

CORPORATE CONFIDENCE — AND — COMMUNICATION

**HOW TO CREATE AND CONFIDENTLY
DELIVER PRESENTATIONS**

ANDY O'SULLIVAN

Corporate Confidence and Communication

*How to Create and Confidently Deliver
Presentations*

Andy O'Sullivan

Beatrice

To whom I owe it all

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	Who is Andy O’Sullivan How He Will Help You. How to Save Your Pain.	11
Preface	Presentation, Pitch or Speech? Discovering the Definition. Knowing the Terms.	31
CHAPTER 1	Preparation Why You Need Corporate Confidence. Core Components of Your Presentation. Situations Where You Will Speak.	37
CHAPTER 2	Psych Changing Your Mindset, Changing Your Focus, Catching Success. Normality of Nervousness. Why We Ask Disempowering Questions. Potential of Imagination.	47

CHAPTER 3	Perception	81
	Why You?	
	How You are Perceived.	
	How to Start Preparing.	
	Deciding If It is For You.	
	Taking a Position that is	
	Against Your Personal Beliefs.	
	Who's Going to Be There.	
	Attendees, Roles and Views.	
CHAPTER 4	Plan	105
	Speech Strategy & Your End Result.	
	The Reason For Every Speech	
	You'll Ever Give.	
	The Impact of Speaking on	
	The Success You Achieve.	
	Where to Start.	
	The Most Important Sentence.	

CHAPTER 5	Partition (Part 1)	121
	Separating Your Speech into its Essential Elements. The Key Components Every Speech Must Have. Creating Your Speech Structure.	
CHAPTER 6	Partition (Part 2)	135
	Starting Your Speech. Snatching Attention. Making a Great First Impression. When Your Speech Starts. How to Stand Out.	
CHAPTER 7	Partition (Part 3)	155
	Avoiding the Common Mistakes. The Serial Position Effect. Ending Your Speech. Being Remembered.	

CHAPTER 8	Presence	169
	Speaking with Presence.	
	Delivering with Impact.	
	Maintaining Your Credibility.	
CHAPTER 9	P.R.O.M.P.T Presentations	193
	Speaking On The Spot.	
	Answering Questions Off The Cuff.	
	Formulating a Clear Answer.	
	Finishing Confidently.	
CHAPTER 10	Pitch	209
	Why Everyone Needs a Pitch.	
	The Importance of a Personal Pitch	
	Getting Known With Your	
	Professional Positioning Pitch.	
	The Essential 3 Pitch Components	
	About Andy O'Sullivan	223
	Acknowledgements	227
	References	231
	Bibliography	233

INTRODUCTION

Who is Andy O’Sullivan... and How You Can Now Benefit From All His Pain, Panic and Practice

You may have noticed that whenever there are young children around, they are always happy to play and perform in public.

They are happy to dance, sing, or play instruments in front of family, friends and neighbours.

They will happily do all these things without any fears or worries about getting embarrassed, looking silly or even being judged.

Then something happens to change us.

Something happens that causes us to change the way we see ourselves. This change now makes us worry about what others will think about us.

This change occurs somewhere between childhood and adulthood. It is a change that steals away all the natural confidence we all had when we were born and enjoyed throughout those early years of life.

Rather than feeling happy, relaxed and even excited to perform in front of others, grabbing every opportunity we could ever find, we are now fearful when standing and speaking.

These feelings of fear, panic and pending doom take over immediately we are faced with the ordeal of having to speak in public.

Just the thought of standing and speaking at a meeting that may be weeks away is enough to fill our bodies with all those feelings of dread and fear.

If the idea of speaking in public now fills us with all these unpleasant feelings, I am sure having to sing or dance in front of other people would for many now be a whole lot worse!

What Changed?

So what has happened to change things for us?

What is it that has changed us from feeling happy and confident when performing to now having all those negative feelings fill our bodies whenever we are in these situations?

You may have heard of the ‘fight or flight response’ we have whenever we are placed in a stressful situation, like delivering a pitch.

While this is likely to have played a part in my fear of public speaking, there was another factor that affected how I felt about standing in front of large groups with everyone looking at me.

A big part of my fear and, dare I even say, hatred of speaking in public was all down to my early education.

As I now look back, it is a pity that neither of the schools that I attended ever had a programme where they would help us to develop our communication skills and confidence.

These are the skills so critical to achieving success throughout our professional lives.

If anything, the way the schools operated was totally the opposite.

Punishment and Embarrassment

At my schools, public speaking was used as a punishment by many of my teachers.

If the teachers felt you or the class were misbehaving in any way, they would force us to read either our work or, even worse, from a textbook to the whole class.

As a young child, struggling to read in front of the class of thirty or so other children, I would naturally stumble or hesitate over some of the words.

This situation was more likely to occur if the words were new to me or in another language that I was learning at the time.

What was the result?

The whole class would immediately erupt into laughter, sometimes even pointing and making unpleasant comments.

I would be left standing there in front of the entire class feeling embarrassed, upset and very much alone.

Placing a child in this position was not a way to help build their confidence and self-esteem during those early formative years.

It was not the fault of all the other children in my class in the way they behaved towards me.

Nor was it mine when I did the same during their public reading sessions as they too stumbled over their words, sometimes silently standing there, red with embarrassment.

Haunting Memories

Throughout my school days, speaking or reading in public therefore became an experience to be feared and one to avoid at all costs.

When I meet up with some of my old school friends, we are still haunted by the experiences of those public reading punishments, decades later.

Does this make my fear of public speaking the fault of my teachers?

They were the ones who made the idea of speaking in public something to be feared, making us individually stand up in front of the whole class and read to everyone.

I used to think it was.

Reflecting to Forgive

Now, on reflection, I feel they would never genuinely do anything if they knew the effect it would have on us.

Little did they know the effect these regular humiliations would have on both my classmates and me as we grew up and became adults.

In many of the private schools here in the UK and other education systems around the world, they actively encourage and support public speaking.

Schools will have debating clubs and inter-school contests all aimed at developing their students' speaking skills.

Training in how to communicate and confidently speak in public is something I would love to see in every school, worldwide.

Adulthood

As a young adult, I would always hate being the centre of attention and therefore would work to ensure it was avoided at all costs.

This hatred had an immense effect on both my career and even whenever I was out socialising.

Many years ago, after starting a trainee job at a new company, I was always invited out for some after work drinks on Fridays.

In the bar with my new colleagues, we would often have other people from the department in which we worked join us.

These were people who I had never met or had only had a very brief conversation with.

Vividly I recall how the thought of having to stand there in front of everyone, with them all looking at me, totally scared me as I asked the straightforward question of what drink they would like.

Standing in front of the group, with them all staring at me, was public speaking and I hated it!

It was something that I wanted to avoid at all costs, so came up with an ingenious plan.

Whenever it came to buying a round of drinks (which I was delighted to do), I would always ask one of my close colleagues to get the drinks in and I would give them the money.

Easy!

On reflection, as I was never seen to buy any drinks, all the other people who joined us for those Friday drinks probably perceived me as being very tight with money.

My colleagues, on the other hand, must have been seen to be very generous.

Either way, getting my colleagues to take the orders and buy the drinks never helped me to overcome my fear of speaking in public.

Avoidance

Throughout my career, I carried on taking every opportunity possible to avoid being in the same situation of speaking in public.

This avoidance would often mean not participating in meetings where there were many attendees or feeling unable to voice my opinion to any proposals presented, even when I was against them.

Career Block

The lack of confidence to speak in public would affect my career as changing jobs and attending the inevitable interviews were all part of the process.

It would entail having to sit in the interview with people asking lots of questions while looking at me.

This was scary!

If an interview with one or two people scared me, the idea of a panel type process was entirely out of the question.

The thought of facing an interview panel scared me so much, I would avoid applying for any jobs where this was a known part of the process.

While trying to secure what I felt would be my ideal job, there could be other unexpected hurdles.

Once, having cruised through the interview process for what I felt was the perfect job, I hit a huge hurdle.

The company decided all of the shortlisted candidates would need to deliver a 3 to 5 minute presentation to the members of the department in which they would work if successful in their application.

I could not think of anything worse and immediately withdrew my application for the role.

Facing one or two people in an interview was a terrifying thought for me. The idea of a public presentation was just too much.

Achieving My Potential

It was some years later while working for an international bank that my fears of speaking up in public came to a head.

My management always perceived me to be a 'good worker', which I was, but something was missing. I wanted more.

Being ambitious, I naturally wanted to have more success in my career, to get promoted, to have a more substantial salary.

Continually, I kept seeing newer and less experienced colleagues climbing the corporate career ladder ahead of me.

What was it that they were doing to get this success?

Speaking and Saying Nothing New

These colleagues were the ones who were always actively participating in meetings.

You would find that they would always have an opinion to share in meetings, especially when senior management were present.

On most occasions, the views and ideas they shared were not even their own!

Sometimes all they would do is just repeat and rephrase what somebody else in the meeting had already stated.

Continually, these were the same people the management liked.

While I stayed in exactly the same role, never moving up the corporate career ladder, my colleagues who spoke up became the people who always got noticed, promoted and rewarded.

It became abundantly clear to me that, no matter how hard you work, no matter what hours you are putting in, working evenings and weekends, to stand any chance of getting success, you have to be seen and heard.

That is when it dawned on me! I had to improve my communication skills.

The Journey

As I started out on what was for me a long and tough journey to becoming a more confident public speaker and presenter, I was continually on the lookout for that 'magic pill'.

The one simple step or strategy that would quickly allow me always to feel confident whenever I needed to speak in public.

In my search for this 'magic pill', I started attending countless courses, workshops and seminars and reading all the books on public speaking that I could find.

There were also all of the online courses, articles and videos which I spent many, many hours devouring over my evenings and weekends.

You can find countless tips, tools and techniques on the internet.

They all seem to promise they will help us become better speakers, to have more confidence, to deal better with all those surprise speaking situations.

To the uninitiated, there is also a lot of, dare I say, 'rubbish' that is said about public speaking.

At best it is worthless, while at the worst, it will damage your confidence and along with it any chance you have of achieving success.

After wasting much time and money being given a false belief of instant confidence, having been taught techniques that are ridiculous, I came to what is an obvious conclusion.

There is no 'magic pill'.

Not one simple technique will give you the confidence and skills to allow you to deal with an awkward question, argumentative client or cope when things go terribly wrong.

It was after this realisation that I began what was to become a long and, at times, painful journey of growth.

A journey that would take me from being filled with panic, days before I was due to deliver a pitch or presentation.

Where I would spend days rehearsing my every word, only to deliver pitches and presentations that were seen as a 'major embarrassment'.

Not my words.

Those were the words of my manager at the time.

The very person that I had always been hoping to impress by speaking in public.

Not A Natural

You can probably guess, even as an adult, I was not a 'natural' public speaker, yet today that is precisely what everyone perceives me as being.

When people see me regularly delivering perfect pitches or presentations in large auditoriums, they tell me afterwards that I am a 'natural' and how easy it is for 'people like me'.

Those who see me delivering confident speeches and presentations, even off-the-cuff, have not witnessed or seen the pain and panic that got me into the position where I am today, regularly winning awards and recognition for all my continual achievements.

The journey I have been through over all these years was not pleasant or enjoyable, yet it has taught me a tremendous amount.

It has taught me what works, and most importantly what does not.

It is all this first-hand knowledge and experience that is now available for you in this book.

Lucky you!

