



# The POWER of SPEECH

Whether it's presenting speeches, pitching ideas or conveying a message to a client, good communication skills are critical to those in the finance industry and an asset that can be used as an advantage in a fiercely competitive market. *Daniela Aroche* investigates communicating for success

If you have ever come across a list of the top 10 fear factors across the globe, you may notice that public speaking often ranks strangely high on the list – often even above fears of death and financial ruin.

But, ironically, although most of us have a fear of public speaking, there is an increasing need for professionals worldwide to have strong presentation skills and remain competent in all areas of communication.

"It's an incredibly competitive world out there, and the thing that most impacts your ability to build relationships and ultimately be successful is your ability to communicate," says Carlton Lamb, CEO of presentation training institute, Carlton Lamb Productions. "So the ability to build rapport quickly and maintain it, whether you're a leader presenting a speech or meeting with a client, is critical."

Joe Sirianni



Joe Sirianni, director at franchise Smartline, agrees and says that the ability to present and communicate effectively is especially important for brokers.

"What we do all day is talk to customers, talk to people, and we're always trying to influence outcomes and influence buying decisions," he says. "Therefore, communication is absolutely critical – and poor communicators won't survive in this industry."

### Preparation

Although presenting to an audience is arguably the hardest form of communication, the simple key to success, as in most skills, is all in the practice and how well you prepare.

Before even putting pen to paper to draft your speech, you must do two things:

- research and know your topic inside out, and
- research your target audience – who are they, what information will they be interested in hearing and what's the best way to engage them?

Once you have identified who you will be pitching to, it becomes much easier to structure your speech and focus on the message you want to convey.

Thomas Murrell, director of 8M Media & Communications, says there are a few important questions that are vital to the preparation process. "These are the five key questions that everyone should answer before they start any form of oral presentation," he says.

1. What is your main objective?
2. What are your other objectives? These may include raising your profile or improving your career prospects.

3. What does success look like to you? What would success feel like or look like to you, after your last words of the presentation – give this some thought.

4. What is the one key message you want the audience to take home?

5. What is the nature of your message in your presentation? Because if you get the context wrong, even if you have the content right – it could be a disaster.

### Technology: friend or foe?

When it comes to technology, and PowerPoint slides in particular, the message from the experts is clear: less is more.

"The key in my mind is to not 'over-engineer' the presentation. Keep it simple, and in terms of slides, keep them short, sharp and sweet. In other words, slides should be very brief, even to

Carlton Lamb



a few words you can talk around – there's nothing worse than reading off slides, so keep them to a few key points maximum," says Sirianni.

Ideally, any extra material you bring with you to embellish your content should be just that: an addition to your speech – not a crucial component. That way, if something does go wrong, you will be able to continue, regardless. If technology does serve you an injustice by breaking down, the experts have an answer. Lamb advises the following. "Have a backup, but if the backup fails the show must go on. It's a real opportunity to tell the story without the technology. Apologise to the audience, take a deep breath and leap. Audiences will empathise – and it's a real chance to be memorable, so grab it."

### Using humour

Once the key points have been nussed out and your speech is structured, it is then possible to personalise it by adding humour or a personal story. This can often make the presentation more effective by engaging the audience, but it's important to ensure that the material used is appropriate for the audience and subject matter.

From personal experience, Sirianni says it is always a good idea to inject some humour or quirkiness into a presentation: "My view is personalise it, tell a story or ask a question at the start to get the audience engaged," Sirianni says.

"The advantage of telling a story is that the audience can relate to it – people always love stories, and if you can give an example within your story it's always very powerful."

If you have already researched your audience, it should become easier to gauge the appropriateness of whether to use humour or not. As a general rule, Lamb says it is usually best to trust yourself to make that decision.

"Use your own personality. If you enjoy being funny, then, great, go for it! Just remember to make sure the overall speech is valuable to the audience," he says.

### Controlling pre-speech nerves

Even the perfect speech can be undermined by the flurry of nerves that has become the well-known signature for public speaking. Karine

## WHAT TO WEAR

When making your presentation, follow these tips by Thomas Murrell, director, 8M Media & Communications

**Men:** "For mortgage brokers, a tie is best, because it projects the image of safe and secure. Try to wear a tie that matches the colour of your corporate brand – this is a very subtle thing that most people don't think about, but having your visuals congruent with your brand makes the presentation visually seamless."



**Women:** Murrell says closed toe shoes are a must. In addition, he says women can look to prominent female newsreaders for ideas. "Why? One, because they are in a visual medium," he says, "and, secondly, because they dress to make sure that their image doesn't overpower their message."

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Gouriou, president of the Chandos Challengers at Toastmasters public speaking institute, says a top tip to control those nerves and stay focused is to believe in yourself and your speech.

“Come prepared, know your speech,” she says. “Believe in what you’ll say, concentrate on it and breathe deeply.”

