chapter 17

Eight important Trade Secrets of Professional Platform Speakers
The successful people from whom I gathered the information for this chapter are all professionals in the art of conversation and public speaking. Their professions and occupations include professional platform speakers, politicians, television and stage personalities, sales managers, ministers, college professors, and many others. When you learn the trade secrets of these highly skilled people,

YOU CAN GAIN THE FOLLOWING MAGNIFICENT BENEFITS FOR YOURSELF

1. You’ll be able to stand up in front of a large audience and give a talk, make a speech, or voice your ideas and opinions without fear.

2. You’ll know how to hold your own in a conversation with anyone. You’ll be capable of handling yourself successfully in any business or social situation.

3. You’ll have no trouble at all in getting people to accept your idea or your point of view.

4. You’ll have the power to control the emotions and actions of your audience.

5. You’ll gain the respect of your friends and be the envy of your associates.

6. You’ll be able to think clearly and to express yourself precisely even when you’re under heavy pressure.

7. A winning, positive, and outgoing personality will be yours. As your skills in public speaking improve, your confidence in yourself and your own abilities will expand and increase immeasurably.

8. The ability to speak without fear in public will give you a sense of personal power and fulfillment unlike anything you’ve ever experienced before. You’ll have a tremendous feeling of self-accomplishment.
How to Develop Your Own Distinctive Speaking Style

The style of your talking, the way you speak to others, makes a vital contribution to your reputation and to your success. For example, if you talk down to people, they will resent you. If you are too deferential to your superiors, say your supervisor or employer, they may look at you as weak and spineless and not worthy of advancement or promotion. Your conversational style is not only a matter of the words you use, but also your way of using them, as well as your attitude and bearing.

The best way to develop your own distinctive and personal speaking style is to be natural, to be yourself. Don’t try to imitate someone else or be something you’re not. Develop a style that is distinctively yours, not someone else’s.

For instance, I was born and raised on an Iowa farm. Except for the last fifteen years, I have made my home in the midwest most of my life. I still sound like a midwesterner when I talk, but I’ve never tried to change that way of speaking. Why should I? What’s wrong with being from the midwest?

If you have a southern accent, don’t try to get rid of it, unless it’s so thick you can’t be understood. As long as people understand you, leave it alone. The same goes for the long Texas drawl of the southwest or the clipped abrupt New England way of speaking. Where you come from is a part of your heritage. This helps make you a unique person and an individual different from all others.

It’s far more important for you to get rid of such voice problems as nasality, stridency, shrillness, breathiness, and lack of projection, than it is to worry too much about a regional accent.

If you could make only one improvement in your voice, it should be to lower the pitch of your voice, for all those problems I have just mentioned go hand in hand with a high-pitched voice. This is especially important for a woman to correct, for a woman’s high-pitched voice can be disturbing to men and really turn them off. The more you can develop a low-pitched, strong, firm voice, the better, since it is that relatively higher pitch of a woman’s voice that causes men to be wary and on guard. Such a voice can wreck a woman’s chances for advancement in the business world.
I have always been fortunate in having a deep and resonant baritone voice that people remember easily. Two years ago I saw a lady whom I had met for only a few hours nearly 40 years before. "I wouldn't have remembered your face, for then you didn't wear a mustache, and, of course, we were both much younger," she said, "but the moment you spoke, I remembered you. Your voice is so distinctive no one could possibly forget it."

How to Control the Emotions of Your Audience

A top-notch preacher knows how to control the emotions of his audience. Watch some of those television ministers work. You may not approve of their methods or their constant clamor for pledges and contributions, but you must admit, they do know how to control the emotions of their studio audiences.

One of the greatest masters of all time of this technique was John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist faith. He enjoyed an enormous success as an English evangelist. He had a shrewd and intuitive understanding of the inner workings of the human mind.