You now get the benefit of all the pain, stress and upset that I went through, which will now ensure you become confident and competent as you now successfully create and deliver winning speeches, presentations and pitches with the tips in this book.

Enjoy the journey....

I will be here every step of the way.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "ANDY". The letters are bold and slightly slanted, with a casual, personal feel.

Andy O'Sullivan

Contact Andy:- **www.andy.chat/contact**

Key Points

Introduction

We are not the only ones who get scared of speaking in public.

In today's corporate world, being a 'good worker' does not bring career success.

Public speaking skills are essential to ensure you are able to share your opinions and views.

You need to be seen and heard to achieve your potential.

PREFACE

PRESENTATION, PITCH OR MAYBE EVEN A SPEECH

*Which Will You Deliver and If It Really
Matters to Your Success*

When speaking in public, are you giving a speech, presentation or pitch?

This question is one that usually occupies my clients as though they will need to adopt a specific approach to their creative process.

Some people think that a speech will only ever get delivered in more formal settings such as a wedding, whereas a presentation will be given in a business environment and a pitch to clients.

This definition seems to be dominant in the corporate environment when the speaker is also using a presentation program such as PowerPoint.

If this distinction between a speech and presentation is correct, I wonder where the keynote speeches we see being delivered at business conferences and other corporate events then fit into the definition.

The Oxford Dictionary (2016) offers this as its definition of a presentation: -

A speech or talk in which a new product, idea, or piece of work is shown and explained to an audience.

As you notice from this definition, there is no actual distinction between a speech or presentation.

I know from personal experience of working in the corporate world that most people will use 'presentation' to describe the act of speaking in public, whether this is to their colleagues, clients or those controlling their company.

There is also another word you see used to describe delivering a speech or presentation.

Those whose job involves visiting clients to deliver sales presentations will often describe the meeting as a 'pitch'.

A pitch is what the Oxford Dictionary (2016) defines as:-

A form of words used when trying to persuade someone to buy or accept something.

This definition may cause confusion as any speech or presentation you may give or hear can also be persuasive in purpose.

The speaker may not be trying to persuade us to buy from them, but they will still have created their speech with the aim of persuading us to do or believe something.

The speech may be by a manager sharing details of a new application that will shortly get installed on everyone's computer in the department.

Here you would still want to persuade those attending of the benefits of this application and how it will be of help to them in their role.

As you can see, the actual distinction between a speech, presentation or even pitch really is down to your personal preference, and the language used in your environment.

It is acceptable for you to use one term over the other, especially when this is the one most frequently used in your company or industry.

Each of the stages required to create a pitch, presentation or speech that connects with your audience and conveys your ideas while leaving an impression on those listening to you will be the same.

As there is no difference between the steps required, in this book I will use the words speech and presentation interchangeably.

Follow along, and by the end of this book, you will have all the tips, tools and techniques required to create a powerful pitch, presentation or speech.

Key Points

Presentation, Pitch or Maybe Even a Speech

Whether it is a presentation, pitch or speech, the aims are the same.

Use the term that best suits your environment.

This book uses the terms of both speech and presentation interchangeably as the processes covered are exactly the same.

CHAPTER 1

Preparation

Why You Now Need Corporate Confidence

In today's world, we are fortunate to have access to a whole wealth of information literally at our fingertips.

With our phone or laptop, we can access information that people could only once have dreamt of seeing.

With access to all this information, I am sure you will have seen some of the unlimited numbers of blog posts, books and videos available as you seek to develop your public speaking skills.

Many of these resources will contain valuable information that will be of help and assistance to you.

There are also those that provide information which is of, shall we say, a more dubious quality.

While reading, watching and learning from these sources and the many courses I had paid good money to attend, I realised that there was not a concise source of knowledge and information that would provide me with precisely what it takes to have success in the corporate world.

Everything read, and all the courses attended, came from the same stance.

The stance they take is that I would be delivering a speech from the front of a room with a PowerPoint presentation loaded onto the laptop, rows of seats in front of me and all those eyes staring back.

While this may be a reasonable assumption for many other people, it was not always going to be like this for me.

Sure, sometimes this would be precisely how I would deliver my speech.

There were, however, more times when the audience would be a lot smaller and the occasion far more informal.

Then there would be the many times during my corporate career where I would deliver a project update to my colleagues over a working lunch while seated at a table.

They would interrupt to ask questions, discuss and even disagree with what I had told them.

At other times, I would present a plan or proposal to a manager with only the two of us present at the meeting.

Then there were the many less formal interactions when I would have been delivering a short pitch on what it was I did in my role, career or was presently working on.

In all the cases, they each required me to create and deliver a speech of varying length with confidence and clarity that would stand up to scrutiny and detailed questioning.

The same skills required when standing up and speaking in front of a room full of people.

However, I could never find a reputable resource to show me precisely how to deliver these kinds of speeches.

The Birth of Corporate Confidence and Communication

The lack of a reputable resource forced me to learn the hard way and experience all the embarrassment that goes with doing it on your own.

This experience is the reason I have taken the time to create the influential Corporate Confidence and Communication System™.

A system that shows you how to: -

- Lose your presentation nerves.

- Feel confident in the moments before speaking in public.

- The correct way to create your speech.

- How to always impress your colleagues, clients and managers, even when speaking off the cuff in meetings, networking events or job interviews.

This is where the information in this book will help you, by ensuring you know how to prepare, create and deliver your speech, even if it only lasts thirty seconds.

Yep, even a thirty-second speech at say a networking event can make a difference to a successful outcome of that conversation.

The Corporate Confidence and Communication System™ has been taught by me and now used successfully by professionals at all levels of their career. Giving them those extra tools and skills to climb further up the corporate career ladder.

The core components of the Corporate Confidence and Communication System™ are: -

Psych - the importance of approaching your speech with the right mindset to achieve your success.

Perception - how you will be perceived as the speaker and how to prepare the core message of your presentation.

Plan - the purpose of creating your presentation and defining your end result.

Partition - partitioning your speech into its essential core elements.

Presence - speaking with stage presence and delivering with impact.

P.R.O.M.P.T presentations - speaking on the spot and off the cuff with confidence.

Pitch - getting known with your professional positioning pitch.

As you now learn how to follow and implement each of the components contained in the Corporate Confidence and Communication System™, you will see how your confidence, competence and career skyrocket.

Allowing you to speak in public to any size audience and people in all walks of life and all levels of seniority.

Key Points

Preparation

The skills to speak in public with confidence are critical to your career success.

We are speaking in public when standing up at the front of a room or in a team meeting.

The Corporate Confidence and Communication System™ has been taught and used successfully by professionals at all levels of their career.

This system has ensured their success as it will now for you.

CHAPTER 2

Psych

Changing Your Mindset, Changing Your Focus, Catching Success

The first question that my new clients usually ask during our initial meeting is how they can get over the fear they experience when speaking in public.

My clients are all seeking that one secret to solving what they perceive as their 'problem' when delivering presentations.

They are seeking a 'magic pill' that will instantly take away all of their nerves and fears.

The same 'magic pill' that I wasted so much of my time trying to find.

Explaining how there is not one simple, straightforward 'thing' they can do to feel confident when delivering their presentations, always results in such an expression of disappointment on their faces.

This is like telling a child Father Christmas does not exist.

Not that I have ever done that to a child.

I can just imagine the expression on their face when being told the news.

The journey of developing the confidence to speak and present in public starts with our mindset.

Our mindset is how we interpret all that is currently happening around us and what takes place in the days and weeks before our presentation.

The mindset includes what we perceive might occur in the hours before, during and even after our presentation has finished.

Let us now consider the concrete steps we can take to become more confident.

Accepting The Fact

The first step to building your presentation confidence is accepting that no single strategy will remove instantly any fears or anxiety you experience when speaking in public.

This point was touched on previously but is so vital that it is worth reiterating.

Becoming a confident public speaker and presenter will be a combination of changing your mindset and adopting the tips, tools and techniques in this book.

Putting into practice all the information we cover, along with taking every opportunity possible to deliver a presentation, will help you become a confident speaker.

An integral part of the process is implementation.

Resist the temptation to wait for everything to be 'perfect' and until you learn another additional skill.

This book provides you with all the information and skills to start speaking with confidence.

What you are about to discover is not fluff and theory.

Everything is all based on my personal and bitter experiences; as I struggled to become the confident professional speaker, I am today.

Dating Excitement

Do you remember the excitement of going on a date?

The build-up in the days before as we worked out where we would go, what we would wear, and perhaps even say.

Maybe you mentally prepared how your time together would go?

Do you recall the buzz, nerves and butterflies in advance of the first date?

Unless you are fortunate, this is something we go through many times searching for that one special person.

Being nervous before a date is natural as you are eager and excited to be seeing them.

Have you ever noticed how we experience some of the same symptoms as when speaking in public?

Symptoms of nerves, apprehension, butterflies, etc.

These are now, however, viewed differently. This time, it may even get referred to as a 'phobia of public speaking'.

Some feelings of nervousness in the lead up to any occasion important to you, such as a date or delivering a presentation, are entirely natural.

Acknowledging to yourself that public speaking nerves are completely normal, is the first step to building confidence.

Everyone experiences these feelings of nervousness at some stage.

Over the years, while running my many courses on public speaking, when asking attendees to share some symptoms they experience in the days or hours before speaking in public, the most frequent ones raised are:-

Sweating

Dry mouth

Sticky palms

Pounding heart

Butterflies in the belly

Do any of these sound familiar to you?

What physical symptoms do you experience leading up to your presentations?

One fascinating revelation always evolves out of this sharing.

Those attending my courses start to realise how they are not the only ones to get nervous or experience these symptoms.

We all do.

Only Me?

Long before I became a multi-award winning speaker, whenever I used to attend meetings, I would sit wondering why all the other speakers seemed so confident and relaxed, whereas I was so nervous.

What did they know or were doing differently to me?

In truth, all the other speakers will also have been feeling some public speaking anxiety, even if they would not admit to it.

It is not just speakers who experience nervousness and anxiety before delivering a presentation.

Many professional musicians and actors have admitted to experiencing the same anxiety that they refer to as stage fright.

Sometimes the stage fright becomes so severe, they are physically ill and throw up before their performance.

A few well-known artists who experience this degree of stage fright are Adele, Rhianna and Katy Perry.

We should take some comfort from the knowledge that if these highly talented and accomplished artists experience anxiety before their performances, we as the occasional presenter, are no different.

The Signs

As my public speaking skills and experience grew, I recognised the signs of nervousness in all the other presenters. The same speakers who previously appeared to be confident communicators.

This was the moment it occurred to me that others experienced the same anxiety as I did.

While working in the corporate world, I often saw speakers sitting and literally rewriting their presentation in the moments before they delivered it.

The stress and pressure that had built up inside while waiting to speak created the urge to rewrite the speech.

Somehow, they decided the new ideas coming to mind at the highest moment of anxiety would be better than all those previously prepared and practised before the meeting.

Really?

The worst time to consider changing what you had prepared to say in a presentation is in the minutes before you are due to speak.

How do I know this?

It is something I have also done many times, leading to disastrous presentations.

You may consider making a late and small change to your speech to come over as more spontaneous when incorporating another speaker's comment.

This type of minor update is different too rapidly rewriting whole swathes of your speech.

Acceptance

We now realise all of the speakers previously seen presenting will have felt some nerves before delivering a speech or presentation, even if they looked so calm, confident and professional.

This is perfectly normal.

The knowledge of how others also experienced nerves and anxiety about speaking in public made a significant difference to my confidence, after all, I am normal!

