

‘Goes direct to the questions that trouble experienced as well as new speakers.  
Good, clear, straight advice, exceptionally well-written.’

Matthew Parris, Journalist, Author & Broadcaster

# INSIDER SECRETS OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

Answers to the 50 biggest questions  
on how to deliver brilliant  
speeches and presentations



**Nadine Dereza & Ian Hawkins**

# **INSIDER SECRETS**

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Answers to the 50 biggest  
questions on how to deliver brilliant  
speeches and presentations



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# Introduction

Spiders, death and clowns: scary, yes, but in survey after survey, it's been found that none of these is as terrifying as speaking in public. When we are asked for advice from clients who have a date with the stage and have no way of getting out of it, we often find the fear of public speaking is at the root of their problems.

Some of these clients come to us when their fear of getting it wrong outweighs their ability to prepare and they feel that they can't deliver a confident and engaging presentation.

Other clients are experienced, professional speakers, many of them paid thousands of pounds for a single speech, who would like to improve their speaking, but are worried about trying something new when someone else is writing them such a large cheque.

Both groups want to know what works, what doesn't, and what's best for them.

Why do they listen to us? Why should *you* listen to us?

We are a unique partnership. Between us, we have spoken at award ceremonies, business conferences and in the media. We've taken on roles as diverse as motivational speaker, conference chair, sports commentator and stand-up comedian. Our experience has enabled us to coach politicians, actors, academics, curators, business leaders, journalists, Olympic athletes and speakers for TED talks.

We have worked behind the scenes to shape programmes and content for conferences, award ceremonies and other live events, recommended and booked speakers, and evaluated and analysed the process every step of the way.

We have been there, done that and, hand-on-heart, promise you won't find anything here that hasn't been tried and tested in the real world.

Let's be honest: the real world is where good speakers are made. The best way of learning how to speak in public is to go out and just do it. No book will replace experience, but only this book will guide you through the process of learning. We think learning to speak in public is a bit like driving a car: our intention is to show you how the gears work and where the mirrors are, so that you can drive to wherever you like. You may find some interesting back roads, or go off-road completely, but hopefully you'll build up your own experience and arrive in one piece.

We have adopted a Q&A format, because real-world problems demand practical solutions, and you should see beyond *what* you should do and start to understand *why* you are doing them. The format also allows you to look through the contents and quickly find an answer to the question that most closely fits your own dilemma – and if you're feeling a bit hopeless in the face of the swiftly approaching speech, it's comforting to know other people have been in the same position as you. You too can go out, deliver the presentation, survive and maybe even surprise yourself by finding how enjoyable the process is. Speaking in public is a great life skill to have.



# Three Golden Principles

We are biased towards the practical, but we also have our share of big ideas, so let's kick off with our philosophy on speaking; our three golden principles. These are the basis of a good presentation or speech, whatever the occasion, whoever you are.

## 1. Authenticity

We live in a world of on-message PR (Public Relations). The highest profile politicians of recent years have been those who have spoken out of turn. As an example, Boris Johnson and Sarah Palin, from different sides of the Atlantic, may be divisive, but you know who they are, and they get more written about them than time-servers in grey suits. They are themselves. You may not agree with what the speaker says, but you understand where they are coming from. They are influential because they voice honest, heartfelt dissent from the mainstream.

Great speeches don't just happen on the page; the best speeches are tethered to the person who makes them. An audience wants their speaker to be passionate, knowledgeable and confident, for if the speaker isn't, why should they listen?

If you are delivering a speech that doesn't come from *your* heart, you should look at how to make it uniquely your own. There should be something about your presentation that makes it impossible to be told by anyone else.

A good speaker is the best version of themselves they can be. As that great one-off, Oscar Wilde, said; *'Always be yourself. Everybody else is already taken.'*

## 2. Audience

Despite being the focus of attention, it's not about the speaker. The speaker must understand what the audience needs from a presentation. It might be a clear explanation of complex data, it might be the latest sales figures or it might be a break for tea and coffee; whatever it may be, the speaker needs to know what it is, and act.

When you're putting together a speech or presentation, your first thought should be about the audience's experience: so how can you get the audience to *want* to listen to you?

