

The Art of Effective Business Communication

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Abstract

Review Article

The purpose of business communication is to discern what is implied and what is inferred in a professional setting. Public speaking is arguably one of the most feared events in most people's lives. Very few people are natural orators. In business, having the ability to speak well in the presence of colleagues or superiors can define an employee's upward mobility. Effective public speaking can impel a team of colleagues toward upward growth, however, an uninspiring speech can distract from the speaker's message. An impressive speaker is one who does not internalize the pressure of performing well, but instead focuses on the needs of the audience. Presenting in public is a form of dialogue. Once a connection is made between the presenter and the audience, several steps can help enhance the speaker's ability to communicate his or her message. When a speaker displays their arsenal of public speaking tips and tricks, he or she naturally becomes a more confident speaker.

Keywords: Inoculation Theory, public speaking, communication, change management, leadership.

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INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate well is a precursor to success in business. Of the various methods of communication, none is quite as noticeable and daunting as public speaking. Public speaking is more than just words; the art comes in how one uses one's words. Most beginners in public speaking focus on what they are saying i.e. the words, phrases, and ideas expressed, but more importantly, the way in which an idea is expressed is the difference in the audience supporting the idea or ignoring it. While this may seem overly simplistic, consider the great orators throughout history. Can you recall who began his most famous speech with the words, "I have a dream"! Martin Luther King, Jr. used the art of oratory to deliver his message with effectiveness and resounding acceptance.

Friend, Adams and Curry [1] focused on public speaking in the academic environment, with particular reference to educational leaders often faced with the task of delivering news to the public or media, sometimes positive but usually grim. Technology offers more opportunity for leaders to get the message out to a broader audience but it can also place a spotlight on those speakers. A strong façade is critical for these leaders, and Friend *et al.*, [1] examined a preparatory teaching method for leaders when engaged in public speaking.

Technology has evolved exponentially in the 21st century, and includes the creation of multi-media technologies with the capability to improve leadership preparatory programs through real-life case studies and replications. Friend *et al.*, [1] exploited video simulations and role playing with leaders, with the intent to turn theoretical and content knowledge into practical applications. As a result of this training, speakers gained confidence and were able to effectively deliver the message.

A key characteristic of a healthy organization is good communication, be it top down, bottom up, or lateral. All three of these are necessary to operate a healthy organization in today's business world. Malhotra and Hunt [2] argued that lack of effective communication within an organization could hinder leadership development and impede learning opportunities. Effective communication is an essential component, both in business and personal interactions.

As employees process rapid changes, a primary indicator of organizational health is how quickly employees accept and acclimatize to changes. Simoes and Esposito [3], explored how effective communication influenced change management in a corporate environment. Simoes *et al.*, [3] stated that

communication has been acknowledged as a pertinent dimension to the success of organizational change, and is considered crucial in developing enthusiasm, reducing doubt, and gaining commitment from employees. Another key aspect of communication is trust. When employees trust their leader, they follow corporate policy and offer support.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature is robust in the knowledge base of what makes a good public speaker and how a speaker's skillfulness affects the audience's retention of the message. Scholarly advocates delving into conceptual frameworks to examine theories pertaining to the art of public speaking, explored the Inoculation Theory originally developed in 1961 by William J. McGuire [4]. The simplest way to describe the theory is the effort to 'inoculate' attitudes against persuasion, similar to one's immune system being protected from invading viruses.

Jaremko [5] promulgated that stress inoculation training (SIT), (a package of stress management techniques) reduced anxiety in individuals who engaged in public speaking. Basically SIT consisted of three phases; a) education on the nature of stress, b) rehearsal of coping skills; and c) application of the skills. Jaremko realized that by encouraging participants to recognize the three phases by using practical exercises and education, their stress levels reduced and they were able to more readily conquer their fears.

Effective public speaking is a valuable skill to possess for any professional. Engaging and fluent communication is a key to establishing productive relations with clients and colleagues. A polished performance is essential to establish credibility. Pausing between sentences using fillers such as "um", "er" or interjection of the word "like" detract from that credibility. Mancuso and Miltenberger [6] hold that habit reversal training may solve this problem for those individuals. The basic premise of the training is to remove the habit of using filled pauses. In essence, preparation, critique, rehearsal, being aware of and correcting one's habits is the key to eliminating those pauses.

Yingxia, Ying and Dongyu [7], stated that public speaking is an indispensable skill and creates a platform for people to get their ideas across to others. There are numerous areas where effective communication is required, for example, thesis defense, interviews and business negotiations. Yingxia *et al.*, [7] explored the challenges non-English speakers face in public speaking, and performed a case study utilizing TED videos as motivation for Chinese students to deliver a speech in English. An excellent speaker needs to not only express his or her views in public areas with rational and organized language, but also use non-

verbal skills to interact with the audience, and answer questions.

Another challenge for speakers is how one responds to those members of the audience who insist on disrupting the presentation. Baum and Boughton [8], focused on coping with those individuals and presented tips to would be speakers to include, but not limited to, arriving early to study the room layout, check audio visual equipment, etc., and ensure there are no distractions. Encourage the audience to fill the seats from the front, thus ensuring latecomers are in the back, so as not to detract from the presentation.

Confidence and good presentation skills are highly correlated. A well prepared presentation gives the speaker a sense of security and a modicum of confidence. Dale Carnegie [9], a pioneer in oratory communication believed that a prepared speaker exudes confidence.

