

(Adapted from a paper presented at a Public Speaking Course organized jointly by AIESEC, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia and the Stamford Group of Colleges.)

What is public speaking? It is the ability to effectively deliver an interesting speech to an audience.

What is the value of public speaking? Why do people need to speak well in public?

Being able to speak well in public does wonders for the development of your self-confidence. There will be many occasions when you will be called on to speak in public and it will benefit you enormously to know the principles and techniques underlying the skill of public speaking.

Business and social contacts can be forged through being able to speak well. Teachers should have a natural edge over others in this area but there is a difference between teaching students and giving a speech in public. When a teacher is teaching, he is imparting knowledge to students whom he is familiar with. There is constant verbal interaction both ways. But when you are giving a speech in public, you often encounter a sea of unfamiliar faces making you feel less self-assured and more nervous.

When you are unable to put across to your audience your ideas, either because you are timid or you are nervous and cannot think clearly, your whole personality may be blocked off – leaving people with an unfavourable impression of you.

Whenever public speaking is mentioned, it evokes feelings of fear and nervousness. Why? Because most people have visions of a speaker eloquently standing up and facing an audience, delivering a speech effortlessly and spontaneously with the audience rapt in attention that it seems such an impossible skill to achieve.

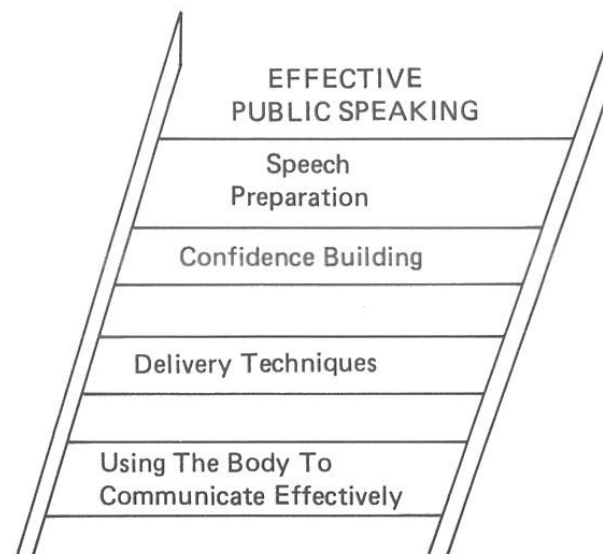
The late Dale Carnegie's basic philosophy regarding public speaking was that it is not only the expression of a few words, it also reveals the human personality. Man is a tender, sensitive being – to go up to the stage to deliver a speech is exposure of one's inner self – not only are one's

strengths displayed but also one's weaknesses and the latter might overshadow the former. Therefore, it requires a great deal of confidence to go up on to a stage.

The person who stands there and speaks effectively is doing so because he has acquired the basic skills and has the necessary qualities to be a good speaker.

How do you go about acquiring the skills? There is no magic formula, neither is there any profound theory to help you achieve the skill of public speaking. In fact, the steps that you take are so simple that most of us know about them. Why then is the road to achieving this skill a seemingly uphill struggle? This is because to master the skill requires the hard work of putting into practice the various steps. Like any successful venture in life it requires 99 per cent perspiration and 1 per cent inspiration and anyone with a determined mind should be able to succeed.

What are the steps that you need to take? The steps to achieving the skill can be regarded as the rungs of a ladder which you have to climb to get to the top. The different rungs are made up of different skills and are not listed here in order of priority. Collectively, they all need to be acquired to get to the top of the ladder – which is the public speaking skill.



Building Up Confidence

In this paper, the component 'Building Confidence' is dealt with first, as psychologically this is the emotion that you usually have to grapple with and progressively acquire before being able to deliver the other components effectively.

One of the greatest barriers to speaking effectively in public is nervousness. If it is any help, I have given a number of speeches and till today I still feel nervous whenever I have to make a speech. The feeling of being nervous will always be present but you can minimize it and make it work to your advantage. A certain degree of nervousness gives you what physiologists call "muscle tonus". This, coupled with a thorough preparation of the speech, can lead to an effective delivery of a speech in public.

Through constant practice and exposure, you find that when you convey the ideas you believe in and interact with the audience, you slowly overcome the feeling of nervousness.

What are the remedies for these feelings of nervousness?

1. Preparation

There is no greater aid in the fight against nervousness than 'preparation'. A speaker should have gathered sufficient relevant information on the topic of his speech to arm him with more knowledge — confidence. Knowing more about the topic than your audience is a definite way of gaining self-assurance. Only when you have worked thoroughly on your speech and practised its delivery can you acquire the confidence that ensures an effective presentation. Effective public speaking can be regarded as a wheel which needs to be oiled with adequate preparation in order to run smoothly and efficiently.

2. Act Confidently and Predetermine Your Mind To Success

To possess courage, you must act as if you already

have confidence. To be able to act convincingly you must have prepared your work sufficiently. Dale Carnegie's recommendation is that, if you have prepared sufficiently, you should take a deep breath, step out briskly, draw yourself up to your full height and look your audience straight in the eye and begin to talk as if every one of them owed you money. Imagine that they are all here in front of you to beg you for an extension of the loan.

You have an objective in your mind — to acquire confidence to enable you to communicate effectively. You must let nothing deviate from this goal and you should work persistently and consistently at achieving it.

3. Speak as Often as You can

You must seize every opportunity you have to speak — there is no better way of gaining self-assurance than to practise speaking in public — with every attempt we should try to record the speeches on tape. When we later listen to ourselves, we can detect our strengths and we should then try to improve on the weaknesses and thus try to improve on them and thus progressively become better speakers.

Public speaking is a skill that can be acquired and it is not totally a gift. Bearing this in mind and applying the principles that have been covered, you can possess greater confidence. Once an individual realizes that he can stand up and talk intelligently to a group of people, he will have a self-assurance that will open up many new avenues for him.

References

1. Carnegie. D. 1956, *How to Develop Self-Confidence and Influence People by Public Speaking*, New York: Pocket Books
2. Monroe and Ehninger 1969, *Principles of Speech Communication*, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company.