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Quick Tips You Can Use in Everyday Situations

Excerpt from, "10 Days to More Confident Public Speaking"
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A terrific first step to developing speaking skills is to begin to focus on how you speak in everyday speaking situations. Let's take a look at four situations where you can begin to polish your speaking skills.

Situation #1 - Running into someone at the store

How many of you have bumped into a friend while shopping or running an errand? Here you are--another opportunity to practice your public speaking.

- * Initiate the conversation.

- * Ask the person how her family is doing. What's new with her job? Does she have any vacation plans coming up?

- * Tell a funny story about something that happened recently to you, your family, or your friends.

- * Think about how fast you speak, how you pronounce your words, and how you organize your thoughts. This is called your natural speaking style and will come in handy here.

Situation #2 - Parties

Parties are the perfect opportunity to practice your public speaking skills. So the next party you attend, make sure you bring your bag of tricks.

- * If you find yourself standing alone in a corner of the room, don't just eat all the crab dip: Initiate a conversation with the next person who walks by.

- * Introduce yourself to two new people

- * Participate in a group discussion, but do not dominate the conversation

- * Have a conversation with someone you may have not seen in a while.

Situation #3 - Leaving a Telephone Message

Doesn't it seem nowadays that you leave a message or voice mail more often than reaching someone on the phone right off the bat? Telephone tag is a new corporate sport. Consider these moments golden opportunities to practice your speaking and organization skills. The next time you need to call someone, write a few brief notes so you won't forget anything if you get the person's voice mail--and I guarantee you, you will get their voice mail.

* Slow down! Do not speak fast when you are leaving a message, especially if you have an accent. Most answering machines today allow enough time for a short message. I can't tell you the number of messages I get a day where I cannot understand what the caller is saying because he or she is speaking too fast. I often find myself replaying the message a few times. This is why notes come in handy. Also, SLOW DOWN when saying your telephone number.

* Pronounce your name clearly. State your name slowly, especially if your name is not as common as Smith or Jones. Also spell your name slowly if necessary (f as in Friday, t as in ticker...)

* In addition to your name, give your title, your company name, and the reason you are calling. Describe to the person, in a few short sentences, the purpose of the call. If appropriate, leave the time you called (be sensitive to different time zones).

* Let them know when to return the call. Leave a date, preferred time, and telephone number.

* Always sound professional. Do not chew gum, and do not leave a long-winded message. Be aware of your tone. I always tell my clients to smile when leaving a message--it automatically gives your voice an upbeat, pleasant tone.

Should the person you are calling actually answer the telephone, you can still use your notes. It will make you sound more professional and organized.

Situation #4 - Creating a Voice Mail

Even though you may not have thought about it this way, your own voice mail message is like a little presentation to the public and leaves a first impression.

* Before you record your greeting, write it down and practice saying it. Record the message, play it back, and rerecord it if necessary. Is your message too fast? Is it too slow? Is your voice clear and easy to understand? This is great practice for when you prepare your own speech.

* Make sure your answering machine greeting sounds professional and friendly. Call your own phone number and listen to your own greeting. Ask yourself if your voice is clear and your message makes sense. You would be surprised at the number of poor greetings I've heard when returning calls.

* Leave the caller clear instructions on what to do when leaving a message.

* If you run a business, as I do, your voice mail greeting is a great opportunity to plug your business. Be careful of information overload, though.

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