This is obvious, but so often we can become trapped into thinking we are the only ones who get nervous about speaking in public.

We are all human, so all have the same feelings, admittedly in various quantities.

Power of Imagination

While any feelings of nervousness may be normal, one thing they may do is make us imagine the worst of all scenarios.

Can you picture this situation: -

You are asked to deliver a presentation to your department with about fifty people attending, including all of your managers and colleagues.

The subject of the presentation is one you have extensive experience in and are therefore highly qualified to cover.

How do you feel in the weeks, days, hours and even minutes leading up to the presentation?

I used to feel scared witless when in these situations!

Even the idea of delivering a presentation that could be weeks away would set off many feelings of sheer panic.

The physical sense of stress and anxiety would intensify as the day and time for my presentation drew ever nearer.

How can we sometimes show symptoms way before our speaking event?

An event that may still be weeks away.

What If....?

Let us take a step back and examine what would go through my mind as soon as I had agreed to deliver any presentation.

If you are like me, in the run-up to giving the presentation, you will ask yourself a series of 'what if' questions.

Questions like: -

What if I look silly?

What if they don't like me?

What if I forget my words?

What if I trip up my words?

What if they know more than me?

What if they ask awkward questions?

What if I don't know the answer to a question?

Do you ask yourself questions like these?

These questions would continually revolve round and round in my head, even in my dreams.

Asking these questions over and over again added to all the stress and tension I experienced.

As you now read the list of questions that continually ran through my mind, do you see what they all have in common?

There is one clear theme to all the questions.

Every single one of the questions was centred on me.

Yes, me!

The full focus of every question is what will happen to me at the meeting and how everyone attending will perceive me.

While this is the natural approach to take in the lead up to a presentation, this is the wrong strategy to have running in a continuous cycle through your mind.

So how do we stop running this cycle of all these 'what if' questions in the days before our presentation?

The answer is simple - stop being so selfish.

There I said it....

Stop being so selfish!

I don't mean to be harsh, but this is so important that I am keen for you to get this point.

A critical first step in reducing our public speaking nerves in the lead up to a presentation is to change where we focus.

Let us view the situation this way.

Imagine this...

You have invited some friends over to your home for a small party next week.

What would be your thought process?

Stop and take a moment to think about it before you read any further.

I am sure you would start off by considering the types of food and drinks to purchase to cater for their individual tastes.

To ensure all of your friends have a wonderful time you may need to purchase a mix of meat, vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, etc.

How about a playlist for some music?

These are the thoughts we would typically have when planning a party.

How many of your initial thoughts centred on you?

Did you focus on how to ensure you enjoy the party or what the guests can do to make sure you have a fun evening?

How about asking questions such as: -

What if I get bored?

What if I don't enjoy the party?

What if I don't enjoy the conversation?

I am sure these are not the first questions that spring to mind or ones you would keep worrying about in the lead up to the party.

Altering Our Focus

Just as a good host takes the time to ensure all of their guests enjoy the event, you can now start to focus on those who will listen to your presentation.

Instead of having the mental focus 100% internally on us, worried about how people will perceive or judge us, start to now consider the people attending the meeting.

What can you do to ensure they all enjoy listening to you?

What do you want them to take away from your presentation?

When you start to change your focus away from your internal thoughts, worries and concerns and onto those attending, the symptoms of public speaking stress will soon start to diminish.

Even if you stop reading now and never see another word in this book, following this single strategy will make you feel more confident and far less stressed when presenting or speaking in public.

Attendees

As you saw in the 'what if' questions previously listed, I used to become stressed worrying about how everyone attending my presentation would behave and perceive me.

My experience and those of all my many coaching clients show these break down into two common approaches for imagining how the presentation will go.

The first is imagining that everyone attending the meeting at which you will be presenting will start to act like a flock of vultures.

They will all sit patiently, waiting for the first opportunity to tear into both you and your presentation.

Once they start, they continue all the way through your presentation until the meeting concludes.

They will deliberately ask you loads of really awkward and tough questions, knowing you will be unable to answer any of them.

They will then argue with you or say you are wrong.

Either way, they will leave you and your reputation torn to shreds in front of everyone.

That is scary!

If you have any thoughts like these, well no wonder you feel nervous about speaking in public.

An unfriendly audience became one of my biggest worries for delivering any speech or presentation, especially if I considered they might have more knowledge than me.

In truth, this is utter rubbish.

When did you ever attend a meeting having already decided to attack the speaker?

Have you ever decided in advance to gang up with your colleagues to tear into anyone's speech?

To deliberately humiliate them in front of everybody who is attending?

To totally destroy their reputation?

I am certain the answer to all these questions will be never.

The same applies to everybody attending the meeting at which you are speaking.

You may find that some people in the meetings at which you are speaking will disagree, debate or just ignore your proposal.

That is ok!

This is a worst-case scenario, after all, you will never find everyone agrees with you all of the time.

If you happen to be pitching in front of a prospective client, they may ask challenging questions. They may even say thank you, but no thank you to your proposal.

What you will encounter is that in most meetings where you will be presenting, everyone will be well-behaved asking pertinent and professional questions.

Even if you are speaking on a subject that may give rise to some disagreement, people can differentiate between you and the issue on which you are speaking.

They may all disagree with your proposal and even reject it, but that does not mean they are rejecting you.

Always consider the people attending your presentation as intelligent, respectful listeners.

Disaster Strikes

The second way of imagining how the presentation will go is to see everything going horribly wrong.

As mentioned previously with the 'what if' questions, your mind will start to imagine what will happen if no one turns up, you forget your words, you look silly, or maybe even unable to answer one of their questions.

It is incredible how the mind can make everything seem so real.

As I used to run these questions and thoughts through my mind, I would get palpitations weeks before my presentation.

A Change of View

A much more positive and powerful way to use your imagination is to see everything going well for you.

Many professional sports stars use this process of positive visualisation before their game or event.

With this technique, you visualise your extraordinary success and how you can see everyone smiling and nodding as you deliver your presentation.

Hear all the warm applause as you finish and feel those 'pats on the back' for a presentation well delivered.

This technique helped me whenever I used to get stressed at the idea of giving a speech in front of even eight colleagues.

I would visualise giving the speech in a stadium of 80,000 and a global television audience.

After completing this visualisation a few times, when I then contemplated making the speech in front of my eight colleagues, the fear was dramatically reduced.

In my mind, I had now given the speech successfully in front of 80,000, so now eight people seemed nothing in comparison.

Adopt the habit of keeping all of your thoughts about your future presentations positive.

Stop yourself whenever an imagined worry or negative thought leaps into your mind and becomes a focus.

I realise this is easier said than done, especially in the beginning, but with practice, it will become a lot more straightforward for you.

Preparing and Practising

Let us cover briefly here, writing and practising your presentation as this can reduce your speaking nerves when done correctly.

We will cover this subject in more detail during later chapters.

We can all sometimes procrastinate about getting tasks completed which we would prefer not to undertake.

In years past, a regular mistake I would make was preparing my presentations a few hours before the meeting.

Rather than dedicating any time to making the slides or writing my notes, I would convince myself there were more important tasks to complete.

All this did was increase the pressure of the presentation, especially as I sat in the meeting, waiting for my turn to speak.

As I became so focused trying to learn the contents of my presentation during the meeting, I would leave with no understanding of what any of the other speakers shared.

My presentation would become another stressful situation, solely because I failed to take adequate time to prepare and practise.

Do not let creating your presentation be a task you procrastinate over or leave to the last moment.

When you allow yourself plenty of time to prepare and practise, you will become far more confident about delivering your presentation in front of those attending the meeting.

Trying to Control Everything

Another source of stress is what to do if things go wrong.

There will invariably be particular circumstances and situations outside of your control.

For example, you are unable to stop the fire alarm activating, a senior manager being delayed by a previous meeting or the room being double booked.

As there is no way for you to control these types of situations, there is little point in worrying about them happening.

Worrying about events outside of your control increases the pressure experienced, leading to you feeling more nervous.

Time can be taken to plan for any eventualities within your control adequately.

For example, printing your notes and presentations in case the laptop stops functioning, or saving the file to a memory stick.

Once you have prepared for these eventualities, you can stop worrying about them occurring.

Having completed this book, you will discover a combination of techniques that will be the most efficient to make you a confident, competent public speaker and presenter.

Presentation Room

When you arrive in the meeting room or venue at which you will be delivering your presentation, there is one action you can take that will help settle your nerves.

Walk to the speaking area, stand to face all the empty seats.

Get a sense of what it will be like when you are standing and delivering your presentation.

Glance around the room and imagine all the seats filled with supportive listeners.

Giving all or some of your presentation out loud can help, as this will provide a sense of the volume level you will need to speak at during your presentation.

There is no reason to feel any embarrassment about delivering your presentation while a few people in the room are pottering about or helping with the setup.

Take the opportunity to rehearse if available as there will be far more people in the room listening to you later.

As everyone arrives in the meeting room, take the time to stand again for a moment in the speaking area, looking out as people take their seats.

The people attending will be so busy settling in and chatting, they will not notice you standing at the front for a few seconds.

When it comes to the actual presentation, you will have previously seen where everyone will be sitting and heard your voice, so speaking in public will now be a lot easier for you.

In later chapters, we will cover preparing and presenting your presentations in more detail.

Key Points

Psych

There is no "magic pill" to remove any nerves or anxiety experienced when speaking in public.

Feelings of nervousness are perfectly normal in these situations.

While all the other speakers look confident, they also experience public speaking nerves and anxiety.

Avoid continually asking negative 'what if' questions in the run-up to your presentation.

Act as an exceptional host and focus on what you can do for the people listening to your speech.

Concentrate on the positive by imagining how well your speech goes and all the comments of praise you receive.

Arrive in the room early, taking the time to stand in the speaking area.

CHAPTER 3

Perception

*How You are Perceived, Why You, and
How to Start Preparing The Core
Message of Your Presentation*

When invited to speak at a meeting, either within your organisation or externally, by a client, club or another group, the person sending the invitation will usually believe there is something of value you can share with the people attending their meeting.

Their view can be based on: -

Your position

Your influence

Your reputation

Your experience

Your knowledge

A recommendation

One or several of these will have persuaded the person organising the meeting there is something of benefit and value you can share with those attending.

When you receive the invitation to present at the meeting, you may feel excited, worried or even scared. Maybe even a little intimidated.

That is how I used to feel!

These are of course entirely natural emotions which are experienced by most speakers.

Questions and Ideas

Once the idea of speaking at the meeting has settled in, you will probably start giving some consideration to the specific subjects or areas you would want to cover during your presentation.

Typically, many ideas will start running through your head of the content that you can include and share with everyone attending.

There are three crucial questions to ask yourself long before you start the process of creating your presentation.

As you will discover, answering these questions is a fundamental initial step.

The answers you come up with will serve to ensure your reputation within the organisation is maintained.

Question 1

Are you really the right person to deliver the presentation?

Question 2

Is the subject matter of the presentation an appropriate one for you to deliver?

Question 3

Do you honestly support the point of view that you are expected to take on the subject?

Although you were the person invited to speak at the meeting, you may consider that there are colleagues who will be better suited to speak on the subject or even assist you owing to their knowledge or experience.

The third question is relevant when it comes to speaking in public.

If you take a position at the meeting that is well known to be against your personal beliefs, there can be a devastating effect on your long-term credibility.

Let me give you an example based on one that I witnessed during my corporate career.

Imagine you work in the Overseas Sales Office for a large multinational corporation, dealing with all of their global clients.

