

Key Principles of Public Speaking Success

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Abstract

Public speaking can be a terrifying experience for a great number of people. Some people have even experienced panic attacks at the thought of making a public speech or presentation. There is even a name for this fear factor in public speaking, glossophobia. Glossophobia or speech anxiety is the fear of public speaking or of speaking in general [CITATION Sta17 \l 1033]. Fear of public speaking is the most common of all phobias [CITATION Dav17 \l 1033]. It is common for people to have panic attacks at the mere thought of standing in front of a crowd.

Not being prepared can cause one to fail miserably giving a public address. If you have any anxieties about speaking in front of a crowd, you will make them ten times worse by not giving yourself adequate time to prepare your speech. I recall Ben Franklin's statement when he said failing to prepare is preparing to fail.

This writing will furnish six key principles to help overcome detrimental causes of public speaking failures. These six keys are as follows:

1. Choosing a subject
2. Gathering support material
3. Knowing your time limits
4. Speaking verbally and bodily
5. Closing strong
6. Practice, Practice, Practice

Using these key principles will help lessen the fear and assist in your preparing well.

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Introduction

I was a 24 year old Baptist minister in July of 1994. I had been in the ministry for only a few months at the time. My first public sermon was a success at my home church in the area I am from. Having been a Sunday School Teacher for a few years, I was not entirely foreign to public speaking. Two months prior, I had given a sermon at my father-in-law's church and that went well. He then recommended me to minister a word to a congregation in his stead. I was honored; however, I made the mistake of not adequately preparing for this public address.

As a result, when I arrived I was completely surprised to find: that it was a church of a different denomination, a special occasion was being celebrated, I was a stranger to the pastor and the congregation, my message was not relevant for the occasion, and that made me nervous and afraid. Needless to say, it was a disaster and an embarrassment for me and my father-in-law. I never got invited there again. I learned at that moment that the best way to control fear of public speaking is to never be unprepared. The following key principles will help you be prepared as well as alleviate some fear.

Choose a Topic

The first step in making a speech is choosing a topic. The topic you choose should be determined with the occasion in mind. If you are chosen to speak because you are an expert in your field, then your topic will not be a problem. For instance, a police officer may be asked to speak about the consequences of buying or selling drugs in the neighborhood you live in. If you are instructed to select a topic of your own, select a topic you are familiar with. Along with choosing a topic, you need to determine the general purpose of your speech. Generally a public speech is given to persuade or to inform. Stephen E. Lucas stated "there is a third category—the

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speech to entertain”[CITATION Ste86 \l 1033]. This category is rarely assigned in a classroom setting. Be sure to choose a topic that is appropriate for the occasion.

Gathering Support Material

Gathering material for your talk can originate from several different resources. David Zarefsky identified seven types of supporting material to aid in preparing a speech[CITATION Zar96 \l 1033].

1. Personal experience
2. Common knowledge
3. Direct observation
4. Examples
5. Documents
6. Statistics
7. Testimony

Be sure to test the validity of your support material. You want to make sure your memory serves you correctly on your personal experience. Can your document sources be trusted? Are your statistics reliable? Is your expert really a reliable expert on the subject? These are just a few questions you must ask yourself before using any support material for your presentation.

Know Your Time Limits

Be aware of the time it takes to deliver your speech. If you are given a set amount of time, most certainly, respect the time restraints allowed. Always assume your audience is busy and have other things to do. Finishing on time is the goal, not too early and definitely not too late. One rule of thumb is to speak for between 90-100% of your allowed time [CITATION Dlu12 \l 1033].

Speaking Verbally and Bodily

Speaking clearly is vital to effective oral communication. The public speaker must be able to articulate the purpose and main ideas of the speech being given. Avoid using phrases that may be peculiar to your neighborhood or region. Some phrases carry different meanings for different cultures and environments, or may be gender offensive. Avoid street lingo as well.

Body language comprises gesture, stance, and facial expression. These are all the more important when all eyes of an audience are upon you. When you are presenting, strong, positive body language becomes an essential tool in helping you build credibility, express your emotions, and connect with your listeners. It also helps your listeners focus more intently on you and what you're saying [CITATION Exe03 \l 1033].

Closing Strong

Closing with a good strong statement or compelling example will help your message become more memorable. This could be the difference in making a sale, swaying a vote, or getting a decision to fall in your favor.

Practice

Practice and rehearse your speech to ensure that all your ideas flow smoothly and concisely. This will help settle your nerves and build up your confidence to deliver your presentation. Take note of the amount of time it takes to cover your material. Watch yourself in a mirror to gauge your body language and facial expressions. Try to predict what questions may be asked based upon your information.

Proofread any written material to ensure smooth reading and coherent thought. Organize your notes ahead of time to avoid confusion and awkwardness during the talk. Practicing is the time to encourage yourself and work on ways to control your nerves. If at all possible, practice with a friend you trust and ask for constructive criticism. Once you have everything written down and organized, practice, practice, and practice some more.

Summary

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Glossophobia or speech anxiety and being unprepared are two main causes of failing in public speaking. Choosing a topic fit for the occasion is important. Gather your support material and validate the accuracy of your sources. Know your time restraints. As a rule of thumb, use 90-100% of the time allowed for presenting. Never go over your time. Be aware that you are communicating in two ways with your audience: verbally speaking and body language. Give a good closing argument or compelling example at the end of your address. This will make the speech more memorable to the listener. Practice your speech. Practice will help relieve your nerves and build up your confidence. These are my keys to successful public speaking and overcoming glossophobia and unpreparedness.

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