This paper focuses on three styles of oratory communication and provides tips for each: a) face-to-face (FtF), b) small group (2-5); and b) large group. Depending on the size of the group, various techniques can be adopted to aptly navigate the seemingly treacherous waters of public speaking.

Audience Size and Intimacy of Communication

a) Face to Face (FTF)

The art of conversation may be inherent in certain individuals, but the reality is that most individuals are uncomfortable in this situation, unless it is to describe an exciting event in their life. In this instance, simple techniques can be employed to progress to speak in front of a larger audience.

Prior to entering the workforce, an individual with strong social skills may assume that those skills demonstrate competency and yield a competitive edge. However, communicating with one's peers and superiors creates a challenge. This challenge is especially true of female presenters, as they have the added stress of appearing confident and assertive. Hunt and Malhotra [10] believed stereotypical assumptions played a role in first impressions, which may attribute to the learners arriving at certain expectations from the presenter based on their gender.

When communicating with one person, eye contact and body language become increasingly important. A conversation in which both parties are genuinely interested in what is communicated promotes an atmosphere of trust in the relationship. In business settings, this type of trust is vital for healthy, productive working relationships. Attentive professional image should be exhibited as opposed to appearing detached from the conversation by leaning away and turning so the speaker is not in their direct line of sight. This non-verbal message is an indication of lack of interest on the

part of the listener. When speaking with a colleague, a subordinate, or a superior, it is essential for that relationship that the listener displays sincere interest in the speaker and the topic which he or she is addressing. This can be achieved by maintaining good eye contact and projecting positive body language.

b) Small Group

When addressing a small group, it is critical that the information presented be concise and accurate. If the speaker has inaccurate information, such as statistics and facts, it is possible that another individual in the group will point out the error. In comparison to a larger group that will judge the speaker on presentation skills in a small group conversation the listeners may form opinion of the speaker's trustworthiness based on how well the speaker connects with the listeners.

It is also critical that the statistics and facts are understood verbally. For instance if a speaker stated that 'one-half of our product testers experienced adverse reactions, but one-third of those people had previous conditions which were not reported'; this is an ambiguous and confusing statement for the audience. Instead of introducing multiple fractions within one sentence, introduce one fact at a time, thus allowing the audience more time to absorb each fact separately, leading to improved understanding.

Enunciating a complex statement to a small audience creates a challenge for a speaker, as there is quite a disparity between the written word and the art of oratory. With the written word, if a point is complex the reader can simply re-read the sentence until he or she comprehends the complexity. To present a complex statement in a way the audience understands, the speaker must dissect the statement, so it can be explained in a succinct manner and by layering each fact, the speaker can maintain the attention of the audience. An effective way to achieve this is to repeat a new, complex idea multiple times, restating it a different way each time. This will help the audience slowly absorb this new way of thinking, concentrating on that idea, until they understand. When speaking to a small group of people, not only should the speaker remember the important rule of focusing on the audience's comprehension, but also augment the message through clear, accurate statistics, and facts.

c) Large Group

Undoubtedly, it is most intimidating to present to a large audience. There are several techniques which combined with the previous tips, can create an effective, and trouble free presentation. Irrespective of the manner of the presentation visual or written, the speaker should be well prepared. In the case of a pre-written speech, it is useful to organize the speech in a logical pattern – the most common being the three-point speech: A strong beginning (purpose of the speech), Three or four points that support the purpose and a strong conclusion.

This is a typical way polished speakers write or present their speeches concisely for their audiences. Since the audience is already programmed to think along this roadmap, it is helpful to any new or experienced speaker to use such an outline. An advantage of a prepared speech is the ability to use props or visual aids to enhance the message. This tip may be less appropriate for a small group of people, but can be immensely successful when speaking to a large audience. An effective method to introduce complex ideas is to pair a vocal portion (public speaking) with a visual portion, such as a PowerPoint presentation or a handout of graphs or data. During the speech, the visual presentation will add to the audience comprehension and validation of topic. Academic research attests that an overwhelming majority of all people are visual learners. Petr, Belk and Decrop [11] stated that in the current environment of "user-content generation," visual data are vital offering researchers a chance to be creative and skillfully present their message. These skills enhance communication to a large audience. It is important for presenters to take advantage of their ability to compose a well-organized speech to ensure that their audience receives the message they are trying to convey.

CONCLUSION

Even after learning all of these highly useful lessons about oratory communication, most people would still be fearful when asked to speak in front of people.

"According to most studies, people's number one fear is public speaking. Number two is death. Death is number two. Does that sound right? This means to the average person, if you go to a funeral, you're better off in the casket than delivering the eulogy" Seinfeld [12].

One must understand that a presentation is prepared to educate ones audience. The presenter is the expert and is there to impart knowledge to inform the listeners. The focus should be turned away from the speaker and onto the audience, which combat the fear, intimidation and anxiety that normally predicates public speaking. There are also many tips to enhance communication, such as maintaining good eye contact and body language, editing the content for the audience, using visual aids, and organization of the speech. These tips should inspire a potential presenter and instill the confidence to become a polished and professional speaker. Practicing these skills in conjunction with recurring public speaking will help a speaker gain confidence with every speech, resulting in a more confident speaker and an audience that fully understands the message conveyed.

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