
117 Ideas for Better Business Presentations

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Controlling Nervousness

- 1.** The number one protection against nervousness is knowing your subject cold. Be over-prepared and you will automatically feel better about your presentation.
- 2.** Talk to one person at a time. *Literally*, look directly into the eyes of one listener at a time, just as you normally do in one-on-one conversation. This will be difficult at first if you are used to scanning or avoiding eye contact, but it is worth the effort to acquire this basic habit of effective speech.
- 3.** Stand up straight. Correct posture will make it easier for you to breathe properly, which will in turn make it easier to get your words out naturally.
- 4.** Don't rely on alcohol or drugs to calm your nerves. The result may be slowed reaction time, slurred speech, and hazy memory.

5. Know exactly what your opening line is going to be. Knowing your opening statement will reduce worry about getting started, the most bothersome time for most speakers.

6. Just before you get up to speak, say to yourself: "I know what I'm going to say and I'm glad for this chance to say it."

Keeping Audience Attention

7. Speak up. Talk a little louder than you think you have to. Most people speak far too softly and the result is often mumbling. (Speaking up also helps you feel less nervous).

8. Use stories that force the audience to visualize. The listener's mind is hungry for pictures. Give them something to "see."

9. Use "first person" stories when possible. The audience perks up for phrases like "the other day I...," "I have found from my own experience...," and "a friend of mine once told me...."

10. Pause occasionally. Pauses are perhaps the most effective technique for regaining the attention of the audience. Most speakers neglect this powerful idea because the silence is deafening *to them*; however, the pause is welcomed by the audience. Try it and you will see all eyes looking back to you for your next statement.

11. Save handouts until after your presentation. If you give people materials at the beginning of your talk, they will read instead of paying attention to you.

12. Throw in some rhetorical questions, like, "What would you think if...?" These are questions you do not expect anyone to answer out loud. The effect is usually to force people to respond mentally, hence keeping them on track with you.

Opening Remarks

13. George Jessel an Oil director said this about speeches: "If you haven't struck oil in three minutes, stop boring!" I would modify that slightly: you have less than a minute to convince business audiences that you have something interesting to say. Moral: find an interesting opening story or compelling first sentence.

14. Unless you know in advance what the response is likely to be, avoid asking a question as an opener (unless it is rhetorical and merely thought provoking). You will be risking offbeat, irrelevant, and distracting comments.

15. Unless it is a formal occasion, you do not have to thank the person who introduced you or thank the audience for coming or the organization for inviting you. Jump right into your powerful opening sentence. It will be a pleasant surprise for your listeners and will automatically identify you as a no-nonsense, confident speaker.

16. Pause slightly before you open your mouth to speak. Have your eyes focused on one person in the audience, preferably someone about halfway toward the back. The pause will get attention and by directing your attention to someone in the middle of the room, you will automatically speak louder than you would if you looked at somebody in the front row.

17. Don't risk losing the effect of your planned opening statement by trying to respond to the previous speaker's remarks. As always, exceptions prove the rule, but the better plan is to stick with your planned opening no matter how tempting it may be to change it.

18. Make your opening statement relate to your business point of view, *not* to the audience or the city where you are speaking or something in the news. That kind of thing may be appropriate in the *middle* of your talk as a means of personalizing or showing the audience your human side, but you have been asked to speak because you are an expert on your business topic, so start on a businesslike note.

19. The oldest advice to speakers is probably this. "Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em. Tell 'em. Tell 'em what you told 'em." Always summarize your central theme and repeat your key points. (By the way, the audience will never remember more than three key points.)

20. Don't sit down until you have told the audience what you want them to do. Presumably, you were not just talking to be nice, so tell them specifically what you want them to do. (If you *are* just talking to be nice, you are giving a social talk even if it is to a business audience. In that case, simply end with a pleasant remark.)

21. The most welcome closing for the average business audience is one that comes a little ahead of schedule. Do not rush to finish early: *plan in advance to do so*. Past 12 to 15 minutes, you are in serious danger of losing your listeners. (What if you *must* speak for an hour? Break your presentation into digestible modules of 10-12 minutes, each with its own *single* key point.

22. If you plan to move into a question period after your presentation, the *transition* will be your closing period rather than the chronological ending; therefore, plan for a *logical* conclusion before you accept questions and save a minute or two at the close of questions for a brief recap of your talk.

23. Bring back your best visual to accompany your closing remarks. This will give your audience both verbal and visual reinforcement of your central theme. (Knowing

in advance that you are going to return to a key visual will also keep you focused on your conclusion during the entire presentation.)