Wesley would open his sermon with a long and vivid description of the agonies and torture to which his listeners would be condemned for all eternity unless they became converted to the faith. Then after a sense of terror, guilt, and extreme anxiety had brought his audience to the brink of a complete nervous breakdown, he would offer eternal salvation to those who accepted Christ and repented of their sins.

By this kind of preaching, Wesley converted hundreds and thousands of people. Intense prolonged fear exhausted his listeners' nervous systems and produced a state of greatly intensified suggestibility in their subconscious minds. In this highly vulnerable condition, they accepted the preacher's theological message without question. They emerged from this religious ordeal with new behavior patterns firmly planted in their subconscious minds.

I'm not proposing that you use such extreme measures to control the emotions and behavior patterns of your audience. I would suggest, however, that you find a suitable method that fits your own style and personality. I would also recommend that you keep one of my previous thoughts in mind while searching for such a technique. That idea is simply that the head never hears 'til the heart has listened, for that's the quickest shortcut I know of to control the emotions and actions of others.
Five Methods You Can Use to Overcome Your Nervousness

As I told you before, nervousness is a perfectly normal physiological reaction to a new or strange situation. However, although it's normal, you must make sure you don't let it take over completely. Here are 5 simple methods you can use to control your nervousness and keep it from getting out of hand.

1. Be thoroughly prepared. Master your subject completely. Be the authority. This is the biggest confidence builder you can use. By the same token, a lack of professional knowledge about your subject is the deadliest confidence killer of all.

2. Have a positive mental attitude. Be confident in yourself and have faith in your own abilities. Act as if it were impossible to fail and you will always succeed.

3. Have your initial remarks well in mind. The first few moments are always the most critical, for the first impression will usually be the lasting one. Knowing exactly what you are going to say when you start to speak will get rid of those butterflies in your stomach.

4. Tell a story on yourself, Jack Benny style. Although telling a joke is not recommended by most public speakers, telling a story on yourself makes you human. It releases tension and endears you to your audience.

5. Be deliberate... slow down. Don't hurry. Force yourself to speak more slowly. Take a breath and pause slightly after each sentence. Your normal poise and bearing will quickly return to you.

Four Ways to Physically Project Your Personality While Speaking

Your audience will respond to what they see as well as to what they hear. Your movements and gestures can be highly expressive and extremely influential in helping you make your point. They can make the difference between an excellent enthusiastic talk and a dull and lifeless one.

Any physical attitude you assume, any body movement, or any gesture that attracts attention to itself rather than emphasizing or complementing what you are saying is distracting to your listeners. It then becomes a hindrance, not a help. To be helpful, your movements and gestures should appear free and natural.

Bert Flanders, an expert in training people to speak in public,
says that there are four main methods you can use to physically project your personality to an audience.

"You must maintain an erect posture," Bert says, "in a position where your entire audience can see you. Stand with one foot slightly ahead of the other. Put most of your weight on that leading foot. Lean forward slightly toward your audience. Don't slouch and never lean on the lectern. You don't have to stand rigidly at attention as if you were in the army, but you should look physically and mentally alert. The key to correct posture is to think tall.

"Next, be vital and enthusiastic. Vitality comes easily when you are enthusiastic about your subject. If you believe in what you are saying, then the sincerity, warmth, and positive feeling that guarantees a good talk and an excellent audience response will come through loud and clear. Enthusiasm is contagious. Of course, your enthusiasm has to be based on a thorough knowledge of your subject and an understanding of how your talk will benefit your listeners.

"You should use gestures to emphasize your point," Bert says. "If you're making a strong point, don't be afraid to bang your fist on the lectern—once—or to hold out your arms to your audience in a bold closing call for action. Your gestures should come spontaneously from your enthusiasm, your convictions, your emotions. Don't try to emphasize every single sentence with a gesture. If you did that, you'd look more like a windmill than a good speaker and you could actually defeat the purpose of your talk.

