

Five tips to quash your fear of public speaking!

Many people do indeed have a fear and loathing of public speaking – even ranking it above death in various “top 10 fears” studies! Intercom seminar trainer Martin Hooper presents five clear tips to keep cool when the heat is on.

“I absolutely hate public speaking”

“Success in business ultimately depends on whether you can effectively communicate your ideas and plans to others” (Sir Richard Branson, Entrepreneur & Chairman of Virgin Group).

Most people would agree with both of these statements! And therein lays a common conundrum of modern-day communication. At the root of this problem lies the fear of public speaking – you may have seen a video on the web recently in which the speaker confessed that “I absolutely hate public speaking. Me and public speaking are just not compatible.”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27WufdasQYs>

Many people would echo his sentiments, but possibly few would choose his solution!

So having started with the bad news it is probably best to move on to the good news – so here are 5 tips to reassure you when you next stand up to speak in front of a group:

#1 The main reason why speaking in public causes such fear is, of course, nerves. It is always interesting to talk to presenters on a seminar directly after they have presented – their first observation is usually “I was so nervous”! The feedback they get immediately from their fellow seminar-participants is nearly always “Really? I didn’t notice it!” And this is not just hollow reassurance – the presenter is usually much more aware of their own nervousness than the audience is. So keep that in mind – usually the audience does not notice your nervousness.

#2 Giving a presentation in a foreign language can be quite a challenge. You can make it easier for yourself by acquiring the required language tools. When giving a presentation in your own language you barely notice the phrases and expressions that you use to link and structure your talk, building bridges from one section to another. These phrases are very important in presentations held in English – remember that presenters in English-speaking cultures are encouraged to “say what you are going to say, say it & then say what you have said”. These are the tools they use to do so.

#3 The number “60” is often quoted on presentation seminars. What is its relevance? It is often stated that in the first 60 seconds of your presentation you get 60% of your total impact. So everything they say about first impressions seems to be true! So the good news here is that if you can make sure you get a strong first 60/90 seconds then it is all easy from that point onwards! So structure and plan your first 90 seconds and speak it aloud when practicing beforehand. You will probably find that you develop 2 or 3 slightly different versions, each of which you feel perfectly comfortable with. It isn't important to learn off by heart all exact words of the first 90 seconds, but you should be able to easily remember key expressions and statements. This will automatically free you up to really focus on the audience when opening your presentation. If you think of your presentation as a conversation, you would never start a conversation by not looking at your partner for the first 60 seconds! The beginning of your presentation is when you establish your rapport with your audience. They are usually on your side – your task is to keep them there!

#4 There are many pressures in modern-day business life – not the least of which is simply a shortage of time. This can lead to corner-cutting in the preparation of presentations. Which can mean taking a presentation you have given in the past which was maybe slightly similar to your current presentation, and just adapting it. Which can be dangerous!

Please think of your audience here! Who exactly will you be addressing? What do they need to know? What do they already know? What are your key points that you want them to “take home”? Your presentation needs to be audience-oriented and not presenter-oriented – asking yourself these questions will support this aim. Try to always put yourselves in the shoes of your audience: There should always be a reason or a benefit for them in what you are saying. What is in it for them?

#5 Learn from the presentation “masters”! There are so many excellent presentations available on the internet today - you can always learn from other presenters and incorporate aspects of their presenting style – but trying to just copy them is not such a good idea. It is important that you don't do anything that feels unnatural for you (though by all means try new things out!) just because it works for someone else

Probably most importantly, to end with a quote from another song, keep all this in mind but:

♪ Be yourself, no matter what they say! ♪