24. When you are preparing your talk, begin by outlining the conclusion. This is the last thing they will hear and the part they are most likely to remember. (Many successful trial lawyers use this technique. They write their final argument first and then line up the evidence that best supports the facts they must prove to the jury.)

Handling Q & A

25. Sometimes the hardest part of Q&A is getting people to ask questions. This is especially true with large audiences because no one wants to be first. Try to break the ice by asking easy "conversational" questions related to your subject. Once the first person speaks, the questions will follow.

26. Unless you want to be interrupted in the middle of your talk, tell the audience in advance that you are saving plenty of time for questions at the end and ask them to hold their questions until that time.

27. With audiences of 30 or more people, it is a good idea to repeat each question so the entire audience knows exactly what question you are answering. This also gives you valuable thinking time. You do not have to repeat each question verbatim; just make sure you restate the essential elements.

28. Look directly at the person asking you a question and make sure they are finished before you start your answer. During your answer, do not look just at the questioner, but talk to the rest of the audience. If you direct your attention only to the questioner, you will lose the others' attention.

29. Don't return to the person who asked the question and ask them if you have answered their question. You probably have not, but the rest of the audience probably does not care, so why start a detailed discussion with one person. Keep it moving, go on to the next questioner. (What if a previous questioner comes back for a more thorough answer to his question? If it is your boss, you already know the answer. If it is a nitpicker, be polite, give some additional information, but do not get bogged down. If he or she persists, tell them you will be happy to meet with them afterwards for a longer discussion of that specific point.)

30. Let the audience know when you are wrapping up by announcing that you have time for only one more question. Be specific. If you intend to take two more, tell them that, but do not say "one or two more." That sounds indecisive.

Using Visual Aids

31. PowerPoint® and competing software programs have simplified the production and display of presentation graphics; however, widespread overuse has marginalized

their effectiveness with live audiences. Less is better. Use a few well-conceived visuals that are memorable, rather than many ordinary, boring charts or slides.

32. Keep the number of words per visual to a minimum. Use headlines only. Better still; use short phrases or single words in bold type that can be seen clearly from the back row.

33. Use colour to highlight key points.

34. Explain exactly what each visual means so the audience does not have to guess. Even if it is fairly obvious what is on a chart, it is a good habit to repeat it verbally, thus adding reinforcement to key points.

35. When possible use your hand to point to visuals. Most speakers misuse pointers, especially the retractable types. (Have you ever seen a speaker with a retractable pointer who did not play with it at least once?)

36. When you are through with a visual, cover it up. Do not give the audience something to distract from what you are saying *now*.

Introducing Another Speaker

37. The key to an effective introduction is giving the audience a logical reason *why the speaker was asked to be there*. This usually has nothing to do with where he or she went to school or how many kids they have. Tell them they are about to hear from an expert on safety techniques for scuba divers. He is a veteran of over 600 deep-water dives, has himself spent over 200 hours in decompression chambers, and is the recipient of 25 commendations for rescues at sea. If you are talking to a local dive club, you have said enough and your speaker and the audience are equally well served.

38. The major exception to the "logical reason" rule is the "testimonial" or "award" introduction. In this case, where the honouree or recipient is going to give an acceptance speech, the introduction is a mini-speech itself. Best plan: get a detailed resume from the person's secretary, then, if you do not know the person, interview him or her by phone to get some additional interesting material. Even better, interview one or two acquaintances of the person.

39. Don't say, "Our guest speaker needs no introduction."

40. Be different. Come right out with the speaker's name. "Mary Smith is not only a key executive of CKY Services Co., she is a leading authority on direct response advertising." Everybody knows from the printed program what her name is, so why pretend you are building to a surprise by waiting until the end of the introduction to give the speaker's name?

41. Double-check information in resumes and newspaper clippings. Facts change. People get divorced, widowed, change job titles, affiliations, political parties.

42. If you are introducing a colleague who is well known to most of the attendees-- like a fellow executive in the same company-- use the opportunity to say something *new* about him. Part of your job is to get your speaker off to a good start and even old friends appreciate thoughtful introductions.

How to Incorporate Humour

43. Don't. That is the safest approach for the average business presenter. Amateur attempts at comedy make audiences nervous because everybody knows the attempt is likely to fail.

44. The most natural expression of humour is a simple smile. Moreover, since most smiles are started by other smiles, simply make it a point to smile at least a couple of times during your talk, especially at the beginning.

