

You're Always Public Speaking So Be Prepared

Summary: Many people think they can fly by the seat of their pants when giving a talk, but being fully prepared gives you options that those people simply don't have.

The funny thing about presenting and public speaking is that the majority of people will tell you they don't enjoy it and/or aren't very good at it. And yet regardless of who they are and what they do, most of the speaking they do on a day-to-day basis IS public speaking.

You see, mostly when we talk to ourselves we keep it as an internal dialogue that nobody else can hear. But whenever we open our mouths and actually make a noise in front of another person we're speaking in public – hence "public speaking". So why do so many people find it so scary?

I think it's the eyes. All those sets of eyes fixed on you..... BORING into you. It's unsettling. So would it be any easier if your audience was ignoring you and all looking the other way? What if they all dozed off so it WAS as if you were talking to yourself? (Have you ever been a Rotary after-dinner speaker?)

Whatever the reason, the fact is that before getting up to speak, even the most seasoned professional will have some butterflies, whether they choose to call the feeling nervousness or excitement doesn't really matter. Rest assured, we all experience it to some degree.

If I had one tip to pass on, if I was asked to tell you the most important lesson I've learnt over the years I've been presenting, it would have to be to stress the absolute necessity of being totally prepared.

Now this may sound obvious and I'm sure you've heard this before, possibly many times, and like a lot of important messages it tends to become diluted the more we hear it "Oh yes, I knew that, now what else?".

And yet, knowing this, some people will be outside in the car park seconds before they have to deliver their sales pitch scribbling it out on the back of a business card. I know, I've been there.

When I talk about being prepared, I mean you should know your talk off by heart. You should be able to give it verbatim, standing on your head, without even having to think about what comes next.

Now some of you may be thinking "Yes, but I don't work like that. I like to keep the spontaneity" or "Yes, but I want to tailor my talk to the occasion" or "Yes, but that would be boring because I'd just be on auto pilot."

But actually, that's not what happens. In effect, the opposite is true. When you know your talk by rote, it gives you the freedom to change it around, to add, to subtract without losing your direction. It's like driving from A to B. If your route is set from the outset and you know it well, you can safely veer off and browse in a few antique shops and have a pub lunch in a picturesque village off the beaten track and still get back to where you were to complete your journey. But, if you'd just set off in the general direction with no main route to which to return, you'd soon get lost if you were to be diverted and you'd have difficulty picking up that thread again.

You see, there are so many things out there that can throw the speaker, and lots of unexpected things can occur when you're dealing with the public. No matter how good you are, you will become distracted, so knowing your material to the nth degree is absolutely crucial.

If something happens that needs your attention, you'll have to stop and deal with it, but you can return to your talk with barely a glitch and appear calm, collected and hence the ultimate professional.

You see we all get nervous. We all stick our feet in our mouths sometimes. We don't ever operate in a hermetically sealed environment, especially when exposed to other humans. But prepare, prepare and over-prepare and not only will you enjoy the confidence of knowing that nothing can phase you because you know your material, but if you're forced off your chosen route for any reason you can return smoothly and appear to be the consummate professional speaker.

And after all, if you can't – or won't – speak about your business, who will?

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Maria Davies is the UK's top professional speaker and presentations coach
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