The corporation recently announced your department is merging with the National Sales Office, who deal with customers in your home country.

Since the announcement of the merger, you have been somewhat outspoken in your resistance to the plan, as your experience within the company shows it is unlikely to succeed.

In fact, anyone who will listen has witnessed your arguments on why the department merger is entirely the wrong decision.

Nothing amiss with that as this is your belief.

Facing a Dilemma

A senior executive of the company has just phoned to ask if you would accept the lead in a presentation to the department describing the benefits of the merger.

What would you do?

If you now speak of the benefits of merging the two departments after being so outspoken in your opposition, do you consider any of your colleagues are likely to be convinced?

It would be unlikely.

If you are asked to speak on a subject on which you have any doubts, decline the opportunity, or pass it to someone else to present who you perceive will be more comfortable with the topic.

You will never be able to convince or persuade anyone of a proposal or idea when you do not believe in it.

The decision to decline an invitation to speak due to your doubts on the subject is not to be confused with experiencing anxiety when pondering the presentation.

These are the thoughts that may lead you to seek a reason or excuse to decline the invitation.

Research

A sizable part of preparing the message of your presentation will be the research on who will be attending the meeting at which you are speaking.

This information is essential in ensuring that the presentation you create will connect and engage with everyone attending while still giving them all the information that they are keen to receive.

If you are delivering a presentation to your own department or people that you already know, this research will be much quicker and easier for you to complete.

A presentation that is being delivered externally, say to clients, will take more time and contain comprehensive research on those attending, which is crucial to the success of your speech.

The following sequence of steps will help you with the research required to compile your speech.

Step 1

The first area to examine is who will be attending the meeting at which you are speaking.

Some of the attendees' areas you may need to consider are: -

Ages - This information will be useful when talking to community, voluntary or youth groups.

Appetite - What will be the attendees' interest in the information? Are they interested in hearing from you or are they all being obliged to attend the meeting?

Decision makers - Get to know their names and if they are attending the meeting.

Details - Will the attendees require in-depth information, a broad overview or something in between?

Knowledge and understanding - Will the subject on which you are speaking be unfamiliar to the attendees or do they have existing knowledge?

Seniority - Discover the attendees' seniority in the company, group or organisation. Find out if the attendees will be interns, international directors, mixed, etc.

Roles & responsibilities - What positions do the attendees hold in the organisation? For example, senior directors, accountants or the end-users.

Step 2

Presentations can be delivered in a vast variety of situations to people from an internal company meeting to clients and external community groups.

Some of the information you may like to uncover is: -

Will everyone who is attending the meeting at which you are speaking all work in the same: -

Company

Department

Team

Industry

Or

Are they all members of the same: -

Association

Society

Group

Club

Or

Do they all share the same: -

Aspirations

Concerns

Dreams

Worries

When you determine where the people attending the meeting work or what their connection is to the organisers, you will be better able to address their needs and target your presentation directly to them.

By satisfying the meeting attendees' needs, you will be able to achieve all of your objectives and for your listeners to take the value from the time they gave up for your presentation.

Step 3

Once you have identified the subject on which you will be presenting, who specifically will be attending, where they work and their level of interest, you will next need to find out the attendees' views on your presentation subject.

An essential part of your preparation is discovering if the people attending the meeting hold any preconceptions on the subject on which you will be speaking.

Seek to identify: -

Will they be for the idea/subject/proposal?

Do they hold firm views against?

Maybe they are going to be indifferent?

Perhaps this is going to be the first time the idea/subject/proposal will be presented to them?

By discovering their views and any preconceptions they hold in advance of the meeting as part of your preparation, you will be able to structure the presentation to address them openly.

It may mean directly challenging any views or concerns they currently hold, or giving a broader outline of your proposal or the message in your speech.

Step 4

The next step is to find out the knowledge and level of expertise those attending the meeting may already have on the subject that you are planning to cover in your speech.

You may like to learn if they: -

Have heard of the product, service,
methodology or idea?

Are they entirely new to the
product/service/methodology/idea?

Do they have any first-hand experience of it?

Are they the end users or the decision
makers?

This information will give you the opportunity to include and cover the material you would like everyone to learn within the time the meeting organiser has allocated for your presentation.

The information will also allow you to pitch your content at precisely the right level for the meeting attendees, ensuring the level is neither too technical nor elemental.

If anyone can not follow along or gets bored, they will soon switch off from what you are saying.

Step 5

During my corporate career, I was required to attend many hundreds of meetings.

Most of the time, there was a purpose as to why the meeting was scheduled, and I had been invited to participate.

The principal objectives of each of the meetings were vast and varied, covering everything from recruiting to redundancies, new managers to new systems plus the regular team updates.

When you know the principal purpose of the meeting at which are speaking, this will help prepare future research for your presentation.

Examples of the diverse types of meetings at which you may be speaking are: -

Budget setting

Client pitches

Pitching ideas

Job interviews

Team meetings

Planning events

Raising finance

Project meetings

Financial updates

Department meetings

Stakeholder or shareholder updates

The approach you take to preparing, structuring and delivering your presentation will vary on the principal purpose of the meeting.

For example, the approach you would take for a team meeting will be different to the one adopted for a client pitch.

Step 6

Can you imagine how you would feel turning up to a meeting expecting 2 people to be attending and finding 22 sitting there?

The number attending the meeting will determine how you design and deliver your presentation.

If there are going to be many people attending the meeting, you may decide on a PowerPoint type presentation or even require a microphone.

Sufficient copies of any documents and handouts will be required and printed for everyone attending.

You will give a very unprofessional initial impression if asking senior executives to share copies of your proposal because you never took the time to check on the numbers attending the meeting.

Step 7

When invited to speak at a meeting, event or conference that you are unfamiliar with, ask the organiser about speakers who previously presented at the event.

Aim to bring to light any information the organiser liked about the speakers, how well they were received by the those attending and particularly, what they may not have liked about them.

You may like to ask the meeting organiser: -

What subjects did the previous speakers cover?

What was the feedback from attendees?

What did the previous speakers do well?

What do they believe the previous speakers could do better?

This information will help to ensure your success with both the attendees and the organiser.

Step 8

The final step is to ask how long has been allocated for you to deliver your speech and take questions if pertinent to your presentation.

Once you learn the length of your time slot, stick to it.

Many other speakers somehow consider they are giving extra value and content if they speak for longer than allocated.

In truth, neither the people attending the meeting, Chair, nor organisers will appreciate you going over the time allocated.

In practice, they may even prefer you to finish early, especially if the meeting is already running late owing to some of the preceding speakers going over time.

Speakers who deliberately go over time cause disruption to the meeting timings, even resulting in some items getting dropped from the agenda.

Always finish within the time allocated.

Key Points

Perception

When you are invited to speak at a meeting, recognise that the meeting organiser perceives you have something of interest and value to share with those attending.

Consider if you are the best person for the presentation.

Taking a position that is known to be against your personal beliefs is likely to affect your professional credibility.

Discover the purpose of the meeting to help with creating your presentation.

Research the roles and backgrounds of the people who will be hearing you speak.

Knowing the roles, responsibilities and views of the attendees will help you with the presentation content.

Find out the number attending the meeting and how long you have been allocated for your presentation.

CHAPTER 4

Plan

The Purpose of Creating Your Presentation, a Single Strategy & Your End Result

Wherever you are currently on the career ladder, your capacity to communicate in meetings and deliver presentations in public will have an immense impact on the success you achieve.

While working for many years in the corporate world, I saw some incredible presentations delivered by people on all rungs of their career ladder.

These speakers had clearly researched who would be attending the meeting and listening to their presentation.

The result?

Those speakers connected and engaged with everyone in the room so successfully, we were hanging on to their every word.

The speakers who always researched their audience developed a reputation for delivering high-quality presentations, so we would all sit up and pay attention when they started.

Then there were all the other speakers.

Losing Credibility

These speakers never took the time to prepare or even update the slides in their presentations. Some speakers simply dusted off an old presentation created months earlier for a different meeting and audience.

Sometimes, sitting through their speeches, I used to wonder if the presenters had even seen the slides before as they had such a look of surprise as the information displayed on the screen.

Once, I remember sitting in a presentation at which the speaker showed us a slide on which the font selected for his financial data had been set so small, we were unable to read any of the details.

This was from the front row.

The speaker then admitted he had added the slide's financial data over six months ago.

Neglecting to update the financial data included in his presentation was lazy on his part.

Another admission by the speaker then made the situation even worse.

Having admitted to adding the slide over six months ago, he now admitted the data was even older.

The figures on the slide happened to be over a year old and therefore so out of date, the information became irrelevant to everyone.

Although the speaker carefully went through the figures on that single slide for a whole 11 minutes, he wasted both his and our time.

This information had been on one of the first slides in his presentation, so can you guess what we sat in the meeting wondering?

If the speaker presented out of date and unreliable figures on the first slide that could not be trusted, what about the rest of his presentation?

Could we trust anything being presented to us?

That day, the speaker lost all credibility in the eyes of his colleagues and the senior managers attending the meeting.

As you create your presentations, be certain to check they contain the most up-to-date information available.

While reusing slides is perfectly fine, they nevertheless need to be updated or adjusted to suit your audience.

Purpose

A presentation always has the same, single purpose.

This purpose is the process of creating a speech structure which will move the knowledge, beliefs, and experience from you to the listeners in a manner that is easily understood by all those attending.

You will find that obtaining the information is one thing, knowing how to create and deliver a well-structured presentation that will keep the audience interested is another.

Presentation structure is what we are covering in this part of the book.

Writing Your Speech

The moment at which you sit down to write your speech is the one which I used to find the most challenging.

I would structure writing my speeches by deciding in advance that say, on Monday at 1pm, I would sit down to write all the content out in full.

At the given time with the laptop open, I would sit at my desk ready to type out my masterpiece.

After an incredibly long time, I realised something. This approach is the wrong way ever to go about creating a speech.

Instead of typing away, I would usually sit looking at my blank document, with a sense of frustration building inside.

The frustration would build, as I needed to produce something, especially when up against a tight deadline.

On the occasions when creating the speech was left until an hour or two before the meeting, the frustration and pressure made clear, logical thought impossible.

Yet, for some reason, I would often leave creating my speech to the last moment.

After a long while, I realised the process of creating a compelling presentation that impacts on your listeners is not the same as writing an email.

The process used all those years for all my presentations.

I would start at the beginning with my opening comments and slowly work through to my closing sentence.

This way of writing was not an efficient way to spend my time writing the speech.

Another method my colleagues used, so I tried, is to start with creating my presentation slides, with the surrounding content written to fit them.

The trouble with all these methods?

With each method, we start at the beginning, working towards the end.

While this may seem to be entirely logical (it did to me), they will never allow you to create a presentation that connects and excites your listener.

Planning Your Route

The way to connect with and excite your listeners is to take them on a journey as you progress through your presentation.

When we make any journey, there are three things you need to decide: -

Where we are going.

Where we are starting from.

The route to take.

These are the same things we need when creating our presentations.

We need first the destination of the journey we are going to embark on with our listeners.

In advance of creating your speech, decide what it is you ultimately want your listeners to leave the meeting having understood.

If you met up with someone who heard your speech a week later, what would be the one thing you would love them to have remembered?

One thing will do as even that will put you way ahead of most of the other speakers at the meeting.

By having an understanding of this single purpose of your speech before you sit down and start writing, will make the whole process so much simpler and more successful.

Once this sole purpose is clear in your mind, it is time to create your End Result.

