

ASPECTS OF PROPER SPEECH DELIVERY IN PUBLIC SPEAKING

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ABSTRACT

Public speaking skills are considered valuable in today's competitive environment. Most poor presenting is the result of bad habits such as not making eye contact with the audience or muttering to oneself instead of speaking clearly. The speaker may not even realise that they are doing these things. Therefore, it is important to assess the quality of one's speech with the help of a friend in order to be aware of the mistakes committed when delivering a speech. Based on parameters such as voice, pace, clarity and modulation one can assess the quality of the speech delivered and can improvise in the problematic areas. Proper utilization of speaking situations and tools used while speaking can help in the rendering of a proper speech and communication of the message clearly to the audience. Most aspects of communication can be improved rapidly with practice.

KEYWORDS: Public Speaking Skills, Voice, Pace, Clarity, Modulation, Speaking Situations and Tools

INTRODUCTION

Enhancing your ability to speak in front of an audience is one of the greatest benefits that one can achieve through time. Given appropriate practise one could speak effectively in a range of situations and also in front of audiences of varying backgrounds. Practise will also help to gain expertise which is essential for your future endeavours.

Transferable skills are the most talked about in recent times. Among these set of skills, public speaking skills is even more valuable because the ability to speak well, persuade or influence an audience is a major asset that one can cherish all throughout his or her life. Most often people are worried about speaking in public or in front of an audience because of nervousness and a feeling of vulnerability at the very first sight of a huge crowd of people waiting to listen to you. It is a very natural reaction though, and there is absolutely no need to worry about. As a matter of fact, excellent speakers also become nervous at the prospect of speaking. But this by itself can be a great advantage once you have made a presentation.

You will gain enormous confidence which would encourage you to make an even better presentation the next time. Your newfound confidence will also influence your other areas of work too. Lecturers have commented that most often, students after their completion of their presentation for the first time become more interactive in class, readily take up challenges, become more organised and work efficiently. Simple tips will help you to improve your public speaking skills not just as part of your coursework or in your leisure time, whether you decide to become a representative of a company or just put across a point in a social meeting. The speaking situations and the tools used as one speaks are discussed in detail in this article.

Using Your Voice

Voice is an essential component while delivering a speech. Here is a checklist that can assess the voice of a person. It will also help to improve on certain aspects that the person is weak in.

Ask these questions:

- Is my voice too loud?
- Is my voice too soft?
- Do I speak very slowly?
- Do I speak quickly?
- Is there monotony in my voice?
- Do I articulate clearly?
- Do I mutter to myself?
- Does my accent cause any difficulty to my audience?
- Do I run out of breath and gasp for air when I speak?

Let us start with the first and second questions. It is interesting to know that a 'yes' to the first question is very rare. While loud voices aren't uncommon, voices that are too loud for a particular setting or circumstances in which they are to be used may sound unusual. The owner of such a voice is likely to be aware of the problem.

Loud Voice

Possession of a naturally loud voice is obviously an added advantage as people are going to hear the message. It is easier to assert oneself with a loud voice. But care should be taken not to trample on other people's ideas if they are different from yours. While working as a part of a team or group, it is always best to try to listen to the views of others before giving our own suggestions. And also try to start by saying something friendly such as "I really like what you are saying, but perhaps..." rather than going for a straight disagreement.

Adjusting the volume and tone of one's voice depending upon the space in which they are going to deliver the speech should be done. If it is a large auditorium or hall, then ask a friend to sit at the back. Initially speak naturally and check if you can be heard then try decreasing or increasing the volume slightly as long as your friend can hear you comfortably from the back of the room. People can absorb sound and therefore the speaker must be a little louder when the hall or the auditorium is full than when the hall is empty. There is only a very minute difference and one must not exaggerate. This may take some time but you are setting up the good habit of adjusting your volume in accordance with the venue.

Speaking in a small space such as a room requires adjustment of volume and tone of the speaker's voice in accordance with the environment. Speaking more softly with more pauses and also watching out for the reactions of the audiences is needed. If the audience tend to move away or sit right back in their seats, it is a clear indication that the speaker may be overwhelming them with his/her loud voice. In such a case, it is essential to lower the pitch of voice.

