

Last month's Tip Sheet No. 10 provided information on forming and utilizing a speakers bureau. Now somebody's got to get out there and deliver an insightful, stimulating and captivating speech. Yikes -- don't look at me, you say. Don't panic, which is often the response that someone has to our greatest fear – speaking in public. Follow these tips and you will find that you, too, can be an eloquent and inspiring speaker and have fun while doing it, too.

PE TIP SHEET NO. 11:

Tips for Effective Public Speaking

BY

John A. Giachino
Chair, FWEA Public Education Committee

When Yogi Berra in his imitable manner uttered, "I didn't really say everything I said," he probably didn't even miss a beat. Is this how you feel after you've just finished a presentation or speech? The audience thinks you're an idiot, right? Wrong. Eleanor Roosevelt once said, "No one can make you feel inferior, unless you agree with it." Unless you know you're absolutely facing a hostile group of people, human nature is such that your audience wants you succeed. Relax -- they're on your side! Yogi-isms aside, take these three points into account to become a relaxed, compelling and accomplished speaker.

1. Prepare and practice (and prepare and practice and prepare and practice).
2. Keep your audience mesmerized and motivated.
3. Use proven public speaking tips and techniques.

Prepare and Practice

Your speech is like a path that your audience takes to reach the conclusions you want them to arrive at. To prepare the presentation, ask yourself the following questions.

- ◆ What is the purpose of the presentation?
- ◆ Who will be attending?
- ◆ What does the audience already know about the subject?
- ◆ What is the audience's attitude towards me (e.g. hostile, friendly)?

Once you have answered these questions, you can block out your presentation. An effective presentation is comprised of three parts -- the introduction, the body and the conclusion.

The Introduction

A good presentation starts out with introductions and an icebreaker such as a story, interesting statement or fact, joke, quotation, or an activity to get the group warmed up. You should state the theme of your presentation and the objective or result you wish to obtain as part of the introduction. This not only tells

the audience what you are going to talk about, but it also informs them of the purpose of your presentation.

The Body

Next comes the body of the presentation. Do not write it out word for word. All you want is an outline. By jotting down the main points on a set of index cards, you not only have your outline, but also a memory jogger for the actual presentation.

A 45 minutes talk should have no more than five main points. This may not seem like very many, but if you are to leave the audience with a clear picture of what you have said, you cannot expect them to remember much more than that.

A Word About Structure

Structure is an important element of giving presentations and speeches. Without it, you will leave your audience wandering and wondering – wandering through the maze of information they've just heard and wondering what your message was. There are several options for structuring the presentation.

It can be structured in a Timeline where you arrange your points in sequential order. It can use a Climax approach where you deliver the main points in order of increasing importance. You can use a Problem/Solution tactic where you present a problem, suggest a solution and then give the benefits. Or use the Simple to Complex method where ideas are listed from the simplest to the most complex. This method can also be reversed -- from the most complex ideas to the simplest.

Include some visual information that will help the audience understand your presentation. Use bright and bold colors, and pictures as well as text. Develop charts, graphs, slides, handouts, etc. Use colored backgrounds (such as yellow) on PowerPoint and other slides, as the bright white light can be harsh on the eyes and will quickly cause your audience to tire. When preparing PowerPoint slides or writing on flip charts, again remember the magic number five. Use no more than five lines of text per page and no more than five words per line. Try to distill your points down to simple, memorable bullets. This takes discipline but you can do it by choosing your words and phrases carefully.

The Conclusion

The closing is where you ask for questions, provide a wrap-up (summary), and thank the participants for attending. Notice that you told them what they are about to hear (the introduction), told them (the body), and told them what they heard (the conclusion).

Now about the important part of preparing -- *practice, practice, practice*. If you don't practice your presentation, you could get lost when delivering it. As Yogi Berra also said, "If you don't know where you are going, when you get there, you'll be lost." Consequently, your audience will be, too and you risk losing some credibility.

