

INTRODUCTION

YOU SWEAT WHEN YOU ARE ASKED TO SPEAK IN PUBLIC. What's the big deal if your heart starts racing, your mouth goes dry, and your voice starts quivering?

After all, who cares about advancing your career, generating more sales for your business, carrying the day for your public policy issues, or earning esteem in the eyes of your peers?

Here is the truth about public speaking: If you aspire to anything beyond run-of-the-mill in either your professional or personal life, you need solid presentation skills.

A nervous CEO inspires little confidence on Wall Street. A fidgety business owner fails to win customers on Main Street. An edgy project manager proves unable to get the ball rolling. An ill-at-ease government official scores no points for her prime initiatives.

Yet public speaking involves much more than conquering a case of the jitters. Bookstore shelves groan under the weight of volumes that dwell on nerves. I want to make the positive case regarding the benefits of delivering presentations.

In fact, I believe the secret to great presentations entails stressing the positive. Tell your audience what you can do rather than what you refuse to do. Paint a picture of your accomplishments, not what your competition does.

It is how you perform in front of the room that counts. Note that I say it is what you do, not only what you say. Presentation skills—including your nonverbal abilities—are critical in opening up your audience to your message.

Sure, I will offer some tips on how to corral your nerves; that is part of evolving into a better speaker. But there is more. This book gives you the complete speaking package by zeroing in on the Three Keys to Great Presentations™.

Each chapter begins with its own set of Three Keys—specific objectives that tell you what you can expect to learn.

What you read on these pages will give you the same truth my clients gain when I lead them through a public speaking workshop. In teaching presentation skills to corporate, association, government, and non-profit leaders over the years, I have found the Three Keys to Great Presentations a remarkable—and fun—learning tool.

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The ideas incorporated here are for you if you can see your reflection in these profiles:

- A highly technical mind that struggles to translate things into plain English
- A nervous individual who begins to quake at the mere thought of delivering a presentation
- A business leader who has just been promoted to a position of greater responsibility
- A middle manager who wants to climb the corporate ladder
- A CFO who needs to deliver complex quarterly results in an easy to understand manner
- A board member for a non-profit organization who needs to reach out to potential donors and volunteers
- A manager or team leader who must find a way to motivate team members
- A public relations professional who wants to be taken more seriously by senior management
- An expert charged with talking to the media
- A human resources officer seeking a seat at the executive committee table
- A salesperson in need of stronger interpersonal skills

I have often said that nervousness is the unchallenged number one killer of great public speakers. *The Truth About Public Speaking: The Three Keys to Great Presentations* shows you how to get beyond nervous.

But there is much more than that to your improvement when standing before an audience. I encourage you to develop a greater thirst for lifelong learning. That is why my goal here is to provide an organized method that you, as a speaker, can use to improve your craft on an ongoing basis.

This volume covers two often overlooked fundamentals—Preparation and Assessing Feedback—and offers strategies that put you on a path toward constant improvement.

Taken together, the Three Keys provide the comprehensive yet easy to grasp system you need to sharpen your communications edge.

Chapter One introduces the Three Keys, laying the groundwork and explaining their importance.

Chapter Two delves into the benefits—and there are many—of transforming yourself into an admired public speaker.

The first key—Preparation—is detailed in Chapter Three. Preparation is the equivalent of batting practice for a speaker. It requires your attention well in advance of your performance.

The essentials of the second key, Performance, are spelled out in Chapter Four. It covers everything from how to be introduced exactly the way you want to dealing with rude audience members.

Chapter Five is devoted to Winning the Communications Trifecta, outlining how you can benefit by using your Video Tools, Audio Tools, and Message Tools for maximum impact.

Nonverbal communication is the basis for Chapter Six, where we will delve into the research and then place things in context.

Chapter Seven answers the question, why are some speakers so bad? I analyze some case studies and offer a positive perspective that can help you grow your speaking talents.

Fielding questions from the audience is a big part of any presentation. Chapter Eight covers all the bases of Q&A, from handling challenging inquiries to shutting down the Agenda Hog who tries to steal your spotlight.

The third of the three keys—Assessing Feedback—is crucial in any field, including public speaking. Strangely, it is all too often ignored. Chapter Nine is dedicated to giving you concrete methods to gauge your performance. If you fail to measure your skills as a presenter, you might as well kiss goodbye your hope of sharpening your communications edge.

Chapter Ten helps you master the use of presentation software. Lots of speakers use slide shows; many of them use it quite badly. Here, you will gain an understanding of what a winning slide looks like, how you can brand each one, and more.

Chapter Eleven focuses on the vital step of developing a plan for lifelong learning. This aspect is too frequently ignored despite the fact that your future success depends on it.

The appendices are stocked with added resources, including:

- The form I use to gather information on upcoming presentations
- An exercise to help you sharpen your nonverbal skills
- A list of questions you should ask when searching for a communications trainer
- Recommended reading to enhance your lifelong learning
- A catalog of keyboard shortcuts designed to smooth your use of presentation software

If you are looking for a quick fix, you can stop reading now. I have no interest in explaining how you can get better by simply reading a book or participating in a lone workshop.

I am a firm believer in lifelong learning. In this volume, I want to show you how to set yourself up for a lifetime of ongoing enrichment as a presenter by using The Three Keys to Great Presentations: Preparation, Performance, and Assessing Feedback.

Here is the bottom line: You will *not* get better if you fail to prepare. And you certainly will not get better if you fail to learn the value of assessing feedback routinely.

The central question remains, what's in it for you? This volume can put you on the road to becoming a better speaker, whether you address the National Press Club or your local garden club.

If you take these lessons to heart, here is some of what you can expect:

- *Convey confidence* when speaking before any audience
- *Get rid of* annoying nonverbal habits
- *Utilize visual aids* and presentation software effectively
- *Refuse to be sidetracked* by off-point or hostile questions
- *Craft and deliver* a magnetic message
- *Find friendly faces* in any audience
- *Prevent nasty surprises* from your audio/visual equipment
- *Utilize your body language* for maximum impact
- *Reduce anxiety* when addressing a roomful of people
- *Develop* quotable quotes
- *Take charge* during the crucial question and answer period
- *Persuade, educate, or inform* your audience

I make no promises that you will become a great orator. You would be better served by investing in a pair of magical ruby slippers as in a book that guarantees to transform you into a star.

The only way to become a better speaker is to speak—a lot. You should leap at the chance to deliver a presentation whenever and wherever a sensible opportunity presents itself.

Here is my bargain with you: Use the methods and exercises contained within these pages; mix them with a healthy dose of dedication, hard work, and practice. Over time, you will improve no matter your current skill level.

An average speaker will become adept. An exciting speaker will become superb.

Finally, I shudder to think of a learning experience that does not contain an element of fun. I freely admit that I love my work—teaching today’s leaders to become better communicators. I hope my passion shines through on these pages.

Engaging in lifelong learning to improve your public speaking skills is far from drudgery. It can lead to a better job, higher profits, more donations, and public policy objectives. That sounds like fun to me.

Enjoy the next steps contained on these pages. Let us now unlock the door to speaking success by helping you take possession of the Three Keys to Great Presentations.

So, start reading. As you glide through these pages, rehearse the techniques. That is the only assurance to improvement any reputable public speaking coach can offer.

—ED BARKS