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52 TIPS FOR

Presentation Success

By Jayne Latz



Everyone can learn to be a good public speaker.

Yes, everyone!

Learning to give an engaging, powerful presentation is essential to professional success. Speaking and presenting to others builds trust and credibility. It also builds your business and your brand.

What if I told you that with the proper knowledge and practice you too can deliver your message with great impact? A successful presentation is one that influences, impacts, and inspires your audience. You will know that the presentation was a success when people are moved to action by your message.

Not everyone is a natural-born speaker. I was so introverted throughout my formative years that I wouldn't even raise my hand in class. I knew what I wanted to ask, I thought about it, but I just couldn't get that hand up in the air. Total fear. What if it was a stupid question? Would everyone think I was dumb? I was that shy kid in high school that looked down at the floor when walking the halls rather than head up and smiling to others when they passed. Time and practice have certainly helped to make many changes.

The best public speakers make the time to practice. Yes, practice does make perfect. A good presentation does not just happen. It is planned, rehearsed then delivered with flair. A good presenter is one who learns the skills of presentations.

Go in front of a mirror and study your facial expressions while you are speaking. Are you connecting to the listener and the audience with your eyes and your smile? What about your hands? Are they in your pockets or on your waist? Do you look stiff and in pain, or comfortable and at ease?

Record yourself and listen to the recording. Are you clear and articulate? Do you have good vocal variety or do you speak in a monotone? Are you delivering your message strategically or rushing through the presentation so that the message is lost?

In this book, I present 52 tips to help you take your public speaking skills to the next level—one for each week of the year. Each of these small, bite-size nuggets are easy to learn and easy to practice and will help you to engage and connect with your listener, whether speaking to an audience of one or one thousand.

Are you ready to get started? Read on.



1

Be prepared

Do you have an important presentation coming up? Preparation is the best way to make sure that you are calm, confident, and clear on the big day. Make an outline of the most important points to be made, then rehearse until you can run through your entire presentation in a smooth, natural manner. If you choose to create handouts for your audience, make sure they are written, edited, and printed well in advance. Also, be sure to test all audio-visual equipment before stepping in front of the audience.

**2**

Engage your audience.

If you want to keep your audience from glazing over, involve them in your presentation. Ask questions that require a show of hands or have people stand up. Include moments where audience members need to speak with their neighbor. Anything that gets your audience involved will help keep them invested in your presentation and drive your message home.

**3**

Let your passion shine through.

If you're excited and passionate about a topic, your audience will be too! All too often people try to tone down their own excitement in order to appear more "professional". Usually the result is a dry, stuffy speaking style. Speak with professionalism, clarity, and confidence, but don't be afraid to let your audience know that this topic is exciting to you, and it should be for them as well.



4

Pause for increased clarity.

Distance can make it difficult to interpret the visual cues that many of us rely on in face-to-face conversations, so it's even more important than usual to focus on clarity in public speaking. To make sure your audience understands the most important information, pause between phrases or important points. Not only will it make your message clearer, it will also add variety and excitement to your speech.



5

Less is more.

When you're an expert on a topic, it's easy to get caught up in the details and include too much information in your presentation. Rather than including every little piece of information, distill your message down to the most important points. Then find ways to repeat that takeaway in several different engaging ways to make sure your audience walks away with your intended message.



6

Don't rely on your slides.

Technology can be a great way to help your audience absorb your message, but for many speakers, slides can become a crutch. Reading material directly off of your slides makes you appear unprepared and unprofessional. Know what you want to say at each point in your presentation, and you will only have to give each slide a quick glance to know what you're saying next.



7

Connect with your eyes.

Looking into a sea of faces can be intimidating. Focus on connecting with one audience member at a time by making eye contact with individuals rather than just scanning the crowd. Focusing your eye contact in this way will not only help your audience stay engaged, it will make you appear more confident and surer of yourself.



8

Reduce anxiety by simply breathing.

