

Improving Speaking Skills

Submitted by Peter Fetzer

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Overview:

Public speaking is an area of communication that people in the field of education will need to be able to use to present their ideas to groups of students or other teachers. The image of a person standing behind a podium to present a speech is often the image people have in their minds when they think of public speaking. There are three types of presentation styles that may be appropriate at different types in an education setting. These include monologues, guided discussions, and interactive presentations (Adler & Elmhurst, 2010, p. 377). Presenting a monologue would be a good starting point for me to learn how to lower my anxiety about public speaking and learn how to organize a speech so I will be able to represent my profession in a confident manner.

Description of Problem:

It is very difficult for me to organize and deliver a public speech. I am able to talk with individual members of our staff at school and feel confident in the interactions I have with them. However, even the idea of being able to stand in front of a group of people I know well causes me great anxiety and nervousness. This problem is greatly increased when I think of presenting to an unfamiliar group. While I feel this may be a problem just related to me, a study indicated that a third of the population in a certain city had anxiety that was more than the normal fears of giving a public speech. This type of anxiety can cause concerns for success in the career field when there is a need to be able to give organized presentations (Adler & Elmhurst, 2010, p. 393).

Resources and Constraints:

Communication 1010 is a resource that I can use to help me learn some of the skills that I need to improve my public speaking. The text has several good suggestions that can be implemented to help me organize so that I feel more prepared when I need to give a public presentation. The team that I work with is another a resource that I can utilize for feedback on smaller presentations I do in our work setting. Members of my family would be a good resource to take the opportunity to practice before them so that I begin to feel more comfortable in front of a group. One constraint would be that I do not have the opportunity to have team members at work give me feedback until school starts again in the fall. My own fears are the greatest constraint because I need to step out of my comfort zone to work on this skill.

Recommendations:

Carefully preparing for a presentation is the first step I need to take to help reduce anxiety in speaking. Adler and Elmhurst point out that writing a speech out and reading it may make a presenter feel more confident because the words are in front of the speaker. A speaker may even memorize their speech to try to avoid nervousness. The authors recommend that neither of these methods be followed since they often lead to boring speeches and can even create more anxiety if the speaker loses their place in their text or memorized thoughts. The authors recommend the use of extemporaneous presentation for nearly all types of speaking engagements. An extemporaneous presentation is not just the speaker getting up and starting to talk as the title might imply. It is a planned and rehearsed speech, but it is not given word-for-word (p. 378-379).

There are several steps to take to prepare for an extemporaneous presentation. Once you have decided on a topic and planned your presentation, you should create a method of some type of

reminder for the main points of your topic. Note cards may be used. The notes should be brief so you are not tempted to read the notes. PowerPoint is a software program that is very useful for presentations and easily becomes the replacement for note cards. PowerPoint slides should only guide the speaker and not have all of the information on the slide for the speaker to read (Adler & Elmhurst, 2010, p. 379).

The next step to help reduce anxiety is to rehearse my presentation. You may mentally practice your presentation, but you need to actually see how it works while you speaking in front of an audience. Our text points out that you may choose to practice in front of your family or co-workers. The audience that you are practicing in front of should be willing to honestly evaluate your presentation and offer suggestions. If they are willing to do this, you have the opportunity to make adjustments before you give the final presentation. Realize that you need to be careful of the timing of your presentation. Presentations often run longer than the rehearsal so it is important to limit your time by about twenty percent. The authors also point out that a presenter should consider the opening and closing of their presentation. The audience will remember the first and last statements you make so you should choose your words carefully (p. 395).

Other pointers to help reduce nervousness include taking time to familiarize myself with the setting and the people who are present. The text suggests walking around the room to help burn off nervous energy and to avoid alcohol and caffeine before the presentation. While you are walking around the room, you might be able to mingle with members of the audience which helps to build a relationship with the audience. When you begin to speak, you can look for friendly faces in the audience to help build your self-confidence (p. 393).

Finally, it is important to be able to accept a certain amount of nervousness when you are presenting. Alder and Elmhurst suggest that the best goal is not to try to eliminate nervousness but to learn to control it. While you may feel nervous, studies indicate that audiences often rate the appearance of nervousness lower than the speaker does (p. 394). One of the best ways to help reduce anxiety is to find more opportunities to present. These opportunities may be at small groups that I feel familiar with without having to give a presentation that is critical to my job.

The tips presented by the text should provide a foundation for learning how to give a presentation with the least amount of anxiety as possible. These tips would be critical to me as an educator since there may be many opportunities to be in front of groups where I need to share information. It would be helpful for my co-workers to know they could depend on me to represent them.

Conclusion:

I have a difficult time being able to speak in front of a group. This causes me concern, because I know that I may have times that I will need to present information to unfamiliar people. If I am able to learn how to control the anxiety I feel, it will give me more opportunities to share the information and skills that I have learned that might be of benefit to others in my profession. This proposal presents several tips to use when giving a presentation. Methods to follow include speech preparation, rehearsal, meeting the audience, learning to control anxiety and not eliminate it, and finding opportunities to present will give me more confidence as I work to improve my speech skills.

Works Cited:

Adler, R. B., & Elmhorst, J. M. (2010). *Communicating at Work*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.