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THE LITTLE BOOK OF

PUBLIC SPEAKING & PRESENTING

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01 ROLL UP!
02 THE BIG THREE
03 THE AUDIENCE
04 YOU: THE PRESENTER
05 GOOD PRESENTERS
06 THE PRESENTATION
07 HUMOUR
08 IDEAS
09 PITCHING
10 MORE ABOUT PITCHING
11 SLIGHTLY MORE ABOUT PITCHING
12 PRESENTING VIRTUALLY
13 SIT OR STAND?
14 REHEARSE AND PRACTICE
15 COMPOSE
16 PRACTICAL STUFF
17 BEFORE YOU GO UP THERE
18 WALKING UP THERE
19 POWERPOINT
20 DURING
21 IT'S ALL OVER



01

ROLL UP!

List a load of things you'd really prefer not to do, and I bet 'standing up and speaking in public' is right up there and rightly so: it's a stupid thing to do.

There are, however, people like me, that love it so much they choose to earn a living doing it. I speak as someone who was painfully shy at school and the thought of standing in front of anyone and speaking held as much appeal as it does to most.

Years later and with lots of practice and experience, I now deliver training, host award ceremonies, deliver after-dinner speeches and speak at conferences attended by hundreds of people.

This booklet provides you with some tips, hints and advice on how to get to a point where you can make a decent fist and perhaps even go on to enjoy speaking in public, because once you deliver a speech or presentation your audience love, you'll be hooked.

THE BIG THREE

When it comes to any form of public speaking, whether that be pitching, presenting or delivering a speech at a family occasion, there are 3 things you must consider:

Them: Your audience.
You: The presenter.
It: The presentation (speech).





WHO'S OUT THERE?

Who? What age? Sex? Knowledge, background, qualifications?

What? What do they expect? What have they come to hear? What reaction do you want from them – laughter, contemplation, action, thoughtful reflection, tears, elation, or a kick up the backside?

Why? Why are you delivering this? Why have you been chosen? Why this day, at this time, in this arena?

When? Time of day, day of the week, sequence relative to other speakers, time of year?

Where? What town or city? Venue – class room, boardroom, lecture theatre, room layout, with or without a lectern, on a stage?

THE AUDIENCE

Don't even think about putting finger to keyboard until you have given thought to the people who'll hear it. Your audience dictates what you deliver and how you deliver it.

When it comes to presentations one size does not fit all.

I have referred to the audience as 'your' audience because that's how I want you to regard it: it's yours. You have a responsibility to your audience. It looks to you for guidance, authority and direction. Audiences are like dogs: they can detect weakness a mile away. Sure, they won't bite or even snarl; they'll just ignore you. You can lose an audience in seconds and never get them back, no matter how hard you try. Consider the who, what, why, when and where because once you have the answers to these you will be a lot closer to 'how'.

Glean as much information about the audience as you can. Understanding the kinds of people you have in front of you will give you a steer what will make an emotional connection with them.



WATCHING GRASS GROW

Avoid this by using pictures, video, music, analogy and metaphor. Stories are superb. References to personal experience breathe life into a presentation and allow the audience to see that you are like them. You need to make an emotional connection!

04

YOU: THE PRESENTER

The people in your audience have either chosen to hear you speak because they believe you can add value to cold, dry information or are there at your invitation, in which case they are under the impression you think it's worth their while. Either way, you have a duty and a responsibility towards them.

Reading out loud to a room full of people who can already read is insulting and a waste of their time. Next time you are preparing for a speech, consider the combined hourly rate of everyone in the room.

Aristotle understood a speech has to contain 3 elements:
Ethos is to demonstrate to your audience you are credible and worth listening to. You achieve this by using their language.
Logos refers to convincing your audience using logical argument.
Pathos is all about appealing to the emotions of your audience.

The most important of these 3 is by far and away Pathos! It makes up 65% of a persuasive and enlightening speech. Logic/Logos represents 25% and ethos, your credibility, a mere 10%.

All of which means your speech needs to be engaging. You need to stand out from all the other 'noise' out there, to move people, to inspire, to provoke comment and discussion, to enliven, to motivate, to cause a stir, to wake people from a slumber, to stand up and shout and be heard above the great wave of mediocre greyness inflicted upon us every day.