If you are anxious before a presentation, meeting, or even a one-on-one with an important client or superior, take some time in advance to breathe. Closing your eyes, clear your mind, and focus on your breathing for about ten to twenty seconds. Taking several deep, cleansing breaths can do wonders for focusing your mind and resetting your body.



9

Engage immediately with a story.

Including a story in your presentation will help your audience feel more connected to you and your message. For the best results, include a story early on that illustrates why your message is important for this particular audience. This will pull your audience in early and keep them invested in what you have to say. It will also make you more relatable.



10

Own your space.

Keep your body language strong during a presentation. Don't fold your arms, stand with your hands on your hips, or put your hands in your pockets. You should also avoid the "fig leaf" stance (standing with your arms straight down with your hands in front of your body). Instead, incorporate natural gestures into your speech. This will help you appear more relaxed and confident, and can help you highlight your most important points.



11

Tell them why.

The value of your message may be obvious to you, but it might not be to everyone else. Consider who is in your audience and how what you have to say will improve their lives. Then, spell that out directly. Let everyone know what they have to gain up front, and you'll have a more attentive audience throughout your presentation.



12

Close Strong

Your audience will likely remember the end of your presentation the most clearly, so make sure your ending is clear and engaging. Finish up your presentation with an anecdote, story, or quote that sums up your message. Memorize your closing in advance so that you can concentrate on your delivery and so that nerves don't get in the way of a strong ending.



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Step Away From The Podium!

Just because a podium is on stage doesn't mean you have to stand behind it for your entire presentation. Standing behind a podium restricts your movement and puts a physical barrier between you and your audience, which can be alienating. Standing in front of or next to the podium gives you the freedom to move naturally across the stage and engage with your audience throughout your presentation.



14

Dress for success!

When choosing an outfit for a presentation, being neat, clean and professional should be a given. However, when dressing, you should also consider how you'll be moving during your presentation. For example, if you'll be pointing or gesturing at a higher level, make sure you aren't wearing a shirt that will slip up too high. Also avoid bracelets or earrings that make noise and are distracting. Think about your footwear as well; make sure your shoes are comfortable enough to stand in for the duration of your presentation and aren't likely to make you stumble, for example, high heels that you're not comfortable walking in should not be worn for the presentation.



15

Keep water on hand.

Hydration is key for maintaining a strong, dynamic speaking voice. In addition, if you need a moment to gather your thoughts or regain your composure for any reason, taking a sip of water is a natural way to do so. If possible, use a glass rather than a bottle; noisy plastic and screwing and unscrewing a bottle top can be distracting for the audience.



16

Delivery matters!

When preparing for a talk or presentation, make sure you devote just as much time to delivery as content. While it's important that you convey all the necessary material to your audience in a straightforward way, it's your delivery style that will leave a lasting impression. Pay particular attention to your pacing, clarity, and body language as you practice. It has been said that how we say something matters twice as much as what we actually say.



17

Don't Memorize.

When preparing for a talk, don't memorize each and every word. While you may want to memorize key, high-stakes parts, like the opening or closing lines, memorizing everything can make you sound stiff and can alienate your audience. Instead, try to internalize your message; your speech will still be clear and professional, but will seem much more natural.



18

A tip for the Q & A.

The Q&A session after a presentation can often be more intimidating than the presentation itself. One way to take off the pressure is to restate an audience member's question before answering. This ensures that you properly understood what was being asked before responding, helps clarify the question for the rest of the audience if the speaker couldn't be heard, and gives you a moment to gather your thoughts and formulate your answer.



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Managing the Q & A.

During a Q&A session, it's likely that not every question will be a great one. If a person asks a question that is off-topic, antagonistic, or goes on for several turns, defer by saying something like, "That's an excellent point, and I'd love to discuss it more with you off-line after the presentation." Whenever possible, schedule time to stick around for a little bit after the presentation so that you can actually follow through on this offer.



20

What is your voice saying about you?

