

How to act on stage

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Conclusion

- Relax counting to ten. Look at your friends.
- The opening phrase may be something to create a good mood or a question or something controversial.
- Continue with a quick overview.

- Use flash cards to assist your memory.
- Ask a lot of questions. Some questions you may answer yourself.

- Let your friends have a chance to figure out what you are saying by making a pause at all commas and full stops.
- Pronounce important words, slowly and clearly.

- Make more gestures than you usually might.
- Look at your friends. Have they got your message?

- You may sum up with: The important issue was...

Why learning to speak is important

You will be presenting your work, your ideas, your results for the board, for a group of other employees in a meeting, for people from another company who may be buying or selling real estate, to the staff at the bank or you have to perform the "Thanks for the dinner" or the "Congratulations" speech or to give a lecture.

Mistakes made by beginners

The speaker starts with:

- Excuse me, I am a little bit late but...

- Sorry, I have forgotten the documents...

- How does this projector work? It usually works.

- One, two, three, do you hear me, one, two, one, two?

We have all been forced to listen to annoying speeches. Competent persons but too afraid about forgetting things, stand in front of you, their back towards you, reading line after line of small-font words off a Power Point presentation. He or she shows a balance sheet or a budget and says; “This might be difficult for you to see, but I will read it out for you.” A disaster! Avoid that kind of thing altogether.

You may remember your first speech in school. You were nervous for days beforehand. You did not concentrate on the speeches made by your classmates. You rushed up in front of everybody and immediately started to read from your written text very quickly, line after line. You paid no attention to commas, full stops, new paragraphs nor took the time to look at the audience. You made the speech in eight minutes. Not even the teacher reacted to the jokes you included.

You will never see students who have passed the Akelius MBA making a speech like this.

The art of speaking

In the last century a good speaker was similar to an agitator or a demagogue. He could perform a one man show on a stage in evangelical churches.

In the world of politicians we had the best type of prepared improvisations done by Churchill.

“I cannot promise you anything but blonde sweats, teasing” or something similar.

There are the rhetorical tricks repeating a phrase. Martin Luther King dreamed a lot
I had a dream....
I had a dream...
I had a dream...

The same man apparently liked vegetables when dreaming as he launched:
- Peas in our time.

There was a forerunner of extremely well-organized but almost crazy American political events – put on by Hitler in his very media-savvy Nazi organization.

There are speech writers inventing slogans or new words such as for Kennedy:
-I am a Hamburger.
And what did Kennedy said in Frankfurt?

From above you have also probably learned indirectly to avoid jokes.
We will not be focusing on big political events, or shows done by pop stars or the pope.

Relaxed ambiance

Today, messages making headlines are delivered in interviews with a relaxed background ambiance, the speaker sitting on a sofa in a studio styled like somebody's home. The best result will be achieved if the journalist asks hard questions and your answers are well prepared, using precise, rational terms, pronounced calmly – and not a hint of aggression.

These days, no one has the patience to listen to a one man show on TV. Some presidents or members of royalty try to make a half hour TV address to their people at New Year's Eve. But does anyone care? Fidel Castro amused primarily himself giving talks that took five hours.

Thus, you should try to create a relaxed ambiance including audience interaction. Make it sort of like chatting with your friends.

As a listener it is really boring if the speaker does not deviate from his/her manuscript. Try to pick up some points from your audience members. You may change the sequence of your points in your manuscript and thus obtain a lively discussion rather than simply giving a monologue.

Preparation

Essential facts

As usual with all work done at Akelius, the first question to ask oneself is: What is important? What is essential?

The essential for a speech to your colleagues at the university is that your colleagues get to know your subject. This is essential for future work there.

Go for the essential facts. Repeat facts.

What is the main message?

What other messages are important?

What facts need to be mentioned in this context?

A politician or pastor certainly knows his message, even if he is reluctant to discuss the details.

Questions

You will never impress a nice person of the opposite sex by giving him or her a brilliant speech detailing how well-educated, tall, handsome, well-trained and prosperous you are or aim to be. You would get a similar result as the CEOs in the 1990s who were great at describing an appealing vision. Your listeners will be attracted and engaged by their *own* actions – such as answering relevant questions. When selling an idea, such as to sell a piece of real estate or to make a proposal to the board, the most important thing is understanding which argument is the primary argument for the prospective buyer. So ask them.

Be ready to skip a part of your arguments or your speech as soon as you understand that your audience is not impressed.

You usually present the problem, the question, before presenting a fine solution.

Posing a question is the first priority in the art of rhetoric.

You will get your audience listening by posing questions.
Prepare questions.

Three

“We have three important issues,
number one...
number two...
number three...”

Interestingly enough, your audience will remember 3 arguments more readily than 2 or 4.

Professionals use flash cards

How do excellent teacher acts?

You can also gain experience by studying TV reporters.

Very often an entertainer or a reporter will use *flash cards* with the keywords on them.

