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Panic Clinic for Public Speaking

The people who often achieve the most in their careers are those with the "gift of the gab". These people seem to be natural talkers whether they're presenting prepared speeches or are speaking off the cuff. The good news is that many of these people were not extroverts from birth. In fact, many were born shy. They realized that effective speaking opens many doors and that learning a handful of techniques would make them effective speakers. They also know that speaking well gives them an edge in the IT industry. Even if you are talkative by nature, you can improve your career by improving how you speak. Focusing first on preparing a formal speech will also allow you to better present impromptu speeches. Adding regular practice to prepared and impromptu speaking skills will help certification students snag a job and will help workers vault up the career ladder.

Both certification students and working IT professionals can benefit from improved speaking skills. Students should always be cognizant that the next person they meet could be a potential employer. Thus, students should learn to speak to the best of their abilities, as this is a skill high on the list of most employers. IT professionals often conduct presentations to peers, managers and clients. Effectively presenting speeches is a great way to get noticed and enhance your career.

Many times when students or workers have a speech to present they are fortunate to have some preparation time. Use this time to follow several basic steps and you will improve the quality of your speech.

Knowing the topic purpose of your speech will help you focus your thoughts as you develop your speech. A speech can be presented to, entertain, inform, persuade or inspire.

The first step, after selecting your topic and the purpose of your speech, is to record as many ideas as possible that are related to your speech topic. Then categorize these topics into three major groups. While doing this, remove the items that relate least to your topic and add any other strong points that you think of. When choosing which items to keep and which to toss keep your audience in mind. For a less experienced audience, include the simpler ideas; for a more experienced audience, focus on deeper issues.

A speech should have an opening, body and conclusion. The opening is where you tell the audience what you're going to tell them. The body is where you tell the audience. The conclusion is where you tell the audience what you told them. Now that you have three groups of topics in hand, you can write the opening of your speech by relating the three topics and stating a theme based on the topics. You construct the body by taking each category of topics and discussing the individual items. You conclude the speech by reviewing the three major topics.

Remember to tailor the closing of your speech appropriately. If your speech is meant to entertain, consider a humorous ending. If the speech is meant to inspire, exhort your audience to take a particular action based on your speech. Also, ensure that you tie together the different segments of your speech with appropriate transitional statements. Lastly, review your speech and check for a reasonable amount of both repetition and variety in your vocabulary, sentence structure, sentence length, and sentence type. Remember, variety is the spice of life and speaking.

Many speakers get off on the wrong foot when the emcee delivers a poor or inappropriate introduction of them. Don't take this chance. Give the emcee a brief self-introduction that outlines your credentials, shows the relevance of your speech to the audience and concludes with your name and speech title.

Now that you have the basics of the speech looked after, work to add some sizzle to it.

Make eye contact with people throughout the room. As you say a phrase, hold eye contact with one person. As you say the next phrase, look at someone else. Remember what your mother told you about posture? Keep your back straight. Don't bounce from side to side. Keep your hands out of your pocket and instead hold them at your side (except when gesturing). Scale your gestures to the size of the audience. The larger the audience, the bigger the gesture.

Speak clearly and audibly. Vary your tone and volume, as the speech requires. And eliminate unnatural sayings from your speech, such as "uhm", "ah", "like", "you know", "yeah" and replace these crutches with power pauses (pauses made with a purpose). Audiences appreciate some planned pauses: it gives them a chance to digest your material.

This week's feature by

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