

A Survival Guide to Public Speaking

For many people, public speaking is a fate worse than death.

That's not just talk. Public speaking is the number-one fear among Americans, according to communications consultant Gary Cosnett. That has been the result of studies done on the U.S. population as a whole, on research done with college students, and even in a study of CEOs of *Fortune* 500 companies, says Cosnett.

Death is only the sixth most common fear.

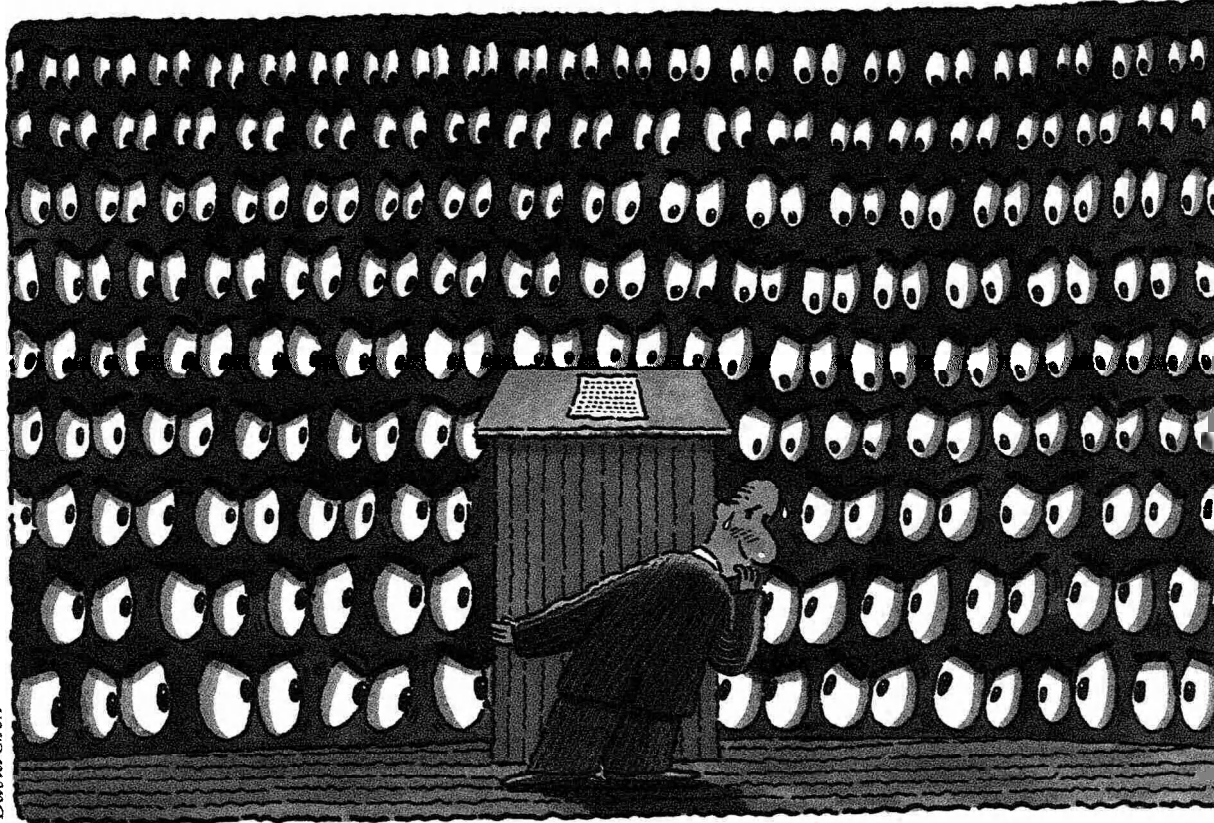
So how do you stop the trembling in your knees and the quavering in your voice? What if your mind goes blank at the lectern and you forget everything you were going to say?

For a trainer, feeling comfortable speaking in front of a group is all-important. In addition, you may be asked to coach others in your organization to improve their own presentation skills.

Here is some advice from four oral-communications experts on how to prepare for your next speaking engagement, whether it's a training seminar for 12 or a keynote address for 1,200.

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A study by AT&T and Stanford University found that the number-one predictor of success and up-



David Chen

ward mobility is how much you enjoy public speaking and how effective you are at it.

But I'd guess that 85 percent of the population suffers in some degree from fear of public speaking. In some cases, it is immobilizing. In other cases, it just causes undue anxiety and concern.

You may be one of the few people who say, "Well, I've never had any concern about public speaking." Even so, there's usually one configuration or another that is going to cause you a lot of anxiety—a larger group than you're used to speaking to, for example, or maybe a smaller, more intimate one. When it comes and you have no tools to deal with it, you're out of luck; you may come unglued.