End Result

We have just examined how every presentation that you ever create will require you to have a very clearly defined end in mind, otherwise, why would you bother giving up so much of your time to write, rehearse and present it?

There has to be an end result!

Just like when starting any journey, you will need the destination before setting off, so you realise when you have arrived.

How else would you know?

Once you have a clear and defined end result in mind, you will be able to focus on what information and knowledge you need to include in your presentation to achieve this goal.

As you start creating the presentation, anything that does not help those hearing your presentation to achieve the end result must be discarded.

We can all believe that everything ever learnt on the subject needs to be included, just in case the details help those attending.

In practice, unnecessary and excessive information overwhelms those attending the presentation.

Be strict with yourself by including what will help you to explain, expand or emphasise the end result you are pursuing.

Create the end result so that it will achieve both your purpose for the presentation and also meet the audience's interest in listening.

You will often find that when delivering what is mostly the same presentation on another occasion, your end result will change to meet the interests of a different audience.

If you can state the end result of your presentation in a single sentence, you will have created a very clearly defined destination for your listeners.

This single sentence will help you to create a compelling presentation that leaves a lasting impact on those who hear it.

Know the end result of your presentation before you create it.

Key Points

Plan

The purpose of creating a presentation is to help the people who will hear it by sharing your knowledge, beliefs, and experience.

Your ability to communicate in public will have an immense impact on the professional success you achieve.

Before you start creating your speech, decide and define your end result.

The same presentation slides and content can be used for different meetings.

Review or update slides to suit your audience.

CHAPTER 5

Partition Part 1

Partitioning Your Speech into its Core Essential Elements

Every speech, presentation or pitch you create requires the same essential elements.

Most other people consider these elements to be the: -

Title

Opening

Body & Transitions

Closing

The order listed above may be the logical flow to follow when creating your speech, but there is a considerably more efficient way to create them.

The key elements of every speech and the order in which to create them are: -

End Result

Body & Transitions

Closing

Opening

Title

1) End Result

In the previous chapter, we examined how, before creating your speech, you will want to establish the end result that you are aiming to achieve.

To help you establish the end result for your presentation, start by creating a single sentence that will ensure you achieve your objective.

Every single story, point, example, etc. should solely be included in your presentation if they help with achieving the objective set out in your end result.

Be very strict with yourself on this.

Although you may love to add a fascinating tale, including superfluous stories will merely create confusion in the mind of the audience, rather than assist with achieving the end result.

2) Body

With your end result established and created, the second step is to start designing the structure for your speech.

The structure designing stage begins with the body.

Step 1

A super simple way to start is by creating a list of all the points you need to cover to reach the end result you created.

List down any thoughts that come to mind without taking any time to consider or filter them out at this stage.

You may find writing the list by hand is more advantageous at allowing you to be creative with your thoughts.

Step 2

With the list created, the time has arrived to review and discard any points that do not contribute to you reaching the end result of your speech previously created.

They may be exciting or entertaining points, but unless they serve to explain or reinforce the message and lead to the end result, they will be a distraction.

Take the points out and save them for another presentation.

Step 3

As you review your list, search for a natural or obvious approach that helps you to structure or segment the list.

There are numerous approaches you can take towards achieving this objective.

The primary structures that I have found useful are: -

Priority

When using the priority structure, you would either list the points starting with the most important, moving to the least important or the other way around.

Logical

When the one idea in your speech has a logical flow between the points you are going to cover.

As an example, a speech on public transport can logically flow from buses to trains and then to trams.

Cause-Effect

You would adopt this structure when able to identify a precise cause of the issue followed by the effect it will or is having.

Sequence

Utilise this structure when a connection exists between a series of events that create a definite sequence.

For example, if speaking about a sales order process, this would cover an order getting placed, dispatched and finally delivered to the customer.

Problem-Solution

Here you would describe the problem, what happened or occurred, its consequences and conclude by providing the solution.

Pendulum

With this structure, as you present the point, take it to extremes on both sides of the discussion, before you propose a solution that settles in the mid-point.

Location

This structure is suitable when there is a definite location-based structure for the speech.

If you were presenting on your company's various international sales offices, you might talk about London, Moscow and then New York.

On average, you will be looking to cover one point/segment in your speech every 10 minutes.

This 10 minute time slot will provide sufficient time to explain and back up the segment with any required evidence such as anecdotes, facts, statistics or stories.

Even when delivering a long speech, the most you will probably need to cover are three separate segments.

Limiting your speech to three segments ensures the meeting attendees easily remember the details they contain, without them getting overwhelmed by information.

Step 4

With your list now arranged into a structure that suits your speech, select a single word that encapsulates the individual segments.

If you have three segments, they will each have a single word to summarise specifically what each one covers.

These individual words will become the headings for each of the segments you wish to present in your speech.

You now have your headings in place for each segment and the main points they contain.

Under each heading will be the sub-points.

Step 5

Now that your speech has been split into three segments with each having its own headings and sub-points in place, the next step will be much simpler.

For each segment, write out: -

The basis for the main point it covers.

Support the main point using anecdotes, facts, statistics and stories. These are to ensure everyone attending will clearly understand the point.

As you create each segment, keep in mind the end result you defined at the beginning and how it links to the speech purpose.

Towards the end of each segment, recap the main point you have covered, as this will help with the audience's understanding, then transition to the next segment.

3) Closing

The closing part of every speech is the opportunity to emphasise your main message and the takeaway points.

4) Opening

Create your speech opening sentences to capture everyone's attention and answer all the questions that may be on their minds at that time.

The closing and opening parts of your speech structure are covered in more detail later in the following two chapters.

5) Title

Creating the appropriate title for your speech is more significant than most other people realise.

When introducing speakers, so often when I ask them for the title of their speech, I will be greeted with a blank look.

They had never even thought about creating a title for their speech.

When you create an intriguing title, the audience can be interested before you have even stood up to speak.

At many meetings attended over the years, attendees were intrigued by a presentation, having just read the title on a meeting agenda.

At other meetings, the attendees started laughing and having fun merely after they heard the title.

You can imagine the very enthusiastic reception those speakers received.

By treating the title of your speech as one of its critical components, you ensure it will have the right impact before uttering a word.

As you now follow the steps in this structure, you will be creating speeches that ensure those attending the meeting listen and engage with what you are presenting.

Key Points

Partition Part 1

To create a well-structured speech, the key components and order to write them in are: -

- 1) End Result
- 2) Body & Transitions
- 3) Closing
- 4) Opening
- 5) Title

Decide the end result of your speech before moving on to create the other elements.

Include each story, point, example, etc, only if each one will help to achieve the end result of your speech.

Select the most appropriate structure for the body of your speech: -

Cause-Effect

Location

Logical

Pendulum

Priority

Problem-Solution

Sequence

The speech title is one of the crucial components of your speech that other speakers neglect.

Create a title that intrigues and has the right impact before you have spoken.

CHAPTER 6

Partition Part 2

Opening

Starting Your Speech & Snatching Attention

You may have heard the saying that you have one chance to make a great first impression.

This saying is definitely correct when we consider delivering your presentations.

Let me ask you a question.

When does a speech start?

Consider this for a moment as this is not a trick question.

Does your speech start as you begin speaking?

Maybe while you are being introduced?

How about as you are walking to the speaking area?

Each of these points will contribute to the initial impression you create on everyone who is attending and listening.

This is the purpose of your presentation - to leave a significant impression on those listening to you.

The impression you create will have started being formed long before you spoke.

Your speech starts from the exact moment you are visible to those attending the meeting at which you are presenting.

Recently, I was reading some research which showed a candidate's chances of success when attending a job interview can be affected by the first 12 words they say.

The study (Rodionova, 2016) found interviewers judge candidates by the quality of their small talk while walking to the room where the interview is being held.

In the same way as interviewers are evaluating candidates before the formal interview has started, you will find attendees at the event will also be judging you and forming an impression before your presentation.

If those attending the meeting know you well, for example, they may be colleagues from the same department in which you work, they may notice you possibly appear nervous or stressed but will excuse you and be supportive.

Let us suppose you are giving a presentation at the offices of a prospective client.

As the client arrives in the lobby to meet you, she sees you being rude to the receptionist. The impression you created will stay in her mind the whole time and will probably be a more prominent memory than your presentation.

You are creating an impression in people's minds from the moment you are first in view, so make a good one.

Creating a Captivating Opening

After the body content of your presentation has been created, the next step is creating an opening to encapsulate the core of your message.

Consider the opening or start of your speech as two segments.

First is the initial sentence which needs to be relevant, interesting and different.

Make sure this sentence is relevant to your listeners, so it is immediately of interest to them, captures their focus and it is different to all the other speakers.

After the initial first sentence, you will want to continue holding onto everyone's attention by highlighting the key points coming up in your speech and mapping out the main areas you are going to cover.

The opening will need to be created to catch the audience's attention, builds rapport and draws them away from all the other distractions like their smartphones and self-talk.

Other speakers often give boring, lacklustre openings which are the same as everybody else's, so people soon start to switch off.

Once people's attention has been lost, considerable hard work and passion are required to win it back.

A typical way you will frequently see people open their presentation at meetings will be with something like: -

Hello, erm... I work in the ABC department, and I've come here this morning to err... tell you about a project I'm working on.

This type of opening sentence will never move the attendees to the edge of their seats, wanting to learn more.

As a speaker, we will want to capture everyone's immediate attention and then keep it.

Ways to Open Your Speech

Your speech will need to be started to immediately command the attention of your audience and get them interested in listening to the entire speech.

Here are some suggestions on how you may consider opening your speech.

Ask a question

Have you noticed how you will always answer any question you are asked?

Even if you just answer the question silently?

The power of a question is how everyone will always answer.

A question has everyone listening and taking part in your presentation, even if this is a silent part.

Any question you ask must matter to your listeners and hold some significance to them, otherwise, why should they care or listen to you?

If the question asked is not of interest, they will decide this speech is not for them and quickly start to switch off.

When the question asked is about a subject of importance to those attending, they will want to hear more from you, so focus on your speech.

Ask a Rhetorical Question

When asking a rhetorical question, this will be similar to the point above in that it will need to be constructed so it matters to everyone attending.

The decision to ask a rhetorical question will provide one significant advantage if you are feeling nervous.

You will not need to worry about whether or not anyone answers the question.

The question is rhetorical after all!

If anyone does answer, well this is great as it proves they are already engaged with you and the speech.

On the other hand, as you are not expecting an answer, the silence will not affect your flow.

You will need to give time for people to consider the question in their minds, so pause long enough for them to formulate an answer.

The time taken to answer depends on the question you asked and how long they will need to consider their reply.

As a guide, mentally respond to the question posed before continuing with your speech.

Statistics that surprise

We generally consider statistics to be mundane rows of figures on a slide or spreadsheet.

When you seek out and find a short statistic which will surprise and interest your listeners, it will grab their attention.

Here is an example of one statistic that surprised me: -

1 in 6 women would rather be blind than fat
(Realbuzz, 2012)

This statistic would be perfect if delivering a presentation related to the health or slimming sectors.

On the other hand, using this same statistic would not sit so well in a financial presentation on quarterly car sales.

As when asking a question, find a statistic from a reliable source that is relevant and of interest to those attending your presentation.

Command Words

By starting your speech with a command is one way guaranteed to get everyone's attention.

The command word will be unexpected and certainly different to any of the other speakers.

Here are three examples of the type of commands you could use: -

Stop

Wait

Listen

This will be a powerful way to get attention when said in a forceful tone and followed by a pause.

