

5 Worst Mistakes Speakers Regularly Make

And simple tips on how to avoid them

1.) Leaving the audience wanting less.

Ideally when you finish speaking the correct reaction from the audience is for them to clap and think “yes, I ‘d love to hear some more”. So often, however, the audience is sitting there, nodding off thinking, “I need a whiskey”. At a wedding I was at recently, the best man spoke for 8 minutes; perfect length and the audience loved it. Then he announced a `treat` for the audience, and a video screen dropped down, as did the audience’s spirits. 30 minutes later, most of the guests had sneaked out and I believe, eventually, he had to be surgically removed from the mike!

Tip: Finish with your best material, keep it succinct and leave the audience on a high.

2.) Losing Eye Contact.

We always say at SpeakersBank that “if you lose eye contact, you lose the audience”. For many speakers actually looking at people can be distressing. And not because they are being rude, but because they are shy or nervous. Indeed in some cultures looking directly at an older person, for instance, can be construed as disrespect. In Western culture, however, it is a mark of respect **and** confidence. If you find this difficult when presenting in public, then practice in one-to-one situations with friends. On the day you will find it much easier when faced with an audience as you don’t need to maintain long periods of eye contact as in one-to-one.

Tip: Remember to mentally break the room into 4 quadrants and then “scan” these different sections of the audience with your eyes.

3.) Speaking too faaaaaassssssttttttttt.

Bill Gove, the father of professional speaking used to say that when he went to evaluate a new speaker he would always write down on his clipboard his first piece of advice to the speaker, which was “Slow down”, and this was before he even heard the speaker! Nerves, excitement, adrenalin, flight or fight, whatever you want to call it - it gets to the speaker and they are off like a greyhound after the rabbit.

Tip: Get into the habit of taping yourself so that you can self-evaluate and slow down. & Speak at a level that feels unnaturally slow for you and it will probably be spot on.

4.) Killing the audience with PowerPoint.

As a rule of thumb, if you are using PowerPoint, you should have one powerful slide for each key point, possibly a couple of slides to explain complex material in a simple fashion and no more. If you arrive at a presentation and the presenter’s first slide reads “Hello, welcome to my talk today about...” heed the house keeping rules and head for the fire exit!

Tip: Don’t forget as the presenter you are the focus – don’t hide behind IT.

5.) Assuming the Audience will be interested because of your Expertise.

Listening to a General speaking at a conference recently reminded me of this. He was talking to an audience both of military and of civilians. He presumed the audience was sufficiently interested in his material that he didn’t need to `hook` the audience. He forgot that as well as **informing** he also has a duty to **entertain**. There are 3 parts of the communication triangle; delivery, content and structure, and he ignored the delivery part. Good structure & content but poorly delivered. Delivery is not just how you say it, eg vocal projection but also how you mould the content and deliver it through the use of metaphors, anecdotes and analogies, so that the audience are more willing to listen and learn because you have made it interesting.

Tip: Develop a story or analogy to bring the main parts of your speech or presentation to life.

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