

From Nervous to Inspirational - Tips For Outstanding Presentation Skills

Whether you love it or hate it, you probably won't escape it. Public speaking is fast becoming an essential skill in business and life. And the truth is, most of us hate it. Public speaking is more feared than death. As Jerry Seinfeld noted, most of us would rather be in the coffin, than delivering the eulogy. Below are five tips for overcoming presentation nerves to deliver an inspiring message.

1. Live and breathe your opening.

Make sure you practise your opening repeatedly until you can say it in your sleep. Feeling nervous impairs your ability to think logically and clearly. Repetition of your opening lines can activate a subconscious part of your brain known as the basal ganglia. Activation of the basal ganglia allows you to feel anxious, but look composed. This area of the brain allows you to go into automatic pilot during times of anxiety, accessing well rehearsed subject matter with ease. Although your nerves may inhibit your critical thinking skills, it will have no effect on your ability to recall deeply ingrained information. This allows you to get off to a sound start, giving your nerves time to dissipate, before you need to access your critical and logical thinking skills again.

2. Prime yourself

Before you start take a few deep breaths. Shake your hands and move around. In-between your deep breaths, smile. The rationale for all this priming? The movement will help decrease your body's desire to go into survival mode, which can reduce your capacity for critical thinking. The deep breaths will slow your breathing, encouraging you to feel more calm, and reducing hyperventilation. Smiling is actually a physical means of encouraging your body to believe you are feeling happy, helping you produce happy hormones, which in turn will help you perform well. Yes, it's true!

3. Move

In front of your audience, engage in motion. If you are behind a fixed microphone, ensure you look around

at different people in the audience, rather than staring straight ahead. Alter your vocal tone and utilise passion in your delivery. Use your upper body to accentuate your words. If you are not behind a fixed microphone, move around the stage. Create a good balance between movement and stillness. Running around the stage for your entire presentation can be distracting. Standing still the whole time can put your audience to sleep or end with you fainting as the blood pools at your feet. When you want to create some energy or excitement in the room, move around. When you want to highlight an important point, stand in one place.

4. Identify your main message

Most people will not remember every detail of your presentation or speech. They will remember your main message and how that message made them feel. Define exactly what message you want your audience to leave with, and how you want them to feel at the end of the presentation. Structure your presentation with these two factors in mind. This will allow you to cut out the extraneous details, giving you less to remember and less slides to prepare. It will also allow for more conversation between you and your audience rather than presenting 'Death by PowerPoint'. This will create more focus and confidence for you during your presentation. Concentrating on the main outcome will allow you to bring your audience to that outcome in the most interesting and inspiring way.

5. Know your stuff

Your audience needs to feel confident that you are the expert in the area in

which you are presenting. And so do you! Confidence in our knowledge of a topic can calm our nerves when presenting. If we know what we are going to say, and we know we will be able to answer questions that come our way, this will give us the benefit of self confidence. And a confident and knowledgeable presenter is usually an impactful presenter. Research your topic, practice your entire presentation over and over, anticipate questions and prepare back up slides. This type of preparation will go a long way to quelling those nerves.

The best presentations are the ones that ignite emotion. A good result is when people discuss your message at the end of your presentation. A great result is when people incorporate your message into their beliefs or behaviours moving forward. Everyone has the ability to present with impact. Overcoming those nerves will go a long way to helping us deliver the message with confidence and professionalism.

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