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5 public speaking hacks you need to know

Soft skills—like public speaking—are becoming more crucial in the modern workforce. There's never been a better time to shape up your verbal skills says *Shane Michael Hatton*.



THE EXPERT

Shane Michael Hatton is a leadership and communication expert committed to helping leaders build and leverage their platform to lead, inspire and mobilise their people. Shane is the author of *Lead the Room – Communicate a Message That Counts in Moments That Matter* (Major Street Publishing).

A 2019 report from Deloitte found that by the year 2030, two thirds of the jobs in Australia will be soft skill intensive, and yet, skills like verbal communication remain largely in deficit.

For nearly three quarters of the population, the thought of standing up in front of a room to speak can evoke both a psychological and physical response. But while the thought of speaking in public might make you feel uncomfortable—it doesn't need to be inherently stressful or even impossible. Just like learning to drive a car, speaking a language or playing an instrument, public speaking is a skill you can master—but it will take investment and time. In the short term, let's look at five speaking hacks that will help manage the nerves in your next speaking opportunity.

Don't believe everything you think

There's always an internal conversation taking place—can you recognise it? What are you telling yourself? Are those thoughts helpful? If you want to lead the room, you first need to be able to lead your brain—and that starts with recognising the unhelpful thinking. Once you have recognised any unhelpful thoughts, take time to reframe them with more helpful alternatives. Let these helpful thoughts become your internal mantras when preparing to speak.

Make your first thirty seconds intentional

The moments right before your presentation and the first few moments in your presentation are typically when people feel most vulnerable or anxious. Beyond that point they usually find a flow and begin to settle. These opening moments are also when the audience engagement is at its peak. Try starting your presentation with an intentional story. Stories are not only an engaging strategy for your audience, but they are easy for you to remember and share without slides or notes, making them an easy way to build your own confidence.

Find friends in the crowd

Don't rate the quality of your delivery on the face of your audience. People have a thinking face and a processing face. Just because they aren't smiling doesn't mean they aren't listening. With that said, there are always going to be some naturally encouraging people in the room who show it on their face. They are your 'friends' in the crowd. They are great anchor points to keep coming back to when you need to uplift during your presentation.

Expect the best, plan for the worst

Technology is helpful but frequently unreliable. Use it but don't lean on it. Having a 'slide deck' can be great, but don't assume that you will have a 'presenter view'. Videos can be a helpful visual aid, but know what you would do if the audio fails. Expect that it will work in your favour but prepare to deliver without it.

Show up in service

Matt Church, founder of Thought Leaders Global and voted in the top 10 keynote speakers globally, once said 'fix nervous with service'. When the focus is on others, the focus is less on 'how do I look?' And more on 'how can I help?'. It's the difference between walking into the room with the 'selfie' camera, which focuses on me, and flipping it to the rear camera, which focuses on others.

It takes a lot of effort to make something look effortless. Soft skills are actually hard work. Just as a ballerina makes leaping gracefully through the air seem effortless or a golfer drives a ball 350 metres with what looks like barely a touch, don't be tricked into thinking that those who deliver with precision, clarity and poise do so without a depth of preparation, dedication and discipline. Start with these hacks, but then be ready to do the work. Say yes to speaking or taking on new opportunities that allow you to get your hands dirty and have a go. Next time someone asks for a volunteer to say a few words at an event, why not put your hand up? When someone needs to present the figures to the board, take the lead and have a go. ✖

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