45. Don't worry about not deliberately incorporating humour. Most speakers find something that is naturally funny to laugh at during the talk. Like an upside down slide, or a Freudian slip of the tongue. Or something humorous that a member of the audience throws in--intentionally or not--during Q&A. Hint: do not take yourself too seriously and your natural sense of humour will come through.

46. What about jokes? One of America's top comedy writers, Bob Orben, said in a *Wall Street Journal* article that he would guarantee five show-stopper, belly laughs from any business audience if he did the research and wrote the jokes into the speech. His fee for the job: several thousand dollars. What if a client doesn't have that kind of budget? In that case, Orben recommends buying one of his joke books and taking your chances. The point is this: being a stand-up comedian is an art mastered by only a few lifetime professionals. If you are not one of them, why risk making a fool of yourself in the attempt.

47. If you feel you must tell a joke, try it out on a couple of associates who not only know the audience you plan to use it on, but who know you well enough to tell you if it's not appropriate for the occasion.

48. In contrast to jokes, *amusing incidents from real life* are sometimes quite appropriate. Here the key is *timing*. Tell the story at the right point in your talk. Try to tie it in to your theme and tell it briefly.

Delivering the Verbatim Text

49. Most speeches that are read word for word are painfully boring unless you have a professional speechwriter and a good coach to help you with the delivery. Opt for a topic outline or key phrase script if possible.

50. If every single word of your talk must be exact (for legal purposes for instance), print it in bold typeface with a large point size. Have it typed with only five or six words per line, so you can read it easily without having to keep your eyes glued to the paper. Do not let sentences spill over to the next page.

51. Use one hand to keep your place in the script and keep the other hand free for appropriate gestures. Otherwise, there is nothing for the audience to watch but a talking head.

52. If you lose your place, pause for a second, then go back and repeat the last sentence. (The audience will think you are doing it for a dramatic effect.)

53. Slide pages to the side as you go to the next page. This will reduce the distraction of turning pages (a constant reminder to the audience that you are reading instead of talking to them).

54. If possible, even if most of your remarks are written verbatim, try to incorporate at least one incident, illustration, example, or story that you can tell in your own words. Even a few moments of unrehearsed conversation with your audience will break the monotonous spell of reading to them.

Speaking from Notes

55. The biggest danger in speaking from notes or an outline is losing track of time. Have you noticed how many times you have heard speakers get carried away with the first point of a five-point talk and have to rush to cover the other points? Try organizing your talk around the specific examples or evidence you plan to use rather than ad-libbing about the topic heading.

56. Print notes or outlines in large letters with colourful marker pens. Even if you wear glasses, you will not have to strain to pick up your next point.

57. Use one page or individual index card for each point in your presentation. This will help you stay on the specific point. When you go to the next page or card, pause briefly to give the audience a chance to absorb the information you have just given them.

58. If you use a direct quotation in your presentation, hold up the card or page you are reading from, so they can see that you are reading. This is one time you want to make it clear that you are reading: it adds authority to the quote. Make it clear whom you are quoting and where you got the quote.

59. Use short phrases or key words rather than complete sentences. The phrases and key words will serve as memory joggers, but will not restrict you to an exact sentence that might not flow naturally during your live talk.

60. Use a colour code such as a red dot to indicate when you have planned to introduce a visual. It is a good idea to have a miniature version of your visuals incorporated into your notes so you can introduce them with smooth transitions.

Absolute, No-Exception Don'ts

61. *Don't ever* use off-colour material or four letter words in a business presentation. Even in an all-male gathering, the most masculine speaker can get along without running the risk of sounding unbusinesslike. This is not a prudish exhortation, but a basic principle of good business communication.

62. *Don't ever* accept a speaking assignment you do not have adequate time to prepare for. It is possible to speak on practically any subject if you have time to prepare. (At least you can tell about what you do not know in an interesting manner.) However, the most disastrous presentations are given by experts who simply are not prepared to speak.

63. *Don't ever* attempt to answer a question if you do not honestly know the answer. Spontaneous answers to routine questions are not expected to be perfect; however, any suggestion of fabrication will destroy a speaker's credibility. When you get a tough question that you cannot answer, say so, and add confidently that you will get the information to the questioner and anyone else who is interested. (For sales and marketing executives, this is a perfect invitation for a follow-up contact.)

64. *Don't ever* lose your temper before an audience. Even if a heckler provokes you, an attack on any member of the audience is perceived by the audience as an attack upon all.

