

Impediments to the Art of Public Speaking

International Journal of English Learning and Teaching Skills

Anusriti Choudhuri (1st Year, EE, 2018-19)

Sagnik Seal (1st Year, CSE, 2018-19)

Prof. Arun Kumar Chatterjee

Institute of Engineering & Management, Kolkata

Abstract

Public speaking can be defined as the action of presenting a live speech in front of an audience. The speaker has to stand face-to-face with a group of people and has to deliver a speech on a particular topic or a group of similar, inter-related topics. The art of public speaking is very difficult to master, but has high demand in the corporate world and every person needs to try and grasp this skill in order to be sharply visible in the competitive crowd. There are several impediments to the art of public speaking and a speaker needs to be well aware of these obstacles in order to master the art and become a good orator.

Most of us find it difficult to speak in front of a group of people because we feel shy to speak and are afraid of the reactions that may be evoked from the audience about our opinions and proposals. There are several reasons that lead to this uneasiness and they need to be overcome to become effective speakers.

Introduction

“You can speak well if your tongue can deliver the message of your heart.”-- John Ford

An activity as complex as public speaking is bound to suffer from setbacks if conditions arise that hamper the smooth execution of the speaking process. They are referred to as impediments as they give rise to barriers in the propagation of the speech. Identification of these impediments is extremely important.

The following state the important impediments:

- 1. Badly expressed idea:** Not being well acquainted with the topic under discussion can create this kind of problems.
- 2. Inability to transmit the actual message:** This is a common phenomenon, and it gains a sharp significance if it leads to failure in conveying the actual message or idea.
- 3. Semantic errors:** Words that make us sound smart and knowledgeable are not always the ones that captivate the audience, because they are not always comprehensible by the receiver. In any case gaudy and showy words should be carefully and consciously avoided.
- 4. Quantum of communication:** The quantity of information that is provided to the receiver has to be just right. The information provided should neither be too detailed, nor should it be so short that the receiver is not able to grasp the full content of the message.

5. I –syndrome: Try to visualize a piece of communication that starts and ends in the pronoun “I”. It is going to be tedious for the listener to sit through the entire piece of interaction. Whenever possible “we” serves as a better option.

6. Prejudice: Starting an interaction with a bias or with the attitude of a braggart can prove to be counterproductive to the growth of any interaction process.

The word impediments can be interpreted in a way so as to point out the barriers to the art of public speaking. This can be done as follows:

I - Insensitivity

M - Muddle **P**-Pessimism **E**-Egoism

D - Distraction

I - Intricacy

M - Maziness

E - Elongation

N - Negligence

T - Tiredness

S - Shyness

Effects of the impediments on a speaker:

1. Insensitivity: The speaker should keep in mind the society and he should speak in such a way so as to not offend the audience, because when a listener is agitated by what the speaker is saying the person is going to lose interest in the speech and may even end up protesting in certain situations. This is never something a speaker wishes to confront, if he plans to be a good public speaker. The speaker should not make any biased comments on the basis of gender, religion, caste, creed or one's financial conditions and so on. He should also resist any kind of offensive remarks no matter how provoking the situation of the speech or how inappropriate the reactions of the listeners are. On doing so there remains no speciality in the speaker so that the audience may continue to follow his ideas.

2. Muddle: The speaker should arrange his speech beforehand because if he does not do so there remains a chance that he might disarrange his points and end up mixing up the speech into a hotchpotch of words which becomes very difficult for the listener to decipher, and anything that is difficult for the listener to understand, makes the listener lose track of the points and then he/she fails to catch up most of the time and ends up either disinterested or upset and irritated. This results in the failure of the primary target of having a strong grip on the attention of the audience. Thus, a muddled speech makes the speaker very vulnerable and so is a critical barrier that has to be tackled carefully in order to succeed.

3. Pessimism: Pessimism is the tendency of anticipating that the worst is going to occur. This kind of attitude of a speaker is very destructive because it makes him lose self-confidence, because he stops believing in himself and his ideas. This becomes transparent to the audience when he goes on stage and fails to create a strong impression because no one wants to follow someone who himself doesn't believe in what he is trying to convey. Hence, the speaker should always be optimistic about his speech, this optimism will provide him confidence to carry the audience with him.

