

HOW TO COMMUNICATE YOUR IDEAS BEAUTIFULLY: PLANNING, PREPARATION AND DELIVERY

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In the current information age, the requirements for educated professionals, employees of companies and corporations have changed, and now it is expected that they should possess not only “hard skills”, that is knowledge related a particular activity and acquired at university, but also “soft skills”, namely, personal qualities, the ability to interact with people, share their ideas, speak publicly. Today it is already obvious that “soft skills” have a much greater impact on career development. This article offers specific tips on how to prepare for public speaking step by step, what to take into account in the course of planning and preparing the material, what can help to gain confidence, and how to convey your ideas to the audience beautifully and convincingly. The author also touches on the issues that most often worry people and hinder their desire to communicate their ideas to a wide audience, namely, the fear of public speaking and psychological dependence on reading “from the paper-notes”. The article suggests some ways to overcome these unpleasant emotions, which may contribute to people’s greater emancipation and will help them to gain confidence in their communicative abilities.

Key words: “soft skills”; communication skills; public speaking; three-component structure; supplementary material; spoken vs written language; overcoming fear; a “psychological crutch”.

КАК ДОНЕСТИ СВОИ ИДЕИ КРАСИВО: ПЛАНИРОВАНИЕ, ПОДГОТОВКА И ВЫСТУПЛЕНИЕ

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В нынешний информационный век требования к специалистам, сотрудникам компаний и корпораций изменились, и теперь от них ждут не просто знаний, связанных с конкретным видом деятельности и приобретенных в университете (так называемых, «твердых навыков»), но и «мягких навыков», а именно, личностных качеств, умений взаимодействовать с людьми, делиться своими идеями, выступать публично. Сегодня уже очевидно, что «мягкие» навыки гораздо в большей степени влияют на развитие карьеры. В данной статье предлагаются конкретные советы, как поэтапно подготовиться к публичному выступлению, что принимать во внимание при планировании и подготовке материала, что может помочь приобрести уверенность и как донести свои идеи до аудитории красиво и убедительно. Автор также затрагивает вопросы, наиболее часто волнующие людей и препятствующие их желанию доносить свои идеи до широкой аудитории, а именно страх публичных выступлений и психологическую зависимость от выступлений «по бумажке». В статье предлагаются некоторые способы преодоления этих неприятных волнений, что, возможно, поспособствует большему раскрепощению и поможет обрести уверенность в своих коммуникативных возможностях.

Ключевые слова: «мягкие навыки»; коммуникативные навыки; публичное выступление; трехкомпонентная структура; дополнительный материал; устная и письменная речь; преодоление страха; «психологический козырь».

All the great speakers were bad speakers at first.
Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1803-1882

In the modern information age, the most important skills required for today’s professionals are “soft skills”, namely, communication mastery, which imply the ability to negotiate, persuade, reason and work in a team. These skills are not taught at universities, but are developed through personal experience and gained through trial and error. Nowadays, many corporations, IT and logistics companies more willingly employ humanitarians and graduates from linguistic universities rather than engineers and technicians of all sorts. It is quite explicable, because humanitarians, by definition, are more sociable and well-spoken. A programmer can so excel at program-code writing that he can do it blindfolded, but only the ability to interact in a social milieu may help him to become a top manager or head of the company. The Carnegie Mellon Foundation and the Stanford Research Institute have carried out a joint research in more than 500 companies, and the results indicate that the success of managers by 75 % depends on “soft skills”, while “hard skills” take up only 25 %. For this reason, many business people nowadays sign up to various courses and trainings, willing to learn to speak publicly, because they need it to negotiate business deals, present their products and ideas, speak at conferences, in other words, to communicate their ideas beautifully and convincingly.

