

Tips to Improve Your Public Speaking

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As someone who has been a motivational and educational speaker for decades, I know that there are more people who are fearful of public speaking than who love it. I started speaking before I graduated from Penn State University often to college campuses. Through my years with Toastmasters International, I have seen ordinary people become excellent public speakers. Here are my tips to improving your public speaking abilities.

1. Make a commitment

Half-hearted commitments produce half-hearted results. If you want to improve your public speaking, start by making a firm commitment that you will make the effort and take the actions necessary to do so. Be willing to DO something to improve your speaking.

2. Get over yourself already

No one thinks as much about you and what you do as you do. Trust me on this one. So you get up and give a terrible speech. The likelihood of anyone remembering it in a week or two is slim to none unless you are a Presidential candidate or a celebrity. Stop flattering yourself by thinking that people will either remember or that they care that much. You are the only one that thinks so much about what you do. I realize that this sounds very harsh; however we live in a generation where people are very busy and think mostly of what they have to do – not what you are doing.

3. Study books and other speakers

Make notes to yourself about what you like when you hear other good or great speakers. What are they doing that you love? What are they doing that doesn't work? There are books on this subject. Since I have not read any of them, I am not in a position to recommend any. I would venture a guess there are some decent books on the topic.

4. Put yourself out there

One frightening, but often results producing method to improve your public speaking is to agree to give a presentation, a speech or a workshop. Often that gives people the necessary deadline and motivation to improve. For people who are not self-motivated and self-disciplined, this often works quite well.

5. If you have money, hire a coach

If money is no object, you could certainly hire a speaking coach. The difficulty with this idea is that it is hard to tell who would make a great speaking coach. Some great speakers would be poor at coaching. You could end up spending a

lot of money without actually improving very much. I would use caution if you are considering this idea as it could be waste of money.

6. Be willing to fail

People become great at things that they are willing to fail at and that they are willing to practice over and over again. Mastery is defined as 10,000 hours in a particular field. You would most likely feel like a master if you spent a few hundred hours engaged in public speaking. Be willing to fail and practice until you have mastery.

7. Join Toastmasters International

Since 1924 Toastmasters International has been helping people become better speakers, better leaders and learn how to run effective meetings. Toastmasters International is a 501(3)C nonprofit organization that offers a positive environment to nurture and develop speaking and listen skills. Dues for membership are inexpensive compared to other professional training seminars or workshops. Each club has a different personality, so shop around and find a club that fits your style. Plan to invest more than a year if you want to get certified to the first level.

Even advanced and confident speakers can pick up new skills in Toastmasters. It is not just for beginners. It is also for people who love to talk. You can find out where a club near you is from the Toastmasters International website at www.Toastmasters.org.

8. Look at why people fail

While there are many reasons why people fail at any given task, here are the top three reasons, in my humble opinion, why people fail when it comes to failing to improve in their public speaking ability:

- (1) They are too thin-skinned: they take any feedback offered personal. They are wounded by constructive feedback instead of grateful that someone is pointing out how they can improve.
- (2) They are not willing to practice in one way or another. Experts assert that no matter how genius or gifted a person is, it takes 10,000 hours to be a master in any field.
- (3) They were not really all that committed. When you are really committed, you keep working at a project until you succeed, or you at least try something else to accomplish the task. What you don't do, if you are committed, is quit. Edison and Einstein are two classic examples of committed individuals who kept at it until they got what they came for.