

The well-rounded IE

Make an impact with style

By Steve Kaye

Presentation tips for leaders

Someday, it is going to happen. You may be eating dinner, you may be attending a party, or you may be enjoying a luncheon. And then someone will interrupt your serenity by asking you to say a few words.

What do you do? Here are tips to help you bring success to the event and credit to your role as a leader.

- ◆ **Be prepared.** Recognize that if you are the supervisor, manager, or top executive attending a company event, there is at least a 99.9 percent chance that you will be called upon to speak. This includes retirement dinners, company picnics, service award banquets, conferences, management retreats, holiday luncheons, and (even) informal parties.

Begin by contacting the person organizing the event to ask if you will be called upon to speak. If the planner seems uncertain, you may want to volunteer. This puts you in control of what follows. Then ask key questions:

- ◆ What is the theme for the event? (Refer to it during your presentation.)
- ◆ How long do you want me to speak? (Speaking for too long can ruin the event.)
- ◆ Who will be in the audience? (Tune your message to the audience and recognize any notable attendees.)
- ◆ What type of presentation do you want? (Let the planner help you identify what to say.)
- ◆ What types of presentations have worked in the past? (Let the planner coach you on what leads to success.)
- ◆ What should I avoid? (This includes topics that will offend, disturb, or upset the audience. It also provides another opportunity to obtain coaching from the planner.)

You may know the answers to most of these questions. The value in asking them is to initiate a dialogue with the planner to

define your role. If you disagree with the planner's requests, then counter with offers to provide what you consider appropriate. The key is to establish a mutual understanding of what you will say and how it will contribute to the event. This sidesteps surprises for you, the planner, and the audience. It also avoids embarrassing mistakes.

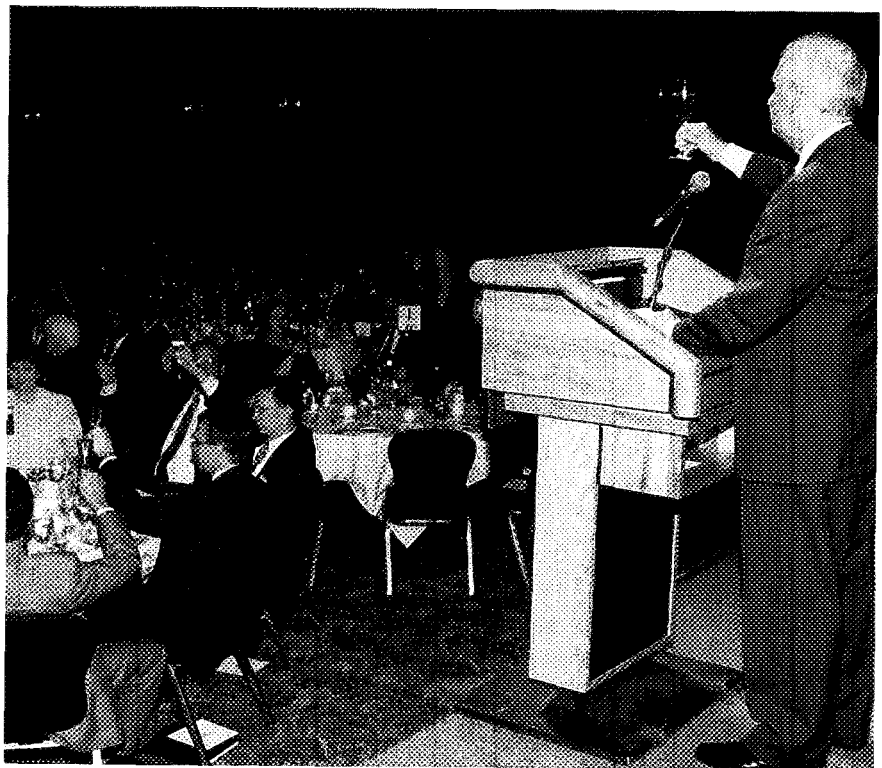
Of course, you may choose to decline to speak at the event. If the nature of the event requires an official statement from a company representative, then recommend someone else. This will protect you from hearing something like, "Our president, Pat, is here tonight. And while Pat refused to speak, we're sure she was just kidding. Ha ha ha. So, come on up here and say a few words!"

- ◆ **Be rehearsed.** Once you know what

is expected, plan what you will say. What message do you want to convey? What points do you want to make? What impression do you want to leave?