I've done a lot of reading on public speaking, and the suggestions for controlling anxiety range from the helpful to the ludicrous to the bizarre. Some books say, "Don't put your hands in your pockets." Others say, "Put your hands in your pockets." You can spend so much

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Death is number six**

time trying to remember the rules of how to do it that you forget what you're there for.

The only rule I suggest is to have a conversation with the audience. That way, you're going to be comfortable and effective, whether you stand up or sit down, and whether you put your hands in your pockets or not. Whatever's comfortable for you is going to make the audience comfortable, and that's going to make your presentation effective.

You're really going to engage the audience when they see you as a human being communicating with human beings. When you can do that—when you're freed up enough to do that—you're an engaging speaker.

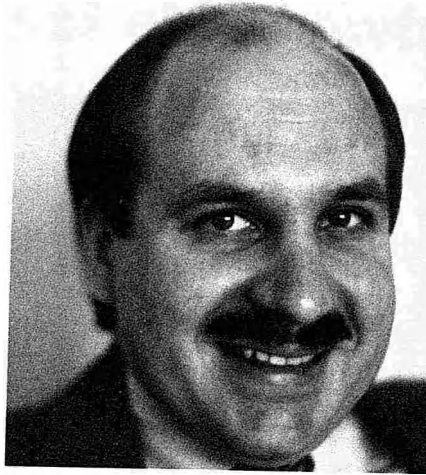
Cosnett's recommendations

1 Set realistic goals. People tend to think of speaking in terms of all or nothing: you're going to be successful or you're going to fail.

You may set out with the unexamined goal of engaging 100 percent of the audience 100 percent of the time. Anyone who's had any speaking experience knows that that's impossible, but many people still expect it.

Have reasonable expectations; for example, "I can engage half of this group," or "I can engage 65 percent of this group." Set that 50 percent or 65 percent as a success mark. Then, when you notice during your speech that some of the people are losing interest, it won't unnerve you. You will be successful by your own terms, which will make you feel more comfortable. That will tend to draw more people in, as opposed to having them drop off.

When I started teaching, I had 125 sociology students whose attitude was, "Go ahead and teach me sociology; I dare you." I thought that I would be a failure unless I got 123 of those people engaged at the outset every day. That became tougher and tougher to do. Then I realized that even on my best days, I might get only 90 people of that group really actively interested, maybe only 75. When I judged that to be a success, it became easier



and easier to achieve.

In order to set realistic goals, you have to do a little bit of audience analysis beforehand. For example, if you are addressing people on a topic in which they do not have a lot of personal interest, you should know you're not going to get 100 percent of them. If you are addressing a group that has a lot of interest in the topic, you might get as much as 90 percent of the audience's attention.

You'll never get more than 90 percent of the people tuned in at one time; people have other distractions. But you tend to focus on the 10 percent or 15 percent or 20 percent who are not listening, so they take most of your attention away from the larger group. That results in you becoming more and more nervous through the course of the discussion, when in fact, you should become calmer as you speak.

A week or so before a presentation, call up the person who asked you to speak. Ask what kinds of people are in the group, how interested they've tended to be in past sessions, what things tend to appeal to them, and what things don't appeal to them. That will give you a reasonable estimate of how much of that audience you can expect to captivate.

One of the techniques that I use deals with certain personality types that I know I'll see in the audience:

- Somebody will be going to sleep.
- Someone will be shaking his or her head the whole time, unable to believe how stupid I am.

- Somebody in the group will be hopelessly bored.
- Someone will be writing a letter to her or his mother, or whomever.

When I'm being introduced, I look out into the audience for such people and "greet" them individually. I say to myself, "OK, there's the sleeper," and so on. Then I can ignore them. Otherwise my attention is drawn to them exclusively and they become distracting; I start thinking that they are the whole audience. Instead, I want to make contact with the people who are actually tuned into me.

2 Give yourself credit. People frequently call me in a panic and say, "I've been asked to speak on X, Y, or Z. . . . Why me?" When you are asked to speak on a particular subject, you may suddenly focus on the things that you don't know about the topic. You've got to remember that you have abilities, you have skills, and you have a certain perspective that is valuable. The person who has asked you to speak obviously thinks it's going to be of value to the audience. He or she is not lining you up for a masochistic experience.

So how do you get over that anxiety? Sit down and list the things that you do know about the topic. You might not know everything there is to know. It is virtually impossible for anyone to be a complete master of any area. Remember that you have the right to know this information, but that you also have the right not to know everything.

A related fear is that during the question-and-answer period, someone will ask you a question to which you don't know the answer. Once again, if you reserve the right not to know some information, you can simply say that you don't know. Offer to get back to that person; give a concrete deadline. People will be more impressed with that than with you trying to fake it.

