Becoming an Effective Speaker – Train the Trainer



THE IMPORTANCE OF STRONG PUBLIC SPEAKING

Strong speaking skills will set you apart, make you feel more confident, and give you the ability to take on leadership roles.

Public speaking offers one of the most effective ways to get your point across, demonstrate your knowledge, and influence others. It can even help you stay organized and improve your writing and interpersonal communication.

Many people who appear completely comfortable in front of crowds started out with a significant fear of public speaking. By overcoming this fear, practicing, and gaining confidence, you can have more advantages in life.

STRATEGIES TO BECOME AN EFFECTIVE SPEAKER

Plan Appropriately. Make sure that you plan your communication appropriately. Use tools like the Rhetorical Triangle, Monroe's Motivated Sequence, and the 7Cs of Communication to think about how you'll structure what you're going to say.

When you do this, think about how important a book's first paragraph is; if it doesn't grab you, you're likely going to put it down. The same principle goes for your speech: from the beginning, you need to intrigue your audience.

Planning helps you to think on your feet. This is especially important for unpredictable question and answer sessions or last-minute communications.

Perfect Practice Makes Perfect.

People say, "Practice makes perfect!" Better said, "perfect practice makes perfect!!" Seek opportunities to speak in front of others. For example, Toastmasters is a club geared specifically towards aspiring speakers, and you can get plenty of practice at Toastmasters sessions.

If you're going to be delivering a presentation or prepared speech, create it as early as possible. The earlier you put it together, the more time you'll have to practice.

Practice it plenty of times alone, using the resources you'll rely on at the event.

If appropriate, do a test run in front of a small audience: this will help you calm your jitters.

Engage the Audience. Engage your audience. This makes you feel less isolated as a speaker. Ask leading questions targeted to individuals or groups and encourage people to participate and ask questions.

Keep in mind that some words reduce your power as a speaker. For instance, think about how these sentences sound: "I just want to add that I think we can meet these goals" or "I just think this plan is a good one." The words "just" and "I think" limit your authority and conviction. Don't use them.

Pay attention to how you're speaking. If you're nervous, you might talk quickly. This increases the chances that you'll trip over your words or say something you don't mean. Force yourself to slow down by breathing deeply. Don't be afraid to gather your thoughts; pauses are an important part of conversation.

Avoid reading word-for-word from your notes. Instead, make a list of important points on cue cards.

Pay Attention to Body Language. Your body language will give your audience subtle clues about your inner state. If you're nervous, or if you don't believe in what you're saying, the audience will know.

Pay attention to your body language: stand up straight, take deep breaths, look people in the eye, and smile.

Many people prefer to speak behind a podium when giving presentations. Instead of standing behind a podium, walk around and use gestures to engage the audience.

Positive Thinking. Positive thinking can make a huge difference to the success of your communication.

Fear makes it all too easy to slip into a cycle of negative self-talk, especially right before you speak. Self-sabotaging thoughts such as "I'll never be good at this!" or "I'm going to fall flat on my face!" lower your confidence and increase the chances that you won't achieve what you're truly capable of.

Affirmations and visualization raise your confidence. This is especially important right before your speech or presentation. Visualize giving a successful presentation and imagine how you'll feel once it's over and when you've made a positive difference for others. Use positive affirmations such as "I'm grateful I have the opportunity to help my audience" or "I'm going to do well!"

Cope With Nerves. Many people cite speaking to an audience as their biggest fear, and a fear of failure is often at the root of this. Public speaking can lead your "fight or flight" response to kick in: adrenaline courses through your bloodstream, your heart rate increases, you sweat, and your breath becomes fast and shallow.

Make an effort to stop thinking about yourself, your nervousness, and your fear. Instead, focus on your audience: what you're saying is "about them." Remember that you're trying to help or educate them in some way, and your message is more important than your fear.

Use deep breathing exercises to slow your heart rate and give your body the oxygen it needs to perform. This is especially important right before you speak.

Watch Recordings of Your Speeches. Whenever possible, record your presentations and speeches. You can improve your speaking skills dramatically by watching yourself later.

Notice any verbal stalls, such as "um" or "like." Look at your body language: are you swaying, leaning on the podium, or leaning heavily on one leg? Are you looking at the audience? Did you smile?

Pay attention to your gestures. Do they appear natural or forced? Make sure that people can see them.

Look at how you handled interruptions, such as a sneeze or a question that you weren't prepared for. Does your face show surprise, hesitation, or annoyance? If so, practice managing interruptions like these smoothly, so that you're even better next time.

TAKEAWAY

Good communication is never perfect. Putting in the time to prepare will help you become a better speaker. Becoming a better and more effective speaker is a learnable skill.