How to Survive….. Speaking to an Audience

Public Speaking isn’t on many people’s list of favourite things to do. But avoiding it for the rest of your life is going to be very difficult (and also very inconvenient).

A good speaker:
- Has a clear voice
- Can hold the audience’s attention
- Knows the subject
- Looks comfortable
- Is easy to understand
- Has prepared in detail

So there is a lot to think about before you speak in front of an audience! Brian Cooney (in his book ‘Talk Sense’) describes the essential steps as Planning, Preparation, Practice and Performance.

Planning

In this case you need to plan for everything. You need to think about your audience, the venue, visual aids, your message and how you will be perceived. It’s all up to you!

Preparation

When you are preparing the content, the most important thing to consider is your audience. What do they want to hear? This will help you to:

- Focus on the talk’s purpose
- Put the material in the right order
- Carefully plan the structure

If you are in doubt about including certain material – think “Why do I need this?” If there is no obvious answer then leave it out!

Nerves? – a quick tip

Every speaker has them (even the professionals). So often speakers ‘take a deep breath’ before starting. This is the worst thing to do. It makes you ‘sigh’ before the first word. It gives you a squeaky voice. Not a good start! A good trick is to breathe OUT. This relaxes you and prepares you for the first word.
Practice

There are a hundred tips for conquering nerves and improving your speaking. But to be perfectly honest there is no substitute for practicing. It’s not what everyone wants to hear – but it’s a bit like riding a bike – you’ve just got to have a go at it (and if you can find an audience – even better).

Practice helps you fine tune various elements of your presentation including:

- Timing
- Notes
- Volume
- Pace
- Logic

The Performance!

Delivering a successful performance relies on all the other steps being completed satisfactorily (plan, prepare and practice). Your delivery is the final polish – and it makes all the difference.

- Maintain eye contact with WHOLE the audience
- DON’T READ FROM A SCRIPT
- Speak slow and loud enough for everyone to hear
- Use easy to understand terms
- Sound interested! (otherwise no one else will be either)

All of the steps described here are really about controlling as many of the variables as you possibly can. The principles are the same whether you are speaking in a first year unit or at an international conference.

So finally – use the venue to your advantage.

- Visit the room well ahead of time
- Test whether you need the microphone (if there is one)
- Move the lectern if you need to
- Shift some of the chairs (moving them towards you is best – encourage people to sit at the front)

Other useful resources:

Other Survival guides – ‘Seminar Presentations’
Practice your speaking - www.toastmasterswa.org