"My last point about how to physically project your personality is this: Since your message comes from your face, leave loud clothes like prints, checks, and plaids at home. The more simple the design of your clothes, the more effective you'll be as a speaker. The most effective public speakers wear subdued clothes with only one striking point of interest in either color or design near the face. With a man, that's usually a tie—not a busy one, please—and with a woman, it can be a necklace. As far as colors go, navy and white have been proven to inspire the most confidence in the speaker, although black and white run a close second."

How to Be the Final Authority on Your Subject

There's absolutely no substitute for knowledge, but there is also a slick stage technique you can use to let your audience know that you are the absolute master of your subject. I learned this secret from an enterprising young minister many years ago. I've used it to good advantage ever since.
I used to marvel at the way Paul could move swiftly and unerringly from one reference to another in his Bible during his sermon. I'd have sworn he knew the entire Bible by heart.

Paul would start off by reading some scripture. Then he would say, for example, “And in Matthew, the Eighth Chapter, the first through the fourth verses, we find...” Then he would turn to that scripture. After reading it, he would say, “We also find confirmation of this principle in the Fifth Chapter of Luke, the twelfth through the sixteenth verses.” And he would turn to that scripture. And so it went.

One day I asked Paul how he could retain such a tremendous number of scriptures in his memory, know the material each one contained, and be able to cross-reference the way he did.

Paul smiled and then, with my promise not to reveal his secret, told me how he did it. “I know the first reference,” he said. “I have to know that one, but it’s the only one I need know. Let’s say the subject of my sermon is “Love Your Neighbor As Yourself.” I want to establish a scriptural basis for my theme, so I’ll start with the twenty-second Chapter of Matthew, the thirty-ninth verse, where Christ says, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’

“Now on that page I have a tiny card inserted that says, Turn to Mark 12:31 on page 39. Inserted there will be still another small card that says, Turn to Romans 13:9 on page 124. Each one of these references will have to do with loving your neighbor as yourself. Of course, since I have no visible notes in front of me, it appears that I have a prodigious memory. And that’s how it’s done.”

I haven’t broken my promise to Paul in revealing his secret to you. He’s now retired and said he didn’t object if I passed it on.

Seven Irritating Mannerisms to Avoid

I know you’ve listened to people who had some irritating habits that distracted you and caused you to view those speakers unfavorably. I went to a doctor once, who, when explaining my physical condition to me, had the habit of constantly asking, “Do you follow me?” with every third or fourth sentence. After a few minutes, this really got on my nerves. I found myself betting mentally when he would say it again, rather than actually listening to what he was telling me.

Others will use such phrases as “you know” over and over again. Tape yourself on a recorder and see if you pick up any repetitive phrases when you play it back. And have someone else—your wife, your children, or a friend—listen to your tape, too. They’ll hear words
or phrases that you use too often. You'll miss them because you're so used to hearing them.

Physical mannerisms can include your knuckles, drumming your fingers on a desk, excessive chewing, rubbing your nose, stroking your mustache, pulling your ear, adjusting your glasses. By themselves they're nothing, but when your listener sees them constantly, he's distracted by them. He loses interest in what you're saying. Here, now, are seven specific distracting mannerisms to avoid when you're making a speech or giving a talk to a large audience:

1. *The dying warrior.* In this position, the speaker leans heavily on the lectern. He wears an air of total exhaustion and never moves. All he needs to complete this picture is a feather drooping down over his forehead from an Indian headband.

2. *The fig leaf* is favored by the speaker who has no lectern to lean on. He stands solidly with both hands clasped in front below the waist, feet 18 inches apart and completely immovable, his body solid as a rock.

3. *The walkie-talkie* is a descriptive term in itself. This one is the pacer who never holds still for a single moment. Most "walkie-talkies" seem to be would-be lawyers who imagine themselves pacing back and forth in front of the jury.

4. *The chained elephant* stands with his weight first on one foot, then on the other. He goes nowhere, but constantly moves his feet in position, shuffling back and forth.

5. *The change counter* constantly counts the money in his pocket. Soon the audience hears only the jingle of coins rather than what he's saying.

6. *The swordsman* works with a pointer and a chart. He has the bad habit of fighting imaginary duels with his pointer as if he were holding a sword.