Your documentation as an activation tool

Keep your audience from dozing off by letting them do something now and then. Get them to participate.

Supposing that you want to teach your students the key statistics used in income statements. You can prepare twenty questions or rather definitions on the document which you then hand out to the students. One typical question is:

“What is the acronym for Earnings before Income, Tax, Depreciation and Amortization?”

You discuss why and where these figures are helpful, state the name and then keep quiet while writing it out on the white board “EBITDA”.

One advantage with this method is that you do not need other notes.

You can do the same with multiple choice questions.

Opening words

Choose your opening words

to create a friendly atmosphere,,

to get the listeners to react via a question or a provocative statement,

to prepare for your treatment of the subject.

A rock star may start a show by asking the audience if they are feeling good. And the crowd will shout their approval with a loud "YEAH!" The same approach works at a football stadium but not for a lecturer or from a sofa in a TV studio. Try to create a relaxed and natural atmosphere.

I was visiting some twenty towns a year as a lecturer. There were usually about two hundred people in the audience. I generally opened the seminars with the words:

- This morning I took a half an hour for a lovely walk in the fresh air along the river. Now I understand why people live here. I was, of course, reminded of the famous history here with.....

Depending where I was, I would refer to "the river", "the beech" or "the center of town, or "the luscious green parks". Similarly, I would refer to a "famous athlete", a "well-known manufacturer" instead of "history"... or something else.

You demonstrate that you like the audience by demonstrating you have some familiarity with their home town. You establish some common ground.

Another method to open your speech is posing an active question to start things off:

- Do you know why certain affluent real estate companies have had to file chapter 11 because they did not understand cash flow?

Point at someone to elicit an answer or give a name. You have initiated interaction. This puts people on their toes. They will be somewhat anxious about not listening.

Continue with a provocative phrase:

- Today, I will prove that cash flow is more important than long-term profit.

Head directly for the main message

Board members and CEOs do not like to wait for your main issue. They want your proposal immediately. They know what information they want.

The main message might be: "A proposal to sell the Altona 38 in Hamburg for 4.4 percent."

In this case, they know where the real estate is located, so do not bother to describe the setting. Go directly for the main facts like the need for extra maintenance or poor liquidity. They will ask.

Using surprise and acting

Action. Due to TV and movies listeners are used to action.

Prepare something, which doesn't take too long. You might want to use gadgets, pictures or flamboyant gestures.

Use your hands and facial expression. Make it over the top. Don't worry. Any expansive gesture will look small from a

distance.

Whenever something is big, use both of your arms.

When you want to get rid of something, making a kicking motion or take a walk onstage. You will find out how effective these things can be.

Things to avoid

Do not try using jokes.

When you have listeners who have paid to hear you, you should not market your products.

Avoid mentioning your own company too often when absolutely needed.

You may have your own notes, but avoid Power Point for anything other than showing a diagram or picture.

Talk or write, but never simultaneously.

Rehearsal

Any big event has a mandatory rehearsal beforehand. Be sure to have your own rehearsal at home.

Emphasize the pronunciation of important words and make sure that you make a small pause where there is a comma, or a full stop.

Keep track of the time.

Onstage

Check equipment

Before entering the stage

- Test the microphone and the projectors,
- Hand out the relevant documents,
- Check available time and your watch.

Start with a pause and smile

To get everybody quiet in the auditorium and to relax, *count to ten* onstage before talking. If anyone continues talking, simply look at him/her until he/she stops talking. You take the control of the audience by using *silence* and displaying a *cheerful face*.

You need to demonstrate that you are a pleasant and friendly person. *Smile and nod* to various and sundry persons in the audience.

Opening words

You are there to entertain just like an artist would. Use your hands and your body.

Try to establish eye contact with the people sitting farther away in the back of the room. Address the opening sentences you have prepared to those people.

Has anyone received what you intended to deliver?

Pronounce important words slowly and clearly. Take your time to pronounce "r" and "s" sounds.

Write essential terms on the white board.

Try to communicate. *Use interaction.* You are not an old-fashioned preacher using frontal-approach, one-way communication.

Check to make sure that your listeners have understood. Look directly into a person's eyes asking
- Have you understood what I am saying?
Use different words to explain something if someone is having difficulty understanding.

Sum things up: my main argument was...

Repeat it very briefly, using just a few sentences.
And then you should thank your audience.

“Thank you very much for your attention”

Special for Akelius MBA Conferences

The essential is teaching your colleagues:

- a) the vocabulary/terminology in English
- b) how to use the information

So be sure to write a lot of the vocabulary on the white board and define them in your documentation. You may use questions or take a multiple-choice approach.

No need to be anxious

At the Akelius University you will have many opportunities to overcome the initial fear/ butterflies when speaking in English in front of other people. The teachers are here to help you to improve, not to make notes of how well you are performing currently. After the MBA year, your level of onstage performance and confidence will have improved significantly.