65. *Don't ever* call upon an associate or colleague in the audience to answer a question you cannot handle *unless* he or she has agreed to be available for such help.

66. *Don't ever* forget that you are talking to real live human beings just like yourself. They do not expect you to be perfect anymore than you expect perfection of other speakers. What most business people are looking for is honest, easy to understand conversation, delivered clearly and concisely.

Microphones and Equipment

67. Microphones are usually counterproductive for small groups. They cause speakers to speak in an amplified monotone. You are better off using your own vocal power if you can make yourself heard in the back of the room. Without a microphone,

you will try harder, you will have better inflection, and the audience will listen more carefully if they are not lulled into inattention by the PA system.

68. If your meeting room requires amplification to be heard, have the sound system adjusted so that you can speak with as much of your own volume as possible.

69. If you use a slide projector with any regularity, you already know about the application of *Murphy's Law as Applied to Equipment*. Expect trouble. Eventually, a bulb will go out or a gear will get stuck, or the motor will freeze. Tip: if it is a very important presentation, bring two, separate, projection systems.

70. You do not have to turn the house lights all the way down to use a projector. Keep the room as light as possible so you can see your audience and they can see. Darkened rooms are an invitation to drowsiness. (If you have been to enough meetings, you are familiar with the sound of snoring, especially after lunch, when the lights go down.)

71. Overhead projectors are the most commonly used of all types in British business. They are also the most abused, mainly because the easy-to-make typewritten transparencies cannot be read by anybody past the second row. Solution: add colour for highlight, use fewer words.

72. If you want to use a produced audio-visual module to change the pace, keep it short, preferably no longer than seven minutes. When asked to guess the length of business films (or videotapes) the average person guesses *double*, the actual viewing time.

The Well-Dressed Speaker

73. Even with the trend toward casual workplace attire, there will always be occasions where a more formal manner of dress is appropriate. Remember that the speaker's wardrobe is just as much about business as it is about fashion.

74. Nationwide, the safest colour is grey if you want to appear businesslike and project a professional image. White shirts and blouses may not sound exciting or fashionable, but in a hotel meeting room, they are your best bet to accent a business suit, especially when seen from the back of the room.

75. If you want to project an *authoritative* image, go with dark blue suits. Especially when you address strangers--people who have no idea what you are really like as a person. Remember: "No matter what you say, your clothes say more."

76. Keep your suit jacket buttoned during your presentation and you will automatically look more businesslike. Wear it open, and you will have a more casual look. Neither look is intrinsically good or bad, yet you are making a definite statement

about attitude toward both subject matter and audience, depending upon the option you select.

77. Personal accessories, including jewellery and wristwatches, can be distracting to your listeners if they dominate your visual presentation, especially if they glitter under artificial lights. When in doubt about the effect of accessories on your audience, keep them in your briefcase until after the presentation.

78. Tinted prescription glasses make it difficult for listeners to get good eye contact from you. Avoid them when speaking to more than 30 people.

Rehearsal Vs. Practice

79. It is usually a good idea to plan how you verbally emphasize key phrases and ideas, especially points that you want to repeat during your presentation. *But do not try to rehearse specific gestures.* Rehearsed gestures invariably come across as phoney.

80. The best way to prepare yourself for delivering a presentation is with a tape recorder. Videotape is superior, but let's assume you use a small audiocassette recorder. First, try going over your talk without an audience, just speaking in a normal conversational voice into the tape recorder. You will learn a lot from your first playback. On your second run-through, concentrate on staying close to your time limit and on making smooth transitions from one point to the next. On your third taping, try it with at least one person in the room. Do it standing up and be sure to speak loudly and clearly just as you will in the actual situation. *Nothing can take the place of recording your practice sessions.*

81. You are likely to discover *content* changes you wish to make as you go over your talk in the practice phase. Make a fresh set of notes (or reprint the entire script) to reflect the final version you intend to deliver. Clean, clear, easy-to-read notes are important when you are facing an audience.

82. Be sure to complete your final practice session before the day of your presentation. You will get very little benefit from last-minute practice. Use the few hours just before you speak (if they are available to you) to reflect on the concepts and major theme of your presentation.

83. It is a good idea to visit the physical location of your presentation a day ahead. There is apparently a subconscious mental adjustment to the exact dimensions and dynamics of the actual space in which you are going to speak which will work best for you with a night to let it "sink in."

84. The best preparation for tough questions is a version of the devil's advocate method. Have an associate prepare a list of questions based on your talk. Then have someone read these questions to you. The key to this practice technique is *listening to questions that have been phrased by someone else*. Isn't this exactly what you will face in the real situation?

