

Ten Principles of Effective Public Speaking

Published: Jan 24, 2019, Modified: Apr 09, 2024, Updated Jan 24, 2023

By Richard Zeoli, Edited and Reviewed by AMA Staff

Comments by Alan B. Power

When we watch celebrities, politicians, or business leaders speak on television or in public, they seem so at ease that we may wonder: are great speakers made, or are they just born that way? While it is true that some individuals are born with this gift, many effective public speakers have trained themselves to be so. Either they have received formal media training, or they have delivered so many presentations that over time they've learned what works for them. So, what is the true secret to effective public speaking?

Here are ten principles of public speaking that I've developed in my role as a media coach. Keep them in mind the next time you find yourself presenting before a group.

So, we last reviewed the 5 P's of Public Speaking, now we get a further lesson of 10 principles.

Perception: Stop Trying to Be a Great "Public" Speaker

People want to listen to someone who is interesting, relaxed, and comfortable. In the routine conversations we have every day, we have no problem being ourselves. Yet too often, when we stand up to give a speech, something changes. We focus on the "public" at the expense of the "speaking." To become effective at public speaking, you must do just the opposite: focus on the speaking and let go of the "public."

Think of it as a conversation between you and the audience. If you can carry on a relaxed conversation with one or two people, you can give a great speech. Whether your audience consists of two people or two thousand and whether you're talking about the latest medical breakthrough or what you did today at work, be yourself; talk directly to people and make a connection with them.

In other words, know what you intend to say well enough so that it naturally flows from you as if you were talking with your friends. Know that you are up there to impart something to them that they need to know and feel confident in what you are sharing. Try to never read a speech, but it is ok to occasionally use queue cards.

Perfection: When You Make a Mistake, No One Cares but You

Even the most accomplished public speaker will make a mistake at some point. Just keep in mind that you'll notice more than anyone in your audience. The most important thing you can do after making a mistake during a presentation is to keep going. Don't stop and—unless the mistake was truly earth shattering—never apologize to the audience for a minor slip. Unless they are reading the speech during your delivery, the audience won't know if you left out a word, said the wrong name, or skipped a page. Because "to err is human," a mistake can work for you, because it allows you to connect with your audience. People don't want to hear from someone who is "perfect;" they will relate much more easily to someone who is real.

This sound advice for most of the time. It's basically saying don't get bound down in minutia. Stick to the main points and you won't run into such problems.

Visualization: If You Can See It, You Can Speak It

Winners in all aspects of life have this in common: they practice visualization to achieve their goals. Salespeople envision themselves closing the deal; executives picture themselves developing new ventures; athletes close their eyes and imagine themselves making that basket, hitting that home run, or breaking that record.

The same is true in public speaking. If you've read "[10 Powerful Body Language Tips](#)" then you know how anxiety can impact presentation skills. The best way to fight anxiety and to become a more comfortable speaker is to practice in the one place where no one else can see you—your mind. If you visualize on a consistent basis, you'll prepare your mind for the prospect of speaking in public, and pretty soon you'll conquer any feelings of anxiety. If you consider yourself an introvert, consider taking our course on [How to Deliver Powerful Presentations as an Introvert](#).

Good speakers practice their speech and what they want to say several times ahead of time. Say it aloud to practice your delivery (not just in your mind). That way, hearing your speech can help you remember what you want to say and how you deliver it. Delivery is important and you can hear your delivery in your mind.

Discipline: Practice Makes Perfectly Good

Your goal is not to be a perfect public speaker. There is no such thing. Your goal is to be an effective public speaker. Like anything else in life, it takes practice to improve those public speaking skills. We too often take communication for granted because we speak to people every day. But when your prosperity is directly linked to how well you perform in front of a group, you need to give the task the same attention as if you were a professional athlete. Remember, even world champion athletes practice every day.

Again, practice ahead of time and do it aloud. That way you will know what you are going to say and avoid the pitfalls of delivery.