3 Control your self-critical inner voice. When you face the challenge of speaking to a group, you might hear your inner critic making such statements as these:

- "I'm not prepared."
- "I'll bomb."
- "I just can't do it; I'm not a speaker."

The voices are automatic and therefore seem natural. You assume that you're getting some kind of inner knowledge that's boiling up to warn you against an impending disaster.

Be aware of the fact that that's what's happening. Try to isolate those critical messages and to actually write them down, because once you get them down on paper you have some kind of control over them. Then you can systematically refute them.

Underneath the inner critic's comment that says, "I'm not prepared," write something like this: "I'm reasonably well prepared for this task."

When we have to make a speech,

we expect 100 percent preparation from ourselves. Again, it doesn't have to be all or nothing. If you're reasonably well prepared, that should be enough.

Maybe the inner critic says, "I always bomb." Challenge that. Has it been true in every case? Have you ever had a successful experience? You probably have, at least once or twice.

Some people tell themselves, "I've tried speechmaking a couple of times and had bad experiences." If people had the same attitude about sex, the population would be very small indeed. If you have enough interest in pursuing something, a couple of bad experiences will still allow you to try it again.

You don't find many 1-year-old children getting discouraged because they fall down repeatedly. They don't say, "Oh well, I tried

walking a couple of days and it didn't work, so I gave up on it."

As we get a little older, a lot of the messages that used to be positive become critical. We internalize them and get programmed through life to view ourselves critically. It's a way of protecting ourselves against making mistakes.

Unfortunately you can't go through the world fully protected; you have to take risks. And standing up in front of a group of people is a risk that you have to take. That inner critical voice is warning you against that risk, but you have to break through that. Many things that involve taking risks are what lead to success.

For a lot of people, the primary concern is that "People will notice that I'm anxious." You can get over that fear by reminding yourself that if people do notice your anxiety, their response is likely to be an empathetic one. Virtually everybody who's been alive for more than 12 years has been in your shoes at one time or another. When a speaker is really suffering, the usual audience response is not to go after her or him but to want to offer support.

I used to be absolutely paranoid about speaking. I used the same technique of writing down my automatic thoughts and trying to counter them with more realistic, rational thoughts. People would think I was holding my notes. Actually, I was holding cards that said such things as, "Your soul is not on trial," and "Yes, you are shaking inside, but it probably doesn't show on the outside."

That enabled me to get to the point where I didn't suffer as much, and then to the point where it was relatively painless, and then to the point where I enjoyed it. Now I'm at the point where it's all I do. Three or four times a week, I'm standing in front of people, talking all day. I devised techniques for myself, and then found that they're effective for a lot of other people.

4 Visualize a successful presentation. If you expect that you will do poorly, you may tend to rehearse vividly that poor performance over and over in your mind, anticipating problems.

Cosnett's Ancient Wisdom for Modern Speakers

Know thy point

A good speech makes one point and one point only. It may be supported by several elements, but the audience should leave knowing exactly what your central point was. That requires that you arrive knowing it.

Know thy audience

Please remember all those things your speech teacher told you to consider, such as age range, income level, occupation, education, political leanings, and so forth. But beyond the sterile statistics, learn who these people are as people. What motivates them? What do they really care about? Then, speak to their concerns.

Know thy plan

Structure your speech with a logical introduction, body, and conclusion. This requires you to focus your topic on a specific area or angle. Audiences are not seeking a review of everything you've

learned in 500 trips to the library. It is infinitely more valuable—and interesting—to offer a fresh, provocative perspective. In short, focus your topic and your presentation will almost organize itself.

Know thy speech

If you find it helpful to write out your speech word-for-word, do so, but reduce it to an outline or note cards for a more natural delivery. Make your speech a conversation with the audience. Don't memorize your speech verbatim. If you go blank at one point, you are likely to forget everything.

Know thyself

Know yourself enough to be yourself. Despite your expertise in your presentation topic, your audience is smarter than you—the group can tell when you are acting, putting on airs, or parading your "superior" knowledge. Respect yourself, your true self, and you can be false to no audience.

Once you reach the lectern, you'll discover that you have rehearsed it that way in your head so many times that what you most fear is actually coming into play. It happens because that's the way you've mentally practiced it.

Instead, consciously visualize yourself walking up to the lectern, getting comfortable, and looking out and seeing an audience that is welcoming you, interested in what you have to say. Visualize as vividly as possible a positive experience. If you do, the positive experience may very well fall into place, because that's your expectation and that's what you've rehearsed.

A lot of sports figures do the same thing: tennis player Billie Jean King, for example. Unless she can visualize a shot and see where it's going to go—almost have it happen in her imagination before it happens on the court—she's not able to pull it off.

Visualization takes considerable practice, but the more vividly you can do it, the more effective it's going to be. People are always visualizing in some form or another. It's natural. Once you become aware of it and start controlling it, then you can improve your skill.