You should know your presentation so well, that during the actual presentation, you should only have to briefly glance at your notes to ensure you are staying on track. This will also help you with your nerves

by giving you the confidence that you can do it. Your practice session should include a "live" session by practicing in front of coworkers, family, or friends. They can be valuable at providing feedback and it gives you a chance to practice controlling your nerves. Another great feedback technique is to make a video or audio tape of your presentation and review it critically with a colleague.

Mesmerize and Motivate

Getting and holding an audience's attention is always a challenge. How can you grab the audience's attention, hold it, and make them believe that what you have to say is important and worth listening to carefully?

You must immediately unite everyone in the room toward a singular goal. Then you must continue to bring your audience into your speech, weaving their interests into your topic throughout the presentation. Consider these tips.

Believe in yourself. Your first mission is to get over your fear by taking the focus away from your inner drama. Consider your audience's point of view. They want to get something out of your talk, and you, the confident and prepared speaker, can bring it to them.

Think about opening with a question. Open-ended questions are a great way to grab an audience's attention and pique their curiosity. Keep in mind that the question needs to be intriguing and must be a question that can easily be woven into your presentation's theme.

Add a timely pause after the opening question. This strategic couple of brief seconds pause gives you a chance to show the audience that you are genuinely talking to each and every one of them. Use your body language to draw the audience in with appropriate hand gestures and by projecting your voice and looking around to gauge their reactions.

State either your own answer to the question, or, if you have time, ask an audience member to share their reaction. This interaction does not have to be long and drawn out, but it does have to establish common ground between you, the speaker, and the collective experiences of the audience.

Transition from the opening question into the presentation. State the main goal of the presentation and, as you list your main points, explain to your audience why what you are about to share is important to them. Remember the Timeline, Climax, Problem/Solution and Simple to Complex methods of stating your case.

Always come back to the audience's interests. As you present your ideas, sprinkle in general interest questions such as, "You do want to..., don't you?" or "Remember when we talked about this? This will help..." Such questions allow the audience to catch up with you, and help lead them farther along in the direction you want them to go.

Don't forget to pause from time to time. Add a pause for effect, to gauge their reactions, or you can open up the floor to questions or comments. This keeps the discussion between you and the audience going, further building your credibility.

End with a request for action. Demonstrate how this desired action would fulfill their needs and benefit them, then explain the action you want them to take.

Use Proven Tips and Techniques

Vice President Dan Quayle once said, “Public speaking is very easy.” He also said, “If we don’t succeed, we run the risk of failure,” which somewhat disproves his first point! Avoid such verbal pratfalls by using these tips and techniques to become a veritable public speaking impresario.

- ✓ Speak clearly and loudly enough for all to hear. Use voice inflection to emphasize your main points.
- ✓ Listen intently to comments and opinions. By using a *lateral thinking technique* (adding to ideas rather than dismissing them), the audience will feel that their ideas, comments, and opinions are worthwhile.
- ✓ Speak to the audience...NOT to the visual aids, such as flip charts or overheads. Also, do not stand between the visual aid and the audience.
- ✓ If you can, try to get close to the audience by stepping away from the podium, which creates a physical barrier between you and your audience. Circulate around the room as you speak. This movement creates a physical closeness to the audience.
- ✓ Be prepared to use an alternate approach if the one you've chosen seems to bog down. You should be confident enough with your own material so that the audience's interests and concerns, not the presentation outline, determines the format. Use your background, experience, and knowledge to interrelate your subject matter.
- ✓ Get to the presentation before your audience arrives; be the last one to leave.
- ✓ If you have handouts, do not read straight from them. The audience does not know if they should read along with you or listen to you read.
- ✓ Do not lean on the podium for long periods. The audience will begin to wonder when you are going to fall over.
- ✓ Do not put both hands in your pockets for long periods of time. It is OK to put one hand in a pocket but ensure there is no loose change or keys to jingle around.
- ✓ Most people find that if they practice in their head, the actual talk will take about 25 per cent longer. Using visual aids also adds to the time. Remember - it is better to finish slightly early than to overrun.

*You can download a reprint of this and other PE Tip Sheets from the FWEA web site at
<http://fwea.cnsusa.com/cms/index.cfm?primarykeylist=,234,248,266,1669,1675>*