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Speaking Tips # 48

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Humor in Presentations

Too many presenters in the business world are terrified of using humor. They either fear not being taken seriously or being incapable of humor. Nothing could be more wrong. Anyone can use humor once we define humor as entertainment. The mediocre, boring speaker who is taken seriously probably has an audience equally mediocre and boring. An audience consists of people with as many differences as their DNA. But an audience has one wish in common: not to be bored!

Entertainment.

There are two ways for a speaker to keep the audience alert. One is to speak about a topic which is so fascinating that it does not have to be entertaining. The other is to speak in such an entertaining way that the topic does not have to be fascinating. Those who manage to combine the two have a guaranteed success. A comedian endeavors to be funny all the time. An entertaining speaker, on the other hand, should convey his/her message with the help of sporadic humor. Both have the same thing in common: they attract laughter or smiles of appreciation more or less often.

Jokes.

Be careful with jokes. If you, as a speaker, come out with a really clumsy joke in an important part of your speech you can lose all credibility. Be judicious! If you feel that you cannot tell jokes, then you leave it. The joke is common property, created by somebody else and there is always a risk that the audience has heard it before. If you insist on using jokes, then it is wise to first say f. ex. "you may have heard this joke before but it is really spot on and illustrates what I am saying, ...". Or you can use it as a simile "it is like ..." followed by the joke.

Facial expressions and pauses.

It sometimes happens that an audience bursts into laughter before the speaker has even uttered one funny word. The reason may be a movement of the eyebrow at just the right time, a shake of the head or a special facial expression etc. In order to intensify expectations, the pause can be crucial before a twist or point is delivered; even afterwards, to make the point sink in. But beware! Different pause lengths affect the effect. It's subtle and requires experience. You will probably land on your bottom more than once. But you get the hang of it sooner or later.

Self irony

The safest way to use humor in a speech is to make fun of ourselves, to deliver pleasantries about our own "faux pas" and weaknesses. Everyone has loads of such experiences, but all too many are too weak to show their weaknesses. A voluntary show of weakness requires self-confidence and strength. Self-irony is an extremely effectual laughter booster and entertainer because basically everyone in the audience can identify with such jokes and stories.

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