Getting to the venue a little earlier to familiarise yourself with the atmosphere can also help, according to Greg Stockwell, director of Public Speaking

Australia: “Always arrive early for your presentation. This enables you to view the venue where you will be speaking, and get a positive feel for the layout of the audience and any A/V equipment that you may be using.” Last, but not least, Sirianni says some simple relaxation techniques such as visualising success can also go a long way to relieve the stress before presenting and, most importantly, use what nervous energy you have towards positive, and not negative, thinking.

“Even though I do a bit of it [public speaking], I don’t ever find it natural, I don’t ever find it easy, and I always get nervous and I get fear too,” he says.

“What you need to do is understand that you have to do it – and if it’s a necessity then you’re better off channelling that energy into a productive presentation rather than negative. Turn it around to say, ‘this is my opportunity to show them what I’m made of and demonstrate that I’m fantastic.’”

### Memorising the speech

The pressure of trying to memorise the entire speech word for word is often a main cause of pre-presentation nerves and an unnecessary stress that can be avoided.

“I don’t believe you should memorise a speech word for word,” says Murrell. “I think that puts too much pressure on the individual – and even actors who spend a lifetime perfecting these techniques get it wrong.”

“What I do suggest is that you use your own stories to illustrate and make key points in your presentation. Those stories will be easy to recall because you’ve lived them. Overall, you need to remember your structure



Karine Gouriou

– introduction, your premise, key points and, most importantly, your ending and your call to action.”

If you’re still not sure that you’ll be able to remember your content, mind maps outlining the structure of the speech and bullet points on a sheet can also help jog your memory.

### Dress for success

Looking the part is important – it’s what you can convey to your audience without having to speak a word.

Of course, this comes down to grooming and personal attire – and, while it’s usually common sense to dress well, according to Murrell knowing exactly what to wear to make an impression is essential.

“You must approach what you wear as a decision about how you want to project yourself to others,” Murrell says.

A dark suit and a crisp white shirt are always a good choice, and a timeless classic for both men and women.

### Delivering the speech

The ‘choreography’ and delivery of a speech can strengthen the overall presentation and make it more engaging for the audience.

Keeping eye contact with your audience, for starters, is the general rule for good presenting. No-one wants to be spoken ‘at’, they want to be spoken ‘to’.

Murrell’s tip is to focus on the entire audience, rather than just one person or a few front row attendees. “Eye contact is critical, so what you can do is divide the room into four sections and scan each quarter at different times during your presentation.”

Using your body to illustrate various points can also enhance your presentation, and Murrell suggests using centre stage for the most important points, then standing to the side once a slide comes into play to allow the audience to concentrate on the screen.

“Manage it so that people are either looking at the slides or listening to you,” says Murrell. “Always stand with your feet shoulder width apart and try not to move around too much. You need to have slow, deliberate body movements – this demonstrates charisma and you have more power,” he says.

Voice tone and pitch can also help, but trying to concentrate on your voice rather than the speech itself can often be complicated and distracting. Murrell says changing the pace and the modality of your delivery can be just as effective for keeping the audience’s attention. Lamb’s advice is to keep it natural and use your own voice.

