

# THE FIVE WORST MISTAKES SPEAKERS REGULARLY MAKE

## 1. LEAVING THE AUDIENCE WANTING LESS.

When you have finished speaking the correct reaction from the audience is for them to be nodding, with a slight smile and thinking “yes, I’d love to hear some more”. However so often the audience is sitting there, nodding off with a slight scowl, 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 AND LEAVE THE AUDIENCE ON A HIGH.**

## 2. LOSING EYE CONTACT.

We always say at SpeakersBank that “if you lose the 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. However in Western culture it is a mark of respect **and** of confidence. So if you find this difficult when speaking or presenting in public, then practice in one-to-one situations and 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 with individuals.

**TIP. REMEMBER MENTALLY BREAK THE ROOM INTO 4 QUADRANTS AND THEN YOU CAN “SCAN” THESE DIFFERENT SECTIONS OF THE AUDIENCE.**

## 3. SPEAKING TOO FAST.

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.**

#### **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 A PRESENTER YOU ARE THE FOCUS NOT A MACHINE.**

#### **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, good content but poorly delivered. Delivery is not just how you say it, i.e. vocal projection etc. but also how you mould the content and deliver that through the use of metaphors, anecdotes, analogies and similes so that the audience are more willing to listen and take in it because you have made it interesting.

**TIP. DEVELOP A STORY OR ANALOGY TO BRING THE MAIN PARTS OF YOUR SPEECH AND PRESENTATION TO LIFE.**