

## 9. COURTESY AND MANNERS

### 9.1 COURTESY AND MANNERS: **Public Speaking Skills Training: Lectern Etiquette**

First, the square wooden object placed at the center of the room is properly called a *lectern*, not a podium. The word podium comes from the same root word as "podiatry," which you probably know means the care of the human foot. As you might guess, the root word in question refers to feet. Therefore, a podium is a stage you stand on with your feet - not what you stand behind. Webster's dictionary definition of a podium is a small platform for the conductor of an orchestra, or for a public speaker. Now you've already added to your public speaking skills - you are among only 9% of the speakers out there that will use the right terminology!

This may seem odd, but primary public speaking skills guidelines for proper lectern etiquette revolve around treating the lectern like a small child. Just wait, it'll make more sense in a moment.

#### **Public Speaking Skills Lectern Etiquette Rule #1: Never touch the lectern inappropriately.**

Most of us would never dream of hitting, grabbing, or leaning on a child. Yet, I see speakers sprawled all over the lectern as they speak. Often new presenters are so nervous they grab the edges of the lectern - sometimes so tightly their knuckles turn white. Then there are those people who beat or pound on the lectern to drive a point home, leaving the audience feeling very defensive. The major problem with treating the lectern this way, aside from offending your audience, is that it distracts your audience and prevents them from hearing what you have to say. This doesn't help your cause. Improve your public speaking skills by standing 10 to 12 inches behind the lectern to avoid the temptation of touching it inappropriately.

#### **Public Speaking Skills Lectern Etiquette Rule #2: Never leave the lectern unattended.**

You would never walk away and leave a child alone in a supermarket or in a train station, would you? No, that would be absurd. Now, how many times have you seen emcees announce the public speaker and then just walk away, leaving the spotlight and everyone's gaze on an empty podium? Every member of the audience feels this public display of awkwardness. It takes great public speaking skills on the part of the featured speaker to either cover up or make up for the lack of interaction. And how about the speaker who ends his speech and then marches off the stage, again leaves the lectern all alone? The emcee quickly and perhaps awkwardly rushes to take charge of the situation. According to public speaking skills lectern etiquette rule #2, when the speech is over, the speaker should return

custody of the lectern to the emcee. It works both ways. In either case, this poor public speaking skills protocol can easily be avoided if you remember to treat the lectern like a child and never leave it unattended.

When the lectern is turned over to you as a speaker, you are then free to move about, returning to the lectern from time to time as needed. I'm referring to the transitions, when you are finished with your speech. Wait patiently at the lectern, enjoying the applause, until the emcee takes charge of the lectern. Think of a relay race, where the runner passes a baton to another runner before slowing her pace. Once the baton is passed, the passing runner is finished - but until then, you have to keep running!

**Public Speaking Skills Lectern Etiquette Rule #3: If your job is to introduce the speaker:**

After you announce his or her name, stay at the lectern until he or she arrives. In the United States, it is customary to shake hands as a professional courtesy (which makes it easier to remember this rule.) Stay at the lectern and greet your speaker; then gracefully leave without upstaging your guest. Since not all emcees and speakers will have read this public speaking skills training article and know what to do, tell them; explain it to them before the event, and eliminate a potentially awkward moment - and other moments in their future.

**Public Speaking Skills Lectern Etiquette Rule#4: Best practices.**

a. Take your time to prepare the lectern. If you have time before you speak, take a moment and place your outline or notes on the lectern prior to your talk. If not, bring your notes with you and take whatever time you need to prepare them before you utter your first word.

b. How to use your script or notes on the lectern. If you are going to use notes during your talk, do not staple them together. If you do, your audience will see you flipping the pages and it could be a distraction. Instead, use this public speaking skills secret: fold the top right corner and quietly move your page to the right, revealing your next page. No one will even know you are using notes.