Raise Your Hand

I have frequently seen speakers ask people to raise their hands at the start of their speech.

A well-phrased question will immediately have people interested and involved.

In addition to being used as part of the opening, asking for a show of hands can be incorporated into any part of your presentation.

If you are going to get your listeners to raise their hands in response to your question, it will help to increase their engagement when you give them prior warning.

Other speakers will say something similar to "who likes XYZ" and expect the entire audience to automatically raise their hands.

By phrasing the question this way, the speaker will often receive a low response from those attending.

When you give people notice they have an action to take, it will provide time for them to process your request.

A notification of how you expect attendees to raise their hands will ensure higher participation and response to your instruction when made.

One way to let your audience appreciate a question is coming is to say something like: -

'raise your hand if '.

As you start to finish the question, raise your left hand.

Why raise your left hand?

As about 90% of the population are right-handed (I am in the other 10%), they will see your raised left arm on their right, making it easier to follow your lead.

If you are requesting a show of hands in a more formal setting such as a business presentation, you may achieve higher engagement by including an explanation for the question before asking for the show of hands.

For example, you may say something like: -

‘I’m going to ask you a question.

The reason I am asking is so that’

After explaining the reason, ask for a show of hands as you raise your left arm.

Stories

We may not realise this, but even as adults, we still love stories.

As children, we were captivated when an adult uttered those particular words ‘once upon a time...’.

We realised this was now the time to settle down and pay close attention.

In a business presentation, it is extremely unlikely we would ever want to start a speech with 'once upon a time'.

We can nevertheless begin with and include stories which are either personal to us or those attending the presentation.

When telling stories, all we are doing is sharing our personal experiences and wisdom. The same way we do every day with family and friends.

The power of sharing your experiences comes in how we can quickly connect with stories that refer to other people, especially when we personally know them.

With their permission, you may find it helpful to include stories about colleagues, clients and if appropriate, the CEO.

These are the types of stories that add interest and impact.

People stories create a stronger and deeper connection with your listeners than talking about concepts, theories, gadgets or gizmos.

Quotations

There are many famous quotes we have seen hundreds of times.

In fact, we remember them so well, we could doubtlessly finish them off when we hear them quoted by a speaker.

These are the types of famous quotes you will want to avoid when opening your presentation.

Take the time to find quotes those attending the meeting are unlikely to have previously come across.

The quotes you select can come from many diverse sources.

I suggest not simply searching the internet for 'quotes' to include in your speech.

Try to be different and look closer to home for examples from your parents, siblings, neighbours, in fact, anyone!

When you find an appropriate, unknown quote, it will create more impact on those attending the meeting.

Personalisation

The presentation you are delivering to the meeting may be one you have given previously. By creating an opening personalised for the meeting, attendees will think you created the presentation for them.

Any nerves you experience when speaking in public will be at their peak when you first start talking.

To build up your confidence and steady the nerves, it will help to commit the first few sentences to memory.

When you are confident in how your speech will start, it will help you to settle into your presentation as you first see everyone from the stage and hear your voice.

Key Points

Partition Part 2

Opening

Your speech starts from the very moment you are visible to those attending.

Start a speech so it will immediately command the attention of your audience.

Create an opening that will be different to all the other speakers.

Ways to Open Your Speech are:-

Sharing a story.

Asking a question.

An unknown quotation.

Start with a command word.

Asking a Rhetorical Question.

Asking attendees to raise their hands.

Sharing a surprising and appropriate statistic.

A presentation personalised for the meeting attendees will deliver more success for both you and the attendees.

CHAPTER 7

Partition Part 3

Closing

Ending Your Speech & Avoiding the Mistakes Other Speakers Make

We all tend to recall the first and last items in a series best, and the middle items worst.

This ability to recall a list of items is what is known as the Serial Position Effect (Indiana.edu, 2016).

This effect also influences how effectively we can recall a presentation after it has been delivered and we have left the room.

As previously covered, careful consideration will need to be given to the opening of a speech to connect and engage with everyone attending the meeting.

The opening is one part of your presentation that people attending will more clearly recall.

The other part based on the Serial Position Effect is the closing.

The last words of a presentation are as important as the first and will require careful consideration to ensure they have the desired impact on your audience long after your meeting has finished.

Before we cover some robust methods for closing a presentation that will ensure everyone remembers your message, let us consider some common errors other speakers make.

These mistakes will confuse the message of the presentation and everyone who is listening to them.

The result of this confusion will be a speech that is quickly forgotten.

New Content

Adding new content when coming to the end of a presentation is a sure-fire way to confuse the listeners.

This new content may be material that the speaker intended to cover earlier but merely overlooked.

The speaker may have thought of new content after someone in the meeting had raised a question or point.

When adding new content that the speaker is unable to explain due to time constraints, the most likely result is a muddled recall of the presentation, rather than being of additional help as the speaker intended.

Audience Questions

Questions are often an essential part of a presentation and should be encouraged to help ensure everyone has a clear understanding.

However, questions should not be taken as you are coming to the close of the presentation.

When asking questions, people can go off-topic, seek to engage in a debate or talk for extended periods.

As the close of your presentation is a critical part that will be remembered by those at the meeting, this is an area you will need to control.

Announcements

When you are the last speaker at a meeting before the break, you may be asked to make some announcements.

These may be announcements like where the refreshments are being served or when the meeting is reconvening.

Any announcements you make after your prepared closing sentences will now become the new end of your speech in everyone's mind.

They may now have details of where to find refreshments, but struggle to recall the close of your speech.

Politely decline when you are asked to make any announcements, or arrange for a colleague to deal with them.

Rambling & Waffling

I am sure you will have seen a speaker finish their speech and then waffle on saying nothing.

After coming to the end of their speech, they say something like: -

"So....err.... as my time is up.... err....I would like to thank you all for coming along today.... I need to introduce no....err.... maybe it's time for tea and coffee...?"

This way of closing their presentation is by far a disappointing and forgettable way to close what was possibly an excellent presentation.

Closing with Impact

Now that we understand how not to finish our presentation, let us look at how to close with impact so that we are the speaker to be remembered.

When attending a meeting to deliver your presentation, other items or speakers will be on the agenda.

How effectively you close your presentation will be critical to ensuring that everyone will be able to recall what you covered and the key points.

Here are several ways to close a presentation that will capture the audience's attention, creating a long-lasting impact on them.

1) Personal Story

A personal story will always create the most impact on those listening to you, especially if you can demonstrate how your proposition has or will affect someone's life.

You may like to share a story that is based on one of your personal experiences.

In addition to sharing your personal experiences, alternative sources for your story are your colleagues, clients or customers.

A story of how your proposal, product or service has impacted on them will bring the presentation to life as people will easily relate to what you share.

If you are identifying people while recounting the story, be sure to ask their permission first.

You will have an unfortunate end to your presentation if the people you are referring to are sitting and squirming in their seats with embarrassment.

2) Read an Email

When you receive an email from a customer or a person influential in your business that endorses the proposal in your presentation, this can be extremely effective when read aloud.

The person writing the email which you will read out can say things about your company, proposal, product, service or idea that you would never be able to say to the same effect.

Seek the sender's permission to include their comments in your presentation, except if the email was written as a testimonial.

When closing the presentation, we can also use some of the same ideas covered when creating the opening.

3) Restate Your Opening

Restating your opening sentences and repeating the key points as your close, can be a helpful way of reinforcing the key points from your presentation.

Here is an example of how this could work: -

"I started by asking you how we can increase profits by 20%. You've now seen how we can increase profits by reducing overheads, increasing sales and developing new products".

4) Repeat Your Opening

If a rhetorical question was used to open your speech, you might find that the same one is suitable to be repeated in the closing sentence.

5) Quotations

The unusual or unheard quote that you are planning on using for your opening sentence may also be suitable to use for the final one.

You can repeat the quote.

Which of these closings will work best for your presentation, depends on the subject, the message and the end result you defined at the first stage in this process.

You may well find that you use alternative closings for the same presentation when being delivered to a different audience.

As with the opening of your presentation, choose the closing which will most effectively help your message and presentation to be remembered.

Key Points

Partition Part 3

Closing

When creating the closing sentences of your speech, choose those that will most effectively help your message and presentation to be remembered.

The last words of a presentation are as important as the first.

The common mistakes other speakers often make when closing their speeches are: -

Adding new content.

Making announcements.

Rambling & waffling.

How effectively you close your presentation will be critical to ensuring that everyone will be able to recall what you covered and the key points.

Ways you can successfully close a presentation are: -

Sharing a personal story.

Repeating your opening.

Restating your opening sentences.

Sharing an unusual or unheard quote.

Reading an email from a customer or a person influential in your business.

CHAPTER 8

Presence

Speaking with Presence, Delivering with Impact

This is it!

The moment you have been preparing and practising for is almost here. You are about to deliver your presentation.

The moments before you start your presentation are when any nerves or anxiety that you may be experiencing are likely to reach their peak.

These were the moments when I used to experience every single known symptom of public speaking nerves.

In this chapter, we will cover what to do in the moments before you speak and what to do in the first minute after you start.

Let me share with you some ways that helped me to reduce, and ultimately lose, those emotions of intense anxiety that I previously always experienced.

If you are going to be speaking in a large room, the conventional format you are likely to see the seating laid out in is what is known as 'theatre-style'.

This room layout you are most likely to be familiar with as all the chairs are in rows with a walkway that is generally down the middle.

When you are speaking in a large room, take the opportunity before you are introduced to stand up and walk to the back.

When you take the chance to move before speaking, it gives you the freedom to loosen up and ensure your legs have not "gone to sleep".

By moving around, you can use up any nervous energy which is all part of the process of getting prepared for your presentation.

If you aim to take a seat towards the back of the room, this will ensure you do not draw any attention from those attending the meeting as you stand up in advance of your speech.

When introduced as the next speaker or your turn to speak has arrived, the longer walk from the back of the room to the speaking area will provide you with another opportunity to burn off some nervous energy, loosen up and focus your mind.

The opportunity to stand up and move around before speaking is not always available to you.

If you are speaking in a small meeting or setting, doing so would be likely to draw unwanted attention and some stares from those attending.

When you are speaking in this situation, or would prefer not to walk to the back of the meeting room, you will still be able to stretch and loosen up.

Here is how to do it.

Sit with both feet flat on the floor so that your legs are uncrossed.

Slowly stretch one of your legs out so that it is straight and your foot is pointing forward.

Hold it in this position for 2 seconds then, slowly, draw it back towards you.

Place your foot so that it is again flat on the floor.

Now repeat the process for the other leg.

This leg stretching exercise can be repeated several times as you find yourself becoming more relaxed and ready for your speech.

Even when we are not planning to deliver a presentation, we can occasionally be asked to speak in public.

Recalling My Name

While working in the corporate world and attending a training session or perhaps meetings with new teams, we would regularly be called upon to introduce ourselves.

The way this would usually work would be to go around the table saying our name and department.

My name and department are details that I naturally could recall without having to give them any consideration.

However, the worry and stress of speaking in public would see me mentally and continually reciting my name and the department in which I worked while waiting for my turn to speak.

The result of mentally reciting my name and the department over and over again while waiting my turn?

When we finished the exercise of going around the table, I still had no idea of anyone's name.

My focus was on getting my details correct, so I would be incapable of listening to any of my colleagues as they introduced themselves.

My internal voice was the only one I heard.

The stress of having to speak to the room would often even make talking difficult as I experienced all those same symptoms of public speaking fears like butterflies in my stomach, racing heart, a dry throat, etc.

