

10 Biggest Public Speaking Mistakes

Top executives often fall flat on their faces as speakers.



How come intelligent, business-savvy people end up boring their audiences? They fail to recognize that public speaking is an acquired skill that improves with practice and honest feedback. Speaking for 20 minutes before the right group of people can do more for your career than spending a year behind a desk!

Rob Sherman, an attorney and public speaker in Columbus, Ohio, says in an article in the *Toastmaster* magazine to avoid these mistakes:

1. **Starting with a whimper.** Don't start with "Thank you for that kind introduction." Start with a bang! Give the audience a startling statistic, an interesting quote, a news headline – something powerful that will get their attention immediately.
2. **Attempting to imitate other speakers.** Authenticity is lost when you aren't yourself.
3. **Failing to "work" the room.** Your audience wants to meet you. If you don't take time to mingle before the presentation, you lose an opportunity to enhance your credibility with your listeners.
4. **Failing to use relaxation techniques.** Do whatever it takes – listening to music, breathing deeply, shrugging your shoulders – to relieve nervous tension.
5. **Reading a speech word for word.** This will put the audience to sleep. Instead use a "keyword" outline: Look at the keyword to prompt your thoughts. Look into the eyes of the audience, then speak.
6. **Using someone else's stories.** It's okay to use brief quotes from other sources, but to connect with the audience, you must illustrate your most profound thoughts from your own life experiences. If you think you don't have any interesting stories to tell, you are not looking hard enough.
7. **Speaking without passion.** The more passionate you are about your topic, the more likely your audience will act on your suggestions.
8. **Ending a speech with questions and answers.** Instead, tell the audience that you will take questions and then say, "We will move to our closing point." After the Q and A, tell a story that ties in with your main theme, or summarize your key points. Conclude with a quote or call to action.
9. **Failing to prepare.** Your reputation is at stake every time you face an audience – so rehearse well enough to ensure you'll leave a good impression!
10. **Failing to recognize that speaking is an acquired skill.** Effective executives learn how to present in the same way they learn to use other tools to operate their businesses.