

Before You Speak, Know Your Audience

It sounds so simple: Before you speak, know your audience. Unfortunately, not all speakers do their homework in this area, and they set themselves up for a fall when they step up to speak. Here are some simple, but often forgotten, common sense tips for you to follow before you speak anywhere.

Who is your audience?

While you know that your audience is a local Rotary Club, you need to know more than that if you want to look like a pro. You will need to know the size and make-up (men, women, or mix) of your audience. What is their average age? What are their common values? What is important to them as individuals and as a group?

What do they want to hear?

It is important to know where your audience “is coming from” so you can speak to their interests and values. It will help to know why they have invited you to speak and what are they expecting to hear. Maybe they heard about you (or the organization you represent) and



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feel that you have something to say of interest to their members. Find out what they want you to speak about. If they don't have a clear idea, make a few suggestions and let them select a topic. How much do they know about your topic? Also ask what they don't want to hear. Many organizations have an unwritten rule against promoting your business while speaking.

How to get this information.

To get this information, simply ask the person who invited you to speak. You may keep a form handy with a list of questions. Check the organization's web site for information about their overall mission. Incorporate your knowledge of their organization

into your speech from the start. This will show that you care about them and their organization. It will make it easier for you to praise them for their work by citing their specific activities.

Get their name right.

Incorporate their name in your speech, and make sure it is correct. Calling a club the wrong name is hazardous to your speech and health. You may want to place the name of the organization on the top of every page of your presentation.

Look like a pro.

Your goal is to look like a pro. Learning all you can about your audience will help you write and give a speech that interests them. Learn about them so you can tie their good work to your speech. This will be the “icing on the cake” and make you look like a real pro. The audience will love you and reward you by inviting you back.

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