Have you ever been in this situation when just saying something simple like your name?

Here is a terrific technique that will help you to calm your nerves while regulating your breathing rate, helping you to become more relaxed when in similar situations.

Place both feet flat on the floor and relax your arms.

Slowly and quietly breathe in for 3 seconds.

Hold your breath for 3 seconds.

Slowly breathe out for 3 seconds.

Hold for 3 seconds.

Breathe in for 3 seconds.

As you repeat this cycle of slow and regulated breathing, you will notice your body relaxing and all the stress slowly slipping away.

You can perform this exercise anywhere you are experiencing some stress without anyone ever realising what you are doing.

The power of this technique is how you breathe deeply and slowly.

Too often when under stress, we start a breathing cycle that is fast and shallow without realising.

This breathing exercise is one taught to a wide variety of clients who hold positions ranging from international directors to interns, all of whom have found it immensely powerful in times of stress, so I am confident this process will work for you.

If you are standing up at the back of a room as mentioned earlier in this chapter, this is an exercise to complete as you are waiting to walk towards the speaking area.

Stand with your back straight, head up and facing forward with your arms hanging loosely at your sides while performing the breathing cycles.

The Big Moment

Let us examine how you can start off your speech in a way that will let everyone be aware you have arrived, and that they now need to pay attention.

Approach

To guarantee you appear confident and in control when it comes to the moment for you to enter the speaking area, walk forward with purpose and at a steady pace, but without rushing.

In the past, with the adrenaline pumping, one of my mistakes was to rush up to the front of the room as though there were some emergency or an announcement that needed to be urgently delivered.

Standing in front of a room full of people short of breath from rushing was always a weak way for me to start my speeches.

You will want those attending the meeting to have confidence in you and what you are about to say.

One way to do this is to appear in control of both yourself and the situation, so take your time in approaching the speaking area.

Position

In the speaking area, move to stand in the spot central to your audience.

This spot may be the middle of the table or even in line with a central walkway if the chairs are set up in theatre style.

The walkway between the rows of chairs may not be central to the audience. For example, the room may be laid out with rows of 10 chairs on the left and 7 on the right. In this case, standing to face the walkway would not be central to your audience.

Addressing the Audience

When standing in the speaking area, one sure sign of nervousness is when the speaker stands too far away from their audience.

The distance that is appropriate for you to stand away from the front row or table will vary on the occasion, room size and how familiar you are with the people attending.

If you are presenting in a meeting room with 10 people, you will find it best to stand much closer than if 100 attendees are sitting in an auditorium.

The distance would also vary between presenting to your colleagues and when pitching in a room with potential clients.

Be mindful of where you are standing as a natural temptation when experiencing public speaking anxiety is to edge backwards away from the audience.

When standing too far back, this signals your nervousness and creates some disengagement with the people at the meeting.

When you stand close to your listeners, you will appear confident and in control, even if you are not particularly feeling it at the time.

Stance

As you arrive in the speaking area, do not say a single word!

Yep, that is right, stay silent.

All too often speakers will start to deliver their speech immediately they arrive at the front of the room and even before they are facing those keenly waiting for their presentation.

When starting to speak before facing the meeting attendees, you create a poor initial impression as the opening few words will be directed towards the back wall and missed by those attending.

As you stand in a central position, close to your listeners and facing them, rather than speaking, take the opportunity to adjust your stance and settle in to 'claim' the speaking area.

Stand squarely with your back straight, head up and with your arms hanging naturally and relaxed at your side.

Now take a deep, slow and silent breath.

As you are aware, breathing is an essential part of our lives, yet we somehow forget to do so correctly when first facing our audience.

Smile at your audience as you gaze around at everyone attending the meeting.

A presentation started with a warm, genuine smile will be appreciated and reciprocated by those attending the meeting.

We usually smile back at people when they smile at us, which helps to create a friendly environment.

In most circumstances, it will be appropriate to smile before speaking.

There are some occasions when smiling at the audience would be an inappropriate way to start.

As an example, if you are announcing significant job losses, standing at the front with a big smile would be unseemly and unlikely to be appreciated by the people attending.

The whole process of arriving in the speaking area, moving into the best position, adjusting your stance, taking a breath while smiling and looking out at your audience will take a few seconds to complete.

These few seconds will positively impact on how you feel at the start of your speech and how those attending the meeting perceive you.

Now is the time to start your presentation.

Maintaining Credibility

Whenever a speaker is under pressure or experiencing anxiety while standing in front of their audience, they will often start to undermine their credibility and authority on the subject about which they are going to speak.

The speaker will have learnt the opening of their presentation, but for some reason go suddenly off script.

Instead of delivering the opening to their presentation they prepared and practised, they start making excuses.

The speaker's thought process is if they explain the situation with excuses, everyone will be more forgiving and understanding of any mistakes they make.

This is precisely what I used to believe.

The reality is members of the audience start to wonder why they are wasting their time.

As covered earlier in this book, your first few sentences are the ones that can make a positive impression and impact, so do not waste them with excuses.

Some of the opening sentences made by speakers that undermine their credibility and authority to speak on the subject are ones like these: -

A few things might go wrong today because ...

I experienced some computer issues.

I am not used to speaking in public.

I didn't have much time to prepare.

I am a bit stressed as ...

I am really nervous.

Unfortunately...

When speakers start making excuses like these, they will be the only ones to feel marginally better.

Your presentation is prepared and practised; you are ready to present.

Present!

Deliver only your prepared opening sentences rather than any excuses that undermine your credibility to be presenting.

Eye Contact

An effective way for you to connect and engage with your audience is by making eye contact with them.

While we are having a one-to-one conversation with a friend or colleague, we would not avoid making eye contact. If we did, they would start to think that we must be hiding something from them or being untruthful.

The same applies when we are speaking to larger groups during our presentations.

My speaking nerves and anxiety would cause me to focus either over everyone's heads, at the floor or even the ceiling.

While looking elsewhere and breaking your eye contact for a few seconds will never be noticed, doing so for extended periods will create a disconnect with everyone attending the meeting.

Consistent eye contact with your audience demonstrates you are interested in them and are keen to hold a conversation.

This conversation and eye contact will help everyone to be included and part of your presentation.

To make eye contact with all of the attendees, you will merely need to gaze at a person for a few seconds before slowly looking at someone else in another area of the room.

Make the change in your eye contact slow and deliberate so that you do not appear to be watching a tennis match with rapid movement from side to side.

Letting Go of My Blanket

Whenever I used to hold any notes during my presentations, I found myself frequently looking down and referring to them.

Reading my notes was something I would consistently do even though I had memorised my presentation content.

Why did I keep referring to my notes if I knew the content?

The speaker notes became a 'security blanket'.

While repeatedly looking at my notes provided reassurance, it kept breaking the connection I was trying to establish with those listening to me.

If you would like to use notes when delivering your presentation, create them on small index cards rather than on sheets of paper.

Small cards make finding your place a lot quicker, allowing you to glance down and then back up to your audience.

Another vital reason for purposefully looking at everyone attending the meeting is to see how they are reacting to your presentation.

Are they all following you?

Do they look interested?

Do they look confused?

Do they look bored?

As you read the audience and gauge their reaction, you can then adjust your presentation.

Key Points

Presence

When speaking in larger rooms, move to the back to loosen up and focus your mind.

If sitting in a small meeting, stretching your legs will help you prepare.

Calm any nerves by taking slow and deep breaths on the 3-second cycle described.

When it comes to your moment to speak, walk forward with purpose and at a steady pace, without rushing.

Settle into the speaking area before starting your speech.

Avoid accidentally undermining your own credibility.

CHAPTER 9

P.R.O.M.P.T Presentations™

Speaking On The Spot With Confidence

Throughout our lives, those around us like family, friends and colleagues are continually asking questions as they seek out new or additional information we can share with them.

These are most likely to be the usual day-to-day questions like what time lunch is, the name of a printer or the location of a meeting.

We can usually give them an instant reply without a second thought, readily supplying them with the information they sought from us.

Then there are the more specialised questions we will be asked by our colleagues, clients or managers which we are still capable of answering, even when we do not have all the information to hand.

We can even answer these questions in some way when we are uncertain of the details.

When we are placed in a more formal setting and asked even the simplest of questions, our brains seem to 'freeze' as the stress starts to set in.

In years gone by, while sitting happily in a meeting, when someone unexpectedly asked me a question, I would struggle to answer.

I would start my response with something like: -

"er... cough... erm... I... cough... er...well...y'know"

Starting my sentences like this was something that I would never do when asked questions outside of the meeting, even when struggling to find the answer.

Once I had finished giving my answer and started to feel calmer, I would be capable of coming up with all of the additional points that I should have included.

Why is that?

When put on the spot, especially when it is unexpected, the sudden surge of adrenaline and cortisol makes it almost impossible to process the information and create a clear reply.

The temptation is to say something immediately, anything!

That is when we start making all those er and erm sounds to fill the silence.

With the process you are about to learn in this chapter, never again will this happen to you.

You will now be ready to clearly and concisely answer any question asked.

These questions may be posed in a meeting, interview or during the question and answer part of your presentation.

The process to follow is the same, allowing you to speak and answer any question clearly and concisely.

Let us explore how you can deliver P.R.O.M.P.T Presentations™.

Pause

As we now understand, the sudden surge of adrenaline and cortisol makes us want to start speaking as soon as the question has been asked.

We may even start answering before the person asking the question has finished speaking.

We can end up even talking over them while delivering what ends up as a poorly structured reply.

The first step when creating your P.R.O.M.P.T Presentations is to pause.

Pausing may seem straightforward, yet is the one thing professionals rarely do when suddenly put on the spot.

No 'law' or requirement says you must start to speak literally at the exact second the other person has finished asking their question, so stay silent, until you are fully ready to answer.

The pause will only need to be for a couple of seconds during which you will have valuable time to process the entire point of what you have been asked and to start developing an answer.

We can sometimes be conscious of silence and have a need to fill it by saying something.

Yet these couple of seconds will not even be noticed by those attending the meeting.

If you happen to take a few extra seconds, they will assume that you are making a considered reply to the question, which serves to build your credibility.

I am constantly astonished how rapidly our brains can deal with all the information received so rapidly.

By briefly pausing, we are allowing our brains a second or two which will help with working out the answer.

Relax

The second component of delivering a P.R.O.M.P.T Presentation is to take a moment to relax.

When you unexpectedly find yourself in the spotlight and being asked to answer a question, some stress or anxiety is entirely natural.

If you consider the person asking the question is challenging you in some manner, then this is likely to increase the feelings of stress in this situation.

In these circumstances, a vital step is to take a moment to relax and reduce any stress you may be experiencing.

Here is an easy and efficient way to start reducing the symptoms of stress.

Take a single, slow, silent breath before you start delivering the answer to the question.

We will generally take shallow, fast breaths when experiencing stress that will not provide us with the oxygen we require for the situation we are facing.

By taking a single, slow, silent breath, you start to decrease any symptoms of stress.

This type of breathing is a good practice to incorporate in the pause you take before speaking as described in the previous section.

Keep the breath silent as then no one in the meeting will perceive it as showing any level of frustration or impatience with the question or the person asking.

Observe

Many years ago, I recall how during one particular job interview, I spent a full two minutes giving my answer to a complicated technical question before realising this was not what they had asked me.

When put on the spot and under stress, the temptation is to rush into answering the question we thought they asked as I did in the interview, rather than the actual one posed.