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If you're going to speak in front of a group, you must have sincerity, believability, and style. Without that, you are cooked. You also must hold the audience's interest. But how do you do that?

Use language that is graphic, descriptive, and simple, with no jargon, no redundancies, no clichés, and no five-syllable words, unless you are talking to a group of peers whom you know will understand that language.

A good opening is very important. You either catch people with the opening, or you die. Here's what your opening should include:



- Start with an audience grabber, but find one that is relevant. It can be an anecdote. Humor may be a good way to start out on the right track. Everybody likes to laugh. Not only does it relax the audience, but it relaxes the speaker, too.

- Tell your listeners what's in it for them. People listen differently when they know that the information is relevant to their needs.

- Tell something about your own expertise and background.

- Tell them what you are going to talk about. You know the old slogan, "Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you just told them." Give them your agenda.

- Tell them what you expect of them. In other words, "At the end of this presentation, I want you to stay for a question-and-answer period," or "I want you to stay and fill out these cards," or "Come see me in the back of the room and have a cup of coffee." Tell them at the beginning so they will listen with it in mind.

It's up to you whether you want questions during or after the presentation. If you're a novice, I suggest that you have the audience save the questions for afterward. If you don't know how to handle an audience, you always get one determined person who sallies forth with something irrelevant for 20 minutes, or someone who is going to show off his or her technical knowledge and bore everybody to death.

It's important to learn how to

handle questions. You've got to get listeners started with questions, and hold the session in control. You have to learn to recognize antagonistic or hostile questions, how to diffuse them, and how to keep your temper and sense of humor.

Your wind-up is important too. Try to make it short and swift. If it's been a long presentation, it's a good idea to do a brief summary. Otherwise, it's great to leave people with an "up" feeling—an anecdote, a narrative, a humorous story. . . a quest for money. It depends on what you are there for.

Donnet's recommendations

1 **Some people say** you can get to the point where you are never nervous about speaking. I don't believe that. You can never really do away with nerves, and I don't think it would be a good idea. Nervousness acts as a hypo and makes public speakers give superb performances.

The point about nerves is that they need to be controlled so they don't control you. Two techniques can help:

- breathing and voice exercises to keep the voice healthy and clear
- relaxation exercises to control the body.

Breathing exercises. You have to learn how to support your breath. You use the breath to support your speaking, so that you don't end up gasping for breath in the middle of phrases, as you hear frequently on television and radio.

Improper breathing can get in the way of what you are trying to say. When you learn to control your breath, you breathe only where a phrase ends naturally. It also gives lovely support so you have a full, resonant voice.

Often, if you tell people to take deep breaths, they heave their chests and raise their shoulders. That is totally useless.

Think of the diaphragm as a balloon. Lie down on the floor and put a book on your diaphragm. When you blow air into a balloon, it expands. When the air is blown out, the diaphragm then slowly moves in, or collapses. Make sure it is the diaphragm and stomach that

are moving, not the chest and shoulders.

Try this one: Start by inhaling, making sure the diaphragm and the stomach are moving up. Then count out loud to five as you exhale. The next time you practice it, increase that count to 10. Every time after that, add two more counts until you can comfortably count to 25. This enables you to say a long phrase or a long sentence without gasping for breath.

Relaxation exercises. I have a little gimmick for relaxation that never fails. If you cannot go off to somewhere private before your speech—if you are stuck right there in front of everyone—then you can do this relaxation exercise while sitting behind a desk.

It works by creating artificial physical tension in your body. Tense up your muscles, starting at the tips of your toes. Bring it all the way up the legs, into the buttocks, into the stomach, and through the hands. Tense and then release the body five or six times. It gets the adrenaline going and helps you lose that clammy feeling in your hands. It energizes at the same time.

If you can go to another place—a washroom, perhaps—you can tense all the way up, right through to your face. Then fall over, relaxed, into a rag doll position. Do that several times. Couple it with breathing and voice exercises, and you are ready to go.

2 The second point has to do with good preparation and rehearsals. First, ask yourself two questions:

- What do I have to prove?
- How do I have to prove it? This can include factual and nonfactual information. (By nonfactual, I mean materials that illicit emotional support—humor, anecdotes, narratives, case histories, quotes from experts, and so on.)

Presenters have a habit of trying to do too much and trying to tell too much. If you narrow your talks down to those two things—what you have to prove and how to prove it—then the audience can follow what you're saying.

Rehearse three or four times. Do the first two rehearsals by yourself.

Invite family members and a few good friends to the third rehearsal. Treat it as a presentation. Then hand out evaluation sheets. You don't have to take everybody's suggestions; take the ones that you think are valid.

Do the last rehearsal for your colleagues, in the clothes you are going to wear for the real thing.

