

**“OH, NO, DO I REALLY HAVE TO GIVE THIS SPEECH? !”**  
**--How to Really Connect With Your Audience: Tips from the Pros--**

***“The mind is a wonderful thing. It starts working the minute you’re born and never stops until you get up to speak in public.” Anonymous***

Public speaking. It’s a term that evokes the strongest of emotions in most of us. By nature it can be enjoyable but to most it is uncomfortable if not unnerving. It comes naturally to very few. You’ve probably heard the old saying that it’s number one on the list of fears...ahead of insects, heights, and even the afterlife...and it’s still true today.

Chances are you are not terribly fearful. After all, you talk on a daily basis to your team, to recruits and their families, at clinics, and to your athletic administration. You will have millions of communications encounters during your career. But when it comes to that formal presentation a certain amount of anxiety is likely to set in. And even if you feel fairly confident you want to sharpen your skills. We at The Speaking Specialists have had the opportunity working with coaches at all levels for many years. So relax and breathe deeply--we are here to help.

***“I just picture everyone in their underwear, wearing black socks.” Dr. Frasier Crane on “Frasier”***

The biggest misconception about speechmaking is that everyone in the audience is watching you carefully waiting for you to mess up. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact they are glad that it’s you up there and not them. Sometimes it’s easy to lose sight of what you do as a coach. It may feel commonplace. “What can I possibly say that would be interesting?” Give yourself a lot of credit here: you’re in the sports world, which is fascinating to most people. They really do want to hear about you, your team, and your school. They want to be let into your circle. We’ll deal with that a little later. Right now you have to put your nerves in check.

Coaches often tell us that that it’s the number of people in the audience that prompts their discomfort. There’s something about a larger crowd that may bring on the anxiety. Another common dilemma we hear over and over again is that it takes about a minute to get ‘warmed up’, then everything is fine. Sort of like the Kentucky Derby. Except now you have to be in the lead from the start. So how can you really be ‘ready’ from the very first word?

Here is one effective technique that we actually use ourselves to gain confidence from the moment we step onto the dais and up to the podium. Despite your strong desire to do so, try not look at the audience in terms of numbers or as a large entity. Instead, before you even get up to speak scout out just one person in the group who look like they really want to be there. That person is smiling, nodding, encouraging. When you begin, speak look straight at that one person. This is really your personal psyche-up because you will be strong at the very beginning. Then you can begin to scan the room after ten to fifteen seconds when the confidence really sets in. Similarly make sure you are strong at the very end. Your final words are often what are most remembered.

***A fifth grade teacher asked the class to sum up the life of the great orator Socrates in four sentences. “ (1)Socrates lived a long time ago. (2) He was very intelligent (3) He gave very long speeches. (4) His friends poisoned him.”***

You’ve all been there---the introductions go on way too long, the introductions to the introductions go on even longer. The speakers themselves drone on, unaware of time or how the audience is reacting. An effective presentation is not about loading up with a lot of facts and figures and statistics and going on and on and on. We like to say there is a very technical term for this: it’s called *rambling*. And too many speechmakers take this incorrect approach. They forget all about the audience.

We are big fans of what we like to call ‘economy or words’, or ‘fewer words, better words’. Think about the Gettysburg Address, which has forever changed the approach to modern speechmaking. It was a time when speeches went on and on (sound familiar?). In fact, the orator who proceeded President Lincoln spoke for what seemed like hours, to the point where people were fainting from exhaustion, causing Lincoln himself to doubt whether he could be effective with his remarks—less than 300 words.

There are also a lot of myths about the Address. For instance, Lincoln didn’t write it on the back of a napkin on the train. He did take the time to prepare, in this case edit himself for brevity. And he didn’t even have a great booming voice like they always portray in the movies. In fact he had a kind of nasally twang which was very unspeaker-like. You’re bound to sound a lot better!

Two lessons here: First, be aware of your vocal delivery. Most of us don’t like our voices, when in fact they sound perfectly fine to the audience. Beware of what we call “tailing off” at the ends of sentences. It’s a common challenge to make sure you are strong at the end, which is more appealing to and compelling for the audience. Using physical animation will greatly aid your voice. Studies show that voice and body work together & account for more than 90% of the impact on the audience.

Secondly, think about how you prepare your remarks. Rather than loading up with a lot of facts and figures and statistics and writing everything down, tell your stories. Make some notes to yourself as prompts. The audience will be charmed by even the simplest anecdote: When the bus broke down, the twins who you can't tell apart, the international player's quest to adapt to American life, the VIP who came to visit the team, how a particular event or occurrence affected the team. This is the most important element and one which you really do know by heart: personalization. It's what the audience will relate to and remember. That includes using your players names and hometowns. It shows you really care about them. And there is no need to go on too long. As we like to remind everyone: ***"More is not better. More is just....more."***

So in conclusion(everyone's three favorite words): Be confident, be passionate, and be brief. Our time is up. Thank you and have a great season and an even greater speech.

*--Sue Castorino & Randy Minkoff are The Speaking Specialists, providing speech coaching and contemporary media training to collegiate and professional teams. They also serve on the faculty of Loyola University Chicago School of Communication. They have delivered thousands of presentations and are proud to say that no one in the audience has fallen asleep yet. They can be reached at [www.speakingspecialists.com](http://www.speakingspecialists.com).*