The temptation is to latch onto the first part of the question and start developing an answer.

While we are doing this, we close out the rest of what the other person is saying which may consist of the key point of their question.

If there are any doubts as to the question, ask for them to repeat it.

You may also choose to repeat the question back to check your understanding is correct.

Avoid the temptation of adopting this approach for every question during a Q & A session or interview as a way to delay delivering your answer and gain extra time while you formulate a response.

If you either repeat every question or ask for them to be repeated, this will soon start to seem evasive by those attending.

Muted

We can sometimes find ourselves asked questions that are deliberately challenging, provocative or antagonistic.

These may come from people like jealous colleagues, upset clients or tough interviewers.

When faced with answering these types of questions, it will be essential to maintain your professionalism and remain in control.

If you start giving an ambiguous or rambling answer, the person asking may consider you are unprepared, were caught off guard or being defensive.

This will be perceived as a deficiency in your knowledge or competence.

There is something even worse I have witnessed speakers do when in these situations. This is something you will want to avoid.

You will never want to give into the temptation, or perhaps even the trap, of instantly hitting back with any form of retaliation or disparaging comment.

The comment can be made in the form of sarcasm, a dismissive remark or even seeking to belittle the person who asked the question.

When finding yourself in these kinds of situations, stay muted or silent until you can formulate a considered, balanced reply.

Staying muted for just a few seconds is all it takes for your brain to create the appropriate sentences to start your considered answer to the challenging question asked.

The person asking the question is likely to realise if they are being deliberately challenging, provocative or antagonistic, as will those attending the meeting.

When people see you taking the time to consider your answer and responding in a controlled, considered way, you will look self-assured and convinced of the content both of your presentation and the response.

Your considered reply will strengthen the audience's confidence in your abilities and knowledge.

Précis

As you reach the end of delivering your answer to the question, you will add clarity and conviction by presenting a précis of your main points.

If the answer you give is extended or technical in nature, the précis will help those listening to recall and remember the points that you made.

Be sure to choose what are the essential points rather than repeating the answer you gave.

A précis works best when kept short in relation to the time taken to give your full answer.

Including a précis with your reply is a potent tool for showing your status as a confident, competent, communicator.

Transition

When you reach the end of your answer and précis, it will be time to transition either back to the person who asked the question or on to the next person if this is part of a question and answer session.

Creating a seamless transition is an essential component of delivering an answer that professionals will often neglect to include.

Many speakers I have heard will deliver a well-structured answer, then not know how to transition back to the person who asked the question or move on to the next one.

They may merely say something like: -

'...well...that is all I have really got to say...'

The transition you use will depend on the situation you are in and the answer that you gave.

You may say something such as: -

"Does that answer your question?"

or

"That is why I consider (repeat the key point)".

Finish your answer with a transition that is positive and confident.

The P.R.O.M.P.T Presentations™ process is a powerful way to create and deliver compelling answers to questions when put on the spot, in what are frequently stressful situations for us.

Key Points

P.R.O.M.P.T Presentations™

Pause: Before starting to answer a question.

Relax: Take a single, slow, silent breath to reduce any symptoms of stress you are feeling.

Take your time to answer when put on the spot.

Avoid the temptation to jump in with an answer immediately.

Breathe slowly and silently to help reduce your stress.

Ensure the question you have heard is the one being asked of you.

CHAPTER 10

Pitch

Getting Known With Your Professional Positioning Pitch™

In our corporate careers, we will continually be meeting new people. They may work within our company, at a client's or in another industry.

When we have the opportunity to meet somebody new for the very first time, there is one question that we will both ask each other.

If this is a more formal occasion, such as a networking event or business breakfast meeting, this question is virtually guaranteed to come up and be asked within the first few sentences of the conversation.

Even in social situations, this question will still come up in conversation.

This question?

"What do you do?"

This is a question invariably asked when two people meet for the first time.

The question helps us as we are figuring the other person out and is innocuous enough so as never to cause any offence.

When we are asked this question "what do you do?", it provides an opportunity for us to explain a little bit more about our professional career.

In some situations, an opportunity is provided to see if any synergy exists with the other person so we may continue the conversation, possibly even doing business with them.

When we are the one asking the question and listening to the other person reply, we can then be seeking the synergy.

Well, that is the theory.

In practice, what will usually happen is that instead of telling the other person what we actually do in our career, we instead give them our job title.

We say something like:

"I am a compliance officer."

"I am a junior auditor".

"I am an accountant".

Most people will do the same when in this situation and speaking to a stranger.

If any interest exists after hearing a job title, there is the opportunity to dig deeper by asking a few questions to find out additional information.

When someone tells you their job title, what do you learn about their work, role or the services they provide?

A job title will tell you very little about them and their role.

An accountant, for example, may work for one of the big worldwide firms, dealing with international clients and multi-million-pound contracts.

On the other hand, they may be self-employed, working from home, helping entrepreneurs and start-up companies with their accounts.

If you happen to work at a large bank dealing with mergers and acquisitions, you may find opportunities exist that are worth discussing with the accountant working at one of the world's big firms.

You would undoubtedly find a lot in common to chat about with them.

There is less likelihood of any business opportunities with the accountant who deals with entrepreneurs and start-ups.

When meeting new people, you need to convey who you work with and how you help them.

The person to whom you are speaking may not be able to offer you a job or business opportunity at that moment, but they may be able to in the future.

They may also be able to recommend you to other people who are looking for your area of expertise.

If you want to be remembered and receive future opportunities from the people you meet, there is one new tool that you need.

This tool will allow you to convey to someone you have met for the first time precisely what you do.

When you can convey this information in a clear, concise and compact way using only one or two sentences, you will leave a definite and lasting impression on them.

This is why it is essential to create your own Professional Positioning Pitch™.

The purpose of a Professional Positioning Pitch™ is to give a very brief overview of what you do, who you do it with and the results you achieve, leaving the conversation open for further discussion and questions.

We will abbreviate the Professional Positioning Pitch™ to P.P.P in this chapter.

While chatting and after explaining your job role with a P.P.P, you may realise the other person is not interested, or there is no synergy between you.

That's fine!

The other person will still now be able to clearly recall the service you provide.

If they later bump into somebody who mentions they are looking for a person with your skills or expertise, guess who will be the person they will think of first?

You!

The principal purpose of a P.P.P is for the sentences to be readily understood by everyone.

This clarity equally applies to those who work outside of your sector, so avoid adding in lots of jargon or technical words.

While delivering your P.P.P is not the time to try impressing someone with your experience and detailed industry knowledge.

Create your P.P.P so that if you were to say it to a friend outside of your industry, they would be able to understand what it is you do and repeat it back to you.

You may be thinking at this stage that a P.P.P is another way of describing what is commonly known as an elevator pitch.

On average, an elevator pitch will take up to two minutes to deliver. That is a long answer to the simple question "what do you do?".

Whenever I have been subjected to that kind of answer to a simple question, I mentally switch off.

A Professional Positioning Pitch™ is far more potent than an elevator pitch and a lot shorter.

The power of a P.P.P is that you use only a couple of sentences.

Each one is constructed and delivered in a way to grab the listener's attention and give them a hook to ask you further questions if they are interested in finding out more details.

At my training courses, we spend time ensuring attendees construct a Professional Positioning Pitch™ that is compelling, memorable and repeatable.

Let us look at each of these components.

Compelling

Your P.P.P should be written so that it evokes both interest and attention when you say it.

When written in this way, it creates interest from the person listening, so they will want to learn more, seeking additional information from you.

Memorable

Construct your P.P.P avoiding any lengthy, complicated or technical words. Every industry has its own jargon that will seem second nature to you.

By removing this jargon, you will enable everyone hearing your P.P.P to understand what you say, allowing them to remember what it is you do more efficiently.

The purpose is to have your P.P.P remembered even when your listener may be speaking to many other people at the same event.

Repeatable

Why is this important?

Create a P.P.P that your listeners will be able to repeat to themselves, giving a far better recall of the conversation they had with you.

They will know many other people in both their own and other industries, so could easily hear of someone looking for a person with your skills, experience or qualifications.

By constructing your P.P.P so it is easy for everyone to repeat, they will be able to explain your expertise or services to others.

Once you have created your P.P.P, practise saying it aloud.

When attendees at my training events share their newly created P.P.P, they sometimes find the words do not flow off the tongue as smoothly as they expected. The time taken to practise aloud provides the opportunity to make revisions and different versions.

When meeting people, you will want to be able to say your P.P.P as easily as you say your name.

This will ensure when delivering your P.P.P, you come over as natural and sincere.

A well-written P.P.P is an essential tool in ensuring your success in today's corporate and business world.

You may find it useful to have different versions of your Professional Positioning Pitch™ for when attending functions and events.

I mentioned earlier how you should remove all industry jargon from your P.P.P so everyone would be able to understand what you do in your career.

There is one exception.

If you are attending an event for your industry, having a version of your Professional Positioning Pitch™ that contains some industry jargon will work as everyone attending will understand your role.

The key is to consider the person you are chatting with, ensuring they will understand and remember your answer to the question "what do you do?".

Key Points

Pitch

Create your own Professional Positioning Pitch™.

Have an answer to the question "what do you do?".

Make a P.P.P that is compelling, memorable and repeatable.

Alternative versions of your P.P.P may be required for different audiences and events.

Practise delivering your Professional Positioning Pitch™, so it becomes as easy as saying your name.

ABOUT **ANDY O'SULLIVAN**

How to achieve success in the business world



Andy O'Sullivan is an international bestselling author, consultant and educator who has written extensively on the subject of how to survive and thrive in the corporate world with effective public speaking and presentation skills.

In his books, workshops and seminars, Andy teaches professionals how to dramatically increase their rise up the corporate career ladder by creating and confidently presenting presentations that inspire, impress and ensure they are the obvious choice for promotion.

Andy enjoyed a successful corporate career that saw him working for many of the leading financial institutions and international banks.

It was while working in the corporate world that Andy recognised the need to develop his own public speaking and presentation skills.

A long and at times, painful journey that lead him to develop the renowned Corporate Confidence and Communication System™.

The Corporate Confidence and Communication System™ utilises all of Andy's knowledge and extensive experience from the real world so professionals are now able to swiftly create speeches that connect with clients, colleagues and even the CEO.

The commitment Andy has continually shown in helping people to learn effective public speaking and presentation skills has been recognised by all of the international awards and accolades he's received.

Andy is the founder of the Academy of Public Speakers, a leading provider of public speaking and presentation skills training to professionals.

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HOW TO CREATE AND CONFIDENTLY DELIVER PRESENTATIONS

Now You Can Finally Receive The Success You Deserve in Your Corporate Career!

In this book, you'll discover: -

- ✓ How to speak fearlessly in any situation with this single proven exercise.
- ✓ How to avoid humiliating yourself in front of colleagues, clients or managers.
- ✓ A powerful way to answer any question, even when suddenly put on the spot in Q & A sessions, meetings or interviews.
- ✓ 9 words that could utterly destroy your presentation even before you've got going... You need to know and avoid these!
- ✓ 5 things you must do in the critical first few minutes with an audience that tells them you're someone they must pay attention to.
- ✓ Shocking truth about how you can really connect with an audience (what you can ignore and what you cannot afford to miss).
- ✓ How to stop destroying your chances of success, even before you've said a single word.

And much, MUCH more....

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Andy O'Sullivan is an international best-selling author, speaker and educator who has written extensively on the subject of how to survive and thrive in the business world with effective public speaking, pitching and presentation skills.