A very important point that I take for granted: never, never memorize the speech. If you do, it will sound canned. You are not an actor; you don't know how to make it sound "trippingly on the tongue." And if you forget what you've memorized, you can't retrieve it. You go blank.

Keep notes, either on cards or in outline form on regular paper, whichever is more comfortable. If you use cards, it will be easier for you to move around.

It's much more interesting to see a moving body than to see someone perched over a lectern. Get a moveable microphone if you can. If you use sheets of paper for your notes, time the speech so that you can move around, and come back to the lectern when you need to for the next point. Then move away again.

3 Analyze your audience.

This is absolutely essential. If you don't, you may find that you talk down to audience members, or that your presentation is over their heads. Either way, you lose them.

If you are speaking in a formal situation, you can find out about your audience from the people who engaged you. If you are speaking to businesspeople, find out who is going to be there—upper management, middle management, department heads, a mixed bag, or whatever.

Also find out about their interests. It's always a good idea to know if they are for or against what you are going to say, if your topic is controversial.

4 Take acting classes. I am a big believer in theater skills. I don't know how other people teach public presentation without theater skills. I have found them to be so valuable.

Many people are very tight. This comes across in their presentations;

they are stiff and artificial. They are so deathly afraid of exposing themselves that they give stiff, boring presentations.

Nothing opens up personalities the way a theater skills course does. It really brings out the creativity in people and expands their personalities.

I give a course in presentational speaking at McMaster University. Such courses teach breathing techniques, tension relaxation, preparation, audience contact, gestures, rehearsal, and how to hold a question-and-answer period.

But I find that my courses in Theater Skills for the Business and Professions are more popular. Everybody runs to them. In effect, these are short acting courses. I teach them just as I do acting courses, except that I relate the work to presentations.

James B. Anderson coaches senior executives in oral presentation skills and is the author of *Speaking to Groups: Eyeball to Eyeball* (hardcover, \$29.95; softcover, \$19.95) and a companion workbook. (Both are available from Wyndmoor Press in Vienna, Virginia; 800/869-0788.) He is with the Anderson Management Group, 413 Victoria Court NW, Vienna VA 22180.

The starting point is to know your subject. That almost goes without saying.

But it's not just what you know that's important; it's how you communicate your ideas to other people. Even the best ideas, if not heard, do not get converted into action. Like it or not, sooner or later, you will have to stand up, face a group, and speak in order to sell those ideas. Seek that opportunity; don't avoid it. It's the best way to get your good ideas heard.

The secret of charisma is to stay your own best, natural self when you face an audience—not to play a role, though you might want to turn up the energy level a few notches. I'm really talking about attitude.

There are half a dozen things a person can do to have more charisma:

- Stay yourself; just be natural.
- Be dramatic. Boring speakers are

not dramatic, but powerful speakers are mysterious, generate strong emotions, have dramatic ways, and use dramatic visuals.

■ **Keep moving.** I'm just talking about physical movement. Don't be static. Have good gestures.

■ **Project energy.** Think of the most charismatic, most powerful speakers you have heard; they have a high-energy joy, a sense of challenge and vitality. They are not lifeless; they are not apathetic. If you want to have charisma, you've got to have true enthusiasm.

■ **Use variety.** Don't do the same thing over and over. Pause. Use more emphasis. Maybe soften down. Maybe speak more loudly.

■ **Keep confident.**

Some of the most charismatic speakers have been some of the most evil people on earth—Adolf Hitler, for example. I am certainly not advocating that we pattern our speeches after Hitler's, but I think that we can learn from tapes of his speeches. He was able to do what he did because he had some of the skills I'm talking about.

That brings up another point. Study the best speakers and learn from them. It's easy to get access to great speeches these days; every historic event that happens is on TV. We can watch the House and the Senate, the President's press conferences, and the world's great leaders.

We can also join such organizations as Toastmasters and the Chambers of Commerce. We can attend meetings such as ASTD's conferences and local chapter activities, in order to be exposed to other speakers and to have the chance to speak ourselves.

Anderson's recommendations

1 Know your audience. If you asked me to tell you in three words the essence of success as a speaker, that would be it. Know your audience. It is fundamental. It is also the most common reason why people have outstanding success or colossal failure when communicating in a professional setting. Their problem is not that they don't



know their stuff, but that they are not speaking in the right way to the people they're trying to reach.

Do a written, detailed audience analysis before you make an important presentation. My book gives a 15-question analysis that I find particularly useful. It advises that you ask yourself such questions as these:

■ **Why are these people attending in the first place?**

■ **What is their basic attitude? Are they basically friendly, receptive, neutral, unpredictable, or hostile?**

■ **What is their level of technical expertise compared to my own?**

■ **What would it take to convince audience members in their own terms and from their own viewpoint? I think this is the most important question. I don't mean to tell them just what they want to hear, but to speak their language.**

Use concrete analogies that relate to their world.

