



District 31 Toastmasters Serving Eastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island

10 Tips for Improving Communication

When at an briefing, sales meeting or networking situation, you are making a presentation. You are actually “selling yourself.” While feeling some nervousness is natural -- even beneficial -- too much nervousness can be detrimental. Here are some proven tips on how to prepare for your opportunity and control your butterflies.

1. **Prepare.** Do as much research on the company, audience, and/or forum as you can. Find out what the company does, what they make, and how your skills can fit in with what they do. Find out the names of people who may be present at the interview or networking situation. What is their role? Are they peers, potential employers, HR representatives, buyers, managers? It's easier to speak to a group of familiar people than to strangers. Pre-select a handful of topics that may arise and prepare your answers.
2. **Practice, Practice, Practice!** Rehearse your thoughts out loud. Get familiar with your own voice in this context. Review it with video or audio recordings. Revise as necessary, but rehearse in its final form. Personalize your thoughts and provide examples from your own experience. Use conversational language and a conversational tone -- try not to sound too stiff or rehearsed.
3. **Introduce Yourself.** Make sure your first impression is a positive one. Remember to smile and make good eye contact with the person to whom you're speaking. Use a firm handshake and don't be afraid to speak first. Be curious and inquisitive to show you are interested.
4. **Know the Venue.** Arrive early and allow yourself time to get familiar with the building and its surroundings. Loosen up by talking to the receptionist or any people you encounter while waiting.
5. **Relax.** Ease tension by taking deep, diaphragmatic breaths. Transform nervous energy into enthusiasm. Focus on the aspects of the process of meeting and talking to new people that you enjoy. Look for the upside of the other aspects of communicating.
6. **Visualize Success.** Imagine yourself speaking to your audience, your voice clear and confident. Clearly picture the situation that you are preparing for -- an interview with potential employers or networking with people in your industry. Focus on a receiving a warm reception and success with your conversation. It will boost your confidence.
7. **Realize that People Want You to Succeed.** Your audience wants you to be interesting, stimulating, informative and entertaining. Interviewers are hoping you will be the candidate they are seeking. Networking associates want to enjoy their interaction with you. Companies are hoping your product will benefit them.
8. **Be Confident.** Don't apologize for any nervousness or problem. Any misstep is probably more obvious to you than to your audience. Your audience may not have even noticed. And even if they did, there's no benefit in highlighting it. Maintain your poise and exemplify your ability to handle yourself in stressful situations.
9. **Concentrate on the Message.** Focus your attention away from your own anxieties and concentrate on your message -- and your audience. Think about educating your audience about you and your knowledgebase. Make your case as to why the company should be interested in you or your product.
10. **Gain Experience.** Experience builds confidence, which is the key to public speaking. Look for opportunities to speak in a safe, friendly environment. Volunteer to speak at weddings, gatherings, family outings -- every chance you get. Visit a local *Toastmasters Club* and ask for opportunities to participate.