There is nothing less pretentious, and at the same time more multifaceted, more amazing and sometimes devastating than human communication. It is the source of our joys and sorrows, hopes and triumphs. If you come to think of it, man is never alone. Even an anchorite, who renounces secular life, maximally shields himself from external relations, and retires to live in the wilderness, is only physically alone, while metaphysically he also communicates with the surrounding environment, the objects of nature around him. It is hard to overestimate the importance of communication. One of the greatest orators and most famous political figures in the United States Daniel Webster once said: „If all my possessions were taken from me with one exception, I would choose to keep the power of communication, for by it I would soon regain all the rest. “[1]

Of all possible ways of communicating information (through gestures, facial expressions, eye contact) speech is the most universal means, as it allows you to convey the meaning of the message most accurately and comprehensively. Speaking at a meeting, discussing a contract, conducting negotiations, dealing with mediation and advertising, or participating in a debate — all this requires eloquence — the ability to express thoughts clearly and persuasively. It is difficult for a tongue-tied businessman to make a good career, or for an incoherent and "stuttering" teacher to explain the new material to students, or for an inarticulate orator to maintain the audience's interest. The well-known American orator Frank Snell urged not to allow speech imperfections to create the false picture of one's abilities, and advised to make one's speech work to a person's benefit. The art of public speaking undoubtedly requires special knowledge, skills and talents. Knowledge of the theory of eloquence, constant practice of speeches and hard work on the spoken or written word give the opportunity to influence the audience or a partner.

The theoretical nitty-gritties of rhetoric are to be found in logic, psychology, linguistics, ethics. Understanding of the applied particularities of these sciences allows you to properly arrange the public performance, skillfully fascinate the audience, speak figuratively, use sparkling language, and rationally prepare for the performance. Today, the comprehension of rhetoric and mastering the skill of communicating your ideas to the audience become a necessity.

Preparation

When you speak to the audience, it is commonly done in the form of a monologue, but, obviously, it is a monologue only in the form of presentation of the material. In essence, however, any statement addressed to the audience involves interaction, communication, a dialogue with them. Preparation for the speech begins with the definition and clarification of the topic. Any topic is part of a bigger issue and represents two or three aspects of it. It is important to be aware of this and not to seek to embrace the immensity in one go. Choosing the topic of speech, you should be guided by the following criteria: 1) you ought to be better aware of this issue than the audience; 2) the topic should cause their interest; 3) it has to be relevant, significant for them.

The "target object" for the speaker is the audience, therefore preliminary information about the audience is one of the guarantees of success. It is essential to have some idea about the size, age, professional level of the people you are going to talk to, and to plan accordingly. It is difficult to expect success if you do not imagine how knowledgeable listeners are in this matter, how highbrow they generally are, what exactly might interest them, how it correlates with their pressing needs. This knowledge may help to decide on the complexity of the topic itself, as well as on the sophistication of the language of delivery. Inexperienced speakers usually talk about what seems important to them, and in a language often inappropriate to a certain audience. Ron Hoff advises to get out of the box of one's own thinking and try to see the topic from the perspective of your listeners. [2, p.43] This will help to prepare your speech, which will meet their expectations and satisfy their needs.

Delineation of the purpose and the main idea of speech

Depending on the attitude of the audience to the issue, we determine the purpose of the speech. We have to decide whether we are going to inform or to explain, to convince or encourage, to inspire or simply to share some knowledge and personal interests with these people. Usually the speech pursues one main goal, while the rest are subordinate to it. Having defined the purpose of the speech, it is now easy to formulate its main idea and the title.

Planning and preparation are essential to any speech or presentation. However, you don't have to spend weeks preparing. Dragging it for days, suffering through it and procrastinating, does not mean you have been getting ready for it. Yet, don't think that you can just stand up in front of the

