

Public Speaking: The Critical Leadership Skill

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Most leaders today are often evaluated by their abilities to speak effectively. If you listen to any effective leader, one of the skills they possess is their ability to speak in public. Becoming a better speaker is a learned skill and an art. Many of the today's leaders were not good public speakers earlier in their careers. Unlike reading and writing, public speaking is not one of those skills we are taught during our school years.

The problem is, most of us have never been taught how to do this. We felt, at the time, our only approach was to write out our entire speech word-for-word and memorize it. The problem is that most of us do not write like we speak and when we try to speak the words we wrote, it feels awkward to us.

As a result, many of us fail at this first public speaking assignment and it leaves us with a lot of negative feelings about public speaking. As we get older we avoid public speaking all together due to this first negative experience. The good news is, we can all become a better speaker with the right tools and guidance.

Here are a few short tips on becoming a better speaker (and leader):

1. **Never memorize your speech or presentation** - instead of memorizing your talk, think about the key points or concepts you want to discuss and just talk about them conversationally.
2. **Use conversational language** – Learn to just have a conversation with your audience. When we approach speaking as a performance, we are worrying more about what the audience is thinking and not focusing on just having a conversation.
3. **Practice and Rehearse**- most people do not rehearse or practice their presentation. Practice your presentation out loud and record the presentation. Record your presentation and play it back and take notes. Listen to not only what you said and how you said it and make changes and adjustment and re-practice and re-record the presentation until you feel comfortable with what you are saying and how you are saying it.
4. **Focus on your message** – Do not focus on the audience. Focus on your message and how to effectively deliver that message. Remember the audience wants you to succeed. If you find yourself thinking about yourself, how you sound, how you look, you are taking away the focus on your message and your nervousness increases.
5. **Take a public speaking class** – The quickest way to improve your public speaking is to take a public speaking class. Read about how to do presentations and how to improve your public speaking skills. Work with a professional who can give you the proper guidance and help to improve and practice what you are taught. Becoming a confident public speaker is achieved only by focused effort and a lot a practice. The good news is your payoff will come quickly, you'll have fun along the way, and the confidence you develop will improve virtually all areas of your life.

Lenny Laskowski is an international professional speaker & Presentation of LJI Seminars and the author of the book, "10 Days to More Confident Public Speaking" (Grand Central Publishing) and "Painless Presentations – The Proven Stress-Free Way to Successful Public Speaking" (John Wiley & Sons).