■ **What possible objections might these people have to this idea? That can be hard; once you've become a true believer, you see all the reasons why something must be done, and it's hard to see why anybody would disagree. Have a dry run in front of somebody who can be the devil's advocate. Have that person ask you the tough questions that might come up.**

Target your talk for a specific action outcome. It's interesting to me that even people at the very highest levels get butterflies when they have to speak in front of groups.

Most of us can recall traumas; you know, that one time that you didn't do your homework and the teacher made you stand up in front

of the whole class to answer questions about it. I call it the Ghost of Speeches Past.

But you need to forget all that. Ask yourself not what you want to have happen when you're facing that group and talking, but what you want to have happen after your talk. Focus on the action you want the audience to take after your presentation. Don't focus on your discomfort about speaking; it's irrelevant. It's just the price you pay to get your action objective accomplished.

2 Plan your closing first. It seems logical to start with the opening. But the closing of your speech is vital from the standpoint of message structure. It determines the long-term impact on the minds of that audience.

Of course, you'll say it in the correct order during your presentation, but in the planning stage, start at the end.

This approach is a tremendously powerful tool for making quicker, more efficient, more effective presentations. It also helps you avoid anticlimactic endings, the kind in which speakers get to the end of their talks and can't seem to get off. They're stuck in verbal flypaper: "So in conclusion, I'd just like to wrap this up here and just say finally, as I've previously said. . . ."

So how do you do it? How do you create your ending first? Think of it as a focus point for your talk. Come up with a single sentence, 25 words or fewer, that summarizes the whole point of the talk. Yes, it's incomplete. Yes, it leaves out a lot of detail. But that nugget is the heart of the whole talk, your sound bite. Start there.

Remember *Alice in Wonderland*? When Alice comes to a fork in the road, she doesn't know which way to go. The Cheshire Cat says, "Well, where would you like to go?" and Alice says, "I don't really know my way around this place." Then the Cheshire Cat grins and says, "If you don't know where you want to go, any road will take you there."

Likewise, if you, the speaker, don't know where you want to go, then you'll just talk. But if you have

that crisp, clear idea of the closing—the bull's eye—you'll know when you've gotten there, and you will stop talking when you have made your point.

3 Add impact with visuals.

Different people perceive things in different ways. Some people can hear a straight verbal lecture, absorb everything—even all the numbers—and remember it forever. Personally, I was bored to death in school most of the time because I don't absorb information that way.

It's true that some of the greatest speeches in history have basically used only that medium. A good speaker can create visuals in our mind's eye. But few of us have the eloquence or power of Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy, Roosevelt, or Churchill. If you don't, you need to add that other element—visuals.

I find that speakers avoid using visuals because they've seen them used so poorly. A bad visual can be disastrous; it has so much impact. In fact, no visual at all is better than a bad one.

The most common problem with visuals is that people tend to over-complicate their presentations. The key to using visuals is simplicity. Don't put the whole story on the screen, just key words—enough to help people track through your ideas. Give them a reason to listen to you. If a visual is complete enough so that you could use a copy of it as a handout, then it is not a visual. It's a report. You could probably just hand it to the audience in advance, go over the highlights, and ask if anyone has any questions.

Less is best. Don't do too many visuals. One quick rule of thumb is to use no more than one visual for every two minutes of talk, but there are certainly exceptions.

Try to use color for emphasis. People don't use color nearly enough. Software is available to put color in there; so are colored marking pens that will write on transparencies. Be consistent with the way you use color, and consider the psychological impact. For example, if you're asking for more money,

you might not want to use red ink.

Another piece of advice about visuals is to be sure you check your equipment. Murphy's Law is waiting for us. Have a good checklist. If you're using a projector, make sure you have an extension cord, a three-to-two-prong adapter, and a spare projector bulb.

But you don't have to have a presentation graphics package with a computer and a full-color plotter to make good visuals. It's not so much the tools as the basic principles. Again, the most important one is simplicity.

You can make effective visuals with a flipchart and markers, if your audience is small. Some transparency material can be run through a photocopier to make inexpensive transparencies. Just remember to use simplicity, boldness, and color.

4 Stay alertly relaxed. When you stand up and face a group, you probably get a little uncomfortable; the nerves come up. Sometimes that edge is what gets you going. You don't want to be totally laxed out and mellow. By the same token, you don't want to be so uptight and nervous that those nerves are working against you. You want to be relaxed but alert.

How do you get to that state?

First of all, do the right kind of preparation. Put together a good script with an effective opening, a sense of the body, and a strong closing. Don't write it out word-for-word to read from, but have enough key words to keep you on track. Have the right kinds of visuals. Do a good, dry-run rehearsal to help you anticipate the questions and answers. All of those things will help you go in more comfortable and more relaxed.