4. Egoism: The speaker should never house egoism in his/her heart or mind. Because, when people have too great an opinion about themselves, they usually feel that they are more important than the others present around them and this can lead them into making offensive comments which are disrespectful for the audience and they will lose interest in the speaker and the speech. Thereafter the speaker fails to continue in a masterly fashion with his speech.

5. Distraction: An important barrier to overcome in public speaking is the presence of distraction. The distractions can be many different types such as, stage lighting, commotion in the audience, background music, and stage help trying to convey a message to the speaker. All of these can distract the speaker and mess up the speech but they all can be overcome with a little bit of increased concentration. But there are some distractions which need a very strong mind to overcome such as thoughts that might be worrying the speaker or other issues outside the current event of speaking that might be of importance to the speaker. He is then bound to fall prey to those thought processes in the middle of the speech and can end up losing his flow in the speech itself. This has to be prevented, as much as possible.

6. Intricacy: The speaker should not try to convey his point(s) in such a way that it becomes complicated. This entangles the mind of the listener who is trying to make out what the speaker's message and may end up misinterpreting the message or completely blacking out of the interaction. Thus, any kind of intricacies should be prevented.

7. Maziness: The term maziness means confusion. Confusion can be very harmful for a speaker who wants to speak well in public. In order to prevent confusion, the speaker must have a clear idea about the topic he has chosen for his speech and should know exactly what he is trying to say. This is important because he would not be able to convey a message to the audience unless he himself has a clear understanding about it.

8. Elongation: The speaker should be careful that he does not elongate his speech unnecessarily. Unnecessary elongation to repetition of the same points and this is clearly visible to the audience and thus they become irritated and disinterested in the speech. The speaker should prevent elongation and rather he should end his/her speech when all topics planned are covered sufficiently well.

9. Negligence: There are certain points that a speaker has to keep in mind before and during the speech. These may include preparations such as practices, collecting reliable information on the topic, preparing and maintaining the correct body language during the speech. Thus, negligence can be very harmful for a speaker. He/she should keep in mind each and every step and make sure he doesn't miss out on any point that may lead to the vulnerability of the speech.

10. Tiredness: Tiredness or fatigue is a significant barrier for any speaker. Tiredness is something clearly visible and can receive adverse reaction from the audience. Also, tiredness interferes with the speaker's thought process and may disturb his speech and so, the speaker should take adequate rest before giving a speech.

11. Shyness: The speaker will not be able to deliver a proper speech until and unless he has a smart and confident body language. Shyness can lead to a fumbling speech which can be very irritating and the audience would not be interested in someone who does not have confidence in himself. Shyness usually arises from the fear of judgement from others. This can only be overcome if the speaker is confident. He should not pay attention to other's opinions rather he should evaluate himself and be satisfied with his performance. In this way, his shyness would not be an obstacle anymore.

Overcoming the impediments:

For effective public speaking, a basic understanding of the language is very important. For effective public speaking one must have the ability to stand in front of audience and deliver a lecture on a chosen topic. It should be convincing, supported with facts and examples, and be able to create an impact. The speaker may have brilliant ideas but, it is important to make the speech understandable and appreciable to the audience. There are many ways to overcome the impediments to the art of public speaking: -

1. Solution to increase enthusiasm:

- Paying attention to the type of facial expressions used and their timings. The speaker should be aware of his/her frowns, smiles or wails.
- Making sure his/her apparent expressions are commensurate to the topic and audience. Smiling when a serious message is being conveyed creates an imbalance between the expression and the objective. The same thing happens in the reverse direction as well, when a light point is put across with acute gravity.
- After increasing the awareness of facial expression this skill should be practiced and mastered.