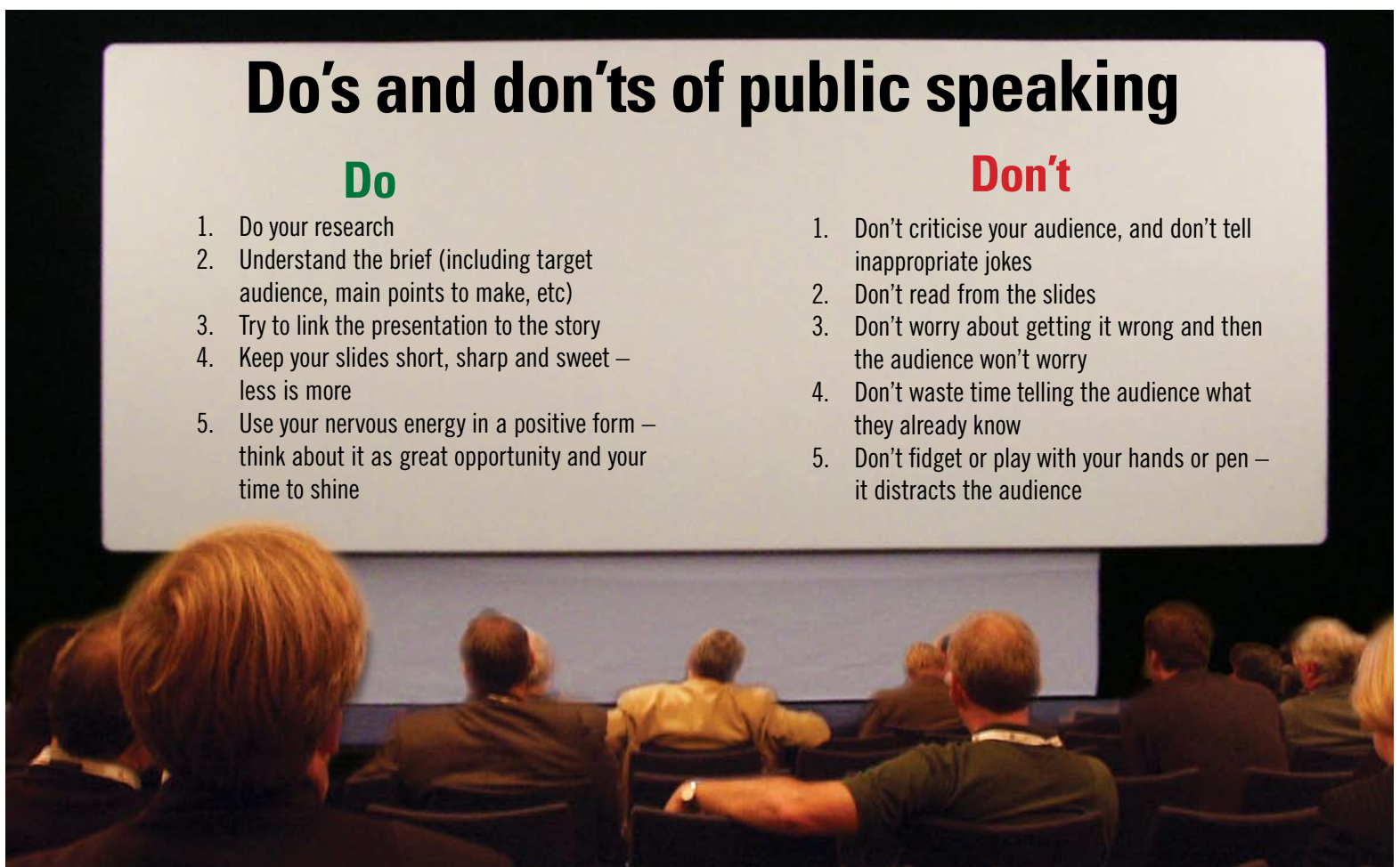
## Do’s and don’ts of public speaking

### Do

1. Do your research
2. Understand the brief (including target audience, main points to make, etc)
3. Try to link the presentation to the story
4. Keep your slides short, sharp and sweet – less is more
5. Use your nervous energy in a positive form – think about it as great opportunity and your time to shine

### Don’t

1. Don’t criticise your audience, and don’t tell inappropriate jokes
2. Don’t read from the slides
3. Don’t worry about getting it wrong and then the audience won’t worry
4. Don’t waste time telling the audience what they already know
5. Don’t fidget or play with your hands or pen – it distracts the audience



### Closing, feedback and question time

It is a given that a strong conclusion is essential to the success of any presentation, and the experts suggest that finishing with a call to action is best.

"Conclude with a strong ending," says Gouriou. "To do this, focus on what you want your audience to take from your speech, what the purpose of your speech is," she says.

Many people believe that constructive criticism is the key to further improvement, and Lamb says this is true of gathering feedback from your presentations. The advice is simple: "Communication is not what you intend, it is what they receive. Therefore, it's important to find out what they, the audience, have received."

Asking questions, then, is often a good way to interpret what information the audience has gathered from your speech and which points they are more interested in.

But Murrell warns: "So many people finish their presentation and then say 'now for question time', and you get that deadly, embarrassing silence. Avoid that by ending every speech with a call to action, not with questions. Either take questions throughout the talk or take questions and then come back for a closing statement."


Lamb says it is also important to prepare for questions that might be asked, to avoid getting stuck in an awkward moment if a difficult question arises.

"Write down the questions that you believe the investigative cynic in the audience would ask," he says, "but even more importantly write down questions that you believe the investigative cynic would think, but not ask."

Ultimately, as complicated as it may seem to deliver a killer presentation, the experts agree that the winning mix is this: believe in your objective and convey it to the audience in the most natural, confident way you can.

Use the tools of preparation, research and your own personality to win them over. As always, practice makes perfect.

"Get good, really good at it," says Lamb. "And if you are already good at it, get better – it will affect your career. Dare to be excellent." ■



**JOE SIRIANNI,  
DIRECTOR, SMARTLINE**

I was once pitching a presentation to a group including the senior executive and manager of the business. As I was presenting, all of a sudden – smack bang in the middle of the presentation – the senior executive just gets right up off his chair and walks straight out of the room!

At this point I didn't know what had happened and seeing as he was the key person – because the others in the group weren't going to do anything without his approval – I was fairly shaken up and, of course, I was pretty embarrassed! Eventually he walked back in, and amazingly shot me a killer question regarding the main point of my presentation – I must have been waffling on during the presentation, because even though he wasn't there he had still got the main point of my presentation. Luckily, because I was prepared I answered the question well, so it was OK, but you can never underestimate the top guy. So clearly the lesson there for me was just be prepared and always try to be sharp and succinct, and get to the point!



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