

Public Speaking Secrets of the Superstars

By Colleen Kettenhofen

“With public speaking, the work is in the preparation, the fun is in the presentation.”

– Colleen Kettenhofen

When I ask my audiences their number one challenge with public speaking they overwhelmingly say, “Overcoming nervousness.” It’s okay to have butterflies. The key is getting them organized, focused and flying in formation. Here are 16 tips for delivering a more powerful, persuasive presentation. Whether you’re speaking in a meeting or giving a speech before a group of 300. Practice these techniques consistently to improve your public speaking skills and minimize nervousness.

1. Ninety-five percent of your success is determined before the presentation. Your audience will know if you didn’t rehearse. To overcome the fear of public speaking, rehearsing, or “rehearing” yourself minimizes 75 percent of your nervousness. Rehearse standing up, or better yet, ask someone to videotape you. The camera will be your most objective ally. The more comfortable you become with your material by rehearsing, the more comfortable you will be with your body language.

2. Memorize or know cold your opening and your close. A maximum of two minutes each is plenty. The most important thing your audience will remember is your close, and second, your opener. Start with something attention grabbing, like a quote, statistic, or story which relates to your topic. Never start with, “Good morning.” It is obvious and boring.

3. Your audience will typically listen to you for the first two minutes. After that they’ll either keep listening, or they’ll tune you out. Likewise, once you’ve signaled the audience you’re about to end, do wrap up within two to three minutes. The worst thing you can do is to say something like, “In closing I’d like to say...” and then talk for another 15 minutes.

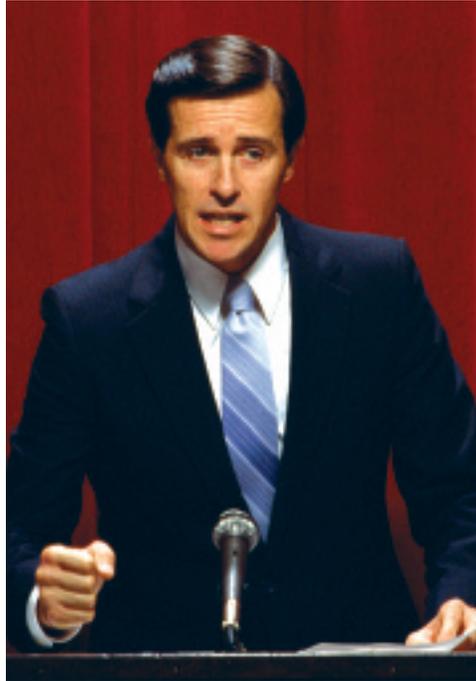
4. Twenty hours before your presentation:

Have a quiet dinner with a quiet friend. This may or may not be your spouse! Put your nervous system on glide.

The evening before, put your presentation on audiocassette as background noise one hour before retiring to bed. Or, listen to your opening and close before bedtime as a review. Having it softly playing as background noise will help you remember the material.

No massive changes 24 hours before. Nothing increases nervousness more than rewriting your material at the last minute.

Visualize your presentation going smoothly and successfully. All Olympic athletes use this technique. It also works with public



speaking. If you know the exact room you’ll be speaking in and what it looks like, visualize that too.

Review your notes and visual aids the evening prior. Your notes should be “fast food for the eyes” in bullet form, and never read to the audience. Make sure your notes are large enough print that you can glance at them while standing.

Eat a good high protein breakfast the morning of your presentation. Even if you’re not speaking until that evening, feed your mind and body the proper fuel.

5. Before your presentation, check yourself in a full-length mirror. A dear friend of mine didn’t do this. During her keynote speech in front of hundreds, someone quietly pointed out that her skirt was tucked into her pantyhose!

6. When organizing your talk, define your purpose. Why are you there? Is this a sales presentation? A community watch group? If you present technical information, is this an information/knowledge transfer or a decision briefing? When presenting technical information make certain not to overload your audience with too much detail, or too much on each slide. Tailor your message. Define your objective.

