



OPINION ARTICLE

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# 5 Presentation Tips for Leaders Who Fear Speaking at Meetings or Conferences

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1 Comment

In my early years as a Front Office Manager I remember how confident I used to be at running a meeting while I sat down at the conference table with my staff all circled around me. I had my agendas all passed out as I led the discussion, ticking off the agenda items one by one with my staff actively participating throughout. My meetings went off without a hitch!



BUT – if I had to stand up in front of my staff (that I was totally comfortable with daily) I would crumble! I would perspire, forget what I had to say, I couldn't focus, I certainly couldn't make any decisions. I was mush. And GOD FORBID if I had to do this in front of my executive staff or at a conference session with my clients. I made it through those meetings.

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wanted to do to develop myself. I told her about my fear of public speaking and she sent me to a 40-hour professional [training course](#) to improve facilitation skills. This class really helped me "come out of my shell."

I learned that I truly loved speaking in front of others, and because I was able to master that skill, I developed an even deeper passion for training. I had always loved one-on-one training and now I felt that I could train large groups. I did this for 8 years as a department head manager for my brand's properties and whenever the opportunity arose I volunteered to serve on task forces for new property openings and conversions. Then I started working on Design and Development projects at our brand's Headquarters office in a job that required very little facilitation in my day-to-day role. Since I still sometimes got to deliver instructor-led training, to stay "fresh" with my facilitation skills I decided to join a public speaking group called Toastmasters International. I have been with Toastmasters now for almost 16 years and have completed the Advanced Communicator Gold- ACG and Advanced Leader Silver – ALS levels in the program.

Here are some tips that I have for you that I have learned along the way:

- Prepare in advance. I always make sure that I outline my speech/talking points and practice them a few times prior to the meeting or event. It's also a [good idea](#) to condense the outline after you have practiced it a few times into note cards that you can keep in your pocket to pull out if necessary when the big day arrives.
- If you don't have someone to critique you, practice in front of a mirror or do a video recording of yourself on your smartphone

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at an event. Use correct voice inflection by displaying a friendly tone and speak with sincerity. Vary your speaking rate to reflect the mood changes and to emphasize the key talking points of your speech.

- Make eye contact with your audience. Have you ever spoken to someone who didn't look at you? Well, looking straight at someone really grabs their attention and will get them to listen to you! After all isn't that what you want them to be doing?
- Use facial expressions and body language. Your audience will be more engaged in your speech if you show them reactions to what you are talking about with your facial expressions and body language. Liven it up and make the speech exciting for them. When compared to how you talk one-on-one, it might feel like an over-exaggeration, but this approach will certainly make it memorable for them and help your message "stick" afterwards.
- If you have an opportunity to tie in a personal story or a parable in some way, or to throw in humor that is appropriate DO SO! You might find those in attendance will [remember](#) the key message and theme of your story much longer than they will remember a bulleted list of talking points.

Speaking of stories, I hope that my own story of how I went from being overwhelmed by fear at the very thought of speaking in front of others to becoming a professional speaker and trainer will inspire my readers who may also have a fear of speaking in front of others. I also hope that these tips will be helpful to you in preparing for your next meeting or presentation. Oh, and if you are interested in that wonderful professional group I that has done wonders for my career, you can