



Public speaking viable in entrepreneurship

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Every few years, the Gallup Poll asks Americans to name their biggest fear. You'd expect the answer to be being shot by a terrorist, falling out of an amusement park ride, or getting kidnapped in an exotic land.

But no. The top fear always comes out the same: speaking in public.

That's why, as an entrepreneur, you can get a competitive advantage by mastering this skill. Business abounds with opportunities for men and women who can tell a story in a compelling manner.

Let's face it: Every four years, Americans usually elect as President of the United States the candidate who is the better public speaker. Academic credentials? Government experience? International acumen? Nah. Ever since the John Kennedy-Richard Nixon debates in the 1960s, we repeatedly have gone for the guy who looks and sounds better.

Having assumed the task of booking speakers for a professional group a few years ago, I dare say that Chester County alone contains hundreds of programming chairpeople eager to hear from entertaining and informative talkers. Take it from me. It's really hard to find speakers who can enliven people who have just drunk two glasses of house wine and eaten rubber chicken.

To be sure, I'm asking you to face up to what may amount to your personal Fear Factor — if I may be so bold as to borrow a line from the title of the strange-but-true television program. I fully understand that for you, speaking at a podium may require the courage

that it took entertainer Donny Osmond to be buried in a container of worms as it recently happened on the aforementioned show.

So what's in making presentations for you? Just take a look at the words of Mirian Otte, author of "Marketing With Speeches and Seminars: Your Key to More Clients and Referrals."

"When you use speaking as a marketing tool, you will discover an amazing phenomenon," Otte writes. "Public speaking establishes you as an expert. You will start to attract new clients from people who have never heard you speak, but want to work with you anyway. You will get referrals from colleagues and other professionals in complementary fields who associate you and your expertise with the subject you speak about."

Kay Keenan, 48, owner of Growth Consulting Inc. in Wilmington, Del., grabs every chance she can to present herself to groups. A longtime resident of Landenberg, Kay even informs targeted organizations that she's "not to proud" to fill in for a last-minute cancellation.

"That has allowed me the opportunity to gain exposure to audiences that I would not have an opportunity to speak to as an authority and communicate with my contact list while I was making the presentation," Kay says.

There you have it. For entrepreneurs, public speaking is good. Fear of public speaking is bad.

Still unconvinced that you have the stuff to appear confident and casual as hundreds of perfect strangers look you up and down and judge everything you say? Here are some tips:

- Face the fear. We're all scared. Simply reframe the anxiety into energy and

enthusiasm. You've heard the advice "Feel and fear and do it anyway."

Here's a classic test of your character.

- Develop an expertise. One of the first rules of effective speaking is to know your topic. I, for example, accept invitations to speak on small business marketing but not on nuclear energy regulations.
- Have visuals. Today's audiences are used to the ultimate in color and movement from television, movies and theme parks. Keep your talk as lively to the eyes as it is to the ears.
- Practice, practice, practice. Kay Keenan says this will help you feel relaxed when you're doing the actual presentation.
- Recognize the audience wants you to succeed, not fail. Why would they want you to bore them to tears when they all could be at the office reading e-mails or at home relaxing in their pajamas?
- Keep going. Even if you make a terrible mistake, plow on. From the podium, I once called my husband by the wrong name. Mercifully, he was not in the audience and no one else noticed.
- Be interesting, be lively and be seated. Generally speaking, you're better off making your key points in six rather than 60 minutes. Unless you're Mike Wallace, of course.

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