

Speaking Out

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Practice makes perfect

Speaking in front of a group of people is not something most people are used to doing. But public speaking can be an important and effective tool for advocates. And, like anything else, it gets easier with practice. If you have not done much public speaking, start out with small groups of people you already know – colleagues at work, a class at school or your place of worship. Reach out to service groups or ask to speak at a Chamber of Commerce meeting. Try not to overlook any possibility. And always be prepared with printed materials about your issue or organization for people to take with them. Leave your business card so people can follow up with you later. You may discover you find allies in the most unexpected places.

Suggestions for getting started

Tell a story—The best public speakers start with great stories. They answer the audience’s basic question, “Why should I care about the subject?” and turn numbing data into exciting anecdotes. Stories stimulate the audience’s imagination. Like the screenwriter Robert McKee says,

“Stories are a creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact.”

Make a connection—Connect with your audience emotionally as well as intellectually. Look at the people you’re talking to, not at your notes. Keep the information on your slides to a minimum. Your audience is there to listen to you, not to read.

Relate to their interests—Relate your stories to the needs and interests of your audience. For example, if you’re talking to salespeople, tell stories about how satisfied clients used your product or service. Remember, everyone resists a sales presentation, but few can resist a good story well told.

Informal presentations and impromptu speaking

Throughout the day, many of us participate in planned and unplanned meetings. Take advantage of every opportunity to advocate for children. Here are some tips for getting through these “power briefings” with busy lawmakers or other officials.

- Know in advance the “core” of your message so you can

Focus: The 30-second message

Having a 30-second message is a critical tool for advocacy. It can enable you to:

- Focus your thinking
- Focus your writing
- Focus your speaking
- Keep conversations on track
- Prepare communications rapidly
- Be more logical and concise
- Be more effective and shorten interviews and meetings
- Facilitate listening
- Reinforce presentations
- Use questions and answers to make your point
- Heighten your confidence
- Get better results

take advantage of unexpected opportunities.

- Assume you'll have less than five minutes to make your case and answer any questions.
- Start your conversation by identifying yourself and your organization. Mention any connections you may have, such as having worked on a campaign or knowing the top aide (this shows you have done your homework on the lawmaker.) Have a business card and any written information ready to hand out.
- Show courtesy and respect for their time by asking if you can walk with them to their next meeting.
- Immediately state the core of your message and support it with two or three salient facts. Explain how your message affects them and make any request you have, i.e., "Please vote in favor of proposed community initiative (fill-in-the-blank)."
- Be prepared to answer questions and be aware of any late-breaking news or current events that may have a bearing on your issue.
- Leave a handout that recaps your message.
- Practice doing these "power briefings" with a clock. Politicians genuinely appreciate people who behave professionally, understand the legislative process and do not waste their time.

The 30-second rule

In 1986, Milo Frank wrote *How to Get Your Message Across in 30 Seconds or Less*, a publication of Pocket Books. Frank's basic principle of the thirty-second message includes having a clear-cut objective, knowing

ACTION AGENDA:

Learn to speak out

- Prepare yourself
- Practice your speech but try not to sound too rehearsed
- Personalize your story wherever possible.
- Show that you care about what you are saying.
- Establish your credibility - briefly refer to your credentials or a personal anecdote.
- Speak clearly and not too quickly.
- Stick to your message. Try to avoid going off on tangents.
- Always thank your host.
- Make sure visuals are large enough to be seen by everyone.
- Keep in mind the six-by-six rule: No more than six words per line and no more than six lines per page.
- Try to avoid computer projectors that require lights to be turned low—especially after a meal.
- If you are going to use pictures of children in your presentation make sure you have appropriate releases on file.

your listener and what your listener wants, and having the right approach.

Have an objective—Having a clear-cut objective involves having a specific idea of what you want to achieve. Ask yourself some questions to help clarify your objective. What do I want to get out of this conversation and why? What is the best possible approach to use?

Know your listener—Knowing your listener and knowing what your lis-

tener wants from you can help guide you in reaching your goal. Learn as much as you can about your listener and try to identify with them and their position.

Use the right approach –Using the right approach involves thinking through what you are trying to say, what your strategy is, your core ideas, supporting information and how the information you are presenting relates to your listener.

Grab their attention –Start your message with an opening statement that grabs the attention of the listener. The opening statement should focus on something unique about your subject –

perhaps the most unusual, interesting or humorous part of what you have to say.

Keep them interested –Make sure that your opening statement also relates to your objective. Be sure it relates to your listener as well and gives them a reason to keep listening. Opening statements sometimes involve visual aids. Sometimes they consist of anecdotes or personal experiences.

Ask for what you want –A message without a specific request is a wasted opportunity. A request for a specific action within a specific time frame is more likely to get results.

Paint a picture–The words you use should paint a picture that your lis-

Be aware

Non-verbal messages can overpower your verbal message. Watch for the following:

Facial expressions
Eye contact
Posture
Gestures
Movement
Tone of voice
Physical appearance
Clothing

ACTION AGENDA:

Making an impromptu speech

You may be called upon suddenly and unexpectedly to speak. Keep in mind these strategies for an effective presentation:

- Try to be prepared for speaking opportunities that may arise. Think about your message, the beginning and ending statements. The middle will fill itself in.
- Decide quickly what your message will be and keep it simple. Try to tailor your remarks to the group or organization that invited you.
- Trust your instincts. Try not to fall back on memorized speeches; respond instead to the moment.
- Start off strong and have some sort of plan in mind. If you only have a moment to prepare, jot down the main points and lead in to your speech by saying, “I’d like to make three points...”
- Make simple transitions; for example, “My second point is...” Don’t try to get too fancy on your feet.
- Maintain eye contact. The people who have asked you to speak want to hear what you have to say.
- Be conversational if it helps get your point across. Humor helps people remember you and what you’ve said.
- Close with something like, “My last point is...,” and then return the floor to the person who asked you to speak, i.e., “That’s all, Mr. Smith,” or “I hope that’s what you were looking for, Ms. Jones.”

teners will remember. Be clear and direct. Personalize the message whenever possible. An emotional appeal can leave a lasting impression.

After consistent use, the 30-second message becomes second nature. It creates a whole new mind set and transforms the way you think and deal with others. You will soon find yourself instinctively prepared and using it all the time.

Handling the tough questions

Not everyone will agree with your position. Here are some transitional phrases you can use to get back on track after a tough question:

- I am not familiar with that, but I can tell you about...
- You're absolutely right, and one other point is...
- I'm sure that's true, and another thing I'm sure of is....
- Yes, that can wait until tomorrow, but something that cannot wait is...
- I agree with you, and I'm sure you'll agree that...