

Public Speaking

for humans



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Asaf Bartov, User:Asaf (WMF), [asaf@wikimedia.org](mailto:asaf@wikimedia.org)

Wikimania 2019 Learning Days, Stockholm



# **PUBLIC SPEAKING** is the most common fear in humans<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Dwyer, Karen & Davidson, Marlina. (2012). Is Public Speaking Really More Feared Than Death? Communication Research Reports. 29. 99-107. 10.1080/08824096.2012.667772.

Why?

# So what are the secrets to public speaking?





**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.



Some great speakers, by User:Fastily [CC BY-SA 4.0]

(7min)

Opening



**Let's share back...**





# So, did anyone say:

- An advanced degree?
- Formality and ceremony?
- Gorgeous looks?
- Inscrutability or aloofness?

# So what does matter?



# 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**

# 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.

# Passion

- 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**

# Listening and Reading

- **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. :)

# 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?



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# 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!

[asaf@wikimedia.org](mailto:asaf@wikimedia.org)



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