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PUBLIC SPEAKING

I was always absolutely terrified of speaking in a public forum!

I just had to overcome that fear as in business today you need to be ready to be available to promote your business as and when required and sometimes that is in a public environment.

What strategies did I initiate to help me address that “scary feeling” when asked to speak in public?

Subject Matter and Practice

If you are comfortable and confident with the subject matter of your presentation, that is the best way to overcome the issues.

I learnt this by doing some lecturing (initially) in the staff training section of a Bank and more recently with a Registered Training Organisation.

I have discovered that (in the circumstances I have mentioned) that as the presenter, I (generally) know more than the attendees and hence if I slip and stumble a bit they really don't notice it!

However, the word “practice” is important and you must be prepared to put a few “dry runs” in before you ascend the public stage! A “mirror presentation” is still a good way of overcoming any issues as you can see your facial expressions and eye movement very easily!!

I can't overemphasise the need to practice, practice and then practice some more!!

Did I make mistakes when I first started?

My word I did and some huge clangers too!

But as I practiced more and more I became very comfortable with the subject matter and developed the confidence I needed.

Imagination and Passion

Use your imagination to see” in your mind's eye” a perfect presentation! Get excited about the subject matter as that really boosts confidence and helps in giving you the ability to speak fluently.

Be very genuine as people can pick up a false presentation very quickly. Always tell the truth and avoid embellishing the facts.

Know Your Audience

Always endeavour to tailor your message to the specific needs of the people attending. Do some research to try and determine their interests, habits etc.

Icebreaker

There are varying methods of “breaking the ice”. I have used different methods here. Telling of a tasteful joke; undertaking a group puzzle and relating an anecdote relative to the topic. There are others and you need to find one with which you are comfortable.

Opening and Closing

Both these sections of any talk are critical. If you don't have a good opening, you have lost the audience before you start.

If you don't close strongly with a call to action or similar the talk may be in vain. Always relate your closing back to the opening so that continuity is seen (and heard) in the audience.

Questions

I tend to seek questions from the audience (in the appropriate environment of course) as I found this is a good way to think on your feet and provides spontaneity.

The risk is that someone will ask you a question to which you may not know the answer.

I have never found that a problem as I simply respond (if I don't know the answer) that I will find out and let them know. The methodology to do that is either via email direct to the enquirer or via a general note on my website.

Don't bluster around pretending to know the answer if you don't! It will detract from all the good work you have done in the presentation.

Most audiences appreciate honesty and will not think poorly of you if you admit that you don't know a response to a question BUT always be prepared to follow up that enquiry and get the response requested subsequent to the presentation. And do it promptly!

<p>Any advice or guidance provided here is of a general nature and is not intended to be a blueprint for every person reading this article. You should discuss your specific requirements and circumstances with your accountant or financial advisor.</p>
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