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P U B L I C S P E A K I N G T E C H N I Q U E

INTRODUCTION: CLOSING THE DISTANCE

Public speaking is all about COMMUNICATING with your audience. Between you and the audience is a great distance, both physical and in that you're doing all the talking and they're just listening. Your aim is to close the distance, to reach your audience and move them. The difference between good and bad public speaking lies in using your voice and body to narrow that distance or to maintain it.

These guidelines are not a checklist for The Right Way to Talk. There is no one correct speaking style. You must find your own style, one that comes naturally and that you feel comfortable with. The points on technique below are simply ways to help improve it.

POSTURE AND BODY LANGUAGE

While there aren't any bonus points for good posture, bad posture and irritating physical mannerisms can inhibit effective communication and put people off.

So stand up STRAIGHT. Stand STILL. Your body, and especially your neck and shoulders, should be as RELAXED as possible. Don't hunch up. Don't shuffle. And don't step forward and backward or rock from foot to foot.

Most importantly, TALK TO and LOOK AT your audience. Make sure that you cover the ENTIRE audience.

Speakers often don't know what to do with their hands. Putting them in your pocket usually looks too casual and clasping them behind your back looks too formal. Both are defensive body language. Its best to keep your hands at your side or to rest them lightly on the lectern. Use your hands for emphasis and to underline important points but avoid repetitive meaningless movements.

For as long as you're on the platform DO NOT SMOKE. Chewing gum, sniffing loudly and scratching yourself are also considered offensive. Oh yes, and make sure you have the same colour socks on.

VOICE

You have to talk LOUDLY, CLEARLY and SLOWLY enough to be heard and understood by everyone in the hall.

A big problem with many speakers is that they're too unemotional, boring and monotonous in their delivery. So USE your voice. Where appropriate, VARY how loud/soft and how slow/fast you talk. EMPHASIZE the words or ideas you want to stand out. Its worth planning in advance where you want to place the emphasis in a sentence and even underlining the key words in your notes. Show some EMOTION. Convey with your voice the feelings you want to arouse in the audience. Far more speakers underact than overact.

Inexperienced speakers are usually scared to use SILENCE, the Good Long Pause. The pause can be very effective just before or just after an important point. It can also be used to indicate a shift in direction or to give the audience an opportunity to absorb what you've said. You will also pause momentarily to take a breath! Make sure you do this at an appropriate point in the sentence.

NOTES

Talk to your audience and not to your notes. You'll want your notes in your hand or on a lectern. Having them on a low table means spending too much time looking down. Every time you look down, your voice will get lost and the audience will have to look at the top of your head. This is not considered good communication.

If your hands shake don't hold your notes. Make sure in advance there's a lectern to put them on.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT HECKLERS

The most effective way of handling hecklers is to IGNORE them and KEEP TALKING. Responding to the heckler will only put you off your stride and be distracting for the audience. If a heckler becomes really disruptive, the chairperson should take over and handle the situation.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT NERVOUSNESS

There's really very little you can do. Most experienced speakers feel nervous before and during their talks. Being a little nervous is not such a bad thing anyway - it keeps the adrenalin pumping and puts the sparkle in your eyes. PRACTISING your speech over and over again and becoming COMPLETELY FAMILIAR with it will give you the confidence you need.

If your voice dries up while you're talking, make sure in advance that a glass of water is available.

FEEDBACK

Make sure you get it, before you speak and afterwards. It's the only way to improve. If there's a TV crew at the meeting at which you speak, try to get a copy of their video. Watching yourself speak is the best way of identifying strongpoints and faults. If its at all possible, use video equipment when running the public speaking workshops.

USING A MICROPHONE

Mikes are very difficult to use. They flatten your voice and restrict your movement. Its also virtually impossible to gauge whether you're coming over too loud or soft.

If you have to use a mike:

- * make sure before you speak that its at the right height so that you aren't talking to the floor or ceiling;
- * don't stand too close to it - a good mike will easily pick you up from a foot away;

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