

Effective Public Speaking in Business Presentations

By [Doug Stanart](#) ★



Presentation or speaking savvy is one of the most critical communication skills needed to move up in today's business environment, according to a national survey of 725 upper and middle managers. I am a member of two Toastmaster Clubs and we practice and evaluate each other's speaking and presentation skills constantly. We work with each other to advance our skills. Toastmasters International also recognizes that speaking and presentation skills are essential to maximizing your career advancement potential.

In a recent study, advertising executives were asked what they considered the single most important business asset for a creative professional to possess besides talent. The majority of respondents, 55 percent to be exact, said strong presentation skills. Specific industry experience ranked a distant second with 23 percent; only 3 percent cited management experience. The survey was conducted by an independent research firm and included responses from 200 advertising executives among the top 1,000 U.S. advertising agencies.

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business conducted a survey of MBA graduates. MBA graduates thought the ability to communicate effectively with another person is the single most useful skill in their career. "The ability to communicate effectively is the most important skill you can have," says Dawn Rosenberg McKay, career planning guide at About.com, Inc.

We all need to pitch our ideas and positions. If you are delivering a speech, promoting an idea with a presentation or having a one-on-one with your boss, the manner and impact of your delivery will be a major factor in the acceptance of the idea and in your promotional potential. The bottom line is that your idea may be worth a fortune, but if you can't communicate it clearly and with the appropriate impact your message may get lost or not convince an audience. Your great idea may become worthless.

Communication skills are extremely important and public speaking is an absolute necessity to anyone aspiring to a leadership position. I have met very intelligent people that cannot effectively communicate even basic information to those around them. They are not effective leaders and are not as successful as they could be. Truly outstanding executives and successful community business leaders are very comfortable communicators. They use simple language that the audience can relate to. In fact I find that the best communicators are ones that use the audience's language and phrases. This only makes sense but is so often missed.

Here are some tips to help you reach a higher level when delivering a presentation or speech.

1. Consider your audience carefully. What do they know and what do they not know? What language or jargon should be avoided? If jargon is necessary (and strongly question this) then define any unusual or uncommon terms (perhaps more than once).

2. Have a prepared introduction for the person that will be introducing you. The introduction should state your name, establish credibility with a bio that has a reinforcing example or two and give the title of the speech.
3. In your opening let the audience know how long the presentation or speech will last. Let them know if there will be a question and answer session at the end or whether you will be available to answer questions later. Explain when and where you will be.
4. If you are going to make a presentation with a slide show then use this to keep yourself on track but do not read your slides and always face and make eye contact with the audience. When making eye contact do not key too much on a particular person and distribute your eye contact about the room.
5. Never apologize for being nervous. It only makes the audience nervous and many in the audience would not have noticed.
6. Use engaging language such as "Imagine if . . ." or "Have you ever considered . . ." or tell a story that captures the attention of the audience as an opening. I have heard some at Toastmasters refer to these phrases as hypnotic stems. They do not actually hypnotize but they get the audience in the mood or get the audience to feel the tone of the speech or presentation better.
7. Use your voice to emphasize key words or phrases. Do not be monotone – speak with enthusiasm.
8. Use body language to emphasize key words or key points. Practice your speech or presentation in advance to fine tune your body language and your animations.
9. Provide a summary and a strong conclusion. Your summary and conclusion should emphasize the major points of the presentation or speech.
10. Do not leave the lectern unattended when finished. Always pass control over to the person running the meeting or the conference or to the Master of Ceremonies. The lectern must never be left unattended.

Delivering a speech or making a high-impact presentation is a necessary skill in today's competitive marketplace. With planning and some practice you can become very good at it. Look for opportunities to speak and present as one of the key things to overcome is a fear of speaking. By speaking and presenting more you will become more comfortable with it.

Gary is President of Presentations That Talk. The core product of Presentations That Talk is the PTT Presenter. The PTT Presenter allows users to easily make voice-narrated streaming media presentations. This allows a company to present their products and services using presentation marketing which adds impact by engaging more senses simultaneously.