in the effective use of the voice. Take a fresh breath whenever and wherever opportunity offers.

### **Delivery**

11. Length of the Speech
- a. **Be Brief.** Speech should be long enough to cover the subject and short enough to be interesting if you have to abide by a time limit, do so punctiliously – it must have been laid down for a good reason.
  - b. **Be Relevant.** Fix upon your point, make it and leave it. The temptation to wander at large through a mass of superfluities must be rigidly suppressed.
12. **Articulation.** To acquire correct articulation every word should be delivered finished, the words should neither be hurried over nor run one into another, nor should they be prolonged or drawled. Special attention should be given to the articulation of the final syllables of each word. It should not be forgotten that clear articulation compensates for weakness of voice. Speak at first to those at the back, if they can not hear, either raise the pitch of your voice a little or speak more deliberately.

13. **Tone, Pitch and Speed** Speakers must guard against artificiality of voice. The acoustic properties of rooms and halls must be kept in mind. It is important to pause at the correct places and to guard against the common fault of dropping the voice at the end of a sentence. A speaker should avoid speaking too fast. As a general rule, rapidity tends to reduce the importance of subject – while deliberate utterance enhances it and makes for effective speech.

14. **Style and Humour.** A few hints on choice of words and use of humour:-

- a. **Style.** Good taste in speaking is marked by simplicity of expression. Be natural and make sure that construction of your sentences is grammatically correct, for public speaking makes any grammatical mistake very noticeable. Avoid repeating familiar words such as ‘good;’, ‘quite’, ‘but’, etc. as these tend to irritate the audience.
- b. **Humour.** Humour is most effective when topical. There are some stories, though very few, which are so good that it is worth recounting them. The ordinary funny stories however, should be rigidly excluded unless absolutely relevant and appropriate to the occasion.
- c. **Vulgarity – Slang.** Vulgarity may raise a laugh, but it is the bankruptcy of wit. Slang and swear words must be shunned in public speaking.

## **HINTS ON PUBLIC SPEAKING**

Technically defined, “stage fright” is a normal and predictable form of emotional tension or anxiety occurring in anyone confronted with a situation in which the performance is important but the outcome uncertain. Simply put, it is a heightened concern over the quality, and consequence, of one’s effort, and could more properly be deemed “speech anxiety.”

As an enemy of communicative effectiveness, it cannot be overestimated. Speech anxiety can cause knees to knock, hairs to raise, limbs to perspire, mouths to go dry, and careers to crumble. It can turn the most promising situation into a formula for disaster. The world which is tripped on the voice which doesn’t project, the eyes which do not make contact, the succinct and insightful phrase which does not get remembered – all are casualties of an unseen, but easily conquered, adversary.

The key to overcoming speech anxiety for the intelligence briefer is as simple as it would appear trite; the right mental attitude. Having the right mental attitude, of course, can solve most human problems, from depression and marital difficulty to low worker productivity and urban alienation. It is easy to say that the right attitude can make the most frightened speaker into the most confident and eloquent.

### **SOME ANXIETY IS BOTH NORMAL AND HEALTHY**

Stage fright is not really fear, as we usually think of it, but anxiety. The speaker is not literally afraid of the situation or his audience, if the speaker fears anything, it is failure. There is, however, an existing level of anxiety which you do not want to get rid of; rather, you want to master it, control it, use its creative and beneficial properties to increase your effectiveness as a communicator.

Speech anxiety causes a number of physiological reactions which will actually improve your chances for success as a speaker. It triggers the release of adrenalin into one’s system. Sugar is released into the bloodstream from reserves in the liver and insulin released from the pancreas to convert that sugar into energy, thereby giving the body greater strength to cope. Breathing is quickened, which brings in oxygen and expels carbon dioxide at a more rapid pace. The pulse rate quickens so

that more fresh blood arrives at the brain, heart, central nervous system, and muscles with larger quantities of oxygen.

It is important for speakers to realize just how beneficial the cumulative effect of these physiological changes can be. As Professor Bert Bradley of Auburn University describes it, "The brain is thus capable of thinking with greater clarity, greater perceptiveness and greater quickness, the muscles are capable of exerting a more intense physical effort and the central nervous system is capable of reacting more quickly. Because of these physiological changes, the human body can perform at a much higher level than under normal conditions".

### **BREATHE PROPERLY, IT WILL HELP**

Whenever you feel uptight or nervous especially before you begin, take a couple of deep breaths, exhaling slowly and deliberately. If in the course of your remarks you stumble, make a mistake, or feel a surge of anxiety coming over you, take another deep breath and exhale slowly. Breathing properly can relax you and return your anxiety level to the lessened state where it worked for you, not against you.

### **USE BODY ACTION TO YOUR ADVANTAGE**

The physiological changes in the body which are caused by speech anxiety often create excess energy. You can easily rid your body of such excess energy through the use of gestures and bodily movement. Such movement, however, should always be natural and appropriate for the situation. Otherwise, the movement will call attention to itself and detract from the message of the speaker.

