

## Sharpen presentation, speaking skills



How are your presentation skills? Do you dread standing up at a networking meeting to tell the audience who you are and what you do? There will be times when you are called upon to introduce a speaker, or make a presentation to your colleagues or your shareholders. Every time you stand before an audience, your presentation skills and, indeed, your credibility, come under close scrutiny.

The biggest faux pas one can make is to be so nonchalant as to be perceived as unprepared. In general, when people are invited to make a short speech or introduction, they think they can "wing it" and ad lib a stellar five-minute presentation. But, it takes longer to prepare a five-minute presentation than a three-hour seminar. In a short presentation, there is no time for miscommunication of your ideas or to search for the right word or phrase, every word must count.

To prepare a speech, make an outline with a beginning, a middle and an end. Use the beginning to capture the audience's attention with a quote or a story, the middle to impart information, and the end to motivate them to whatever action you wish them to take.

Most presenters prepare only for the actual speech. But, a presentation truly begins the moment you walk into the room and ends when you drive away in your car. It is very important to watch your posture, table manners, business card presentation and conversational skills. I once witnessed a speaker, on conclusion of her speech, return to her seat and answer the audience's questions hunched over her unfinished dessert and mumble her replies between mouthfuls of ice cream.

On another occasion, a speaker actually demanded imperially that his dinner be brought to him first as he needed to have time to finish eating before speaking. It would have appeared much more professional if he had taken the time to eat before he arrived, and used the dining period to get to know his

fellow diners. This would also have been a good time to inquire as to what topics his/her audience was interested in, and what their expectations were from the speech.

It is crucial to be just as professional before and after a presentation as during the event. No dessert is worth the price of appearing unprofessional.

As the speaker, arrive early and introduce yourself to as many of your audience members as possible. This ensures that when you are on stage, you have many friendly faces who may be on your side. It also makes it easier for them to ask you questions and add their experiences. There is nothing to replace audience involvement.

Don't just stand there, do something. The podium is a direct barrier between you and your audience. Do not use it as a shield. Some of the best information is imparted from behind podiums and only succeeds in boring the audience.

Create dynamic tension and walk up and down the aisles. It will ensure the audience's undivided attention, because it will be assumed that you could ask a question at any moment.

Use props and visual aids. Most audiences are extremely sophisticated and want to be entertained and educated all at once.

When you are the introducer, it is your task to make the speaker look good. Doing this also enhances your image. Many introducers do not take the time to prepare adequately. They may say, "You all know this person, so he does not need an introduction." Or, "There

are so many things I could tell you about this woman, but it would take all day to list them."

Every speaker needs an introduction. If you are introducing the president of your company, it will be most impressive if you make a proper introduction rather than saying "this person needs no introduction."

Take the time to do some research on your speaker. Ask him or her to give you some information about themselves ahead of time and present it in an orderly fashion.

According to Toastmasters International, the most effective method of introducing a speaker is the "T.I.S." formula. T is for topic. Tell the audience what the speaker will be speaking on. I is for importance. Convince the audience how invaluable this information will be to them. S is for speaker. Give the speaker's credentials in glowing terms and add any personal information you may have researched to add to the speaker's credibility.

Mention the speaker's name at the very end. "Please help me welcome *Mr. Joe Smith*." You, the introducer, must lead the applause until the speaker reaches the podium. Too many speakers walk to the podium in deafening silence, which makes both the speaker and the audience nervous. As the speaker is reaching the conclusion, be ready to approach the podium. Shake hands with the speaker and lead the applause until the speaker reaches his/her seat.

Unfortunately, at many presentations, the speaker has to fulfill both the roles of introducer and speaker. The podium is left unattended and the speaker walks in silence back to a seat. The introducer fails to fulfill his/her leadership role and the audience is not quite sure what is going on. This makes the audience uncomfortable, the speaker feels neglected, and the introducer is "away on leave."

*Betts-Johnson is a San Diego-based consultant and speaker on international business etiquette.*