

# Small Business OPPORTUNITIES

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## MONEY-MAKING IDEAS FOR ENTREPRENEURS

### TALK THE TALK

# SPEAKING OF SUCCESS

*How to speak at a function to promote your small biz.*

By Joe Takash

**A**ccording to studies of American adults, public speaking is the most common human fear—more common than death. In other words, most folks would rather be the person lying in the coffin than the one delivering the eulogy. Something is definitely wrong here!

Speaking and presenting to a group of people can be much easier than you think. A wise woman (who, incidentally, happens to be the author's mother) once said, "Act confident, and the audience will think that you are confident. When you see that they are confident in you, you will become more confident in yourself."

The ability to successfully communicate in public is a key determinant in the success or failure of many careers, not just those in the speaking industry. Whether you're addressing the boardroom at corporate headquarters or answering your boss's question at a weekly staff meeting, it's time for you to get some public speaking experience—and fear nothing.

The first thing you must realize is that you have zero control over the audience's response, so why worry about it?

Granted, it's natural to want the audience to accept and respect you. But fretting about this deepest human desire is as fruitless as worrying about the weather every day.

Once you grasp this mindset and drill it into your head, a tremendous feeling of relief and satisfaction will follow. You may also want to consider practicing some relaxation exercises for added peace of mind.

### Solid Strategies

Successful presentation skills extend far beyond standing in front of a group and sharing information. Speaking effec-

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tively is about showing a natural enthusiasm and connecting with every group you encounter.

The following tips are the "little things that make a big difference" in speaking to a group of people. Incorporate these into your approach with every group you address—from the conference room to the podium—and you will elevate your success to a much higher level.

- \* Smile. A warm and genuine smile has the power to loosen up any atmosphere. When you smile, you communicate that you are happy to be in front of the group to whom you are speaking. No matter how serious the subject matter of your presentation, a pleasant smile is an outstanding tool for disarming every audience. Keep this in mind from the time you enter the room to the time you leave. You will be amazed at the difference a smile makes.

- \* Network beforehand. Prior to your presentation, introduce yourself to attendees and thank them for coming. Network with as many people as possible and learn about who they are and what they do. If you already know your audience, for instance in a staff meeting, take some time to chat with your colleagues. Remember, they are people, just like you. Familiarity with your listeners will help you to relax and improve your effectiveness as a speaker.

- \* Learn and remember names. Effective now, focus more energy on learning names than you ever have before. Learning names will accomplish a number of things: It increases your confidence, humanizes your audience, and makes others feel great. It's more personal to say to a group, "Joan,

what do you think?" as opposed to, "That lady in the red dress with the big glasses has a question."

- When you engage in your pre-speaking networking, try to develop associations and hooks that help you remember people's names. For instance, let's pretend you meet Ben Edwards, a gentleman who happens to have a blue ballpoint pen behind his ear. In your mind, repeat something catchy, like "Blue Pen Ben." Have fun with it!

- \* Include everyone. Now that you are familiar with your audience, try to involve everyone in your presentation. Communicate that they are all integral parts of the learning process. Make eye contact with everyone, and do so with "kindfidence"—a combination of confidence, courtesy, and respect.

- \* Tune in. Read the body language of every audience. Try to get a feel for what they want. How do they feel? Are they absorbing your presentation? Ask questions and refer questions to other audience members. Again, engage everyone, so that everyone feels significant.

- \* Use your creativity. Everyone is creative. Take some chances and break the monotony of the everyday monotone approach. Tell personal stories and take chances on humor. Make it fun for your most important audience member: You! If a joke bombs, so what? If you can't take time to laugh at yourself, you leave the job up to other people.

- \* Be yourself. Incorporating these skills does not entail changing who you are. There is no substitute for authenticity. If a certain approach feels too forced or contrary to your general nature, then consider a different tactic that fits better with your character. "What you see is what you get" is an attitude that everyone appreciates.

We learn the fastest through practice and experience. Nothing beats it. Perhaps you are thinking, "Well, that sounds great in theory, buddy, but I don't have the experience." Guess what, friend? It's time to gather some. Consider joining Toastmasters or another professional speaking group; do your research, though, to make sure the financial investment is worthwhile. Also, volunteer for a committee, speak at your church, participate in the school board, coach a team, or teach a class. Force yourself into situations where you can get repetition before groups.