Take the time to prepare an outline of your talk. If possible, write out your first and last sentences. These are the most important parts of your presentation, and you will deliver them best when you know them exactly.

If you write out your presentation, rehearse it without looking at the script. Then make changes in the script to reflect what you are actually saying. This will force you to present the ideas conversationally, which sounds more natural than reading an essay. It will also free you from the tyranny of trying to remember a written script. I have seen speakers freeze when



IIE President John Jarvis toasted the Institute's 50th anniversary at the 1998 annual conference.

they missed a word or lost their place.

You can rehearse almost anywhere. For example, you can rehearse aloud while you drive, take a shower, or stand in your office. You can also rehearse silently while waiting in the airport or exercising at the health club. And you can develop fluency with key points by talking about these topics during conversations with friends, staff, and family. Be sure to rehearse your complete presentation at least once with a clock to make sure that you will finish within the allotted time.

If you must work from a written text (some formal events require this), then practice reading it out loud. Memorize phrases and simple sentences so you can glance up at the audience occasionally.

You may consider hiring a presentation coach or attending a workshop on business presentations. These services can show you how to maximize your impact while speaking. In fact, learning such skills serves as a long-term investment in your future as an effective leader.

♦ **Be gracious.** Recognize that when you speak at a business event, you represent your company and your office in that company. Use the event as an opportunity to promote good will. Avoid complaints, criticism, or controversy. These will alienate the audience and destroy your credibility quickly. Instead, talk about what the audience wants to hear. Praise your host, honor the occasion, and compliment the attendees. Radiate success and optimism.

If corrective actions are warranted, save working on them for private discussions with the appropriate staff members.

♦ **Be appropriate.** Humor is a wonderful technique for establishing rapport with an audience. Only use humor when you are comfortable with it and it is part of who you are.

If you plan to use humor, be appropriate. Avoid making fun of anyone or anything that might offend people in your audience. Often, the only safe target of humor is yourself.

Jokes are the most elementary form of humor. People will know you are telling a joke. And there is a chance that someone

Tips to overcome fear

♦ **Expect success.** Some people amplify their fears by dwelling on fantasies of outrageous failure. When such visions appear, end the show by pressing your mental stop button.

Instead, tune into visualizations of yourself delivering an eloquent, successful presentation before an appreciative audience. Imagine yourself feeling competent. See yourself doing an outstanding job. Hear yourself receiving applause. Your audience wants you to do well. They are sending you positive energy in support of your presentation. Catch that energy and use it to feel confident.

♦ **Focus on them.** We become anxious when we focus on ourselves. Instead, focus on helping the audience understand your ideas.

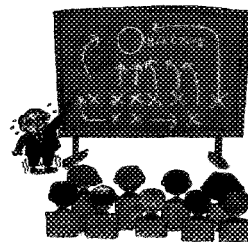
♦ **Free yourself from the tyranny of perfection.** Realize that imperfections mark every human activity. Thus, just do the best that you can. Talk to each person individually, even though they are listening as a group. If a mishap occurs,

acknowledge it and continue. For example, you could say, "It sounds like someone dropped a tray. As I was saying..."

♦ **Practice.** Fear causes people to avoid speaking. Seek out opportunities to speak – everywhere. For example, you could speak at family picnics (offer to propose a toast), chamber of commerce meetings (become active in the community), and club events (volunteer to be an officer).

You could also join Toastmasters, an international organization that helps people overcome fear and learn public speaking. For information on Toastmasters, visit <http://www.toastmasters.org> online or call (949) 858-8255.

The more time that you spend speaking, the more your confidence will increase. Some day you may discover that you actually welcome speaking opportunities.



else told the same joke earlier. So the best type of humor is anecdotal: original stories that make a point. For example, you might tell about the time that you left your luggage in a hotel lobby, the struggles you encountered to retrieve it, and the outstanding service you received from the clerk who found it. This story shows the value of great customer service.

♦ **Be professional.** Avoid admissions of inadequacy, such as "I'm not too good at speaking," "I don't know a whole lot about this topic," or "This is my first time and I feel awful."

Just do it. Let the audience decide for themselves how effective your presentation was. Most likely, they will appreciate your sincere efforts to communicate. In addition, if you have prepared and rehearsed,

your presentation will go smoothly.

Communication is a prime responsibility of every leader. When you speak well, you inspire others. Start with a plan, rehearse your presentation, and be yourself. The audience is waiting for you to succeed.

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