

Speaking Effectively

An effective speaker is one who can limit distractions and engage with the audience. This is not always easy but here are some tricks you can use to make your presentations more effective.

Practise

Go over your speech out loud again and again. This familiarises you with the content which builds your confidence. It also enables you to hear what your speech sounds like and be able to refine it so that it is clear and runs smoothly. Practise over and over. Do it in front of the mirror, in front of friends and family and even in front of your pets.

Look Confident

You probably won't feel confident on the day but you should try to look confident. It helps to relax your audience and adds authority to what you are saying. It is important to remember to

- **Smile.** Before you start speaking, smile at your audience. Don't be in a rush to start.
- **Make eye contact.** Look at your audience often. Connect with them even if you are reading your presentation.
- **Stand up straight.** Stand tall with your shoulders back. This gives the impression of confidence and authority. Hunched shoulders and bowed head can look apologetic and unconvincing.
- **Speak up.** Speak purposefully and sound as if you believe what you are saying. A soft voice means not only that the audience can't hear you but gives the impression that you are not sure of what you are saying.

Speak naturally

Talk naturally using simple language and short sentences. Try to avoid reading if you can. Talking is more expressive than reading. Modulate the tone of



your voice and vary the pace of speech. Talk slightly more slowly than normal. Speaking to an audience needs a slower pace than informal conversation so that they can take in what you are saying.

Use your voice to emphasise the main points you want to make. Slow down and increase the volume a little when you are making a point and then speed up and go a little quieter when you are explaining or giving examples. Also, pause between points. This is a verbal version of missing a line between paragraphs and it signals to your audience that you are moving to a new topic.

Be aware of any mannerisms

Nothing is more distracting than someone who repeats a gesture over and over. People often do this when they are nervous and they are not always aware that they do it. Gestures may include wringing hands, touching your face, swaying, tapping a pen, saying um or ah or keeping your hands in your pockets.

Get someone to watch you practise and give you feedback on anything that you do that may be distracting. Once you have identified a mannerism don't focus on trying to get rid of it. This sometimes makes it worse as you tend to do what you are focusing on, even when you are trying not to. Rather,

focus on a behaviour you want to promote and practise that. For example, if you keep touching your face, don't try not to touch your face but focus on keeping your hand down by your side.

Organise the equipment

Nothing stops the flow of a good presentation like having to stop and fiddle with a computer or DVD player. Practise with your PowerPoint slides so that you can change them smoothly as you talk. People will then be less likely to lose the train of what you are saying. Likewise, make sure that any video clips or other visual aids are in place and ready to go so that you don't have to stop to find what you want to show your audience.

Practise

Let's say it again. The key to all of these things is to *practise*. This means not just practising in your head but practising out loud standing in front of an audience and using the equipment. Don't run through it once but again and again until you know it too well. This is the thing that will make the greatest difference to your presentation.

PHOTO REFERENCE

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