When giving a presentation, your vocal quality can make all the difference in how your audience receives your message. The energy in your voice tells your listener a lot about who you are and whether what you have to say has value. Are you delivering your message with confidence, or are you speaking with a soft, breathy voice? Does your tone sound positive or negative? As you're speaking, take a moment to take stock of how your voice sounds to your audience.



21

Be inclusive with your presentation style.

Try to adapt your presentation so that it can accommodate a range of different learning styles. This gives all of your audience members the best chance possible of taking away your intended message. Provide clear, succinct bullet points and engaging figures for visual learners. For auditory learners, verbally hitting all of your main points in a clear, concise way is essential. And for experiential learners, try to include a hands-on component whenever possible, no matter how brief. As a bonus, this kind of involvement will also keep your audience as a whole engaged and invested in your presentation.



22

Interact with your audience.

Presenting to smaller groups provides opportunities for interaction and engagement that you might not have with larger crowds. For example, you may ask participants to introduce themselves and tell the group what they hope to gain from the presentation. Even with larger audiences, there are often ways to interact with the audience and draw them in. For example, start with a “poll question”, like, “How many of you have had to ask someone to repeat themselves in the workplace?” You can then ask one person to elaborate.



23

Check your mic before you start.

Never start a presentation or talk with, “Can everybody hear me?” So many speakers start out this way out of habit, often while tapping or blowing on the microphone. This significantly weakens the opening of your presentation, making you appear unprepared and unprofessional. If you’re genuinely concerned about the sound quality for whatever reason, make sure to check out your audio equipment in advance.



24

Create a safe environment.

Are you giving a presentation that requires audience participation and engagement? Be sure to create a safe and non-threatening environment. Give your audience a warm, genuine smile as you begin, and encourage everyone to ask questions of you and the other participants. Make sure that everyone who speaks is given your and the audience’s full attention, and never criticize or allow other audience members to criticize a participant.



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Present data clearly.

Presenting data during a presentation can be particularly challenging. Numbers, dates, and jargon can make even simple data difficult to digest when listening. Put time into creating figures and visuals that illustrate data in the clearest, cleanest way possible. Always take time to orient your audience to your figures, for example, “Each of the bars on this chart represent one of our sources of revenue this quarter.” You may even want to consider using a laser pointer to visually draw your audience’s attention to different data points.



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Respect time.

Remember that your audience’s time is valuable. Show your audience that you value the time they’re giving you by not rushing through your content and prioritizing their understanding of your message. On the other hand, you also need to respect the audience’s time by keeping to the agreed upon schedule. You may think that running overtime gives the audience “more bang for their buck”, but everyone likely has busy schedules and other obligations to keep immediately following your presentation. Structure your presentation so that you strike that perfect balance of presenting all your key points in a clear, relaxed manner while still staying within time limits.



27

Be memorable.

To make sure your audience remembers you and your message long after you've left the stage, give them something concrete to take with them. A handout with your key points can be particularly helpful. You can also provide participants with a sheet of paper to take notes on which has your contact information in the header or footer. Even a simple business card can do wonders for keeping you and your presentation in the forefront of your audience's mind.



28

Be concise, precise and relevant.

Do you have trouble expressing your ideas in a clear, succinct manner? Use the 15-word rule. You should be able to summarize each of your key points in 15 words or less. Take the time to craft this core message in the clearest, most effective wording possible. Once you've put your main idea out there, you can elaborate with sub-points. However, you should periodically come back to that 15-word summary to make sure your most important points are fully absorbed by the audience.



29

Don't apologize.

Too many presenters become needlessly apologetic when they're nervous. Don't ever apologize unless you've done something genuinely wrong, like being late to a presentation or saying something incorrect or offensive. Many anxious speakers use apologies like a shield, pre-emptively apologizing for a rough presentation or for being nervous. This just draws your audience's attention to non-existent or miniscule flaws in your work. Instead of apologizing, try to relax, take a breath, and power through your presentation with a smile.



30

Manage your slides.