Description: Make It Personal

Whatever the topic, audiences respond best when the presenter can personalize their message. It's a terrific way to get intimate with large audiences. Take the opportunity to put a face on the facts of your presentation. People like to hear about other people's experiences—the triumphs, tragedies, and everyday humorous anecdotes that make up their lives. Telling stories will give you credibility, and help your listeners engage more often. Whenever possible, insert a personal-interest element in your public speaking. This technique will make your listeners warm up to you, but it will also do wonders at putting you at ease by helping you overcome any lingering nervousness. After all, on what subject is your expertise greater than on the subject of yourself?

Personal experiences and anecdotes are terrific if kept light or as a learning experience. Do not share personal tragedies or negative stories. People like to hear about triumph not about abject failure.

Know Your Audience

Knowing your audience is crucial when it comes to public speaking. Understanding who you are speaking to allows you to tailor your message in a way that will be most effective and engaging for them. It helps you to anticipate the questions and concerns they may have, and to address those in your presentation. It also allows you to use language and examples that will resonate with your audience, making it easier for them to understand and relate to what you are saying. So before you take the stage, take some time to research and get to know your audience. It will make all the difference in how your message is received.

For Masonic presentations, it is pretty easy to know your audience. But only to an extent. Always pick something that you know that will be of interest to them. i.e. Don't try to give a presentation on quantum mechanics to pig farmers.

What to Do with Your Hands When Presenting

Using your hands effectively can greatly enhance your public speaking skills and help you to deliver a more dynamic and engaging presentation. It can also help to keep your audience engaged and focused on what you are saying. However, it's important to use your hands appropriately and not overdo it. Too much gesturing can be distracting and take away from your message. Using your hands as a visual aid is a public speaking skill that's often overlooked, but when executed correctly you can add an extra layer of depth and meaning to your speech.

I was taught to never use my finger to point. If you have to point use your whole hand or a pointer. In using a pointer, hold it in place long enough to let everyone see where you are pointing. Control your extraneous movements or the audience will be watching that instead of listening. Dress appropriately when giving a speech. Improper clothing can be distracting too.

Inspiration: Speak to Serve

For a twist that is sure to take much of the fear out of public speaking, take the focus off yourself and shift it to your audience. After all, the objective is not to benefit the speaker but to benefit the audience, through your speaking skills teaching, motivation, or entertainment. So, in all your preparation and presentations, you should think about your purpose. How can you help your audience members achieve their goals?

Audience involvement is always good in the right setting. Don't be afraid to ask them rhetorical questions and pause a moment to let them think. If you ask questions of a particular person in your audience, make sure it is in an intimate environment where the audience member will have the answer and not be embarrassed.

Deliver Your Speech Authentically

Delivering a speech authentically is crucial for engaging and connecting with your audience. When you speak from the heart and let your true personality shine through, confidence will be recognized in your delivery. This can help to establish trust and credibility with your audience, as they will sense that you are genuine. Use your own voice and language, and don't be afraid to show your emotions and passion for your topic. Remember, the more authentic you are, the more your audience will be able to relate to and connect with you.

In other words, don't regurgitate your speech in a monotone. Use your body language and your emotion to let them know how interested YOU are in conveying your message. I learned a great deal about holding an audiences attention when I was a children's minister in my younger days. If you did not show you were interested in what you were telling them, they weren't interested either. And losing their interest was something that you really did not want to do.

Anticipation: Always Leave 'em Wanting More

One of the most valuable lessons I have learned from my years of [communication skills training](#) is that when it comes to public speaking, less is usually more. I don't think I've ever left a gathering and heard someone say, "I wish that speaker had spoken longer." On the other hand, I can imagine how many speakers probably can't count the times they've thought, "I'm glad that speech is over. It seemed to go on forever!" So, surprise your audience. Always make your presentation just a bit shorter than anticipated.

If you've followed the first six principles outlined here you already have their attention and interest, and it's better to leave your listeners wishing you had spoken for just a few more minutes than squirming in their seats waiting for your speech finally to end.

Stick to key points so your audience can remember what you have said and the message that you gave them. If you give them too much to remember, then it won't be remembered. If done right, they will walk from the room after your speech discussing the message you gave them.

About the Author

Richard Zeoli is the founder and president of RZC Impact, an executive communications training firm. He is the author of *The 7 Principles of Public Speaking* (Skyhorse Publishing) and is a Visiting Associate at the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University in New Jersey.

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