EVERYTHING SHOULD BE MADE AS SIMPLE AS POSSIBLE, BUT NO SIMPLER”

Albert Einstein

GOOD PRESENTERS

Good presenters smile, make eye contact, have a passion for their subject, are enthusiastic are creative, spontaneous, illuminating, communicate with their entire body, move about, pause, use pitch, timbre and pace and are true to themselves and allow their personality to bring their subject to life.

Do not simply regurgitate everything you know about a subject. The audience is looking to you to explain matters in a way that they ‘get’. If you are just going to tell them all that you know, save them the misery of wasting 3-hours of their lives and point them in the direction of a textbook they can read in their own time.

Sometimes, no, virtually always, less is so much more.



THE PRESENTATION

Your speech needs to be engaging. You need to be remembered, to stand out from all the other ‘noise’ out there, to move people, to inspire, to provoke comment and discussion, to enliven, to motivate, to cause a stir, to wake people from a slumber, to stand up and shout and be heard above the great wave of mediocre greyness that is inflicted upon us every day.

You need to make a connection.

Use pictures, video, music, analogy and metaphor. Stories are superb. References to personal experience breathe life into a presentation and allow the audience to see that you are like them.

Careful with the tickling stick.



07

HUMOUR

Business people can earn mega bucks because of the wealth they create. But it's entertainers who we, the public make millionaires. They entertain us, whether they be actors, sports personalities or comedians. We particularly value the latter for no other reason other their ability to make us laugh. We attach and awful lot of weight to that skill.

You can make people laugh when you're in the office or out with your mates or at home with the family. Sure, you may not have them in stitches all of the time but in my experience most people can be quite funny.

When speaking, you need to let the more relaxed, humorous side of your personality come to the fore because it is the single most powerful way of making a connection with your audience.

Embrace humour. Use it to relax you and your audience but make sure it's always appropriate and NEVER tell a joke unless it's the most inoffensive, bland one you've ever heard.

START NOW!



08

IDEAS

Hoover up ideas/comments/thoughts/quotes/stories.

It was whilst taking a break from work and walking through college gardens that Sir Isaac Newton came upon the idea of gravity.

No one ever got a creative idea whilst sitting at a computer.

When faced with putting together a presentation or speech - assuming you have a few days to prepare - make time to get out of the office, wander round the street, sit on a bench or grab a drink and sit staring out of the window of a coffee shop watching the world go by. Take a bit of paper and a pen with you to jot down ideas as they come - no matter how absurd.

You might not consider yourself creative but have faith. You were once, when you were a little kid. I bet you had an amazing imagination and drew, painted and wrote about all kinds of weird stuff. Well, that's still in there, it's just that many of us lose that side of our personality when we become adults and enter the world of work.

Once you do tap in to the creative stuff, it's like turning on a tap: you'll be amazed at how much you come up with.



09

PITCHING

Pitching is selling whilst standing up.

The only thing you have to do is: Give them a reason to buy!

You'll know this is the case, if you've ever interviewed people for a job. The candidate looks good on paper, you ask a few questions so you can assess the depth and breadth of their knowledge but what you are really trying to get a feel for is whether they'd be a decent person to have in the team. Well, that's exactly what an organisation is doing when it invites you in to pitch: do they like you or not. And even if you are the smartest, most experienced, cleverest team in the country, if they think it'd be a pain working with you, you don't get the business.

Go through the same process as I've outlined for putting together a presentation: the same rules apply.

Do follow instructions. If they say they only want to see 3 people in a pitch team, don't send four. Don't even phone them before hand and ask them if it's alright if you send four because even if they agree it'll piss them off. (I know of a law firm that did just that. They didn't win the work and the client told them it had been one of the reasons they'd awarded the contract to a competitor).



10

MORE ABOUT PITCHING

Think about what all your competitors are likely to say during their pitch and then do something different. Example - virtually every law firm in the world describes itself thus:

"We are full-service, commercially-focused, partner-led with strength and depth in key sector areas, delivering tailored solutions and 'real-world' advice to a range of clients with whom we work closely. We are fun to work with and not like other law firms."

If you are a member of a group of directors trying to decide between 4 law firms pitching for your business and you hear this for the fourth time in the same day, not only do you lose the will to live but you have absolutely no way of differentiating between competing firms. If you are pitching, it is incumbent on you to ensure you stand out. In other words, give these people a reason to choose you!

Play to your strengths. You have 40 minutes allotted for your pitch. There are 4 people in your team. They all speak for 10 minutes; yes? No! They don't! Pitches aren't socialist utopias; they are meritocracies. If one of the team is not a confident speaker, don't take them! If he's the specialist, only let him answer the technical questions: briefly!