You can talk *to* an audience, you can talk *with* an audience but if you talk *at* an audience, don't expect your words to have much traction. Find out who they are, and why they are there, and make your message relevant and useful to them. Give them a reason for listening to you, and think: 'At the end of this speech the audience will take away X, Y and Z.' Whether it's how to make a million dollars or the memory of a funny story you have told them, don't get onto a stage without having a really clear idea about what you want to have achieved by the time you leave.

Put the audience's needs first, and you will avoid a lot of trouble.

## 3. Authority

YOU OWN THE STAGE. Four words, but they have profound implications. You are responsible for the room while you are there. It is up to you. Responsibility, yes, but also power. You can be vulnerable of course – it's one of the most attractive things a speaker can be – but you cannot doubt that you have authority. You can tell a personal story, admit to failings and mistakes – so long as you are in charge of what you are talking about. Audiences like to be guided. If it gradually dawns on them that you're nervous and flustered, they will start to worry about you and stop listening.

Speaking in front of others is an act of leadership. Perhaps this is why people fear it. If you doubt your ability to take the reins while you are speaking, it will reduce your impact. Leadership and being a good speaker go hand-in-hand, because if the leader isn't the speaker then it has to be someone else. And if someone else is the leader, why are we listening to the person on-stage?

Authority can be summed up as this: *speak as if what you say makes a difference.*

### **To summarise**

Authenticity, Audience and Authority are our golden principles of public speaking, be it at a conference, wedding, comedy club or in the media.

In the rest of this book, you should be able to spot these guiding principles threaded through the advice we give, and how they impact on what you say, how you say it, what you do and why you do it.

## The Fifty Biggest Questions

We have chosen the fifty biggest questions we've been asked over the years, from our clients, colleagues and friends. All these questions represent 'real people's' issues and challenges when it comes to speaking in front of an audience - whatever its size.

The people who get in touch with us do so because whatever their level of speaking experience, they've suddenly found themselves out of their comfort zone, and need a professional outsider's view.

From a nervous father of the bride to a Chief Executive Officer, these questions address their basic concerns all the way up to professional tips. Our Fifty Biggest Questions have all made the cut because they represent the broad span of what our clients, colleagues and friends frequently ask us, and we think the answers will make anyone standing in front of an audience understand how to do a better job.

This book hasn't been written as a course. It is intended as a reference tool, with short actions that are easy to digest and put into practice. You don't have to read it in any particular order, from start to finish. Dip in, look at the contents, and see what strikes you as being relevant to your abilities and circumstances.

Where we think it will be really useful, is for those moments when you need some inspiration and guidance on how to prepare and deliver a presentation or speech.

Now you know where we are coming from, it's time to open the floor and ask: any questions?

## QUESTION 1

## How do you design a speech from the ground up?

### QUESTION

My predecessor was often asked to speak on a range of subjects about her industry and experience. These talks ranged from twenty minutes after dinner speeches to an hour at conferences about how she built up the company. She has just retired and there is an expectation that I will step into her shoes – although I haven't done as much public speaking as her, and have 'winged' it in the past. I've got to up my game, so how do you design a great speech from the ground up?

### ANSWER

If you're an experienced public speaker you probably can 'wing it' to some extent. However, if you really want to leave the stage feeling proud of having given a great speech, you will need to have the needs of your different audiences at the front of your mind at all times, and spending time on the design will help your delivery.

Start thinking about why your predecessor was given so many speaking opportunities, and what it was that she did particularly well. It is just possible that what worked for her will work for you, but it's more likely that her style will be completely different to your own. The process of discovering your individual style – finding your 'voice' if you like – will be a journey you have to make for yourself.

Having said that, putting the needs of the audience at the front of your mind is something that applies to all speakers, regardless of their experience.

In essence, there are two elements to public speaking: design and delivery, and you should always start with the design of the presentation.

## Design

We like the word ‘design’, although sometimes people refer to it as ‘structure’. It is the same thing and whether you call it design or structure, this is the building blocks of your speech. It is really important that, whatever you are talking about and under whatever circumstances, you are confident in the preparation you have undertaken.

So why are you speaking in the first place? Because you have something of value to say, and you want people to hear it. Light or serious, business or entertainment, you have to identify this value because it will inform everything that you do, everything you keep in and everything you cut out.

You have to know the message of the presentation so that you can match it to the audience’s expectations, and ensure they take away what they are supposed to.

