



Impromptu or Extemporaneous Speaking

by

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While many of us do not like to speak in front of people, there are times when we are asked to get up and say a few words about someone or a topic when we have not planned on saying anything at all. We are more shocked than anyone else. Has this ever happened to you? If and when this does happen to you, be prepared to rise to the challenge. Below are some tips you can use the next time you are called on to speak.

- **Decide quickly what your one message will be** - Keep in mind you have not been asked to give a speech but to make some impromptu remarks. Hopefully they have asked you early enough so you can at least jot down a few notes before you speak. If not, pick ONE message or comment and focus on that one main idea. Many times, other ideas may come to you after you start speaking. If this happens, go with the flow and trust your instincts.
- **Do not try and memorize what you will say** - Trying to memorize will only make you more nervous and you will find yourself thinking more about the words and not about the message.
- **Start off strong and with confidence** - If you at least plan your opening statement, this will get you started on the right foot. After all, just like with any formal speech, getting started is the most difficult. Plan what your first sentence will be. You may even write this opening line down on your note card and glance at it one more time

just before you begin speaking. If you know you have three points or ideas to say, just start off simple by saying, "I would just like to talk about 3 points". The first point is... the second point is... and so on.

- **Decide on your transitions from one point to the other** - After you have decided on your opening remark or line, come up with a simple transition statement that takes you to your main point. If you have more than one point to make, you can use a natural transition such as, "My second point is... or my next point is..." etc. Just list on your note card or napkin, if you have to, the main points or ideas. Do not write out the exact words, but just the points you want to mention.
- **Maintain eye contact with the audience** - This is easier to do if you do not write down all kinds of stuff to read. Look down at your next idea or thought and maintain eye contact with your audience and speak from your heart. Focus on communicating TO your audience and not speaking AT the crowd.
- **Occasionally Throw in an off-the-cuff remark** - Because you want your style to be flexible and seem impromptu, trust your instinct and add a few words which just pop into your head. Keep it conversational and think of the audience as a group of your friends.
- **Finally, have a good conclusion** - Gracefully just state, "And the last point I would like to make is". Once you have made your last point, you can then turn control back to the person who asked you to speak in the first place.

With a little practice, this process will feel more natural to you. Anticipating that you MAY be asked to say a few words should force you to at least think about what you might say if you are asked. Then if you ARE asked, you are better prepared because you anticipated being asked. This is much better than thinking they won't ask you and they actually do!

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