audience, unprepared, and dazzle everybody as you go along. A sensible idea is to start with advance planning. A good plan is considered to be the one that fully and consistently reveals the topic, allows listeners to follow the logic of the presentation, facilitates the presentation of the material. In the process of working on the topic, the plan is adjusted, and the final plan may differ significantly from the preliminary one, but in any case it must obey the rules of logical division of the topic into questions. The immediate preparation of the informational content of speech begins with the selection of the material according to the preliminary plan. The main content will reflect your own thoughts and ideas, but quite often you need to use other sources of information. Today, it is easier and faster than ever, since you have the whole World Wide Web at your disposal. However, having picked up literary sources and references, do not rush to make extracts from what is closer at hand. Much of the information provided in the Internet is not fully reliable and has to be verified. It's advisable, that you should follow a few stages of work with the literature. Start with *selective reading*, which will result in a list of references. It is neither possible nor necessary to work out thoroughly all the available literature on the topic. In order to select the most suitable texts for reference, you should get acquainted with their annotations, if there are any, read the preface, view the table of contents, the first and last chapters, pay attention to the language of the text. Now, it's easy to download the selected material into a separate file and work with it more meticulously further on. At this stage of *perusing the materials*, the preliminary plan is adjusted, as a rule. Finally, *in-depth review* of the selected materials implies fundamental work on the topic of the speech, which has to be worked out completely, making extracts. Extracts from literary sources should not necessarily be verbatim. Factual note-taking is only compulsory when it is important to convey, word for word, the content of a resolution, a new law, advertising information, that is something that cannot be paraphrased.

Following the reading, you get down to the written layout of the material of your speech on paper. Very few public speakers, if any, can talk to the audience off the top of their heads, without preliminary putting their speech down to paper. By and large, there exist four different ways of doing so, and it makes sense to combine all the four. *Arbitrary note-taking* means that you convey the content of the text in your own words, it is just a sketch, the delineation of your ideas. *Evaluative note-taking* is a critical analysis of the content, when along with other authors' judgments you provide your own. In *creative note-taking* the other people's thoughts are complemented, developed, and generalized. Finally, *the lecturer's note-taking* — is the presentation of the material on paper as it will be delivered in the audience, for which purpose it is necessary to convert the written speech into oral.

How to use supplementary material

The visual aids of documents, figures, examples, quotations, illustrations in the form of photographs, drawings or diagrams are a valuable supplementary material that allows you to make the presentation more understandable, visual, convincing, and memorable. But this does not mean that such material should be excessive. Figures and examples should not lead away from the essence of the speech. If statistics are necessary to confirm any idea, they are better and more convincing when presented in comparisons. Moreover, to make the numbers easier to perceive by ear, they had better be rounded-off. While preparing for your presentation, you are most likely to come across interesting examples, stories from life, which undoubtedly have to be included into speech, to make it more vivid and memorable. The example in the speech should be prominent and succinct, without superfluous details. It can be used to illustrate what has been said, to explain complex material, or as a convincing argument. Skillful presenters also provide funny jokes, fictitious examples and examples from their life experience. An example has to hit the bull's eye and not to require an explanation; it is often used to lighten the mood of a tired audience, it breaks the ice and immediately sharpens the audience's attention.

Quotations serve the same purpose as other supporting material: they confirm the idea, make the presentation vibrant and impressive. There should not be one too many of them, however, and the speaker should use them in order not just to sound witty, but for a reason. Apt quotes, when used effectively and appropriately, enliven the performance and evoke benevolence toward the speaker.

Similarly, visual material should be used as needed. Diagrams, drawings, illustrations, photographs, posters, various other items are also presented to confirm or explain the main provisions of the speech.

Delivery

The best prepared speech in the world will be a flop if it is not delivered well. Therefore, it is necessary to think of how to structure the presentation if we want to make it easier for listeners to perceive the material. This can be done by choosing an entertaining course of narrative or, in case the theme does not allow it, an interesting sequence of presentation. You should well consider the composition of the performance — the location of the material and the correlation of its individual parts. Psychologically and logically justified is the three-component structure of the speech: introduction, body and conclusion. The introduction is necessary to establish contact with the audience and prepare listeners for the perception of the topic. The main message of the introduction is an introduction to the topic. The introduction takes about 5-10% of the time of the entire speech. In it you mention the problem you are going to highlight, define some concepts, if necessary, and sometimes report a plan for the upcoming speech, etc. Remember, that a good opening makes for a long-lasting impression.