7. *The baton twirler* also uses a chart and a pointer, but he is more advanced in his techniques than the "swordsman." He uses his pointer as if he were entertaining the crowd at half time.

**Seven Important Don'ts to Remember**

I normally do not like to discuss techniques from a negative viewpoint, but this time I feel it's justified, so here goes:

1. *Don't bluff.* Never bluff to cover up a lack of knowledge. If you
don't know the answer, say so. Then find the answer and let the
person know as soon as you can.

2. Don't use profanity or obscenities. Not even a tiny "Damn!" or
"Hell!" is ever permissible. The moment you use profanity, you run
the risk of losing the respect and attention of some of your listeners.

3. Don't use sarcasm or ridicule. This is especially true if you have
a captive audience. Your listeners will resent it if they can't respond
in the same sarcastic manner. If a person resents you, he won't listen
to you.

4. Don't talk down to your listeners. You might be smarter than your
listeners, but only in one subject, and you selected that one. Never
treat your listeners as ignorant people if you want them to keep lis-
tening to you.

5. Don't lose your patience. If a listener asks you to cover a point
again, don't get upset. His inability to understand might be your
failure to explain it properly. Repeat the information or use a different
approach to make your point clear to him.

6. Don't hide behind the lectern. You must be clearly visible to the
audience. If the lectern doesn't show you at least from the waist up,
be brave and step out to the side.

7. Don't make excuses. Don't start off by saying, "Ill-prepared as
I am ... I didn't have a chance to go over this material ... I'm not
really qualified to speak on this ... I wouldn't be here, but ..." I've
heard these comments and so have you. You were turned off imme-
diately, right? Well, if you use them, your listeners will be turned off
too. Never apologize or make excuses. Only amateurs do that; profes-
sionals never do. Be a pro.

The Professional Way to Use Visual Aids: Eight Guidelines

First, let me tell you the advantages of using visual aids: One,
they can be powerful tools to help get your message across to your
audience. They can add interest and vitality to your presentation.
They will help focus your listeners' attention on the point you're
making.

Two, visual aids make it easier for your audience to understand
a complicated point. Your listeners will more easily grasp your idea
when they can see as well as hear what you're talking about.

Three, visual aids save time for your listeners can learn more
rapidly. And time is always valuable. The older you get, the more
you'll realize that. For instance, I used to joke saying I had more
time than money when I was doing my best to keep from losing my
patience while standing in a long checkout line at the supermarket.
Unfortunately, I've reached the age where that statement is no longer
true.

To be usable and worthwhile to you, a visual aid should have
these seven specific characteristics:

1. A good visual aid should be appropriate. It should help you
illustrate a point or stress a feature.

2. It should be simple and easy to understand. The best way to
keep it simple is to have it emphasize only the point you want to get
across; nothing more.

3. Your visual aid must be accurate. Be sure your facts and
figures are correct and up-to-date. Any inaccuracy will destroy your
credibility.

4. Your aid should be portable and durable. It must be light-
weight for easy handling, or constructed in quickly assembled parts.
Don't end up with something that requires several people to move it.

5. Your visual aid must be easy to use. Aids that are intricate,
complicated, and require a great deal of time to use make an audience
nervous, edgy, and impatient with you.

6. Your aid must be attractive. Dirty and grimy visual aids turn
off your listeners immediately. If you're using charts and some of them
have become smudged, replace them.

7. Your visual aid should be necessary. It should illustrate an
essential point so you can give a better presentation. Never fit your
talk to your visual aid; always fit your visual aid to your talk.

Now I want to give you the eight guidelines for using visual aids
effectively that I promised you earlier:

1. Prepare time-consuming drawings in advance. This guideline is
applicable if you're using a blackboard. If you spend half your time
writing on the blackboard instead of talking to your audience, you'll
irritate your listeners. In fact, unless you have a captive audience,
some of them will have disappeared by the time you're ready to talk.
To keep that from happening, put your material on the board before
your audience arrives.

