Public Speaking Tips – Train the Trainer

BETTER PUBLIC SPEAKING

Public speaking ability is a key ingredient to success in any profession. Here are some tips to help improve your public speaking, from preparation to practice to delivery.

1. **Start practicing when you're not under pressure.** Practice your skills in venues where you are not under pressure, which could include:

   - Formal debate clubs such as Toastmasters, a nonprofit dedicated to improving public speaking skills
   - Games such as Talking Points and Drink Talk Learn
   - Mock "debate nights" with friends

2. **Understand the assignment and the audience.** Before you start working on your presentation's content and structure, understand who will be watching your presentation. Learn about the following:

   - How long of a presentation is expected?
   - Has the topic already been determined?
   - Is there information your topic must include?
   - Will you be presenting remotely or in person?
   - What technology will be available to you?
   - Is a slide deck expected?
   - How familiar is the audience with the topic? Should you avoid technical terms?
   - Does the audience expect handouts?
   - Is there an expected tone for your presentation – formal, informal, somewhere between?

3. **Craft a strong opening and conclusion.** Though the meat of your presentation comes in the middle, the beginning and end can leave the strongest impressions. Generally speaking,

your intro should take 10-20% of your presentation's length. It helps to start with a 30-45 second hook, which can take the form of a:

- Relevant statistic
- Description of a current problem
- Provocative rhetorical question

During your conclusion, pull together the story you've told or point you've argued. To do this, try:

- Describing possibilities you envision
- Quoting a public figure who inspires you

4. **Practice by yourself – and record yourself practicing.** You can start perfecting your presentation by practicing on your own. Record yourself giving the presentation solo and review the video with a critical eye for tone and vocal inflections, body language, and presentation length. Watch out for mistakes like filler words, word choices, eye contact, and rhythm.
5. **Be mindful of pace.** The ideal talking speed for a presentation is close to normal conversation. Speaking too quickly will confuse and overwhelm your audience. Too slowly, and their attention will begin drifting. Either way, they may end up not retaining much of your speech.
6. **Loosen up.** Remember to relax. Memorization isn't worth much if your delivery is stilted and robotic. While you should take care to memorize your intro and conclusion for the sake of structure, the middle section benefits from loosening up.
7. **Minimize your notes; maximize their effectiveness.** To maximize your presentation's effectiveness, try minimizing your reliance on notes. Your notes should cue you to stay on track and hit every main point. Over-reliance on them looks bad and will hurt your confidence.

If you're using a slideshow or other visual aid, you can incorporate cues for yourself, including graphs, tables or stock imagery.

8. **Prepare your mind.** Do something that will regulate your

heart rate and ease your nerves. This could include:

- Meditating
- Walking in nature
- Reading a book
- Listening to a calming music
- Listening to a speech you find inspiring

9. **Look for familiar faces in the audience.** You need a non-adversarial picture of your audience to give a successful presentation. Your audience is at worst neutral and at best hungry to understand your perspective. To help reduce the fear of speaking to a group, connect with your audience as they enter the room. Shake hands, smile, introduce yourself. Direct your eye contact towards familiar faces, whether you are in a virtual or in-person setting.
10. **Overcome the adrenaline rush.** Presenters' nerves are at their worst when they first begin to speak. Start with an icebreaker to engage the audience and give your mind and body time to settle. You could ask audience members to raise a hand if the situation you're addressing has affected them or turn to a neighbor and rate how helpful a certain process is.
11. **Don't fear pauses.** Dead air and a staccato, stop-start rhythm can ruin a presentation, but this does not mean pauses are your enemy! Try adding a pause whenever you need to allow the emotional impact or deeper implications of a statement to sink in for your audience.
12. **Be willing to say, "I don't know".** If someone asks a question that you cannot answer, own it.

TAKEAWAY

Public speaking is a learned skill, and can increase emotional intelligence, confidence, and professional pride in one's work.