

10 Vital Rules For Giving Incredible Speeches

And Why They're
Irrelevant

Discussion Guide



With
Tom Peters

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To The Trainer

There are many programs designed to help people give better speeches and presentations. Most of them concentrate on “do’s and don’ts,” the skills and behaviors of successful speakers.

This program, *Ten Vital Rules for Giving Incredible Speeches and Why They’re Irrelevant* is unique. It encourages viewers to relax and be themselves. It focuses on how viewers can identify and build on their own personal strengths, rather than merely copying someone else’s style.

This program is designed to be used in individual study or in trainer led groups, alone or with other programs on public speaking skills. When you are leading this program, we encourage you to share with participants your own experiences as a skilled public speaker. How did you learn speechmaking or presentation skills? How did you develop your own style? If you are candid, especially about your early, less successful presentations, you will help validate the most important lesson in speechmaking - practice makes perfect.

Introduction

Communication skills are fundamental to success. If you can't get your point across, you can't sell, you can't negotiate and you certainly can't convince your boss to give you a raise. Many of us are accomplished at communicating with one or two people, but we freeze when it comes to public speaking. Yet, more and more, we're called on to make presentations to larger groups. According to one expert, executives are spending anywhere from 50 to 90 percent of the average day in meetings.

There are a thousand rules for making good speeches: Stand up straight. Make eye contact. Open with a joke. Tell the audience what you are going to tell them, tell them, and tell them what you told them. But we've all nodded through speeches that were delivered according to the rules.

How can you learn to give incredible speeches and presentations? In *Ten Vital Rules For Giving Incredible Speeches and Why They're Irrelevant*, Tom Peters, co-author of *In Search of Excellence* and *A Passion for Excellence*, author of *Thriving on Chaos* and a popular and highly paid speaker shares his "secrets" of speaking success. With a list of 13 do's and don't's, he summarizes his unique approach to making powerful speeches. This video was recorded in August, 1990 in Dallas, Texas, when Peters received Toastmasters International's Golden Gavel Award for excellence in communication and leadership. Toastmasters International, a worldwide organization with 160,000 members, is dedicated to developing communication and leadership skills.

Part 1: Ten Absolutely Vital Rules About Speechmaking That You Can Feel Free To Ignore

(Actually there are only eight rules, but a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.)

Rules can help a good speech get better, but, as Peters makes clear, breaking the rules isn't a criminal offense. Each person has to develop his or her own brand of effective speaking and perfect it with practice.

1. Posture, polish and dressing for success

First impressions may be important. But, shocking as it may seem, audiences will care more about your message than your lapels. And you're likely to give a better presentation if you're relaxed.

2. Have a snappy, grabbing beginning, a clear middle and a zippy end.

Forget it. Concentrate on your message; bring it to life any which way. Don't get paranoid about over-structure. If you've got something to say, it's easy to recover from a clumsy start.

3. Humor is the spice of life.

But, bad jokes give you indigestion. Don't you groan when the after-dinner speaker says, "a funny thing happened on the way to..."? As Peters says, if you're a dour sourpuss, skip the jokes and just be the best dour sourpuss there is.

4. Speech is a if not the golden opportunity to convince people.

Don't set your sights so high that you're doomed to fail. Remember, William Jennings Bryan, one of the greatest speakers in American history, failed to convince people to elect him president, not once but three times. The best you can do - which is a lot - is to further stoke the fires of the 15 percent who already agree with you and cause a few of middle-of-the-roaders to think again.

5. Tailor the speech to the specific audience.

It's a mistake to second-guess your audience. You will find they are more interested in what you know and believe than in hearing you repeat their prejudices.

6. Communication is the most important activity of mankind.

If you're not already nervous about public speaking, this rule will throw you into a flop sweat. So don't sweat it. If you blow it, you'll get another chance if you persist.

7. You must be passionate about the topic.

If you are passionate, you won't be able to hide it. If you aren't, you can't fake it. But even here, practice makes perfect. The more you say it, the more passionate you get.

8. Follow the rules.

Unless you have a good reason to break them, which is usually the case. Trying to follow too many rules is like learning to play golf by following a how-to-golf tape. It's only possible in theory.

Exercise: Throwing The Rules Overboard

When you have a speech to give, how do you prepare? Recall the process you go through as you organize, write and rehearse and answer these questions.

- What guidelines do you use in preparing a speech?

- What “rules” do you follow? Where did you learn these rules? (From your high school English teacher?) Do they apply to you?

- Which rules can you eliminate right now?

- Look back at your list of the qualities of a great speaker. Can you use any of these qualities as guidelines in preparing your own speeches and presentations?

Part 2: The Five Keys To Success in Speechmaking

Tom Peters does advocate these five guidelines to successful speechmaking.

1. Most success in speechmaking and in life depends on the careful selection of the right parent.

Be yourself, whether you're poised and polished or unkempt and slightly disorganized. You'll lose credibility by "acting" the part of a public speaker... and gain it by coming across as who you really are.

2. Loosen up and get comfortable.

Don't focus on the speech. Just try talking to the audience, as Peters does, about "some stuff" you know a little something about.

3. It's about "at bats."

As Peters points out, you get good at speechmaking by making speeches. That's what Toastmasters is about. Remember, Pete Rose holds the record for career hits because he holds the record for all time at bats. You have to try (and try and try ...) to succeed.

Just like your mom (see rule 1) said, "practice makes perfect" more or less.

4. All of speechmaking is stories.

A speech, according to Peters, is a string of stories supporting your basic point. And the tinier the nugget, the better. Real illustrations are "little" illustrations. Look at a good novel, classic or potboiler. It's the little bits of color, not the plot, that attract and hold your attention.

5. A speech is an experiment, a work in progress.

The goal of an experiment is to learn something interesting.

Stories, stories, stories ... and more stories

Here are the qualities Tom Peters believes make for good stories.

- Mix stories with data. Business audiences understand and are convinced by numbers. The strength of speeches are stories, says Peters, but the power is numbers.
- Details, details, details. Stories are convincing when they are locked down with names, addresses. Specific sense impressions make stories memorable. What did it sound like? Look like? Feel like?
- Tell a longish story early in the speech. This gives the audience and you a common language and reference point.
- Tell lots of different stories so that you'll appeal to different people in your audience.
- Tell at least one story tied to today's news.

Exercise: Building Your Next Speech

1. What are you talking about? Define your topic in 20 words or less. Make it simple now, because it will get complicated later.

2. What data do you have to support your idea?

3. What stories are you going to tell? (As a rule of thumb, you should have one story every three to five minutes.) Look back at Peters' recommendation for powerful stories. Review your stories to see if they live up to these standards.

A.

B.

C.

Exercise: Outline Your Next Speech

Look at the previous page. Take your 20-word topic statement, and break it down point by point. Then, look back at your data and your stories. Use at least one story or one statistic to support each of your points. Bingo! A speech outline.

1. _____

data/story: _____

2. _____

data/story: _____

3. _____

data/story: _____

4. _____

data/story: _____

The "The All-Purpose, It's Too Late Now Checklist"

Don't worry about the right tailor.
Speechmaking is not a cabaret act.
Make a meticulous choice of mom.
Give a lot of speeches.
Loosen up. Success depends on practice.
You don't have to do it right the first time.
Don't take yourself too seriously.

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