2. Prepare yourself in advance for using the visual aid. Know your
visual aid thoroughly so you can answer any questions about it.
Rehearse your presentation several times using the aid exactly as it will be used later in your live performance.

3. Introduce your aid at the proper time. If your aid is on stage, keep it covered. If you can keep it offstage and have an assistant bring it on, that’s better yet. But either way, don’t expose your visual aid until you’re actually ready to use it. If you expose it too early, your audience will spend its time looking at it rather than listening to you.

4. Explain your visual aid. Elaborate visual aids are often used to illustrate highly complicated and technical subjects. When you first show this kind of aid, briefly explain its purpose. Otherwise your audience will be trying to figure out what it’s for and miss some of what you’re saying.

5. Show the aid so all can see it. Display your visual aid so everybody can see it. If it’s a chart, view it from the back of the room yourself to make sure it can be read. If necessary, change the seating arrangement so all can see. The best visual aid is of no value if everyone cannot see it.

6. Talk to your listeners, not to the aid. Amateurs tend to talk to the aid and not to the audience. When you’re explaining a chart or drawing, keep your eye on your listeners.

7. Use a pointer. A pointer can be used to focus your listeners’ eyes on a particular part of your visual aid. It also keeps you from walking in front of the aid. Always put the pointer away when you’re not using it so you won’t be playing with it.

8. Use an assistant if you can. If you have a clerk or secretary who can help you, have him do so. Make sure he’s been rehearsed, too. He must know exactly what he is to do and when to do it. An assistant can make things go much more smoothly for you when you’re using visual aids. However, keep him offstage, too, when he’s not helping you.

Let me summarize these 8 important trade secrets of professional platform speakers now so you’ll have them in one place for ready reference.

1. Develop your own distinctive speaking style. Don’t try to copy or imitate someone else. Be yourself.

2. Learn to control the emotions of your audience. To capture your listeners, aim for their hearts as well as their heads.
3. Use these 5 simple methods to overcome and control your nervousness:
   (a) Be thoroughly prepared.
   (b) Have a positive mental attitude. Act as if it were impossible to fail.
   (c) Have your initial remarks well in mind.
   (d) Tell a story on yourself, Jack Benny style.
   (e) Be deliberate; slow down.

4. Physically project your personality to your audience by standing erect, using gestures to emphasize your points, being enthusiastic about your subject, and by wearing quiet subdued colors that do not distract your audience.

5. Be the final authority on your subject and only your subject. Don't try to know everything about everything.

6. Avoid these 7 irritating mannerisms:
   (a) The dying warrior
   (b) The fig leaf
   (c) The walkie-talkie
   (d) The chained elephant
   (e) The change counter
   (f) The swordsman
   (g) The baton twirler

7. Seven important don’ts to remember are these:
   (a) Don’t bluff.
   (b) Don’t use profanity or obscenities.
   (c) Don’t use sarcasm or ridicule.
   (d) Don’t talk down to your listeners.
   (e) Don’t lose your patience.
   (f) Don’t hide behind the lectern.
   (g) Don’t make excuses.

8. Eight professional guidelines for using visual aids:
   (a) You should prepare time-consuming drawings in advance.
   (b) Prepare yourself in advance for using your visual aid.
   (c) Introduce your aid at the proper time.
(d) Explain your visual aid to your audience.
(e) Display the aid so all can see it.
(f) Talk to your listeners, not to the aid.
(g) Use a pointer.
(h) Use an assistant if you can.

To wrap up this chapter, I want to say that speaking in public will expand your life and its meaning. It will give you a sense of personal power and fulfillment unlike anything you’ve ever experienced before. And the more you express your ideas and feeling to an audience, the more you’ll want to do so, for you’ll find that you really do enjoy doing it. You’ll have a tremendous feeling of self-accomplishment that nothing else can ever give you.

And now on to the next chapter where I’ll give you some tips on how to use your conversational expertise to succeed in business.