

Marketing 101

Public Speaking

Many people find public speaking a terrifying, horrible experience, and prefer to avoid it if possible. However, as conservationists, working with people is part of our daily routines. It's very likely that at some time in your career you will be asked to make a presentation—to producers, partners, or colleagues. Being a little nervous is a sign that you want to do well. But being overly nervous or scared is a problem. With a little practice you can learn to overcome your nervousness or fear and make informative and memorable presentations. Here's a few tips to follow for successful public speaking.

Before the Presentation

Know the room, test equipment

Check out the place in which you will be making your presentation. Arrive early, test the microphone, computer equipment and other visual aids. Walk around the speaking space. Make sure you can see your visual aids from the back of the room. Make arrangements for assistance with your visual aids, lighting, etc., if needed. Make sure you have a glass and/or pitcher of water if you think you'll need it.

Know your audience

Before developing your presentation find out the particulars on who will attend the presentation, their ages, interests, and occupations. You need to know how many people will be there, as well as your speaking format, including how much time you have, if there's a Q and A session, equipment available for your use, etc., etc.

At the presentation, if you have time, greet people as they arrive and engage in light conversation. You'll feel more comfortable speaking to a group of people you know than to a group of total strangers.

Know your material

Practice your presentation, make changes if needed. If you're not familiar or comfortable with your material, you will be more nervous, and it will show. Practice the night before your presentation, but make sure to get a good night's sleep. You come across better and be less likely to make mistakes.

Dress for success

Choose professional clothing for the day of a presentation. Your outfit should not be too casual or too flashy that people focus on it instead of your message. Wear a favorite outfit that makes you feel confident and comfortable.

Relax

Try to find a quiet place to spend a few moments just prior to the presentation. Try to clear your thoughts, Take a few deep breaths, stretch if it helps to ease your tension.

Visualize yourself making the presentation

When you visualize yourself as successful, you will be successful. Imagine yourself confident and articulate. Remember to be yourself. You can speak clearly and hold an audience's attention. You can be an eloquent and persuasive. You can be a successful public speaker.

Turn anxiety into positive energy

One of the challenges of public speaking is the dread people have that something awful, terrible, or publicly humiliating will happen to them. Try to put it in perspective. What's the worst thing that could happen? You could pass out from nervous exhaustion? You could forget everything you were going to say? These events might be embarrassing, but wouldn't be the end of the world. So relax, and smile. Concentrate on channeling your nervous energy into an enthusiastic and vibrant presentation.

Realize the audience wants you to succeed

Many of the people in your audience are scared to death of public speaking, just like you might be. They know the risk of embarrassment and failure that people take every time they present themselves in public. They admire your courage, and will be on your side. They want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative, and entertaining. They don't want you to fail, they want you to succeed. (Remember how uncomfortable you felt the last time you saw a not so effective speaker). Smile and your audience will likely smile back.

During the Presentation

Use good posture

Stand straight, balance your weight on both feet, and hold your stomach in--it'll improve your posture and maybe even your confidence. Avoid nervous body movements, even if you feel uncomfortable. Try not to fidget as it detracts from your message. Keep your hands away from your face and out of your pockets. Also, don't be afraid to move around a little bit during your presentation. It may ease your tension and keep your audience alert.

Use good eye contact

Eye contact with your audience is a powerful tool to connect with them. Try to include everyone in the audience equally when you look out over the crowd. Good eye contact increases your credibility as a speaker.

Speak clearly

A good speaking voice is essential for delivering an effective speech. Your voice should be pleasant, natural and dynamic. Speak directly into the microphone. If you don't have a microphone, pay special attention that you project enough for everyone in the room to hear you. Use pauses when appropriate- for effect, laughter or applause. Sometimes a pause can help reinforce or point or make a transition to another point.

Don't mention that you're nervous

Don't apologize or call the audience's attention to the fact that you are nervous. They may not even notice, and you certainly don't want to accentuate it.

Concentrate on your message

Focus your attention outwardly toward your message and your audience (and away from yourself and your nervousness). Make sure you don't use acronyms or try to impress your audience with jargon. An audience will quickly tune you out if you try to speak above them or use language they don't know. Concentrate on making your message understandable. It's fine to have notes to speak from--but don't let your notes be a distraction. It's usually apparent from your tone of voice and your appearance when you are reading from a script. But no one objects to a few index cards in your hand with the main points you want to remember to make.

During your presentation, don't try to control your audience. If people are whispering, fidgeting or sleeping, let them be. Concentrate on the things you can control, your presentation and your energy. Don't worry about things you can't control, like other people and their actions, which will only lead to anxiety and frustration.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Experience builds confidence, which is the key to effective speaking. And the only way to do this is to put yourself in the spotlight, over and over and over again. Every speaking opportunity will help you become more confident and comfortable. You can start small and work your way up to bigger audiences and events. In time you'll begin to develop trust in your ability to speak successfully.

Consider joining a group such as Toastmasters to expand your experience and confidence. Volunteer to make presentations at school, social settings, and to colleagues. Pretty soon you'll be an old pro at public speaking. Who knows, you maybe someday you'll even enjoy it.

Sources:

<http://www.usda.gov/news/pubs/fcn/table.htm>

<http://www.toastmasters.org/tips.htm>

<http://www.stresscure.com/jobstress/speak.html>

<http://www.EffectiveMeetings.com/>