Your best speaker should probably open, bring together, and close the pitch.

When other members of the team have done their bit, it is important they remain engaged in the pitch and don 't just stare at their notes thinking 'thank God my part is over'. They should be making eye contact with the panel and looking at whomever is speaking in their team, nodding, and using facial expression to indicate that they agree with what is being said.



11

SLIGHTLY MORE ABOUT PITCHING

Convey your enthusiasm. Before getting in to the technical reasons why a panel should plump for your firm over a competitor, consider why you work for the firm you do. What makes you get up in the morning and go in to the office? Why did you choose this firm? What is it you like about the people you work with?

Don't simply trot out what's in your corporate blurb or your mission statement (should you happen to be one of the few who can remember theirs). What I'm referring to is the emotional, gut feeling stuff. It's really important this comes across to those you are pitching to because if you can't get passionate about why you work at a place, why on earth should they have enough enthusiasm to retain your services.



12

PRESENTING VIRTUALLY

As with all presentations: it's all about your audience.

This means, that whilst it would be far more convenient for you to be seated, you should, with the occasional exception, stand, so your audience sees more of you, particularly your hands, which convey so more of the unspoken message.

Raise your P.C., lap-top or Mac up, so you can stand and look directly into the camera - which you MUST do for virtually the entirety of your presentation.

If possible, be facing a window and always have an additional light source, preferably a proper 'ring-light', which is adjustable for height, and angle, and tone/brightness.

Background - allow them to see where you are presenting from. There is already enough sensory information missing when presenting virtually, why add to the viewers' discomfort by erecting a false or blurred background!

The ability to see the environment in which you are presenting, puts you in context and often engenders a little bit of small talk between you and your audience prior to the presentation.

Slides - use them but be sure to 'stop sharing' when able, so they see more of you!

SIT OR STAND?

When it comes to judging a speaker's attitude or feelings towards what they are saying, it was a guy by the name of Albert Mehrabian, who, in 1971, discovered the listener will look to their body language first (55%), the speed, pitch, tone and pace of what they say, second (38%) and the actual words (7%), last. This makes what you are doing with your body really quite important.

It has become the habit for many people delivering a pitch, to sit down throughout the process. I'm told, by those that adopt such an approach, remaining seated is supposed to indicate to the prospective client 'we are on the same level', 'we are friendly' that 'we are part of your team'.

Well guess what: you're not. They are not hiring you to be their mate, to blow the froth of a couple of cold ones on a Friday night. They are looking for professional advisors, a commercial partner, an expertise they don't have.

By all means be friendly, engaging, enthusiastic and energetic but don't think that comes from sitting down throughout a pitch.

Standing up at points through the pitch gives you gravitas, allows you to highlight an important point, acts as a sign post to your audience you are about to draw their attention to something that matters.

Spontaneity

The other reason standing up is good is because it demonstrates a great deal of confidence and knowledge of your subject, without even having to open your mouth.

It also helps keep your audience engaged. The ability to be spontaneous is one of the things that will set you apart from all the other people who are boring their audience to tears reading from slides.





14

REHEARSE AND PRACTICE

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?"

Some people like to rehearse whilst looking at themselves in a mirror. I'm not one of them because it puts me off. And since I will not be staring at myself when I deliver it for real, there seems little point.

DO, however, imagine yourself delivering it to your audience. Do visualise them sitting there, smiling, laughing, intrigued etc - depending on what reaction you seek.

Speaking your words out loud will help embed words and phrases in your mind but what you'll also find is new ideas come to you as do alternative ways of expressing certain things, so always make sure you have a pen and paper with you when you're practicing.

The more you rehearse the better you get. Is it possible to rehearse too much? I reckon it is. I get to a point where I think; "If I don't know this by now, it's too bad. Let me just get up there and deliver it!"

Lock yourself in a room where you won't be disturbed and start talking. Set a timer or take a look at your watch. You don 't need to speak an entire 45-minute speech but you do want to get the first and final 5 minutes sorted.

COMPOSE

Confession time: About 20 minutes prior to delivering my speech I will slope off to a quiet room or, if none is available, a loo for people with a disability or for baby changing. These are quiet, private and provide enough room to move about and rehearse at least the opening 5 minutes.