From the ground up, start by asking what you want the aim of the speech to be. Is there a straightforward message that you have to convey? Pare it down so that your aims are as clear as you can make them.

Now consider the timing – it’s like the size of the canvas on which you’re going to paint. Whether you have five minutes or fifty, plan the time out: allocate so many minutes for introduction, so many minutes for each example or story, and so on. What you include should all be serving the message. If it doesn’t serve the message, you should probably discard it: stage time is too precious for padding.

This design stage is the time to work out whether you’re using PowerPoint or other visual aids: are you going to give a live demo of a product, or show some footage of an achievement?

You can also play with structure. Do you start at the beginning of the story? Or do you begin with the conclusion – and then explain the journey? Have a look at Question 15 if you need some inspiration on storytelling.

We always think of this stage as laying the foundations that will support the performance. If you take plenty of time to prepare, it enables you to be playful and try new ideas, new ways of saying things. You might not have a formalised script as such, but you will develop a palate of language, a form of words that will come to you naturally when you are on stage. It should feel authentic to yourself. We've seen presentations that feel 'standard', as though anybody could competently present them. We feel that a presentation is much more interesting, engaging and powerful when it comes from the speaker's heart, and you cannot imagine anyone else doing what they are doing.

## **Delivery**

The difference between a 'good' presenter and a 'bad' presenter is in how they communicate their message. If an audience is taken on a journey and finds out something surprising or interesting that they discuss in the days that follow, then the presenter has done a good job. If the audience leaves thinking, 'What was *that* all about?' or has more to say about the presenter's attire than their story, it's a bad sign.

Every speaker is different. Some speakers aim to be as unobtrusive as possible: the story is important, the teller is just a conduit. At the other end of the scale, the speaker *is* the message. The audience leaves knowing they have been in the presence of greatness – but the details are sketchy.

We feel that the sweet spot is somewhere between the two extremes: even if we are being told a story we've heard before, we might keep listening because the storyteller is doing it in a particular way that

grips the audience's imagination, or giving it a personal interpretation that makes us think of it in a different way. We might be bowled over by a speaker's charisma, but if they don't have a message for us to take away, why are we listening in the first place?

Just as the design of a presentation takes its cues from the central message, so too should the delivery aim not to deviate from it. All the elements of stagecraft – including everything from your physical expression through your posture, gesture and movement – should marry up to the story you are telling.

As the presenter, you should be able to access energy and confidence: the audience is looking to you to lead their reactions, and to be in charge of the materials you are delivering. You're not quite telling people what to think, but you are persuading them of your argument.

Above all, while designing a speech is a straightforward, almost intellectual exercise, the business of learning stagecraft is more of a physical process. It's *stagecraft*, and you know it when you see it. Most people could knock out a decent presentation when no one is watching. Standing in front of an audience and delivering it is a different, rarer skill. The old tricks of stagecraft teachers, such as imagining audiences naked or invisible, are pretty useless: you need to keep your imagination free to deliver a good speech. Instead, remember that the audience have given you their attention and time, and that deserves reward. Being a good speaker or presenter is more about good manners than an extensive vocabulary.

Integrating design and delivery are where true impact comes from. It is the marrying up of a well-considered presentation that knows what it is aiming to do and contains intelligent, meaningful and appropriate support materials, with the skills of confidence and persuasion that makes for a memorable presentation.



Whether your audience is big or small, friendly, hostile or indifferent, good preparation plus good performance will serve you well. You might think that good presentation skills come ‘naturally’ to some (and at times they do), but there is a lot that you can do to close the gap and you will go a long way to doing that, if you first focus on the design and then on the delivery of the presentation.

## QUESTION 2

## What's the best way to introduce yourself – and others?

**QUESTION**

I often feel I take to the stage having to explain who I am and why I've been asked to speak. It feels like a weak opening, almost making excuses, but I don't want to seem too full of myself. How do you introduce your credentials without seeming cheesy or self-important?

**ANSWER**

There are two ways, and we'll give the easiest first. If you're being brought on by someone else, a good Host, Chair, Master of Ceremonies (MC), should ask you in advance if you'd like to be introduced in a certain way. It is quite acceptable to save them the trouble of Googling you, and provide them with your own lines of introduction.

If you only require a short introduction, and would rather the Host or MC didn't read out your entire biography, then something along the lines of this will suffice:

'Our next speaker is an expert in intellectual property, branding and licensing. Will you please welcome the author of the Industry Handbook, Karen Smith!'