7. Know your audience before designing your opener and close. It is imperative that you speak the language of your audience. What are their ages? What is the percentage of males and females who will be in attendance? Are they highly technical or non-technical? Do they want to be there or is this mandatory? What are their expectations?

If you are a scientist or engineer, speak to the “lowest common denominator.” Technical presenters especially have a propensity to use a lot of technical jargon, and put too much information on a slide. Does the person in charge of funding understand what you are saying? This is important because often this is the person with the least amount of technical knowledge.

8. Avoid using too many slides. Visual aids are wonderful tools as long as they’re used to enhance the information. A common mistake many presenters make is using the visual aids as the presentation. Look at the audience frequently to establish rapport and a connection. In almost every presentation, you are there to “sell” them not simply “tell” them. Do not look at your visual aids other than a quick glance, and never read them. Never turn your back on the audience to read slides. They will not look at your slides. Their minds will start to wander. Remember, you are your own best visual aid.

9. When I conduct public speaking training, I always remind my audience to keep their slides and other visual aids big, bold and simple. Your slides should resemble a billboard on the interstate where someone driving 55 miles per hour could read the information. Bullets work best as they are easier for your audience to read than sentences. And this way, you are less likely to read your presentation.

In general, no more than six bullets per slide and six to eight words maximum per line. The person who often hires me will privately confide that many of their colleagues put too much information on a slide. They secretly urge me to tell everyone attending that the print must be large enough to read.

10. The print size on your slides should be at least a 28 font for titles and at least 22 point for other text. Simple fonts with clean lines are much easier to read. For instance, Times New Roman, Gothic and Verdana are good choices. Within those font families you have the ability to enhance a page using italics and bold. Just go easy on the underlines. And never put letters in all capitals. Use upper and lower

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case lettering. It is much easier to read and doesn't look like your shouting. Stick to no more than three or four colors maximum. Where visual aids are concerned, less is more.

11. Use graphs for sales figures or sets of numbers showing a trend over a period of time. Graphs are pictures that increase retention and comprehension. Research shows people are far more likely to remember pictures than numbers. No more than two or three lines on a graph. Again, use color sparingly. Use pie charts for market share, budgets, expenses analysis, income sources and the like.

12. Pay attention to lighting. If you're going to dim the lights or turn them off during a portion of your presentation, make sure you turn them back up, or on, at least every six minutes. When the lights are dim for too long, the audience's tendency is to fall asleep. Even if you turn the lights on occasionally to explain something, or tell them what to look for in the next segment, it keeps them focused.

13. Start and end your presentation with the lights fully on. Remember, the opening and close are the two parts of your program the audience remembers most. You want the focus to be on you and your content. You want to keep a connection with your audience.

14. Have three to five seconds of eye contact with each person in the room. The eye contact helps you connect with each member in attendance. It's as if you're having a mini conversation with each person in the room and saying, "I acknowledge you."

15. Good public speaking skills mean being prepared. As the saying goes, prior planning prevents predictably poor performance. Planning and preparation will reduce nervousness 75 percent.

The Q & A period and how to handle a hostile audience: What if they ask a question and you don't know the answer? What if someone in the audience is a know-it-all and doesn't like you? Avoid being argumentative. If you don't know the answer, let them know when you will get back to them. Don't make up an answer. When you lie you die. It destroys your credibility.

16. Variety serves as a wake-up call to your audience. Examples of adding variety would be humor, relevant stories, quotes, voice inflection, paired and group activities, pauses, audience participation in the question and answer period, and slides or other multimedia.

Lastly, make sure to confirm the time, date, and place with the appropriate contact person. If possible, arrange to see the room ahead of time so you can practice visualizing in the exact location of your presentation. Arrive at least one hour ahead of time if possible. **N**

Colleen Kettenhofen is a dynamic speaker, author, and workplace expert having presented over 1000 programs in 47 states and six countries. Popular topics: leadership, management, difficult people, public speaking. She is co-author of The Masters of Success, as featured on NBC's Today Show. Colleen is available for keynotes, breakout sessions and seminars. Email colleen@colleenspeaks.com or visit www.Colleenspeaks.com.