Avoid raising the pitch and shouting as it can harm the voice and also make the listener uncomfortable.

Soft Voice

People most often tend to have very feeble and soft voices that make it difficult for people to hear them. Whereas, for another set of people, their voices go down when they have to speak in a formal occasion in front of an audience. A person with a soft voice must analyse oneself and know under which category they fall. Speaking in a soft tone could also reflect a low confidence level within the speaker. One must take steps to build up confidence- but trying too much at once is not advisable. Here are some ways by which confidence of speaking in public can be developed. It requires hard work and perseverance and therefore instant results cannot be expected. But this can ensure increased chances of success during the successive presentations.

- Joining in small group conversations, even if it is only to say a few words can be helpful.
- Agreeing with another speaker out loud by saying something like “What a good idea”. This way the other speaker would feel pleased and by hearing one’s own voice confidence can be gained.
- Indulging in group activity is also advisable.
- Being present in the room in which the presentation is to be done in advance is a good habit. A mini rehearsal can be carried out as the speaker will be able to analyse the dimensions of the room and decide the position he/she needs to take while presenting in order to be visible to the audience. This way the speaker can become more familiar with the room and alter the tone accordingly.
- Controlling nerves is necessary.
- Always praise yourself for any achievement, however small and encourage yourself.
- The better you feel, the more confident you will be and the more you will be able to project your voice.

When you rehearse before you speak to a real audience, imagine a friend sitting at the back of the room. Ignore all the other people who will be there and focus only on that one friend on giving your information. You have to throw your voice out loud so that your friend can hear and also keep your head high so that you can see your friend. Upon rehearsing this you will be setting up a good habit that will ensure you are audible to people and project your confidence.

PACE

Slow Speech

Under the pretext of talking slowly, sometimes people break up words that they want to say so that it seems to be pauses in places where they aren’t very helpful to the listeners. Try reading the passage in the way prescribed below.

Good Morning... to one... and all present...here...today we ...would like...to present...to you...what seems...to ...be the major...causes of the...general strike in...1926.

A good speaker uses pauses in order to break up the content into smaller and manageable chunks of information. But when the message is broken up too many times, the listener cannot make sense of a group of words. This is because pauses occur too often and also in unexpected places thereby losing its significance. Though the speaker may be talking

slowly, the effect would seem as though the individual words are rushed.

The correct way of putting the above passage across is.

Good morning to one and all present here...today we would like to present to you... what seem to be ...the major causes of the general strike in 1926.

Whatever be the pace of speaking, it is important that the flow of meaning should not be broken. The audience have only a single chance to hear what the speaker is trying to say and therefore it is very important to phrase the information to be conveyed in a way that will be easy for everyone to follow and understood as readily as possible.

Fast Speech

Most of the speakers, particularly, inexperienced ones are very nervous and tend to speak quickly. One of the major causes of this is the state of mind of the speaker. It is the approach towards the presentation or the speech that determines the pace of speech. If the approach of the speaker is like facing a terrible ordeal wishing it were over fast, then inevitably the subconscious mind will suggest to speak quickly. The overall effect that the audience would experience will be much less than satisfactory.

Another common problem is speaking from a full script and being tempted to read rather than to speak. Marking the notes would be helpful as the speaker will have a fair idea on when to pause. Looking at the audience and making eye contact with them is also helpful. The speaker also needs to be familiar with the content so that he/she won't lose place just because of pausing and looking at the audience. Practice is required in order to speak slowly. The recommended speed is about 100- 110 words a minute. Reducing the pace of speaking might seem odd at first, but upon perseverance it will soon become acceptable. One must adopt speaking slowly for the benefit of the audience.

CLARITY

Controlling volume and pace is an indication that some major parts involved in public speaking have been mastered. But one still needs to ensure that proper articulation of all important parts of the words and not swallowing sounds.

Voice Drop

Generally, we tend to drop our voices as we near the end of sentences, leaving the audience to guess what we said. The last few words become completely inaudible. It must be made sure that everything we say in front of an audience should be clearly heard by them.

Accents

Possession of a regional accent may sound weird sometimes. It is a good thing that we have accents because it would be simply boring if we all sounded the same. But the main problem with having accents is that at times it could make the listener's task difficult. The listener might not be able to comprehend the words spoken and eventually the exact meaning and essence of the speech remains undelivered to the listener.

