

My Love Affair With Public Speaking

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Did I get your attention? Hope so- because I'm now going to take you on a brief journey and entice you into exercising your speaking muscle. As one of my personal heroes says 'life is a series of sales situations.' There's no better way to sell our knowledge, experience and practical solutions than to project a powerful, personal, effective message.

I didn't learn public speaking during any of my formal training at university or in the many jobs I've held since the 1980s. I stumbled through it, just like many of you. Never could figure out why this was, when it seemed we have such an important message to share. I never learned just what it takes to speak easily and confidently in front of people until I started flexing my speaking muscle in a Toastmaster club in 1998. Out of necessity, maybe. Or was it that I had just moved 3,000 miles and needed to network with others who were interested in self-development?

So we met. As with any relationship, my steps were tentative at first. I'd never had any trouble heading up projects but now I was being asked to do more complex projects. Was this a side effect of all those club meetings? True, I was speaking before this group at every meeting, whether the speech was a brief impromptu, evaluating a peer, or a prepared one. I also learned the fine art of running a well-organized meeting that started and ended on time. Somehow my confidence grew and I completed my first ten prepared speeches at my club almost two years after joining.

Flash forward to fall, 2001. In the post 9/11 shock a friend asked me to be in charge of arranging speakers for a Toastmaster conference in spring, 2002. Another challenge, another time to step up and speak. But this time it was to invite the World Champion of Public Speaking to be our keynote. There was that confidence, asserting itself again. The result was that our conference broke all records for attendance. During his funny and enlightening keynote address, Darren Lacroix spoke the words that became my mantra-'stage time.' Was the secret to speaking well truly that simple?

In a word, yes. I seized this theme and made it my mission to get as much time before audiences as possible. It is not just the experience of speaking but also the insights you get from each performance. As of this column, I've delivered over 30 formal prepared speeches at my club, and many more for groups of all sizes.

My love affair continues to this day. It has brought me rewards all out of proportion to my investments in time and energy. From the testimonials and feedback I've gotten from clients I'm convinced I was on to something. To see participants in my workshops get that taste of self-assurance that comes with preparing and presenting even a one to two minute speech before a small group is exhilarating.

Next steps on my journey include developing my infant website and marketing my skill to more clients. I hope I've tempted you into starting your own journey as a communicator. After all, knowledge is of little use unless it's shared. Here is a website to explore: www.toastmasters.org. For a short course in public speaking (be prepared for your stage time) see "Punch Up Your Presentations" <http://www.gettingthatjumpstart.com/03PUNCHUP.htm>. Feel free to reach me at www.speakuprd.com

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