A few notes on this introduction: less can sometimes be more, you don't want the audience bored by the idea of you before you step on stage, and you might want to hold a few things back from your biography to reveal later in your speech.

So rather than the Host or MC telling the audience during the introduction that you have helped a client become the number one brand in the market, you will have the opportunity to slip this bit of news in during your presentation:

‘And that’s how I helped my client become the number one brand in the market.’

It’s good form for the Host or MC to end the introduction on the person’s name, as this gives a clear indication that the audience should start to applaud. Try to avoid jargon, acronyms and the like unless you know for sure everyone in the audience will understand them, so say ‘intellectual property,’ and not ‘IP’).

On the day of the event, if you have allowed enough time, you might want to tweak the Host’s introduction if there is something big in the news that you’re connected to and that sets up your first anecdote, but again, avoid the temptation to give the presenter too much of your stage time.

You can’t always rely on getting the introduction that you have written down, particularly if the Host or MC is very experienced and has already written an intro for you that is short, sweet and to the point. So what should you do if you don’t get the introduction you’ve asked for, or have to introduce yourself?

Assuming you don’t have the introduction you deserve, you could start with, ‘My name is Karen Smith and I am the author of the Industry Handbook...’ and go from there. Asking for applause for yourself at the beginning is a bit needy.

If you’re worried about sounding self-important, the temptation is to downplay your achievements – in which case why should the audience listen to you? But you can remain your charming, modest self, and let others put you on a pedestal. Rather than saying, ‘I’m an

expert in...' you can soften this with, 'I'm regarded as an expert in...' or, 'such-and-such newspaper were kind enough to name me as one of their top ten entrepreneurs', which is more a statement of fact than deliberate self-aggrandising, and is a bit of a nudge and a wink to the audience, as you reveal the 'real' you behind the legend.

Over-introduction (the presenter has found your full-page biography and laboriously gone through it) is a common hazard, so you have to respond with a punchy, provocative opening: 'Thanks John. The reason why I've been asked to speak is to answer the question: *Does Intellectual Property have any value?*'

A question is usually good, because it gives the audience something to do, and they feel that they are more part of a conversation than on the receiving end of a lecture.

If you're given a truly terrible introduction, either by deliberate sabotage or incompetence, you win by rising above it. Always be gracious from the platform: the audience will see the glint in your eye. So be prepared for awful introductions, because they will come along.

Keep a stock line handy: 'Thank you for that introduction. You know, the worst introduction I had was when the Host said, 'Coming up we've got a real expert, a highly entertaining speaker and a close friend. But first please welcome...'"

One, it's a cheap laugh. Two, it establishes you've done a lot of these before. Three, it tells the Host/MC their introduction left something to be desired – but you haven't been fazed by it, and have already forgotten it and moved on.

A good Host/MC will set the stage for you. A bad one will leave you having to set the stage for yourself, in which case, be in charge and explain the reason for being there with brevity and conviction. Establish that you have the authority to be there – and then tell your story.

## QUESTION 3

**How can I avoid being a boring speaker?***Give them a reason to listen to you***QUESTION**

I worry that I am a boring speaker. I am often asked to make speeches on a range of subjects at my work conferences, and I worry that my colleagues start to yawn the second they see me take to the stage. What can I do to be more interesting?

**ANSWER**

We, too, share your worry, and with good reason. Julian Huppert, MP for Cambridge, made minor headlines in June 2013, when he accused fellow parliamentarians of ‘bullying’ him for being a boring speaker. Twitter users may be familiar with the hashtag #IAmSpartacus. Julian Huppert said this in Parliament, and delivered it rather apologetically. Had he delivered it with passion and conviction, he could have made headlines of a very different sort from the ones at the time.

In interviews, Julian Huppert is animated and spontaneous, and certainly not boring. When he speaks in Parliament, he often has a script in his hand. If you are also unable to speak about a subject, which you have expertise in and/or strong opinions on, without using a script, beware – it can create a barrier between you and the audience.

If you are speaking in public, being boring is certainly something you should worry about – and the less you worry about it the more likely

you are to be the boring speaker, about whom you overhear people whispering.

