

The 7 Pitfalls of Public Speaking

Eliminating bad habits is one of the swiftest ways to improve stage presence, presentation skills and confidence in your delivery. These 7 Pitfalls act like trapdoors, instantly taking you out of a presentation and leaving the audience to wonder where you and your message went.

Take a minute to reflect on your last speaking engagement. Do any of these feel familiar?

If so, fret not – you’re like countless executives, community leaders and TEDx speakers the MOXiE Institute works with to polish rough edges and improve presentation performance. These errors are common and correctable, and a few subtle tweaks will put you back on a path toward righteous presentations in no time.

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1. TONE DEAFNESS

Audiences come in many shapes and sizes. Why were you asked to speak to this particular crowd? Who are they? What do they stand for? What is the conference theme? Did this group have a good fiscal quarter or was 20% of the company laid off?

The audience is an integral part of your presentation. The best speakers work with the audience and develop a tone that meets their needs; the worst are unaware of the crowd and use a tone that suits themselves. Long before you take the stage, you should ask myriad questions to understand the demographics and mindset of your audience and develop a tone that meets their needs. Don’t play folk music to a hip-hop crowd.

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2. A WING AND A PRAYER

The mythical power of the spontaneous presentation has been greatly exaggerated. Unless you are an accomplished stand-up comic or improv actor, “winging it” is a surefire way to appear unprepared, ill-informed and untrustworthy.

By the time you step on stage, you should know your content inside and out. Your PowerPoint is not a teleprompter, and you should still be able to nail your remarks in the event of a technical problem. Click your heels and say it three times: rehearse, rehearse, rehearse.

3



3. JOLTIN’ JOE

It’s 6am in a dark hotel room several time zones from your actual bed. Jetlagged and anxious, you’re due to take the stage in a few short hours, and you can’t hustle to the lobby Starbucks fast enough.

But just like the higher altitudes and recycled air of an airplane cabin, caffeine dehydrates. That cup (or two or three) of coffee raises the odds that your already depleted body will be hit with cotton mouth or jittery, fidgety limbs at the least opportune time. Do yourself a favor and opt for tea and water.

4



BODY LANGUAGE BARRIER

Commanding the stage is an unnatural art. It takes practice to feel like yourself before a sea of strangers, and even the most assured leaders can shirk under the bright lights.

Confidence begins with posture, and the audience feeds off of every nonverbal cue you emit. Your posture conveys self-worth, credibility and status. Hold your head high, pull your shoulders back and stand tall. You'll soon feel the same strength you're projecting.

5



HAIL OF BULLETS

Conveying complicated, data-heavy ideas on stage is a challenge many speakers face. Dense information that makes for a compelling read is challenging to translate into a stage performance. While bullet points effectively organize ideas for written consumption, their overuse sounds a death knell for presentations.

After a cursory glance at your PowerPoint, the audience wants to focus on you. Bullet points should be used sparingly and audience members should never strain to read layers of content on your slides. When it comes to written presentation content, less is always more. In fact, many professional presenters exclusively use images in their presentation decks. Worth a thousand words, we're told.

6



IS THIS THING ON?

It takes practice to understand how your voice carries in a variety of environments. Speaking in an auditorium is different than speaking in a boardroom, and you'll sound different to yourself with a microphone than you do without. Green speakers often oscillate between boisterous vocal pitch and mumbling through sections of their presentations.

Proper breathing and voice projection techniques will keep your pitch steady with or without a microphone, in front of a small group or in front of thousands. Maintaining eye contact with the audience and using the stage space to vary your delivery can underscore important pieces of your presentation and eliminate the need to yell. Hone your technique and own every stage.

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CHASING BUTTERFLIES

The nervous energy that accompanies your stage entrance can be a terrific ally or a powerful enemy. Untamed, the adrenaline can be disorienting, but it can also feel like a superpower when properly channeled. The choice is yours.

Calm those last minute butterflies with a battery of relaxation techniques used by professional stage performers. Lower your heart rate, center yourself and stride onstage with the wind at your back. Steady does it.

Want to learn more performance tips and techniques like this? Give the MOXiE Institute a call. We'll develop a custom plan to capitalize on your existing strengths and sharpen your edges wherever necessary.

Talk is cheap, performance is priceless.