



# The Speech Clinic®



## ***Speaking Tips No 17*** 051209

### **About unconscious peculiarities**

Nowadays it has been made clear that women use both brain halves, which enables them to think of several things simultaneously, whereas men are limited to using only one half at a time. I am a man and cry out against such a generalization. Women are not a bit better than men when it comes to noticing recurring and distracting personal peculiarities when on stage focusing on what to say. Odd habits may be movements, humming, eye flickering etc. Most of us have a problem with that. But it can be cured! Even men can learn to think of several things at the same time. You will need feed back! Simply ask a couple of friendly people in the audience in advance to honestly tell you afterwards if there was anything distracting about your performance.

First of all I wish to stress that nothing is wrong provided it is not so frequently repeated that it catches the attention of the audience with a disregard for what you actually say.

1. you can move freely on stage but must avoid to constantly move in a certain pattern. Ex. If you walk two steps to the right and then two steps to the left and keep doing that all the time, you will soon be seen as a hunted rocking duck, risking to lose your audience.
2. You can and should use arm movements to emphasize what you say, but you must avoid the same type of movement all the time. Above all, you should avoid repeating those movements in an ongoing sequence. As soon as the audience notices a systematic movement, listening will fade and all that is noticed is the constantly recurring movement. Ex. The left arm moves out in a sweep all the time while the right arm stays put to the body. The attention of the audience will soon focus on the left arm flying about rather than on you.
3. Your eyes should stay in contact with the audience, but absolutely not only with part of it. Those who don't get a glimpse will be annoyed and lose interest in you and in what you say. Those who are being bombarded with your gaze spend energy defending themselves from it rather than focusing on listening.
4. The everlasting humming between the words and sentences as soon as a speaker thinks (also when there is no thinking) are totally superfluous guttural fill outs, which nobody wants to hear. They are quickly noticed by an audience who soon only hears aaahhh, eeeehhhh, andeeehhhh, buteeehhh etc. At the end those are the only words heard and the audience loses the thread. Replace all such fill outs with pauses. Practice to manage silence!

The reason why these unintentional peculiarities are so common is, of course, that we concentrate so much on what we are about to say, that there is no room in our brains to reflect on how we are saying it. Our recurring peculiar habits can ruin an otherwise fine speech content. The solution is to practice – get feedback, practice – get feedback. It can be cured. Even men can be cured!

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