When you deliver the main part of your speech, especially valuable are those methods of presentation that contribute to direct interaction with the audience: direct or rhetorical questions, an address to the audience, direct involvement of the audience into some minor activity. Sometimes speakers resort to another quite interesting method — *a pretend dialogue*, in which the speaker simulates a dialogue with an imaginary opponent: “Someone may object...”, “Sometimes people ask me...”, “If someone wants to ask me what I think...”. An imitation of dialogue revitalizes the speech, excites the audience's attention, allows us to clarify some difficult points.

One of the indicators of successful construction of the performance is the very nature and content of the material. If, for example, you are going to talk about some complex or completely new issues to the audience, such a speech will be difficult to perceive by ear and comprehend. Continuous theoretical arguments unavoidably tire listeners, and D. I. Mendeleev, who was a remarkable lecturer, compared the speech overloaded with facts with a fire, so littered with fuel wood that it begins to die.

There are two extremities of public speaking behavior. On the one hand, the speaker may persistently “touch the audience on the raw” and this eventually begins to annoy them. On the other hand, someone who forgets, that there are living people before him and demonstrates austere rational and dogmatic approach to problem, can similarly cause aversion and boredom. You should have a sense of proportion both in the selection of facts, examples, line of conclusions and in their presentation. Entirely negative information evokes a pessimistic mood in people, while exclusively positive material causes their distrust.

In a word, it is important to observe the compositional proportionality of the material: it is reasonable to combine old and new, theoretical and practical material, positive and negative information, the rational and the emotional in the performance. The conclusion takes approximately 5 % of the entire time of the speech and gives completeness to the narrative. It provides an overview of what has been said, formulates specific and broad-spectrum conclusions.

Text of the speech

It is absolutely necessary to work on the text of the speech, especially if the speaker is inexperienced or he is going to tackle a complex issue. The written version allows you to consolidate the material, better to conceive it, and work on the expressiveness of speech. This third stage of preparation begins when all the material is collected and the final plan of the speech is made. While working on the text of the speech, use the words and turns of phrase inherent to spoken language, because you are going to speak rather than read. Therefore, you need to write the text so that each phrase is perfectly perceived by ear. The speech has to be smooth and coherent, that's why you should pay attention to the links, soft and logical transitions from one part to another, up to the final part of the speech. The impressive ending leaves a good aftertaste; it is like icing on the cake. Having summarized the ideas, or drawn the conclusions, or reviewed what has been said, you may beautifully finalize with a witty quote, or an aphorism or a wish to the audience.

As was mentioned above, mind the language of speech, and never be satisfied with the first draft of the written text, since your intention is to speak to the audience; so you should thoroughly consider the language suitable for oral presentations. It's hard enough to speak publicly in one's mother tongue, let alone in a foreign language. In the course of preparation, you are likely to be tempted to use verbatim other people's words and ideas, especially those of native-speakers', because they sound so much more elegant and beautiful than your own. It's a grave mistake. You had better paraphrase, change the wording, use simpler expressions, and make sure you can pronounce them

correctly. Communicating your thoughts and ideas beautifully does not necessarily mean doing so in incomprehensible language, using intricate, highly sophisticated words and phrases, sometimes out of place. For this need, remember the golden KISS-rule: keep it simple, “stupid”. However, you should not forget about the proficiency level of your audience, because likewise inappropriate would be overly simplified speech addressed to scholarly, shrewd and demanding audience. The choice of the language, as well as the material as a whole, should be based on appropriateness, and if you are in any doubt (regarding either of the two), leave it out!