Slides that are too text-heavy can be distracting and overwhelming to your audience. If you cram each slide with information, your audience is likely to spend more time reading your slides than listening to you. Never use a font size smaller than 30, and try to keep bullet points to two-lines maximum. You don't need to write out each word of your presentation; your slide text should only highlight the main points of your message. Reserve the rich details of your message for your spoken presentation.



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Don't forget to enjoy yourself!

Want to know one of the biggest secrets to giving a great presentation? Have fun! Your audience tends to reflect your own feelings back at you, so if you're tense, nervous, or seem bored by your material, they will be too. On the other hand, if you're having fun giving the presentation, your audience is likely to enjoy the experience more as well. Does having fun during public speaking sound impossible? Keep practicing! The more experience you get, both with a particular presentation and public speaking in general, the more relaxed you'll be on the big day.



32

On the phone? Stand or sit up straight.

Posture can affect your breath support and poor posture can result in a weak voice. Your position can have a psychological effect on the way you communicate. If you are in a reclined or slouched position, you may be more likely to sound overly casual and relaxed.



33

Manage your hands.

During a presentation or professional conversation, be mindful of what you do with your hands.

Many positions and postures can give the wrong impression. For example, putting your hands in your pockets makes you seem unsure of yourself and unprofessional. Crossing your arms gives the impression that you're closed off, and putting your hands on your hips can come across as aggressive. Practice keeping your hands and arms relaxed during professional interactions, gesturing once in a while to avoid monotony or highlight an important point.



36

Connect with a smile.

It may sound overly simple, but smiling can make all the difference in making connections with others. When you smile, others are likely to smile back, which releases endorphins and creates an overall sense of well-being. This helps others feel more closely connected to you and associate you with feeling good. Smiling can also help you feel less nervous, while helping you feel more connected to your audience. to relax, take a breath, and power through your presentation with a smile.



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Warm up!

For a strong, dynamic speaking voice warm up before speaking. Breathe in on a count of five, and exhale on “mmmmmmmmaaaah” alternating between “mmm” and “ahh.” Take a deep breath and gently release it on “aaaah” going from your highest note to your lowest in a long sigh. Lip and tongue trills are another great way to gently warm up your voice and relax your throat before speaking.



40

Be creative.

Use novelty to your advantage during your next presentation. Presenting information in an unexpected way, will help capture and keep your audience's attention. Novelty triggers the release of dopamine, a chemical in the brain that's associated with pleasure. When you need to make an important point, try presenting the information with a visual or a story, something that makes the information “pop” in a novel way.



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Warming up is key!

If you get nervous when presenting, set aside time to warm up before you begin. Tension in your shoulders and neck can affect the way you speak and make it difficult to relax and project your voice. Roll your shoulders forward slowly five times, then backward five times. Tip your head from side to side and then forward and back. Do each movement in a slow, deliberate manner, going through your entire range of motion.



42

Do your research.

Knowing your audience is one of the most important keys to a successful presentation.

Do your research, so that you understand why your audience will be attending your presentation and what they have to gain from it. As you write, always keep your audience in mind, and tailor your presentation to them. The same information can be presented in many different ways; find the language, level of detail, and presentation style that will speak to your particular audience the best.



43

Be yourself.

Don't be afraid to show off your personality. Many speakers try to put on a "professional" persona when they present. Allowing your personality to come through will help make your presentation unique and help it stand out from other, more generic presentations. It will also allow you to speak to the audience more authentically; people can usually sense artifice, and your audience is much more likely to connect with you if they can tell you're being genuine.



44

Use audiovisual aids sparingly.

While videos, pictures, and audio can be a great way to engage your audience and highlight or clarify important parts of your message, using too many can be distracting and can seem like a crutch. They can also break your connection with your audience, making you feel more distant. Keep in mind- the audience is there to listen to you; the subject matter expert. As you craft your presentation, choose the moments in your talk where you want to include audiovisual aids wisely, focusing on the moments that will serve your message the best.



