

EFFECTIVE Public SPEAKING

—by Peter Hammond



"But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defence to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear."
1 Pet 3:15

Including your audience

Leave time for questions and answers. A productive discussion will reinforce your message the best. This helps people to think through the topic, particularly one that is controversial or frustrating...

Stimulating questions

Ask questions that are meaningful, such as: "Do you have any questions or concerns?" Make people think. Do not give the rhetorical question: "are you with me?"



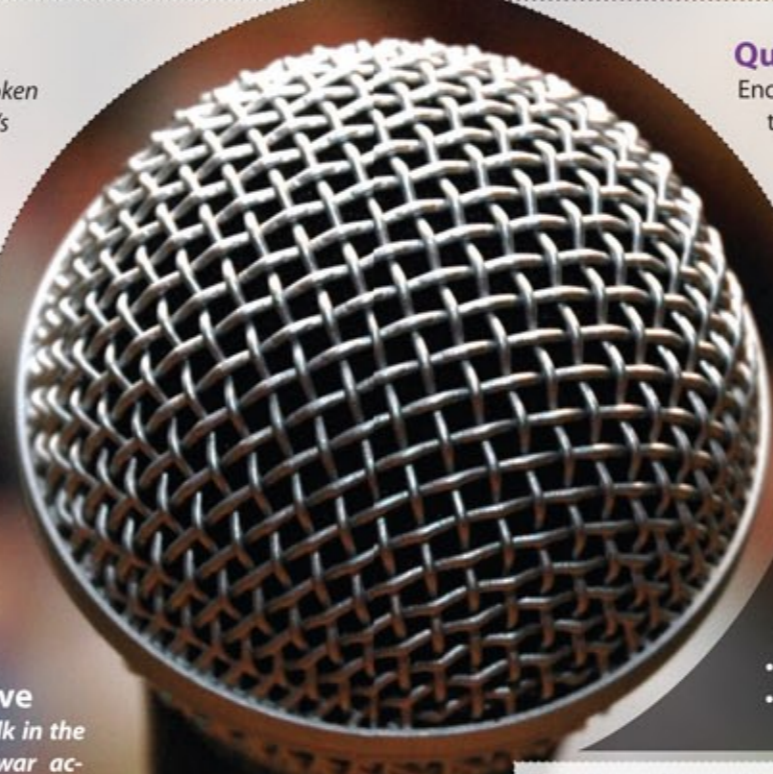
Avoid making excuses

God has called each one of us to give an account for the hope we have. When Moses gave the excuse: "O My Lord, I am not eloquent, neither before, nor since You have spoken to Your servant, but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." The Lord said to him: "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I, the Lord? Now, therefore, go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you shall say." Exo 4:10-12.

When Moses still tried to get out of the call of the Lord and requested "O My Lord, please send by the hand of someone else..." We read that "The anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses..." Exo 4:13-14.

Scripture alone is our authority

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for Doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. I charge you... before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will Judge the living and the dead at His Appearing...Preach the Word! Be ready, in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching."
2 Tim 3:16-4:2



Questions and answers

Encourage questions, maintain a sense of humour and do not be touchy and take offence. Sometimes, to give your audience the time to think, you could have two questions of your own ready to prompt them. If no one responds to your initial: "Any questions?" lead, you may say: "Some people have concerns about..." and then give the answer. Then you can walk to the other side of the platform and offer to answer questions again. If there are still no questions, you can give your second prepared question, which should be very different from the last. If there are still no questions, close with your original conclusion, offer to be at the back afterward if people would like to chat and thank the audience for their time.

Speak to your audience's Needs

Avoid clichés, stock phrases and meaningless repetition. Try to put yourself in the position of those you are speaking to:

- What are their concerns?
- What are their needs?
- What issues are they facing?



Know your audience!

- Who are you going to be speaking to?
- What particular concerns do they have?
- What would your host like you to speak on?
- What results are they looking for?
- Where does your audience stand on the issues?
- Will you be speaking to a hostile audience?
- An undecided group?
- To people who already share your convictions?
- How many people are expected?
- How much time have you been allotted?
- What can you say and what can't you say?
- Why have you been selected to speak to this particular group?
- In what way are you going to enrich or educate your audience?
- What information do you have to give that they are unlikely to receive from another source?
- What actions do you want them to respond with?
- What do you want to happen as a result of this meeting, or series of meetings?

i Take every thought captive

"For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."
2 Cor 10:3-5



Dealing with volatile topics

When you are dealing with a volatile issue, acknowledge that by saying something like: "this discussion revolves around a very emotional issue. However, let us try to set aside the emotional aspects and examine the facts from a balanced and objective perspective." Without compromising the Biblical position, you can say something like: "I do understand what you are saying"; "A lot of other people hold to that position as well". Remember to stay focused - deal with the issue, do not attack the person. If a questioner is very disruptive you should request the organisers remove the offending individual. If someone erupts with great hostility and emotion, try to use a soft answer to turn away wrath: "I'm sorry, you seem so upset, are you alright?" or "You seem so angry, are you angry with me? I'm not angry with you."

If the individual continues to hijack the meeting in an unconstructive direction, you could say: "For the sake of time and others who may have questions, I'm going to have to move on and give someone else a chance, but I would be happy to meet with you afterwards. Next question?" By the time you say "next question", walk towards the other side of the platform, breaking eye contact and moving away from the hostile person.

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Keep your focus, stay relevant and concise

Keep focused on your main points. Do not allow yourself to be tricked onto rabbit trails and red herrings. Your time is limited. Use it wisely, carefully and strategically. Ensure that you have well-worded statements and sound bytes, to present; such as: What we see influences what we think, and therefore what we do. Ideas have consequences. Try to give an address, website or phone number for documentation and more information on the subject.

Evangelising in a hostile environment

Paul on Mars Hill gives us an example of evangelism in a hostile environment, by finding something in their culture to use as a stepping stone to capture their attention and to awaken their curiosity. He starts with God and Creation, with our spiritual longings and the need for repentance.

When you receive an invitation to speak on a certain subject you should first brainstorm: write down briefly with words and symbols everything you can think about on that subject, including sources, Scriptures, principles, examples, illustrations, action items, etc.

Then you should review your ideas and organise them, starting with the problem, the Scriptural principle, and illustrations, first in the Bible, then from history and contemporary and personal experience. Then you should prioritise the most important ideas. This could be summarised as brainstorm, organise and prioritise.



Be selective

Avoid the temptation to overwhelm your audience with information. Have your facts at your fingertips. Consider what attitude you want your audience to develop concerning the chosen subject. Determine what actions you want your audience to do as a result of this presentation. Then consider what advantage you are offering them through the material you will be presenting.

Be positive

Have your facts at your fingertips. Take your handbook, notes and relevant articles.

Plan what you want to say. Write down your key points. Be sure to use positive words: We are not anti-abortion, we are pro-life! We are not anti-pornography, we are pro-family! We are not anti-homosexual, we are pro-moral. Refer to the baby, not the fetus. The mother, not the pregnant woman. Control of pornography, not censorship.

Dos and Don'ts!

- Do not kill the clock by giving long drawn out answers
- Do not look at your watch, or notes while someone is talking to you
- Do not cross your arms as if you are challenging your audience
- Do not get side tracked into peripheral issues or tricked into going way off your topic into some volatile issue
- Try to keep focused on what the meeting has been advertised to deal with
- Respect the time of your audience and keep the question time on what interests the majority of them
- Do not allow anybody to dominate, or to hijack the meeting
- As the presenter, you are responsible to maintain control and ensure that the meeting stays on track, and finishes on time.