

# How to be a More Interesting Speaker

## Opportunities with Content and Delivery

Here are a few tips to help you be and feel more interesting—with both the content of your talk and the way you deliver it. At the heart of all this advice is an emphasis not on your needs as the speaker but on the needs and interests of your audience.

### With the Content of Your Talk

- **Learn something about your audience** and incorporate that information. Try to figure out what aspect of the subject will most appeal to them.
- **Tell a story** relevant to your theme. Just be concise in the telling. We all love good stories—telling, hearing and recalling them. Stories enliven and help your audience remember your message.
- **Use colorful language**, imagery and detail, including metaphors and analogies (see Mark Twain quote below).
- **Use an interesting quote or statistic** (e.g., *” Mark Twain once said, ‘A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.’”* )
- **Reveal something of yourself**—your personal experience with the issue you’re presenting (this might be part of a story).
- **Use humor** (but not necessarily jokes, which if inappropriate or poorly told can backfire). Spontaneous quips, humorous quotes and poking a little fun at yourself can all do wonders.
- **Make creative use of visual aids** to illustrate and dramatize key points. Use colorful images and keep words to a minimum.
- **Emphasize “benefits,” not just “features,”** as our sales training tells us.

- **Be bold and direct** about your central point—as this banking executive was:

*“Today, if you are only a bank, you will fail. If you are only an insurance company, you will fail. If you are only an investment company, you will fail. If you are only a mortgage company, you will fail. We cannot survive anymore by being in only one area of the financial business. We cannot be a only bank. We will make a mistake if we do that. We have to be able to provide across the board services to all our customers in all financial aspects of this business in order to survive. We have to be in, and are in, the business of providing products and services in The Financial Services Industry.”*

- **Use a strong, action-oriented closing** that gives your audience something to do or consider. (e.g., *“So as you hear these reports, I urge you to be skeptical. As Mike Rokyo, the late Chicago journalist liked to say around the newsroom, ‘if your mother tells you she loves you, check it out!’”*)

## With the Delivery of Your Talk

- **Get acquainted with your physical space** before you begin talking—walking around the room and observing it from several different angles. Mentally claim it as your own! If you’re speaking to people you don’t know well, imagine that you have invited some strangers or neighbors you don’t know well into your own home: concentrate on making them feel welcome even though you may be in their space!
- **After you’ve claimed the space, be willing to use it.** If at all possible, find ways to change positions. Approach your audience in a friendly, engaging way in different parts of the room. Don’t simply stand by your projector or screen.
- **Check out the acoustics** in advance and make sure your voice can be heard by someone sitting at the greatest distance from you. Better to be a bit too loud than too soft --rarely does an audience complain that a speaker is “too loud,” but inaudibility is annoying.
- **Be animated**—you don’t necessarily need to the energy level of an infomercial (and this would clearly be inappropriate on some occasions), but make use of your physical tools--facial expressions, vocal variety, movement and gestures. Trust those physical impulses.
- **Vary your pace.** Use pauses and silences to emphasize or key points and indicate transitions.

- **Refer to your notes but don't read them.** If you've practiced, then a few key phrases should be enough to keep you on track and connected to your audience.
- **Make meaningful eye contact**--one person, one thought at a time.
- **Talk to your audience not at your visual aids;** if at all possible, stand at an angle in relation to your audience and your visual aid that allows you to see both at an easy glance. (Special tip: try to stand to your right of any visual since an audience reads left to right.)
- **Introduce any complex visual aid** and give your audience sufficient time to comprehend and appreciate it. Encourage questions before you move on.
- **Interact with your audience.** Pose questions that allow audience members to share their experiences and observations.
- **Ask for questions**--and don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer (but offer to find out). Draw the questioner out to explain the problem or concern he or she is raising. If appropriate, involve other audience members in helping answer the question. (*"Has anyone else encountered this problem?"*)

In any presentation, we may not remember everything we had planned to say; we might get a fact or statistic wrong. But those do not usually spell a tragic end to a presentation. What's more important is that the audience feels that we're trying to "connect" with them, both in our choice of material and the way we choose to deliver it. That's what makes us interesting.