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Speaking Tips # 35 070321

Keep the time – all the time!

Some claim that time does not exist. Others say that time is change. Again others see time vertically in stead of horizontally. We, who give public presentations, should however be deeply aware of the existence of time, regardless of definitions.

Personally, I learnt the hard way when I unconsciously extended a half hour presentation by forty-five minutes. I wasn't even aware that the audience was in a state of polite dissolution. I was blindly swallowed by my own reckless excellence. Only a few minutes after my conclusion the audience had vanished and there I stood, abandoned, struck dumb with the question "what's this, what happened?" It turned out to be a rhetoric question as there was nobody to answer it. This happened long ago now, but what a lesson! I was the last speaker and had not stolen time from other speakers. But I had stolen it from the audience!

When there is an agenda with detailed breaks and a number of subsequent speakers or activities, it is vital to strictly keep the allocated time. The breaks are there for visits to restrooms, for stretching legs, for regaining energy, to discuss and to mingle. We know that ladies' restroom visits, by natural reasons, are much slower than gentlemen's. If your presentation is preceded by a break and your allocated speaking time is 15 minutes, it may well be, that some ladies, who are facing a 10 meter queue "outside" the restroom, decide that they can wait until your speech is over. If you then go over time by a quarter, how much do you think that those in distress listen to you? So, if you suddenly see a scattered female exodus, you may rest assured that you are speaking overtime! In addition, if other speakers follow, then it is also shameless selfishness to take up their time. There is a risk that it goes all the way so that the last speaker is left to speak to an audience that has gone home for dinner.

Here are three tips for learning to keep the time:

1. **Prepare by practicing!** A rule of thumb is that the time it takes when practising is app. 75% of a live talk. We tend to speak faster during a repetition and we often add parts and make more pauses (should do) in reality.
2. **Balance the opening and the conclusion!** In general we are slow starters and have to rush over the all important finish. Remember to spread time correctly by having a short but powerful opening and conclusion. Don't let half the speech be an opening!
3. **Learn your personal pace!** For me, one and a quarter A-4 page in size 12 takes about 7 minutes to present live. Practice with a stopwatch! Once you have drilled a certain time norm into your head, you will have a time feeling also for shorter or longer speeches, without having to consult your wrist watch, which would distract listeners.

Time is consequently a reality rather than a philosophical issue for a speaker. Once you have learnt to keep the time, and you do it all the time, you respect other speakers, you honour your audience and you give those poor distressed ladies a reasonable chance!

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