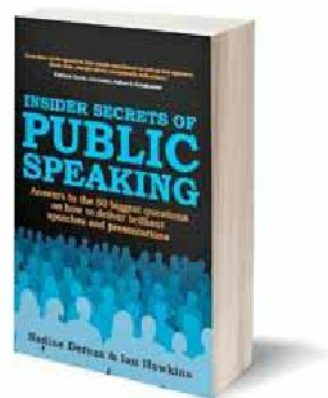


Revealing the secrets of public speaking

Nadine Dereza, international presenter, conference host, award-winning journalist and host of this year's Women in Business Awards, and Ian Hawkins, comedian, who has written for TV, radio and headline comedians, and event host, reveal the three golden principles of public speaking



Most of us have an idea of how we come across when we meet someone else in a formal business or social event. However when you step onto the platform and start speaking, are you as confident that the audience can see the 'real' you that you would like them to see?

It's an anxiety for any business leader, manager or ambitious employee. Every speaker is different, and the technique that always works for one may be a disaster for another. One size, as usual, does not fit all.

Our book, 'Insider Secrets of Public Speaking' encapsulates our wisdom into three golden principles: three approaches that will help you to give the best possible performance, and avoid common pitfalls. With this framework, you will find a way of delivering a speech or presentation that's uniquely you.

1 Authority

The audience is listening to you, so be in charge. Be credible, feel comfortable and own the stage. You can tell a personal story, admit to mistakes – so long as you are in charge of what you are talking about. Audiences like to be guided. If it gradually dawns on them that you're nervous, they will start to worry about you and stop listening.

Public speaking is an act of leadership, and if you lack authority on stage, the audience will assume you lack authority off stage too. Your job as speaker is to focus on delivering the key messages that the audience needs to hear, and one of the most effective ways of dealing with nerves is really know your subject.

Pitfall 1

We've seen managers open their address to staff by saying, 'I haven't prepared anything.' It's



disrespectful to the audience, who are giving you their time. Even an informal talk to a small group deserves some preparation. If you can't spend time in advance thinking about what you're going to say, the audience won't want to spend any time listening to what comes out of your mouth.

2 Authenticity

You have to be yourself, which is usually the cue for a protest that begins, 'But I'm... What? Shy? Introverted? Public speaking is for everyone – not just extroverts. There is no character trait that automatically stops anyone from speaking in front of others.

Audiences, in the main, want a speaker to do well, and will find vulnerability far more endearing than bluster and bogus theatricals.

You have a unique perspective, and that perspective is tied up with who you are as a person. The reason for having a speaker at an event is precisely because audiences respond to a human being delivering a message. Otherwise, why not just send out an email?

Pitfall 2

Too many speakers think they have to open with a joke, and when it falls flat, the audience is wrong footed, and it's hard to get the presentation back on track again. For a joke to work it has to be appropriate and told well, otherwise it creates a barrier between the audience and the speaker.

3 Audience

A speech should be about the audience rather than the speaker: it is absolutely crucial to know who is in the audience, why they are there and what they need from you.

You are setting the agenda, although you have to deliver it in a way that tallies with the needs of the audience. If they are skeptical, you'll have to bring in facts and figures to support your case. If you have bad news, you've got to be sensitive about how you deliver it. (Arriving at a conference in a brand new Ferrari only to sack half the workforce, is bad taste and will create a lasting negative impression.)

Speak to the audience, not at them. Look for reactions and respond to them: a good speech should feel like more of a conversation than a monologue.

Pitfall 3

Scripts are helpful, especially if you've got a lot of facts, though you risk losing yourself in the notes, looking down, and rattling through the words like a machine gun.

Put down your notes, look people in the eye, and have a dialogue.

Conclusion

Successful public speaking is not a dark art, and complicating the process is unhelpful. Concentrating on authority (status), authenticity (personality) and audience (expectations/needs of the people you are speaking to) will head off most problems. These three principles will also enable you to deliver a confident, professional and engaging performance that the audience will remember for all the right reasons.

Nadine Dereza and Ian Hawkins are authors of 'Insider Secrets of Public Speaking'.

'Good common sense from real hands on experience.' Rt Hon David Blunkett, MP.