85. Most people who see themselves on videotape giving a business presentation are more critical of what they see than what they hear. They notice, without prompting, the distracting body language, gestures, uncomfortable and inhibited mannerisms, and facial expressions. The first question they ask is usually: "What do I do with my hands?" The answer: use your hands to make natural gestures, just as you do in normal conversation, only make them broader. Small gestures appear tentative and uncertain when you are in front of a group.

86. When you are not using your hands to make relevant gestures or to lead the audience's attention toward visuals, keep them by your side.

87. Avoid the "fig leaf" position with hands clasped in front of you. It looks defensive and gives the impression that you are apprehensive and lack certainty.

88. You may choose to put your hands in your pockets occasionally; however, do not keep them there for long because your ability to gesture naturally will be restricted. (In addition, be sure to avoid rattling coins or other items your hands may find to play with.)

89. One gesture to avoid is pointing your finger directly at members of the audience. This gesture is intimidating and to some people, quite threatening. It makes no difference that you *intend* to single someone out for friendly purposes; the effect of this particular gesture is *always negative*.

90. Just as we get most of the information we retain from our visual sense, our strongest impressions of a speaker are often visual impressions. A gesture, whether intended or not, is apt to have as great an effect on listeners as the words you are speaking. Moral: either make relevant, productive gestures or make none at all.

Speaking to Young Listeners

91. Business presenters occasionally are asked to speak to young listeners, from campus audiences to youth associations to school groups of all ages. Advice: Never turn down a chance to speak to young people. These occasions are often the most potent learning experiences for public speakers. Why? Because children detect and reject insincerity instantly. This is true of preschool age through early adulthood. *Speaking to young listeners will help you communicate naturally and directly.*

92. The younger your audience the more important it is to speak at eye level. (If you are trying to communicate with four or five year olds, try sitting down in a chair--or on the floor.) With children, there is virtually no communication without direct eye contact.

93. Confucius said: "The ultimate evil is the ability to make abstract that which is concrete." Children like straight talk about *real* things, real objects, people with names and faces. They get impatient with generalizations.

94. Don't talk down to young people. Condescension is another form of phoniness and kids will not tolerate it. If you want to get a message across to children, tell them a story with a subtle moral lesson. Kids buy facts, not philosophy.

95. If you want to communicate effectively with teenagers, try to get them involved during your talk. A freewheeling conversation is the best vehicle. Teenagers have great energy and imagination. Try for direction rather than control when speaking to a roomful of them.

96. Because there is still a child in each of us, the lessons we learn from speaking to young listeners are directly applicable to our communications with adult audiences, even in the business environment. Be open, honest and sincere. Keep your eyes on your listeners' eyes. Avoid abstractions. Get your listeners involved in what you are talking about.

Financial and Technical Talks

97. Gear your talk to the level of sophistication of your audience. Regardless of the level of expertise, you will do well to *eliminate or de-emphasize jargon*.

98. The greater the level of technical sophistication of your listeners, the more important is the use of *analogy*. Listen to mathematicians talking to each other: they use folk expressions and simple English. They are trying to convey broad concepts within a very narrow, non-verbal language.

99. Keep presentation visuals simple. Save details for handouts.

100. Even though the subject matter is technical, you are still talking to human beings--people who get bored, daydream and react irrationally, *even during serious presentations*. Keep your talk upbeat, fast-paced, simple.

101. Accept the fact that technical talks are not the same as technical papers. You can speak at a maximum rate of 160 words per minute; therefore, it is impossible to dwell upon detail. Hit the key points.

102. Stay focused on "bottom line" psychology when delivering financial reports. Suggestions: *Immediately* tell them the result, the bottom line number. Then tell them how you got there. If you try to save the answers until you are finished with your explanation, you will be interrupted by impatient questions.

On-Camera Techniques

103. If your presentation is being videotaped before a live audience, *ignore* the camera. Likewise if you are being interviewed before a camera. The viewer expects to see you communicating with your "live" audience or interviewer.

104. If you are interviewed by a television reporter, keep your comments short and to the point. TV stations have a nasty habit of editing, sometimes to the point of distorting your statements. Your best defence: keep it short.

105. If you are offered makeup in a television studio, accept it. The purpose of TV makeup is elimination of glare.

106. If you perspire under strong TV lights, wipe it off immediately before you go on the air (and again during breaks). Sweat beads make you appear apprehensive, frightened, and insincere.