45

Be early.

Arrive to your presentation space well in advance so you have plenty of time to get the lay of the land. Take some time to test out the sound system and find out what type of microphone you'll be using. Make sure your slides are loaded and will open correctly, so there are no unexpected "technical difficulties". Arriving early will also give you some time to relax and breathe a little before your presentation begins.



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Trick your brain!

Do you get nervous before you speak? Try tricking your brain before your next presentation. When you start to feel those telltale symptoms—sweaty palms, racing heart, shortness of breath—tell yourself you're excited, not nervous. The physical symptoms for fear and excitement frequently overlap, and reinterpreting them as a positive emotion like excitement can help you relax and present in a more confident, dynamic way.



47

Use of power of the pause.

Pausing not only helps make your speech slower and more understandable, it can also be a powerful tool for drawing your audience's attention to the parts of your message you want to highlight the most. Include pauses of varying length throughout your speech, roughly 3 to 5 seconds. Try bookending key statements, pausing both before and after to focus your audience and draw them in.



48

Open strong.

Begin your presentation strong. Don't begin talking to the audience while you walk out on stage. Don't thank them and introduce yourself- that has either been done already or they are well aware of who they are there to listen to. Enter quietly with a confident stride, and find your place at the podium or wherever you'll be speaking from. Then take a moment or two to make eye contact with the audience, smile, and take a deep calming breath. This will help center you and allow you to begin your presentation in a strong, confident way.



49

Keep it simple.

So many presentations suffer from including too much information. Rather than being informative, a plethora of content can confuse your audience and dilute your message. When crafting your talk, keep it simple. Decide on the main message you want your audience to take home, and focus your entire talk on this message. After you've finished, go through and prune out any additional information that doesn't help your audience understand your main point.



50

Practice with video.

When practicing your presentation, set up a camera and film yourself. It will force you to practice saying your full speech out loud, and is a great way to review what's working and what isn't. The way you actually look and sound while speaking can be very different from how it seems in your head. Pay attention to your body language, clarity and rate of speech, and presentation style. Unsure of any particular phrasing or style? Ask a trusted friend or colleague to watch with you and offer feedback. Sometimes a set of fresh eyes can make all the difference.



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Your face needs to warm up.

Don't forget to warm up before speaking in public! Warming up your facial muscles decreases tension and can improve the quality of your speech. Stretch all the muscles of your face, opening your jaw as wide as possible. Then, stretch your tongue beyond your lips in all directions. Pull your lips back into a wide smile, then into a tight pucker, and out again. You can also use massage to relax your muscles. Press your knuckles unto the meat of your lower jaw, gently massaging the "floor of the mouth".



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Practice makes perfect.

Do you want to improve your presentation skills? Practice! Take advantage of opportunities for public speaking in your personal and professional life. Whether it's presenting your ideas in a meeting at work, speaking at a PTA meeting or simply telling a story to a group of friends at a party, use each opportunity for public speaking as a chance to improve your skills. Afterwards, take stock of your performance and decide what you would like to improve on the next time around.



Thank you for joining us.

I'm confident that with the tips and strategies in this book, you are well on your way to becoming an engaging, confident speaker who inspires and impacts their listener. I wish you the best of luck on your communication journey!

—Jayne Latz



About the Author

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For over 25 years she has worked as a speech-language pathologist, college educator, professional speech trainer and coach.

In 2006 she founded Corporate Speech Solutions, LLC which specializes in advancing speech and communication skills for business professionals. She is a Vistage Speaker, a member of National Speakers Association (NSA) and served on the board of the local New York City Chapter for three years. She has been featured in the Wall Street Journal (three times) and was a guest on the Today Show. She is the proud author of *Communicate Up The Corporate Ladder, How To Succeed In Business With Clarity and Confidence*. To learn more, visit corporatespeechsolutions.com

Contact

schedule a telephone call with Jayne Latz to discuss how you can incorporate these tips into a dynamic and engaging presentation.

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