Certain accents also result in swallowing of some sounds thereby making the words unclear. With the help of a dictionary, the exact pronunciation of the word should be studied and practiced repeatedly to avoid pronouncing it in the wrong way.

Usage of Mouth

While speaking, the mouth should move as though a toffee is being chewed. One of the most common reasons for improper articulation is the incomplete usage of the mouth. Hardly moving your lips will produce an incoherent sound, thereby making it very difficult for the audience to understand what one has to say. Exaggeration of the movements of the mouth will help in the production of a clear sound and also proper pronunciation of the words. It may feel weird and unnatural at first, but this will help the listeners in a great way.

VOICE MODULATION

A speaker has interesting information, but one of the common reasons for boredom during speech is the monotony maintained by the speaker in speed and volume, causing the listeners to feel drowsy. If one has to capture the attention of the audience, variation in the rhythms of speech is must.

Voice Rhythms

Very few people are lucky enough to have been born with voices that are flexible, lively and can very clearly reflect their emotions and state of mind. But most others have voices that sound monotonous no matter how exciting and interesting the subject of discussion is. One must ensure that his/her voice sounds interesting, not just to make it easier to listen to but also to convey to the audience how their approach towards the topic should be.

Practicing a few simple tips would help you modulate your voice and establish a lively conversation. On approaching a group of friends in order to tell them exciting news, instinctively raising one's voice will automatically attract attention towards what he/she wants to say. Continuing to speak in a way that would reflect the excitement along with emphasizing on the words and eloquent pauses would help in conveying the message in a better way.

While giving directions make sure to speak much slowly, pause appropriately and observe if the audience are able to understand what is being said. The same kind of variety is essential while talking to an audience also. Start slowly giving emphasis to your topic. Stressing on the key words is essential.

While giving complex information, perhaps technical details, slow down, pause and repeat the key details. Avoid overwhelming the audience by speaking too fast. Asking a few questions to the audience now and then would ensure their understanding about the topic being discussed. And after giving them enough time to think, supply the answer yourself.

Every sentence/phrase in a speech will not be of equal importance; some details are trivial and some of major concern. The audience will have to know what matters the most and the manner in which the speaker uses his/her voice will tell them. While talking of matters that are important, it is essential to slow down, pause for a moment and be louder and emphatic than before. The tone of the voice itself will be a clear indication that it is an important statement. Once the key fact being said, the volume must be lowered just a little such that the audience would realise that the speaker has moved on to the next point and the current point being discussed is of lesser importance.

Marking scripts or notes will make it easier to remember where to emphasize. It is also helpful to realise that we naturally give emphasis to the first part of a sentence and what follows has a reduced stress and so appear to be less important.

PROBLEM PAUSES

Often a speaker tends to employ pauses at appropriate places. But there is also one more reason it happens; forgetting to say next. Forgetfulness is human nature and one can barely do anything to overcome this, especially in this context. It is not of serious nature or a matter to worry as it is bound to happen to almost all speakers occasionally. The notes prepared will come handy in such situations. Having a quick glance at your notes in silence is the best remedy. Though it may seem like its taking ages, in actual, this will take only a few minutes. This practice will enable to recollect the successive points. The golden rule is, not to let the audience know about any difficulties unless you have to, and in this case, you don't have to. Muttering 'er' or 'um' as a method of trying to fill the silence should be avoided as this will clearly tell the audience about the problem that has occurred and disrupted the flow of the speech.

Surprisingly, a little amount of silence will also help the audience as it gives them valuable time for listening, understanding and assimilating the various facts spoken about. As a speaker it is essential to have breathing time for yourself which will prevent you from running out of breath. Above all, sounding authoritative is important for a speaker. Improvising on these aspects of communication will help in becoming a good speaker.

CONCLUSIONS

Public speaking skills are considered valuable because the ability to speak well, persuade or influence an audience is a major asset that one can cherish all throughout his or her life time. Enhancing your ability to speak in front of an audience is a tough feat that one can achieve through time. Practise will help to gain expertise and excel in future endeavours. Therefore, persistent practice of the above mentioned exercises can ensure success in the long run.

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