107. If you *must* face a hostile interview on-camera (say your company accidentally spills a few tons of toxic waste on a neighbourhood school playground): *Avoid the appearance of surprise*. The look of surprise (known as the "O.S." look) can best be seen in the company spokesperson that recoils and grimaces when the opening question is hostile, direct, unfair, and unexpected, like: "Are you people deliberately trying to set a record for the number of innocent people you can kill in a single afternoon? Hitler didn't move this fast!" The only preparation is to *expect* questions like that and do not let them lead you into unwarranted confessions, admissions, or explanations.

Your Own Unique Style

108. Becoming a better presenter is not a one-time event. Make a decision to check your progress with audiotape reviews every three months.

109. Correcting a single previously unchecked mannerism, gesture, or speech habit will often lead to a series of improvements. Idea: find *one* specific behaviour to work on, such as posture, volume, or eye contact. Work on this single physical skill exclusively. The result will be improvement in other areas, too.

110. If you are over six feet tall, you do not have the option of speaking softly. Your sound (volume and projection) must match your physical appearance. Otherwise, listeners will have difficulty matching voice and looks. The principle here

is that you are unique. We are not all physically equipped to sound alike, but there is a "right" sound for each individual.

111. Your personal style of public speaking may not be the same as anybody you know. There is no prototype of a successful speaker. The measuring stick for a good presenter is always *effectiveness*.

112. Good speech habits must be practiced. Use them or lose them. You may compare public speaking to tennis or golf. They are all physical activities. Just like your golf or tennis game, your speaking style will suffer with inactivity. Speaking opportunities are abundant; start speaking every chance you get.

The Magic of Enthusiasm

113. Enthusiasm is contagious. Let your audience know that you are committed to your idea and excited about it. They will not only see your enthusiasm, they will feel it.

114. Enthusiasm is not the exclusive domain of the coach's pep talk or the pitchman's hard-sell delivery. You may speak softly with heartfelt enthusiasm. You may be enthusiastically silent. Consider Marcel Marceau.

115. If it is important enough to talk about, there is room for some enthusiasm. Suggestion: if you cannot muster at least a small amount of real conviction about the subject of your talk, perhaps someone else should give it. (Isn't lack of enthusiasm--or interest--a major reason people change jobs?)

116. It is possible to believe in something and not show it. Remember, we judge others by their behaviour; we judge ourselves by our intentions. You have got to act enthusiastic for your audience to know how to feel.

117. Perhaps the most gratifying result of giving a presentation with sincere enthusiasm is the look on the faces of your listeners. You will see appreciation, surprise, and genuine delight. In today's world of advanced communications technology, there is a renewed demand for old-fashioned, person-to-person messages. After all, we are still human beings--animals that can speak to each other.

Bonus Tips from the Pros

118. Don't say "absolutely" or "that's exactly right" when a simple "yes" will do. "Second of all" is another questionable phrase that adds unproductive syllables.

119. Provide your own written introduction. The person introducing you will appreciate it and you will know it is accurate and appropriate for your talk.

- 120.** Don't drink coffee or soft drinks before speaking. They cause sibilance (a hissing sound) in forming certain words, especially words with "s" beginnings and endings.
- 121.** Carry visual aids made in several formats--diskettes, overheads, and flipcharts--so you will be prepared for any situation when you travel.
- 122.** Professional speakers are physically graceful. Aerobic dancing, jazzercise, boxing or fencing lessons are good basic training for speakers.
- 123.** Practice pronouncing final syllables, making sure that final consonants are formed distinctly. Overdo it. A large percentage of the population has hearing defects: think of them when you practice.
- 124.** When repeating questions during Q&A, do not say, "That's a good question." What you usually mean is "I've got a good answer." Also, what about the other people who asked questions? Were theirs not so good?
- 125.** Unless your regional or foreign accent is so pronounced that people actually have difficulty understanding you, don't try to change it. You do not have to sound like a network newscaster to be an effective speaker. In fact, a slight accent has a quality of realism that adds to a speaker's credibility. What about the "Valley" accent (which makes ordinary declarative sentences sound like questions)? Advice: lose it or lose credibility with adult listeners.
- 126.** Professional speakers may give the same talk many times each year. To avoid getting so familiar with your material that you run the risk of sounding mechanical, alternate your stories and illustrations.
- 127.** For the professional speaker, every appearance must be the very best, like a warrior's last dance. If you want to speak like a pro, get up there and say something that will make them lose track of time and forget everything else in the world except what you are telling them. Give them something to remember.
-