

Molly's Top Ten Talkin' Tips

By Molly E. Holzschlag

I've heard it said that when given the choice between death and public speaking, most people choose death. Not kidding! That's because public speaking is an extremely hard and daring thing to do.

So, here are some tips n' tricks to help you feel more comfortable, and to help your audiences get the most out of your natural brilliance and charm. Some of these suggestions will be old-hat, but review 'em anyway. And, there's sure to be some new gems here too.

Tip 1: Start Early, Get Comfy, Be Friendly

Get to your speaker room at least a half hour ahead of time. This will give you plenty of time to assess the room, set up your stuff, solve any technical difficulties, and give yourself a few minutes to go to the restroom or get some coffee.

Then, about five to ten minutes before you begin, walk around the room welcoming people as they're settling in. Ask how they're enjoying the conference, what they think the highlights are so far, if their accommodations are appropriate. Make nice, ask names. Making friends early on is a sure-fire way to help you—and others—feel

comfortable. It also establishes allies early on, which can assist you later should any unforeseen challenges arise.

Tip 2: Formally Welcome Your Audience

Sounds obvious, doesn't it? Well, it's amazing how speakers—out of nervousness or rushing to get this and that done before starting—forget to simply say hello! When you begin your talk, welcome everyone and introduce yourself by your full name. Let your audience know you're glad they took the time out from their busy lives to spend some time with you.

Tip 3: Earn the Right

Why are you standing on the podium and not someone else? Don't answer this question with a list of credentials—that's for your bio. Instead, focus on what drives your passion. Think of a short and deeply personal experience or anecdote that explains the reason you do what you do.

After welcoming your audience and thanking them for being with you today, tell them your story. It must be brief, but it also must be something that fully expresses why you've earned the right to lead and guide them.



Molly E. Holzschlag, Executive Editor of Web Review, www.WebReview.com is also a best-selling author, trainer and a lot of other things too.

Find out more at www.molly.com.

Tip 4: Get the Audience Involved

Once you've welcomed your audience and earned the right (this should take no more than five minutes total), offer some activity to get the audience involved. Poll-taking is a great way to engage with the audience at large.

When you ask questions, raise your hand to encourage everyone to do the same.

In an HTML class I may, for example, begin by asking "how many people here have been authoring HTML for 1 year or less?" and so on. When you ask questions, raise your hand to encourage everyone to do the same. At this point, you'll often get comments from audience members—engage a few in a short dialog, asking about their personal experiences and how they come to be in the room. Just be careful to graciously keep the interaction short and to the point.

Tip 5: Don't Rely Completely on Your Slides

While you should prepare your media as a guide for the event, you should also be fluid enough to engage in a relevant discussion should the need arise. Your moderator skills come in handy here, because naturally you have to keep on track and get through your information. Just don't let the slides become a crutch for your own vitality and knowledge—or worse, get in the way of the unique contributions your audience members will have that will shape the event and make it particularly personal and memorable.

If you are physically able, avoid sitting during short lectures. Standing and moving keeps the energy and momentum going.

Tip 6: Your Body Says it All

Body language is extremely powerful, and sometimes what we think we shouldn't be doing with our bodies we should, and vice-versa. A perfect example is when someone asks a question. Our natural inclination is to turn toward that person, even move toward them. In a public speaking environment, this is referred to as *compression* and it actually shuts others out!

The proper response is to turn your *face* to the person doing the questioning, but keep your body facing the audience. Move away, not toward, or don't move from your position at all.

Try to develop a comfortable but authoritative stance. Be confident, stand tall. Keep your hands steady at your side and avoid closing your arms across your chest, because this is a defensive rather than open posture. Your body language is the key to establishing and maintaining authority in a room full of people.

If you are physically able, avoid sitting during short lectures. Standing and moving keeps the energy and momentum going. I prefer to get a wireless microphone and actually move into the audience space, making it very personal. Naturally, if you're doing a long tutorial, it's acceptable to sit for periods of time. Just be sure to mix the time between standing and sitting.

It's very intriguing how many honest, good people have a terribly hard time simply saying the words "I don't know."

Tip 7: Dealing with a Difficult Question

When someone asks a question to which you do not know the answer, state clearly that you do not know. It's very intriguing how many honest, good people have a terribly hard time simply saying the words "I don't know." But we forget that other people understand we can't possibly know it all. So, ask if anyone in the audience knows! This encourages participation and expands your own horizons. Plus, you'll get more respect for being authentic and human. Sometimes, you'll have a partial answer and some resources. In that case, say so, and give the resources, then turn to audience members for help.

Tip 8: Dealing with a Difficult Person

On the rare occasion that someone challenges you in a gruff manner, rely again on your body. Answer the person with a short, respectful comment, turn your physical body to the rest of the audience, move *toward* other audience members and away from the individual asking the question. This creates an alliance between you and the crowd, rather than a confrontation between you and the challenge. Continue with your presentation. The audience will align with you. If the trouble continues, express to your problem child that in the interest of the audience, you'll continue with the topic at hand, but thanks for the concern.

If the problem persists, you may ask that person, respectfully, to once again hold their concerns. If the person

becomes belligerent or frightening, it is perfectly acceptable to ask him or her to leave. Just be sure that before you do this there is a volunteer or other person in the audience able to assist and protect you.

Tip 9: Repeat Questions

When a person asks a question, please repeat that question clearly so everyone can hear it. There's nothing so frustrating as a dialog occurring between a speaker and an audience member that no one else can hear!

Tip 10: Thank Your Audience, Applaud Them, and Stick Around for a Few

When you are finished with your presentation, once again thank everyone for taking time out of their day and visiting with you. Let them know that it's been an honor and pleasure to spend time with them, and thank them for their unique contributions to the event. Let them know you'll stay for a few minutes for additional questions. Shy folks often will wait for this moment to ask their question.

It's perfectly acceptable to chat while packing up your stuff, just be sure to make eye contact, ask for an individual's name, and make the experience a personal and warm one.

Conclusion

Well, there you have it! I hope this helps you take your presentations to a new level of personal and professional satisfaction. I do have one more piece of advice—and that's simply to **HAVE FUN!**

Colophon

Body copy set in 11-point Adobe Sabon on 16.5 point leading.
