



Public Speaking Skills Enhance Professional Standing and Proficiency

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Whether you are a clinician or a sales professional—both, as is often the case in the urgent care occupational medicine arena—it is likely that you will find yourself in front of an audience giving a talk at some point.

The topic may be a clinical one or something intended to get the audience to employ your professional services; either way, proficiency as a public speaker will greatly improve your chance of making the most of the opportunity.

Following are some key ingredients to a successful talk:

- **Practice.** The best way to become an outstanding public speaker is to do it over and over again. Seek out every opportunity, whether the group is related to your profession or not, and work on your skills.
It need not be a large audience or especially formal setting, either; local Rotary Clubs always need speakers for their weekly meetings, for example.
- **Prepare.** Always take more time than seems necessary to refine and practice your talk. You should know your material so well that you can give it without the aid of notes or audiovisuals.
- **Structure.** As Mark Twain famously advised: “Tell ‘em what you’re going to tell ‘em, then tell ‘em, then tell ‘em what you told ‘em.” Let your audience know where you are taking them and offer a crisp summary at the end.
- **Involve.** Assume that your audience is tight, unmotivated, and lackadaisical. You need to thaw this frost from the “get go” and to get them involved. Your audience needs to be engaged both physically and mentally.



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I ask an audience to stand up to get their blood flowing. At the same time I like to get them to start thinking about the subject at hand. With a larger audience, ask a simple question, such as “What’s the greatest challenge you face in dealing with the workers’ comp system?” and have them share their answer with their neighbors.

- **Be yourself.** Many speakers think that humor has to be part of any public talk. If you are particularly funny, go for it. On the other hand, if your personality is of the more no-nonsense, business-first variety, do not try to be a comedian.
- **Monitor your movements.** Beware of two extremes: the Wooden Indian and the Energizer Bunny.
The former hides behind a podium and maintains a rigid posture (no wonder their audience usually finds their talk boring!). The latter tends to race back and forth across the stage. Your audience would likely find such a technique forced and distracting.
- **Speak from the heart.** So many talks seem canned and come off as insincere. Incorporate a “from the heart” segment into your presentation. When using phrases such as, “Let me speak from the heart for a moment,” markedly slow down your pace and delivery.
- **Minimize audiovisuals.** I tend to refrain from audiovisual support during major presentations. Eye contact with an audience is crucial and the use of audiovisuals inevitably compromises such contact.
Further, audiovisuals can be a distraction; you will be tempted to turn toward the screen, read words that are plainly seen by your audience, and periodically have to address errors in the audiovisuals or equipment.
- **Offer a challenge.** Make your audience think. Ask questions that are associated with your next thought (e.g.,

Continued on page 36.