TIPS FOR A MORE POWERFUL PRESENTATION

Giving a great speech doesn't have to be difficult.

BY JOAN DETZ

Quick question: How many speeches do you give each year? Likely answer? "A lot."

Now, ask yourself: "Am I using each presentation as an opportunity to connect with my constituency, build my base and communicate my message?"

Here are some practical guidelines to help public servants acquire the power of public speaking:

1 Request a good time slot. The truth is that it takes work to prepare an effective speech. Why spend weeks preparing for a speaking event—only to get stuck with a poor slot on the agenda? Don't assume anything. Ask the host to schedule you for a particular time frame. Avoid common problem spots: late in the evening (when audiences will be tired), or last on a panel (when speaking time may have run out), or right before lunch (when audiences want to go out).

2 Choose the person who will introduce you. You will be judged by the company you keep, so keep good company. Who should introduce you? Someone the audience likes—and someone the audience respects. Don't wait until you arrive at the event to tap this person. By that time, the organization might have assigned the task to someone else. And then it's awkward to change.

3 Write your own introduction. Leave nothing to chance. Write your introduction so you're "branded" most effectively. Since each audience is unique, each introduction should be different. Some speakers rely on generic introductions. Don't be one of them. Emphasize aspects of your background that a particular audience can relate to.

4 Focus your topic. Resist the temptation to throw in everything you know about a subject. If you try to say everything, the audience will probably remember nothing. Instead, narrow your focus and you will command greater authority.

Analyze audience demographics. Start by looking at the hard numbers. How many people will attend? The size of the audience won't change your subject, but it will certainly change the way you approach it. Smaller audiences tend to pay closer attention because they know you can see them. In contrast, larger audiences feel they can "slip away" because they're more anonymous. (That's why attendees look for seats near the back of the room or the end of the row—so they can make an easy exit if your speech gets too boring.)

Other questions to ask about the members of an audience:
- What's the male/female ratio?
- What's the age range?
- What's their educational background?
- What's their income?
- What's their family status?

Consider audience psychology. How will the audience feel about your topic? Do they have any biases? Where have they gotten their information (or their misinformation)? What's their most pressing problem? If you tailor your message to meet their needs, you will build a strong rapport—and be more persuasive.

Target your research. Don't hit your audience with tons of numbers. Go for quality, not quantity. Pick three key statistics, and elaborate on them. Keep in mind: Research is much more than numbers, so use a variety of research. Cite personal anecdotes, powerful examples, clever quotations, interesting definitions, real-life comparisons, endorsements from respected groups, press headlines, letters from community leaders, phone calls from various constituents.

Organize your material. Make it easy to follow. Give your presentation a beginning, a middle, and an ending, and if possible, keep them close together! Whatever you do, be sure to stay within the allotted time frame. What would it say about your respect for your constituents if you ran overtime or repeated information that a previous speaker already covered?

Simplify your language. Make it easy to understand. The audience has to get your message the first time through because there's no second chance to explain your message. So, keep it simple. Get rid of jargon, long-winded phrases and bureaucratic gobbledygook. (Don't say "at this particular juncture in time"; say "now.") Avoid acronyms as much as possible. When you must use an acronym, be sure to identify the term. (For example: "I work closely with C-T-O-A, that's our County Township Officials Association.")

Use humor but don't abuse it. A light touch of humor will bring you closer to an audience. Heavy-handed humor will make your audience uncomfortable. And tasteless jokes can flat-out cost you an election.

Joan Detz is the author of How to Write & Give a Speech, It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It, and Can You Say a Few Words? Since 1992, she has taught the Joan Detz Speechwriting Seminar Series. For more information go to www.joandetz.com.
11 Improve your delivery skills. Make a conscious effort to polish new delivery skill each time you present. The better your delivery skills, the better you can promote your platform. Think “process improvement.” Make a commitment to improve your presentation process. Do what the best speakers do: Get speaker coaching. Good speakers aren’t born great; they’re made great—through practice and training. A skilled speech coach will help you master advanced communication techniques so you can speak with greater confidence and greater clout.

12 Consider your “vocal personality.” The average person speaks about 140 to 150 words per minute. But pace varies by:
   - Age—Younger people talk faster than older people.
   - Geography—People in New York City talk faster than people in North Carolina.
   - How fast (or slow) do you talk? In general, your rate of speed should be similar to the rate your audience uses.

13 Use body language that reinforces your words. Audiences do not comprehend by words alone; they comprehend by body language as well. Does your body language help “sell” your message? Consider these factors:
   - Will you be standing or sitting?
   - Do you typically stand behind the lectern or move out to the open stage?
   - Will you walk around and interact with the audience?
   - Do you have good posture? (By the way, your high school gym teacher was right: Posture really does make a difference. Speakers with good posture convey greater confidence.)
   - Are your feet well-planted? Or do you make the mistake of rocking from foot to foot, or heel to toe?
   - What do you do with your hands? Don’t lock your hands behind your back military-style, don’t fold your hands in front à la fig-leaf, don’t stuff your hands in your pockets.
   - Do you look audiences in the eye? Audiences don’t trust speakers with shifty eyes.
   - Do you have an easy, natural smile? A good smile works miracles.

14 Get a second bounce. If you think your presentation is over when you walk away from the lectern, think again. Savvy legislators seek positive media attention on a regular basis. Simple, inexpensive efforts can yield significant dividends:
   - Put highlights of speeches on your website.
   - Submit excerpts to trade publications.
   - Follow up your appearances with op-ed pieces for area newspapers.
   - Send the manuscript to your alma mater’s magazine.
   - Blog.
   - Send summaries of your speeches to faculty and student leaders at colleges. (Think of the campaign volunteers this can produce.)
After all, it takes a lot of work to prepare a good speech. Use media attention to make sure your speech works just as hard for you.

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