You could try this in a regular loo but I reckon the people in the next cubicle might be a tad alarmed if they hear you clearing you throat and kicking things off with; "Good afternoon ladies and gentleman, what a pleasure it is to be here today ".



Leave the chocolate teapot.



16

PRACTICAL STUFF

No matter how many times you do it, you'll always be nervous before you start speaking so you need to ensure all the practical stuff is in place. This is not an exhaustive list, simply a guide and a list of the stuff I like to have close to hand:

Your notes/prompt sheet*
A pen
A watch/clock
A packet of those little tissues (attend to nose issues/spillage of liquid)
A glass or bottle of water (depending on how long you're speaking)

* Notes. This is NOT a script (unless you have been asked to read from one) these are simply one-line prompts or your 'memory wheel'. I deliver stuff I've delivered hundreds of times but I ALWAYS do a little bit of preparation before hand and jot down a few points I know I must cover during my speech. Sometimes I use these and sometimes I don't but having them there gives me a warm cosy feeling.

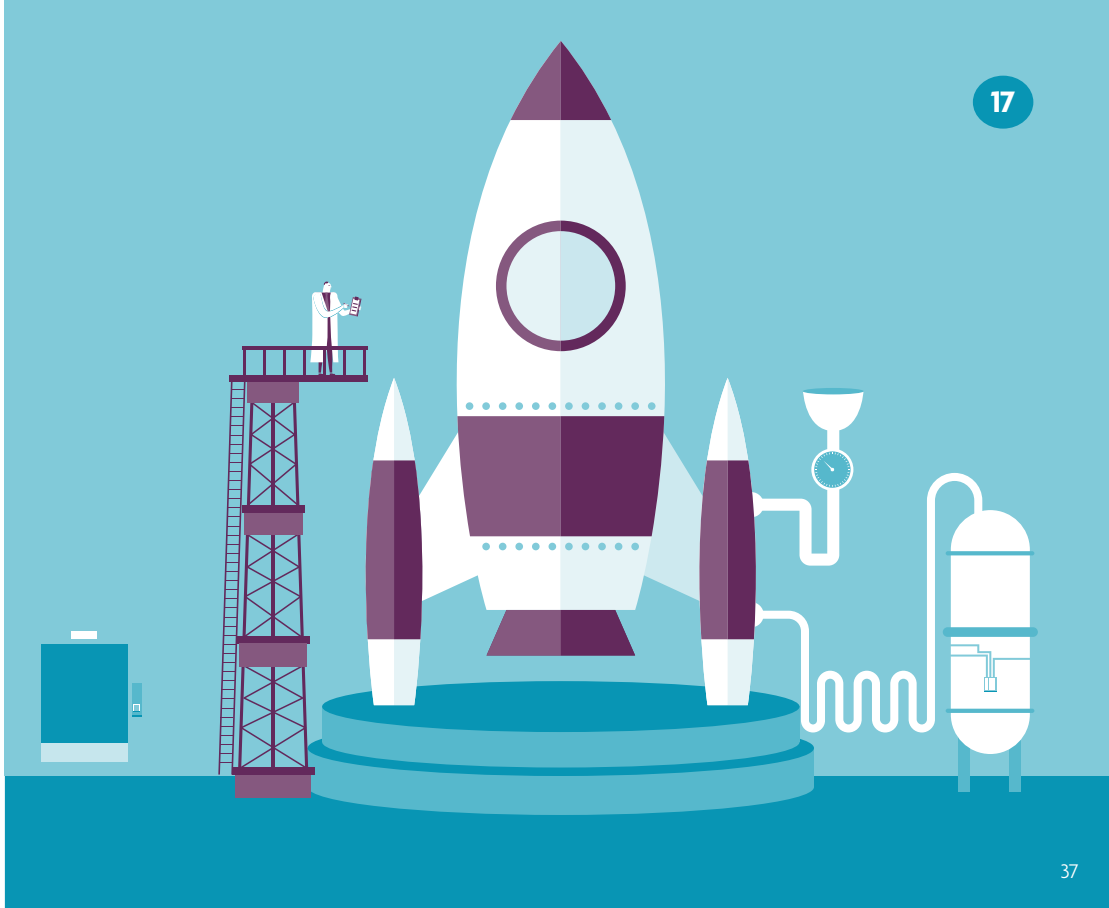
If you do have a script, make sure you receive it with plenty of time before you speak. Read it through as many times as you can. Make sure you get a sense of the 'flow' of it and check up on pronunciations. As long as it doesn't alter the meaning, change sentence order if that improves the flow. Put in your ad-libs. You will by the very nature of ad -libs, add them when you deliver it for real. but you should have some prepared as well.

