

# The Art of Public Speaking

AIC Professional Program, presented by Michael McKay, March 22, 2011



Many people think great public speakers have it easy. They look confident, speak well, interact with the audience, and create an interesting flow of information for their captive

listeners. But Mr. Michael McKay, Chair of the British Swiss Chamber of Commerce, and Principal of McKay's International Corporate Communications & Public Affairs, told American International Club Professional Program attendees at the Hotel Intercontinental on March 22, 2011 that this concept is wrong – all great public speakers *become* great public speakers. And he shared with the group just how to do that.

Mr. McKay's goal was to get his audience to think differently about the way in which they talk to, and communicate with people. The two key points he made were that to speak in public you must prepare, and you must think about the audience rather than yourself. Great speakers never ad-lib, Mr. McKay said. Everything they say has been scripted and well-rehearsed, and it is natural for people to be nervous when speaking in front of a group.

"Speaking in public is not a normal exercise," Mr. McKay said. "Know that you are going to be nervous so that you can control your nerves, and prepare, prepare, prepare." To prepare for a speech, Mr. McKay suggested using a simple process: ask yourself, and answer, some practical questions: "What is the purpose of my speech? Why have I been invited? What is my audience's level and expectations? What sort of impression do I want to create (relaxed, interactive, formal)? What are my key

messages?"

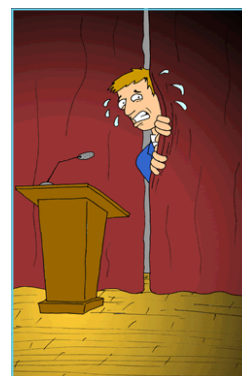
By answering them, Mr. McKay said you can become clearer on what you want to deliver. "You can define what you want your audience to remember, and what you want them to do about your message when they leave the room," he said.

Mr. McKay stressed that the audience, and not the speaker, is the most important part of a presentation because the purpose of public speaking is to engage the people in the far corners of the room. "Imagine what it must be like to be chained to the seat at the back of the room you are speaking in, and having to listen to yourself speak," he said. "If you had to sit and listen to what you're preparing, would you want to leave the room?"

To help yourself make your presentations more captivating, try to record your voice and play it back, Mr. McKay suggested. It helps you to hear what you sound like. You can also use a video camera to prepare your presentation out loud, or use a full-length mirror to see how you stand and present yourself.

Finally, people should not forget a simple and perhaps obvious point that it is crucial to present yourself effectively to your audience. "Be aware of your grooming because it can be distracting," Mr. McKay explains. "You do not want your audience to remember that you had spinach in your teeth or that your zipper was undone – they will focus on these negative points instead of what is actually being said to them."

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#### Recommended reading:

- ◆ [The Penguin Book of Historic Speeches](#), Edited by Brian MacArthur;
- ◆ [The Challenge of Effective Speaking](#) by Rudolph F. Verderber; published by Wadsworth;
- ◆ [Speeches that Changed the World](#); published by Quercus.

#### Michael McKay's PowerPoint tips:

- ⇒ Use PowerPoint to simplify your presentation using graphics and visuals.
- ⇒ Use the Notes Page effectively but do not put it on the screen! This overloads the audience with confusing information.
- ⇒ Use captions for your pictures or photos because people can see different messages in them.

#### More tips from Michael:

- ⇒ Read great speeches so you can learn from them to improve your own.
- ⇒ Use props because they stimulate the senses and help people remember points in your speech.
- ⇒ In your speeches, try to use stories and anecdotes.
- ⇒ Ask questions that the audience might be thinking about, but never let them answer. The key is in your timing.
- ⇒ Be clear using simple words.
- ⇒ Don't read to or turn your back on your audience.
- ⇒ Move around when you are speaking to help yourself relax.