Public Speaking

for humans

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PUBLIC SPEAKING is the most common fear in humans\(^1\)

Why?
So what are the secrets to public speaking?
You already know them!
Don't believe me?

I'll prove it to you!
Exercise 1: Great speakers

1. In your group, think about someone you consider a great speaker.
2. Share your example with the group, and name one quality that makes them a great speaker.

(7min) Opening

Some great speakers, by User:Fastily [CC BY-SA 4.0]
Let's share back...
So, did anyone say:

- An advanced degree?
- Formality and ceremony?
- Gorgeous looks?
- Inscrutability or aloofness?
So what does matter?

Components of great public speaking
These things matter:

- Things you are:
  - Confident
  - Purposeful
  - Passionate
  - Respectful

- Things you do:
  - Tone and animation
  - Listening and reading
  - Humor
  - Structure and rhetoric
And unlike ~charisma~, they are skills, and can be learned! (though not necessarily taught!)
Confidence

- 20% Psychology, 80% Practice (incl. experience)

- Psychology
  - The audience wants you to succeed
  - You are worth listening to
  - You have things of value to offer the audience
  - You are qualified to do this

Components of great public speaking
Confidence

- **Practice**
  - Be prepared
  - Consider recording yourself
  - Practice on with friends

- **Experience**, once gained, adds confidence

- **Don't apologize**

- **Be graceful and flexible about setbacks**
Sense of Purpose

- It is **absolutely crucial** that as speaker, you have complete clarity on the *purpose* of your talk:
  - **Why** is it taking place? What is its *context*? What are its *goals*? Who is the *audience*? What are they likely to *already know*?

- If you have this clarity, you will **radiate** a sense of purpose. If you speak without this clarity, your audience is likely to *sense* the lack of purpose.
Passionate speakers are more likely to inspire; enthusiasm is infectious.

People pick up and respond to "vibes"; passion about the topic is a good vibe. Doubt and fear are bad vibes.

What if I'm not passionate about the topic?
Respect

- An audience wants to feel respected by the speaker.
- Respect your audience; respect what they know, and what they don't know ("there are no stupid questions" etc.); respect what they need (e.g. good A/V; breaks!)
- Treat your audience as peers; no matter the difference in skills or experience between you, you share at least some common goals, and in that, you are peers.
- Always act in integrity. Never lie or overstate. Do admit ignorance. Do follow up on promises.
Tone and animation

- Monotone is boring. **Vary your pitch** in a natural context-sensitive rhythm. Occasionally, **vary speed/volume** too.
- Look **cheerful and relaxed**
  - Sombreness is alienating. Panic is infectious.
- **Filler words** (uh, um, er, ...) **damage credibility**
A good speaker is also a good listener.

- Listen to the room. Noise and fidgeting are signals.
- Read the room. Faces are signals.
- Make eye contact. It engages and reveals.
- If available, use the microphone.
  - Don't ever ask "I don't really need to use this, right?"
  - Do ask if your speaking is clearly understood; amplify or slow down if necessary.
Humor

- Humor is double-edged: it can really help, and it can backfire, too.
- Humor can be humanizing, disarming, bonding, tension-breaking, re-engaging.
- Humor can be offensive, fall flat, feel disrespectful or inappropriate, and be alienating.
- Use with care, and evaluate carefully. And if you can't pull it off authentically, just don't. :}

Components of great public speaking
Structure and Rhetoric

- Clarity to yourself is a pre-requisite (see Sense of Purpose)
- Generally:
  - An opening
  - A body of the talk (<-- itself needs a structure!)
  - A closing
- The more confident you are about your structure, and the stronger mental image you have of its logic and flow, the more prepared you are to deal with questions, deviations, or the unforeseen.
The opening

● Its role: Attract attention and generate initial interest
  ○ Implicitly answer the question in everyone's mind: "Do I need to pay attention to this?"
● Ask yourself: "What’s the problem the audience has for which the talk I’m ready to give is the answer?"
● Establish topic and goal (optionally after a "cold open")
● State your main thesis, if any
Structure for main part

- Choose a structure that **fits your talk's goals**.
- Be concise. All content must serve the goals.
- Structure must be **clear** and **proportionate**.
- Deviate from the structure if there's a compelling need to do so.
Example structures

1. **problem/solution** - introduce a problem and its context; (optionally) describe common ineffective/attempted solutions; describe your recommended solution; mention benefits and also risks (and, ideally, their mitigation); conclude with call to action

2. **Challenge overcome** (aka classic hero story) - briefest introduction/context; complication/challenge/problem/rival happens; actions/struggle; solution/mitigation
Example structures

3. **mystery structure** - introduce question/mystery; gradually reveal clues, or describe efforts to unlock mystery; conclude with revelation or status quo and next steps

4. **debate structure** - present an issue; present an argument for one side; then for another side; then another argument for the first side; then another for the other; etc.; conclude with either "who won" (according to history, or scientific consensus, etc.) or by asking the audience for a vote
Example structures

5. Tool belt - introduce problem/challenge; describe a series of techniques or methods for addressing a problem; summarize

6. History - introduce the topic and the point of beginning; narrate major events/actions; arrive at present day or ending point/event. Flashbacks. *In medias res.*
The closing

- Its role: opportunity to repeat your key message (no details!) and either offer a call to action or be inspirational/aspirational, or both.
- if there's time for, and interest in, a Q&A segment, try to place it before your closing. Recency effect.
- Repetition is the key to long-term memory.
- Call to action: encourage the audience to apply/practice your message.
Exercise #2: Structure

- Divide into pairs
- Pick a subject you can talk about with passion
- Take 2 minutes to plan a structure for a five-minute lightning talk about it (opening+body+closing!)
- Deliver your lightning talk to your pair partner
- Listen to one minute of feedback from your partner
- Switch and listen to your partner's lightning talk
- Give one minute of feedback to your partner
Questions?
In conclusion...

- Effective public speaking is a set of skills you can practice and improve.
- Preparedness, integrity, listening skills, and some good cheer, almost guarantee a good result.
- Practice (and videotaping yourself) is really the key.
- Have I mentioned practice? And repetition?
- Do some public speaking and let me know how it went!
THANK YOU

Keep in touch!

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