This is where getting honest, critical appraisal can help, as can watching footage of yourself. And if you find yourself drifting off, or audience members quietly slipping out of the room, here are a few things to consider for your next performance.

## **1. Pause**

If you just deliver an unpunctuated stream of words, the audience will find it difficult to follow you, and they will let the words wash over them. A pause –

like a line break on the page –  
catches the attention of the audience.

And space between words  
ultimately gives  
each word  
more  
emphasis.

You don't have to fill every moment of the time you are allotted with sound.

## **2. Variety**

Once you have spaces between phrases, be careful that you don't make every line sound the same. Some lines are more important than others; and you should know what these are. Can you encapsulate the ideas behind your speech in a single phrase? If so, you can return to this several times, and it should be the message your audience walks away with (even if they forget all the supporting evidence that you gave between the 'sound-bites').

One big pitfall is to divide all the phrases up into equal lengths, regardless of the length of the sentence, and deliver them with exactly

the same intonation. After a while, you just stop listening to the words, because they are not invested with any particular meaning. If you have a script, look at it from a distance: if every paragraph looks like it's about the same length, you may be at risk of adopting a repetitious structure which is more likely to lull the audience into a snooze than it is to spur them into action.

### **3. Ditch the script**

In conversation or interview, it isn't difficult to be animated and spontaneous, but you can lose this all too easily when you stand up to speak with a script in your hand. If you cannot speak about something you have passionate views about without using a full script, then it can create a barrier between you and the audience, who may think, 'they are going to plough on whether I'm listening or not.' When you stick to a script ignoring the rest of the room, it highlights that you haven't put the needs of the audience first. If you're ignoring what they do, they may feel it's acceptable to ignore what you say.

Working with notes (for stats, numbers, keywords and the like) is OK, but better to do without. You want to be part of the room, engaging in dialogue with the audience. The dialogue may be a complete illusion – but if you're laboriously reading every word of a script, you're not exactly helping that illusion.

If you *have* to deliver certain messages (e.g. you're opening a conference and need to tell people where the fire exits are and when the breaks are) and introduce other speakers, it's fine to read these out – it gives you authority. But when you're talking to an audience on your own subject, leave the notes on the lectern.

If need be, have a cue card with a few key statistics and figures written down, from which you could say, 'I want to make sure I give you the correct figure, and I have written down the statistic on ....'

It's unlikely that you will have the option of autocue (also known as a teleprompter) – unless you are a politician or delivering a speech that has to be exact word for word. Just as with sticking to a paper script, autocue can be a barrier too.

#### **4. Believe your message**

Never apologise for what you really believe in. Your audience doesn't have to agree with you, but you won't change any minds if you do the verbal equivalent of rolling over and showing your tummy. If your message is delivered with passion and conviction, those who agree with you will admire your leadership, those on the fence will consider your view, and those who are dead set against you aren't going to change their minds anyway, but they might respect you more, and listen to what you have to say.

Briefly: if you don't believe in the message, don't expect your audience to.

It is tempting to think that a boring speaker is a boring person. We can debate whether there is any such thing as a boring person – but there are people who don't understand the needs of the audience, and this is what makes them a boring speaker. Fortunately, with a little honesty and practice, any speaker can make themselves more interesting – whatever the subject.



**‘Should be universally used by speakers to ensure complete preparation for any event.’** Nick Gold, MD, Speakers Corner

More frightening than spiders, death and clowns, speaking in public is an essential life skill.

Whether you’re planning your first presentation to a client, speaking at a family occasion, or about to deliver your five hundredth speech at a conference, this book reveals the answers to fifty of the biggest questions that real people ask about public speaking of all kinds.

Practical and powerful advice from two experts, *Insider Secrets of Public Speaking* will tell you how to express yourself with confidence and authenticity, without sacrificing your individuality, whatever the occasion and whoever you are.

**‘Good common sense but from the standpoint of real hands on experience.’** Rt Hon David Blunkett, MP

*Insider Secrets of Public Speaking:*

- Reveals the pitfalls in public speaking and how to avoid them
- Explains the three principles of Authenticity, Authority and Audience
- Will make you more confident, professional and engaging as a speaker
- Helps you find your own style to deliver a compelling message



**Nadine Dereza** is an experienced international presenter, award winning journalist and conference host. She has presented for BBC, Sky TV, SABC, CNN, Simply Money and Summit TV.



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