BEFORE YOU GO UP THERE

If you can get to the venue early, then do so. Take a look around. If there is a stage, get up on it and walk about. Get a sense of the space you will be working in. Imagine the audience in front of you. How does the lectern feel? Is it solid or transparent, will people be able to see your lower body or your feet? Once you've done that, walk out in to the room and stand or sit in various positions in which you audience will be. Take a look at the 'stage' from their perspective. What will they see when you are up there?

Will you need a microphone and if so, do you have a choice? If you do, always go for the lapel mike – a tiny one that clips on to your clothes. If you have one of these it allows you to move about the stage and since 55% of the message you convey is through your body, that's pretty important.

A hand mike is better than one fixed to the lectern but it still limits what you can do with your hands. If you reckon you can dispense with a microphone altogether then so much the better: Being able to 'fill' a room with your voice, demonstrates confidence and that you're in command.





18

WALKING UP THERE

Once you are up there you have a very short time to make an impact. You will be nervous, so accept it and relish it: Too laid back and you are heading for a fall.

Walk slowly and deliberately. This will allow you to gather your thoughts. It also conveys an air of confidence & tells your audience you are confident and in control. (Even if you don't feel it).

Once you are standing where you want to be, pause and look at your audience. Take them in. Make eye contact with individual members and say to yourself as you begin to scan the room; "Right! You are going to listen to me. You're my audience. I'm the expert, this is MY stage and I know what I'm talking about. As soon as I start speaking, you're going to shut up and listen!"

If you think this sounds daft and you're not comfy with it, then ditch it and find something that does work for you. This is what I say to myself and it works for me and gets me geared up and ready to go and that's essential when 800 expectant people are looking at me.

Be under no illusion, you have a matter of seconds to stamp your authority on your audience. They are looking for direction and want you to be good and confident. As soon as they realise you know what you're doing, they will relax, you'll sense this and this, in turn will make you relax.



You don't need them.

POWERPOINT

Less is more. The vast majority of people use PowerPoint the way a drunk makes use of a lamp post: not so much for illumination but rather as something to lean on.

If a slide is in there for you rather than your audience; get rid of it. PowerPoint is great for pictures, video and graphics and graphs but utterly pants for words.

If you do use any of the above, make sure they are decipherable.

Prepare your speech/pitch and then once done, decide which parts of it would benefit from being highlighted using a slide.

The great orators do not use PowerPoint. Imagine Winston Churchill mobilising a nation with, "we will fight them on the beaches..." using PowerPoint!



Handling hiccups.

20

DURING

If you make a mistake or slip-up during your speech; chances are your audience will not notice. If they do, because it's glaringly obvious what you've done, simply acknowledge it.

There's nothing worse than seeing a speaker make a mistake and then try and cover it up or gloss over it, when they know that we know they have made an error.

It's been my experience audiences are actually very forgiving and kind – even comedy audiences on a drunken Saturday night. Most of us appreciate just how nerve-wracking it is in the spotlight and are willing the speaker to succeed. If you forget your place during your presentation just ask your audience to remind you where you were up to. They will and what's more you'll earn their respect for having been no more than a fallible human being: just like them.



IT'S ALL OVER

Once it's all over, go and ask people whose opinion you trust what they thought of your effort. Don't ask those that will give you platitudes. It's good, honest feedback you seek because you can learn from it. What went right, what worked and what did they like? What didn't go down so well? Where there any 'dead' parts of your speech?

There is only one way to get better at speaking in public and that's by doing it – a lot and then evaluating it every single time.

Tommy Cooper said: "I suppose what I'm really striving for in everything I do is simplicity and that's the hardest thing to achieve."

RGT

REALLY GREAT TRAINING

This booklet is designed to be a handy little reminder of the main aspects of stuff covered during the presentation skills course, which is why I dish them out at the end.

And whilst it's as small, portable and easy to handle as a puppy, it's not designed to be the only thing you ever read as part of improving your public speaking skills. On the other hand, it will be happy stored in your desk drawer, whereas puppies won't.

There are loads of books together with a deluge of stuff on the internet that'll help, so seek them out but above all, practice speaking to groups of people! There are many ways to keep in touch with me but here are the ones people seem to like best:

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