



Bulletin

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Take a Deep Breath: Speaking's Not That Scary

Many people fear public speaking more than flying, spiders, snakes, or just about anything else. But whether you have been asked to speak before a large meeting at an industry event, a small group of top executives in a conference room, or just one or two potential clients in their office, making a presentation does not have to be scary—if you prepare.

According to professional speaker, photographer, and consultant [Mark Sincevich](#), knowing how to approach an audience or an executive is integral to being an effective communicator. He suggests the following techniques to help you increase your presentation skills:

- **Set Expectations.** Immediately set expectations up front. Ask how long you have to make your presentation and what the executive and audience would like to take away. Politely ask that all electronic devices be turned off and then deliver on your value.
- **Focus Your Message.** Pick two or three key points that show your value proposition based on what the audience or executive wants to hear and how long you have to present. Weave these points throughout your presentation for even greater reinforcement.
- **Be Yourself.** Your believability will increase when you are the same person in front of an audience as you are in a small group or one-on-one. Executives don't want to listen to a speaker who 'pretends' to be somebody else. If you don't know, be honest and say that you will find out the answer later—then find it and get back to them quickly.

It's About Them

Remember that your audience has limited time to spend listening to your message and is most interested in how what you do can or will affect them. Skip the history of your company and why you are better than your competition. If you have been given the opportunity to speak, your audience—whether a group or a single executive—has already accepted you in some way.

If you are making a sales presentation, keep reminding yourself that it's always about your customer. Promote your

value by showing that you and your services are a great match for their organization.

- **Anticipate Questions.** Have a backup plan. If your organization was involved in the news, immediately address the issues. You know that hope isn't a strategy, so don't count on the possibility that no sensitive questions will be asked. There's nowhere to hide when you're standing in front of a group—be ready with an answer to any question you think might possibly be asked

- **Remove Barriers.** You may need a podium and microphone when speaking to a large group, but in a smaller setting, remove the podium, chairs, and other clutter that are barriers to your communication. You want your audience to be focused on you and not be distracted. Move closer to the listeners and be somewhat animated as an indicator of your passion about your subject—avoid crossing your arms in front of your body as if you are closing off communications.

- **Smile Warmly.** Smiling will naturally draw your audience closer to you and to your position. It conveys warmth and understanding. Some presenters remain too deeply in thought as they speak and this translates into a frown or an expressionless face that is off-putting.

- **End with Action.** Before the audience has a chance to leave, make sure that you ask the very important question, "Did I cover everything you wanted to hear? In a sales presentation, ask about the next steps and when they will be covered, then get out your calendar and enter the date.

Take a deep breath. Prepare. Be Confident. Remember that the opportunity to speak is a gift, not a punishment. And there probably won't be any spiders or snakes anywhere close.