I also recommend that you do a bit of mental rehearsal. You've probably seen some of the studies. For example, the Olympic athletes are doing more and more visualization in great detail before their events.

Sometimes you ask a person to make a presentation and instantly he or she starts running the negative mental tapes: "This is terrible. I'm not ready. I don't have enough

time. I'll probably mess it up. What if they shoot me down?"

It's almost as if the speaker is expecting failure before she or he walks into the room.

It doesn't have to be that way. I don't mean you should get psyched up in a rah-rah sort of way: "Let's just think the best and the best will happen." I really mean that you should do good, solid homework—in particular, studying the audience—so that when you walk into that room, you not only are ready, but you feel ready. The more you can simulate the real event beforehand, the better.

If it's a large, important presentation, go into the room maybe an hour early, just to get relaxed. Check out all the equipment. Get centered inwardly.

Some specific techniques can help you to be alertly relaxed. One of the most simple is also one of the most powerful—take three good, deep breaths right before you stand up to speak. Then there are the progressive relaxation techniques, in which you start by relaxing your toes, then relax your feet, and gradually work your way up your body.

A final technique involves putting the event in perspective. Winston Churchill used to put the audience members in perspective by imagining that they were naked, but I've always thought that would be a little too distracting for me.

Just ask yourself how important this event really is. When the emotions start cooking, it can get out of perspective. What's the worst thing that can happen? Even if it does, you'll live. Yes, this presentation is important, but it's not brain surgery.

Steve Whiteford, a speech coach to actors and executives, is the creator of a new video, "Expressively Speaking." You can reach him or order the video (\$59.95 plus shipping) at 2455-D Silverlake Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90039.

The best thing you can do for yourself as a trainer, teacher, and presenter is to take the time to discover your passion about your subject or your job. What is it that gets

you excited? What turns you on?

You may think that the subject you're presenting is technical and dry. But if you think about it, I'm sure there's something about it you can plug into and feel really good about. Using the energy and vitality of that feeling will allow you to be much more successful in holding the interest of your audience and having the group retain the information you're presenting.

I have a friend who is the CEO for a company that sells tax-related benefit programs to corporations and incorporates insurance in the sale. For many people, that could be a dry, technically complex topic, but for him it's heartfelt and vital. He takes the perspective that his program is really improving the lives of employees who subscribe to the benefits, and improving the morale within a company by freeing corporate dollars for more employee benefits.

His excitement is contagious and his company is successful. But some people might see his business as just another way to make a buck.

I have had occasion to attend



classes geared at preparing students to pass tests for entering different occupations. One thing I have found is that most classes underline technical information by using "passion points" about the job students are seeking licensing for. They also achieve high success rates by using information-packed anecdotes, and humor. People will remember what moves you and what moves them.

Don't think you have to become a performer. Just find what's great about your topic and enthusiastically communicate that element.

Also think about what's really special about you. Even if you have been drafted into a training position because no one else could do it, there's something about you that is great—probably a lot of things. Focus on that element and feel great about it. Remember it often as you do your job. Maybe it's your sense of humor or your thorough knowledge of the subject. It could be your personal warmth, natural authority, commitment, or willingness to do the job. There's some quality—something you have to give as you do your job—that's special, that's you. Use it. Enjoy it.

Whiteford's recommendations

1 Involve your audience. Use the first minute of your time to express who you are and make contact with your group. Don't tell audience members why you're special; show them with your behavior.

After you've established yourself, involve your listeners in as many ways as your topic and format will comfortably permit. Use easy eye contact and ask rhetorical and direct questions. Use workbooks that trainees can write in. Involve all of their learning capacities—visual, auditory, emotional, and physical. If you use visuals or charts, interact with them by alternating focus between them and yourself. This will keep the audience attuned to your message and to you as you illustrate your points.

2 Know your audience. This point may apply more to speakers than trainers. But even if your group is a class, it's effective to have prior knowledge of the students and their varied levels of knowledge and experience.

When speaking to a group, try to be familiar with and to use their frame of reference. This can include current events, special language, and important people in the group.

3 Know your material. That may sound obvious, but if at all possible know it well enough to be creative and to interact with it.

While teaching, I often discover

Whiteford's Seven Samurai Speaker Tips

1. Practice deep, diaphragmatic breathing. It not only relieves stress, but also allows you to support your voice for better projection and a more pleasant tone.

2. Focus on feeling consonants in words. You can feel the vibration of resonance in them. This focus also improves diction.

3. Increase projection by practicing calling out phrases to increasing distances. Support the call from the diaphragm. Visualize the vibration of the sound of your voice surrounding or penetrating your audience.

