



How to be a great public speaker

If the thought of speaking in public brings you out in a cold sweat, you're not alone. Nadine Dereza shares a few simple tips to help you focus and beat those nerves

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Speaking well in public is an important leadership skill: so important that the internet is awash with hints, tips and do's and don'ts that promise to make you a brilliant speaker.

Several women have made headlines in the last few months by delivering memorable speeches. These include Monica Lewinsky talking about cyberbullying, Emma Watson talking about gender equality or Mary Beard talking about women speaking in public.

In the heat of the moment, when you're about to speak in public, it's sometimes hard to remember all the advice that's out there. If you want to deliver a better speech or presentation, I recommend that you try to shut out all the noise, and focus on my three golden principles.

1. Authority

It's really important for a speaker to have authority when they are on stage. Public speaking is an act of leadership. Although you don't want to come across as a demagogue, you still have to be very careful about letting anything undermine your authority.

Know more about the subject than you have put in your speech and be at ease with the subject matter. You are an expert on the topic and your opinion matters.

Bad habits like opening with an apology or letting nerves get the better of you will raise questions in the minds of the audience. They will stop listening to you and start worrying about you.

Part of being authoritative is being in control of your performance space, so arriving early to check the sound, visuals and lighting are all working will help bolster your confidence. There is nothing worse than unexpected feedback from a microphone or a rogue PowerPoint slide.

2. Authenticity

Be the best version of yourself, rather than a second-rate copy of someone else. Audiences like to feel that they've been let in to see the real you. Get rid of the idea that to be a good speaker you have to deploy "tricks": good speakers are, above all, themselves.

What do people like about you? What are the qualities that attract people to you? Play to your strengths rather than worrying about your weaknesses. If you don't think you're naturally funny, don't open with a joke.

We all have unconscious habits that we adopt when under pressure, and if you can review footage of yourself, you'll catch any distracting hair touching and shuffling from side-to-side that you do without thinking. Watching a replay will teach you a lot about yourself.

3. Audience

The audience is the most important part of any speech or presentation. Give the audience information in a way that is useful to them. It's not about you.

Audiences want you to keep to time, be aware of how they are feeling, and justify that listening to you is worth their time.

You won't please everyone all the time, but think about who you are talking to and what sort of information they need, be it facts, a personal story, inspiration or a heartfelt thank you.

Audiences are not passive: they are either actively engaged or they are turned off. Be conscious of this, and if you sense they're not engaged, turn the speech into a conversation that draws people in. Have a few anecdotes or statistics to hand that will help you achieve this. Audiences respond well to a speaker who is having a good time on stage: with authority and authenticity, it gives you that indefinable 'something' that says 'I should be here speaking in public'.

Having authority means that you aren't committed to telling the audience merely what they want to hear: sometimes you have to tell people what they need to hear. You can't shy away from the facts (authority); you can't deny your own responses (authenticity); and you can't pretend that it isn't meaningful to the people you are speaking to (audience). Wherever you are speaking and whatever you are speaking about, try to feel satisfied with what you have done. If you don't, ask why not - and think about what you could do differently next time.

Follow these three golden principles and your speech will be remembered, talked about and possibly acted on.

Nadine Dereza is a journalist, business presenter, conference host and co-author of the book [Insider Secrets of Public Speaking](#)

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