2. Use of proper stress:

The importance of proper pronunciation, with emphasis and stress on the right syllables cannot be over emphasized. Proper accent and correct stress is an important aspect of spoken language. One must try to pay more and more attention to this aspect. It is recommended that traditional and formal orthodox British pronunciations be used, rather than the American versions. But this really is a matter of personal preference. Let's take a simple example:

“This liquid is very harmful”. In this sentence when stress is given on “this” the importance is on the kind of the liquid. When the stress is shifted to “very” the importance is on the nature of harm. If the speech progresses without proper emphasis and intonations it will, very likely get monotonous,

First one should try to understand the meaning of the sentence and then pay attention to give stress for particular words. This can be done by two major things one is practice and another is understanding.

3. Use of Gestures for stress:

Trying to use gestures for stress in words. One can make variations for creating gestures. And gestures can convey the message very well.

Audience can visualize the message when the speaker uses gestures for stress in words. Gesture is a key for grabbing the attention of listeners. Gesture is capable for giving energy in voice.

4. Increase of focus:

When the speaker is in a flow and feels like a running train, then it is necessary to pull back by putting break, that is, a small pause. The speaker should always pay attention to the objective. He/she should always think about what the audience wants to hear.

5. Keep eye contact:

When the speaker speaks to more than one person. He/she should try to connect with them through the eyes as they are also speaking to the audience. When the speaker takes a break, he/she should behave like that is the time of shifting the eye contact from one place to another. These skills should be practiced for an impressive speech.

6. Try to repeat:

Audience need to hear the speaker's message more than once. The speaker should expect that their audience can remember his/her words by hearing once. So, for effective public speaking he/she should try to repeat the message more than once for creating emphasis.

7. Be respectful to the audience:

Sometimes it happens when the speaker can't connect to the audience properly. In that situation he/she needs to keep patience. The speaker should not raise the voice but make his/her voice crystal clear. The speaker needs to understand the audience and then he/she can clear the misunderstanding. The actual intelligence is to understand the audience and then one can cut his/her coat according to the cloth.

8. Achieving confidence:

Most people become anxious before doing something in public. However, one should know how to overcome nervousness so that he/she not only feels confident but also appear so, in front of the audience. The speaker should make fear his/her friend and transform the fear into energy. And prepare, prepare and prepare until, the speaker becomes comfortable with delivering the topic, develops genuine interest in it, gives mock speech in front of friends and family.

9. Achieving clarity:

The speaker should try to speak in an average speed of 120-140 words per minute. Repeat the message for better understanding. Try to pronounce the words clearly. Keeps the voice according

to his/her audience. Give perfect emphasis on words. Try to deliver his/her speech in a well-organized manner. Use common words to describe the topic.

10. Achieving fluency:

Listen to good speakers and news. Watch English documentaries. Read newspaper. Expand his/her vocabulary by learning at least 5 words in a day. Always concentrate on his/her ideas rather than appearance. To enhance the fluency one needs to keep speaking English and continue to learn from mistakes.

So we can interpret this solution by using the word “impress” as an acronym as follow-

I – Idea- The first step in the process of communication is to decide the idea which needs to be communicated. There may be plenty of ideas depending upon the situation and the receiver.

M – Message- After selection of idea one needs to be clothed in a language that is comprehensible to the receiver. One need to deliver the message in a lucid form that has to be understandable by the crowd.

P – Pause- We cannot underestimate the significance of pause. The receiver can comprehend the impact of message if pauses are juxtaposed at just right minute.

R – Receiver- The receiver is the capital in the process of communication. To be a potent speaker one need to satisfy the needs and expectation of the receiver.

E – Empathy- In communication empathy helps us to communicate the idea in a way that makes sense to the audience.

S – Sender- The communication process hinges on the sender. He initiates the Interaction and comes up with ideas and concepts that he wishes to share with the receiver.

S – Security check- Effective communication needs that the receiver listens carefully to the utterance of the sender so that the end results are positive.

This is how one can overcome the impediments to the art of public speaking and can deliver a notable speech.

Conclusion

The capacity to communicate is the way to differentiate humans from other species. But to communicate with a crowd is harder than anticipated. This work is helpful in delivering speech in front of audience effectively. A person who follows these instructions or suggestions can master the art of public speaking and deliver speeches that make him/her stand out in the audience. So it can be said that,

An effective speaker knows that the success or failure of his talk is not for him to decide— it will be decided in the minds and hearts of his hearers.

----Dale Carnegie