4. Exercise your tongue by stretching it out (tongue yoga). This relieves vocal tension and creates flexibility. Stretch for articulation: place a cork lengthwise between your top

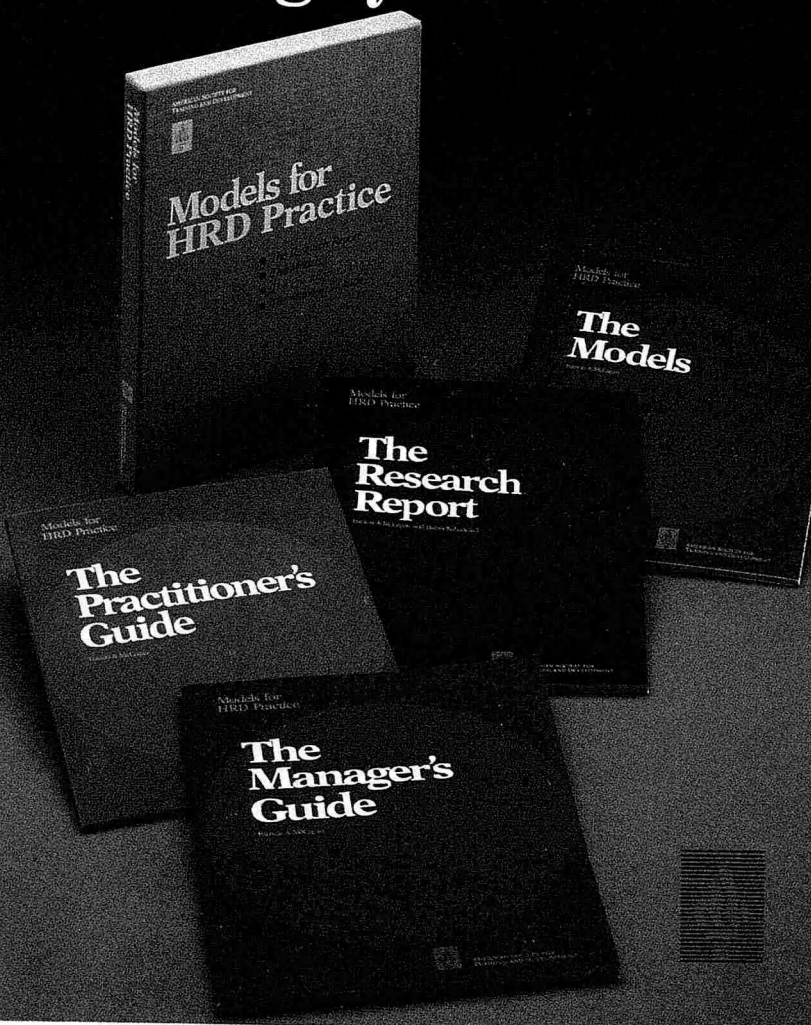
and bottom front teeth and read aloud, overenunciating. Stretch the tongue to the consonant contact points (the places in your mouth where your tongue touches when you form consonant sounds).

5. Smile. A relaxed smile adds warmth to your voice. It's infectious.

6. To relieve butterfiles before speaking, take a very deep breath. Then exhale very slowly, making a strong "F" sound. As you do this, visualize the successful results you desire from your coming presentation. Let nerves give way to excitement!

7. If you tire or strain your voice, massage your vocal chords with an easy hum, making an "M" or "V" sound. Keep it light and concentrate on the easy vibration on your lips.

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important new methods and teaching points. Rehearse your program in your mind and stay open to new observations or ideas as you do. If your position allows any creativity, take advantage of the opportunity to think and rethink your approach. Accept problems as challenges and observe how your knowledge will provide solutions. Even if your program doesn't allow much freedom in the way you approach the training, a creative attitude will add energy to your presentation.

4 Master your craft. Training and presenting is a wonderful profession. Working on your craft will only make it more interesting and allow you to be more professional.

Actively seek education and ways to stretch your capabilities. Learn and use the tools of the craft. Your voice, your body, and your frame of mind are your indispensable tools. Teachings and exercises are available for toning and improving them. Knowing how to warm up and focus each of these areas is vital to your success as a communicator.

Being prepared in this way eliminates most of the natural fears we face about being out in front with the responsibility to communicate. Find what works for you and create your own warm-up routine. Use it religiously. For instance:

- Tone-focusing phrases can prepare your voice and sharpen your diction.
- A quick body check—tensing and releasing muscles while breathing deeply—can energize and relax your body.
- Assuming a confident posture while remembering a time of significant personal success, and visualizing the presentation room filled with your friends, can clear your mind of stage fright.

The confidence and energy you'll gain is well worth the investment.

"Four by Four" is compiled and edited by Catherine M. Petrini. If you have ideas for future topics or would like to be interviewed, write to Four by Four, Training & Development Journal, 1630 Duke Street, Box 1443, Alexandria, VA 22313.