### **YOU CONTROL THE SITUATION**

Usually, you decide when you start and when you finish, you decide when, if at all, to pause, to gesture, to quote someone else, to tell a joke, to employ an analogy, to cite a statistic, or to seek to move an audience, You decide whether to use notes, read from a formal text, use a pointer or visual aid, or take question. In fact, in most cases, you control what is said, or at least the specific points you want to cover, and in what detail and sequence.

Speaking to a group, even delivering an intelligence briefing, is the closest thing to a controlled environment you will encounter in everyday experience – if you approach it, if you just think of it, in such a way. Who can feel nervous when he or she is in complete control?

## **YOU ARE THE EXPERT**

You are the one who has been invited to speak or selected to present the briefing. Most likely, in all but a few instances, you will know more about your subject for that particular presentation than anyone in the audience. Anyone, otherwise, someone else would be making the presentation, not you. You are the expert, what is there to fear?

## **PREPARATION WILL BUILD YOUR CONFIDENCE**

Occasionally you will be called upon to speak or brief impromptu, in which case preparation is not possible. But that is the exception rather than the rule. If you are prepared, if you know your material, your confidence will soar and speech anxiety – save for that small reserve, the effect of which is salutary – will evaporate.

The more prepared, and, in turn, confident, you are, the less you will be tied to your notes or text, all the freer to establish eye contact with your audience. The more eye contact, the greater the visual hone and the more you feel a part of, rather than apart from, your audience. Needless to say, feeling a part of your audience is a natural way to lessen speech anxiety --- and keep the interest of your audience in the process.

## **EVERYONE WANTS YOU TO SUCCEED**

Put differently and perhaps more importantly, no one wants you to fail. Remember the times you have been in an audience and the speaker lost his place in his notes, didn't know the answer to a question, or was struggling for the right word. You almost formed the word on your lips, may be even whispered it to him. You wanted to help. You thought to yourself. There but for the Grace of God go! And your reaction is usually shared by everyone in the audience.

So don't be embarrassed. Don't be nervous. You're human, you're going to stumble occasionally, and no one is going to laugh or humiliate you for being human, if you realize that everyone wants you to succeed, then you're on the road to overcoming speech anxiety for good by defeating the biggest enemy of effective public speaking; fear of failure.

## **GET AS MUCH EXPERIENCE AS POSSIBLE**

Many people, succumbing to a normal tendency, shy away from opportunities to hone their speaking skills when in fact, as with most of life's endeavors, speaking

improves with experience. More importantly, experience breeds confidence, which is a strong antidote to the crippling effects of speech anxiety. So seek out opportunities not just to brief, but to speak, lecture, preside, or comment in general. You will be amazed at how quickly your confidence on your feet increases and, in turn, how speech anxiety actually becomes a tool you use to enhance your communicative effectiveness. You will be surprised at how quickly you become amazed that speech anxiety could ever have been a problem for you.

With public speaking, it isn't so much that practice makes confident, and confidence causes speech anxiety to evaporate.

### **DEVELOP A COMMUNICATIVE ATTITUDE**

Above all, you must concentrate on communicating. You must develop and nurture an attitude in which communicating meaning to your audience is your uppermost goal. You must constantly ask yourself, not "How am I doing," but "Do these people hear me? Am I communicating my concern or interest in this subject? Are they responding in ways I desire?"

If you concentrate on communicating with your audience (communicating to suggests a one-way process), then your failure to worry about speech anxiety will cease it to dissipate to a level at which it helps, rather than hurts, you. In short, if you're thinking about communicating with your audience you won't have time to think about being nervous.

## **IF YOU DO FAIL, THE OUTCOME IS NEVER AS BAD AS YOU IMAGINE**

If you have followed the above nine steps, failure to speak as effectively as possible is extremely unlikely. If, however, you do fail for some reason, the consequences are almost never as bad as you might have imagined.

Think worst case scenario: what can happen if you mispronounce a word, or forget one of your five points? In most cases, nothing, sure if it's your once-in-a-lifetime chance to brief the audience and you absolutely, totally, unquestionably blow it, your career could suffer. But the likelihood of a speaking situation in which the outcome is so important, and the performance so poor, is extremely remote.

As a matter of fact, in most cases your poor performance will not be noticed by your audience. Scholarly studies in the speech communication suggest that members of an audience tend to detect less speech disruption in the speaker than the speaker himself reports having experienced.

In sum, the right mental attitude is the key to overcoming speech anxiety. Doing so can improve your oral skills in general, and your briefing skills in particular, and hence your leadership effectiveness. And right mental attitude, rather than being an abstraction, is really attainable. It is a matter of remembering, and practicing the exercise of, 10 simple commandments:

- Some anxiety is both normal and healthy.
- Breathing properly can help you.
- Use bodily action to your advantage.
- You control the situation.
- You are the expert.
- Preparation builds confidence
- Everyone wants you to succeed
- Get as much experience as possible. Practice makes you confident.
- Develop a communicative attitude.
- Remember: if you fail, the outcome is never as bad as you might imagine