

Challenge, Inform or Get Off the Stage

The Advice Article was taken from An Article Published by EZineArticles.

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"There are two types of speakers; those that are nervous and those that are liars."
Mark Twain

Most of us put public speaking at the top of our list of things to avoid. Then along comes that promotion or new opportunity, and with it, new responsibilities. Among them: communicating, powerfully and effectively in public. Before you rush to get out of that responsibility, consider what it can do for you.

This one ability--communicating ideas powerfully and effectively--can impact professional success more quickly and more absolutely than nearly any other. Become an effective communicator, and you will solidify a reputation as an effective leader. Yet many otherwise accomplished executives never learn to communicate well and take pains to avoid having to speak in public at all.

That's a lot of wasted opportunity. You can't expect your ideas to be considered or followed, much less admired, if they're not communicated well.

Speaking to a group, even a small group that knows you can be an intimidating. No one has yet died in the effort. We can all get past our fear of public speaking with practice. The important thing is to understand the power you have, that we all have, to communicate effectively. Here are some tips for powerful public speaking:

- ✓ Don't hide behind charts, graphs and power point slides. Despite the cliché, facts don't speak for themselves. Materials can only support your communication, not substitute for it.
- ✓ Accept the "public" part of public speaking. Speeches and presentations delivered before an audience really are about you and your ability to connect. If you're bored, your audience will be as well. Find the passion in your work and build your presentation or speech around it.
- ✓ Put real effort into the question and answer period following your speech or presentation. For many in the audience, it's their chance to connect with you and you to them.
- ✓ Make sure your public speech or presentation isn't simply a recitation of the facts. Your audience could get that from you in an email. What any audience wants is your perspective. Always provide a context for the data or information you provide.
- ✓ Never go long. Any performer knows it's best to leave them wanting more. Make sure you have something your audience can take home with them to think about.
- ✓ Don't forget to speak ABOUT something. Your main points should be clearly stated and they'll be back. Before long, you'll be wondering how you ever considered public speaking something to avoid!

Above all, practice, practice, practice. Don't run from public speaking opportunities--embrace them--and the power they have to promote your professional success.

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Article Source: http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Aileen_Pincus

Anyone wanting to improve their public speaking skills should consider what a Toastmasters Club can offer. A club offers you the opportunity to speak in public in a very constructive and encouraging environment. You will receive detailed feedback on all speeches that you deliver.

Also, Toastmasters has a program that you can follow that has been developed, tested and refined and is proven to work in clubs around the world.

There are multiple Toastmaster Clubs that meet regularly in the Upper Valley. To learn more please feel free to visit any one (or all) or them.