Speaking without notes and overcoming fear

Preparation for the delivery of your speech will be completed by rehearsing your presentation. At this stage, the final text should be read several times in order to remember the logic of presentation and to choose the right intonation. It's advisable neither to try to memorize the text of presentation, nor to rely on reading alone. In the former case, you may stumble over a thought, forget something, and then you are trapped: you will be panic-stricken and your speech will be a total mess. Even if you manage to learn the text by heart, you might have the temptation to reproduce it word for word, which will look unnatural, and you will sound phony. In the latter case, unless you are an unrivalled master of expressive reading, listening to someone read a prepared text is as “exciting” as listening to a radio version of a parliamentary hearing. Reading is monotonous, and nothing “kills” the audience better than monotone!

What makes people read the text off the script or try to learn it by heart? It is fear. It is huge, unreasoning fear, that the audience will scrutinize and criticize you, that they are downright hostile, or it might be the fear that the words will slip your memory and you will not know what to say. This fright of public speaking is believed to be the most important reason for a speaker's poor performance. A lot of people come to various trainings in the hope to learn some secret tricks of speaking in front of the public without fear or anxiety. Almost all coaches on public behavior voice the main rule for speeches: speaking from paper notes is bad, it is necessary to abandon this practice! It sounds like an axiom, a dictum. Yet, it is also true that many speakers simply cannot do otherwise: they need this slip of paper with the written text to feel more comfortable. The psychological mechanism of this phenomenon is well understood, but this does not mean that any speaker can easily overcome this barrier. The matter is, that there is no “magic pill” that will help to suppress these unpleasant emotions completely. However, some tips may help in coping with panic and stress.

First of all, it might help to know, that you are not alone; all people experience this fear, and even seasoned speakers have pre-performance jitters. And your fear is groundless, the audience are usually favorably disposed towards you, and will not stone you to death. Excitement does not necessarily harm the performance; it may even help the speaker in making the speech more enthusiastic and genuine. There are other things, which make it positive: you understand that your speaking in public is good, because it makes you think, your intellect work for you, and even adrenalin rush adds to your vitality.

Another set of rules in all probability will also help to relieve fear: you must know the stuff you are talking about, you must like the stuff you are talking about, you must believe in the stuff you are talking about. First and foremost, you should be well-prepared: rehearsals, run-through the text in your mind and out loud, recording of speech, and any other methods will be helpful. Speakers gain confidence with experience, and only practice makes perfect.

As for the dilemma whether to use the written notes or try to avoid using them, much depends on the mindset of the speaker and his/her emotional comfort. If you need the paper-notes as a “psychological crutch”, by all means take them along. If you have these paper-notes in the form of a plan, or if you are well familiar with the layout of the text on paper and only peep into your notes from time to time, listeners will always forgive you this piece of paper. There is an interesting fact: the famous Soviet scientist and psychologist Lev Vygotsky always lectured with a sheet of paper. He placed it in front of him and sometimes glanced at it during the performance. Great was the surprise of his students when they discovered that this sheet of paper was totally blank! However, Vygotsky practiced this throughout all his work, which, incidentally, was devoted to the study of thinking and speech. It is not uncommon for a speaker, especially at the start of his public speaking career, inevitably to use the notes in the speeches, but within time and with gained experience he abandons them, sometimes partially, sometimes completely.

Perhaps the most important secret and basic rule of the speaker is not to be afraid to forget some

part of the speech, or even swap the order of blocks of information. None of the listeners wrote your speech for you, and nobody knows what you have to say in the beginning, or in the middle or in the end. Your listeners don't know what is right, but they can sense that something is wrong, so, just you do not give yourself away. If such a hitch should occur, hold a pause, make this pause meaningful, and in 3-4 seconds you will figure out what to say next. Basically, it's good advice for a speaker: first think, then say; the trail of thought should always be a few moments ahead of the uttered words. Look at the audience, keep eye contact with them, and think. Keeping eye contact is very important, since it also helps to maintain a rapport with the audience.

In conclusion, it's worth reminding again that the mastery of public speaking and the art of communicating ideas are the major constituents of *soft skills*, which are essential for making a successful professional career. Learning them will help to get out of your shell and overcome your shyness and inhibitions.

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