Another public speaking skills professional trick: If you need to return to your notes during your presentation, set a glass of water on the lectern before your talk. During your presentation when you need to look at your notes, simply act as if you are walking back to the lectern to take a drink of water. Pick up the glass and drink while casually glancing at your notes.

c. How to stand behind the lectern. It is never a good idea to give your entire presentation from behind the lectern. Why? It blocks you off from your audience. This could prevent you from connecting well with your listeners. However, in some cases you may be forced to stay behind the wooden blockade due to the need for the microphone, or maybe because there is nowhere else for you to go. In any event, if you find yourself in this position, remember to stand approximately 10 inches away from the lectern, and if you need to lay your hands on it, do so at the very edges closest to you and not the audience. Don't grip, grab or pound on it.

d. How to leave the lectern gracefully. When leaving the lectern, leave your notes. Do not end your powerful presentation by gathering up your papers as you leave. Instead, end with a bang and enjoy the applause. You can always pick up your notes or props after the meeting has ended. As mentioned earlier, wait until your introducer comes and takes control of the lectern.

e. When there is not a lectern. In most business speaking settings there is not a lectern. Often times you may be speaking at a meeting that takes place in a restaurant or conference room. If this is the case, simply ask to be seated near the front of the room and put your notes on the table in front of you.

**9.2 ENVIRONMENTS AND SCENARIOS:** You may ask yourself when you will ever need to give a speech. Maybe you might have to at a wedding, or as part of a class project, but those might be all the situations you could envision. The fact of the matter is that in many different professions you will be called upon to deliver a speech, and all of those instances will present different environments in which you must effectively deliver your message.

Most, if not all, professions have national associations, or business meetings, or require presentations to be made for clients, and each of these different scenarios requires public speaking skills. In fact, today, media has expanded the potential venues through which you might deliver a speech or presentation.

Every speaking situation can be described in three different dimensions. The first is the physical location in which the speech is being delivered. The second dimension details the speaking tools available in that location, and the final dimension of any

speaking situation is the speakers themselves. Each of these dimensions is always relevant to understanding any speaking environment, and in this section, we will explain how these dimensions can manifest differently in various speaking situations.

The physical location of a speech refers to the immediate environment in which the speaker will be speaking. Locations vary from large rooms to small rooms, from outdoors to the comfort of your office or home. It is important, however, to stress that the location refers to a physical environment, and not the medium through which a speech is delivered.

In that respect, the Internet is not a location, but rather a medium through which a message is transmitted. The location would be the actual location in which the video or audio file was recorded. Now that we have made that distinction clear, let's explore a variety of physical locations in which you might deliver a speech and the challenges and advantages inherent in each.

One of the most common venues for a speech of any kind is indoors. The majority of sales presentations, company updates, conference panels, wedding toasts, and eulogies occur inside. "Indoors," however is a broad description with a lot of variance. Indoors can refer to a small intimate setting in a conference room; it can mean a classroom; auditoriums and churches are also both indoors, as are large arenas or even a living room in someone's home. Indoor speaking in any of these environments provides some very basic, but important, advantages for a speaker.

First, the lighting and air temperature usually can be adjusted for your comfort. Being indoors also minimizes certain types of distractions by blocking out the outside world and its associated sounds such as airplanes, cars, wind, weather, and even people talking. The contained nature of an indoor room, regardless of how big or small, is generally the most comfortable situation in which speakers may find themselves.

Indoor speaking does not encompass all possible speaking environments, as occasions do arise when you might be called upon to speak outdoors. These situations could include company picnics, family reunions, golf tournaments, building dedications, political pep rallies, or facility tours for prospective clients. Compared to indoor presentations, outdoor speaking is more challenging because there are significant distractions for the audience and you, but there are also some unique advantages as well.

One prime example of a possible advantage to outdoor speaking situations is the opportunity to adjust the setting in advance of the presentation. In many cases, outdoor speech locations are set up before the speech, and so the actual seating style, arrangement, and design of the environment can be influenced in advance with a site trip.

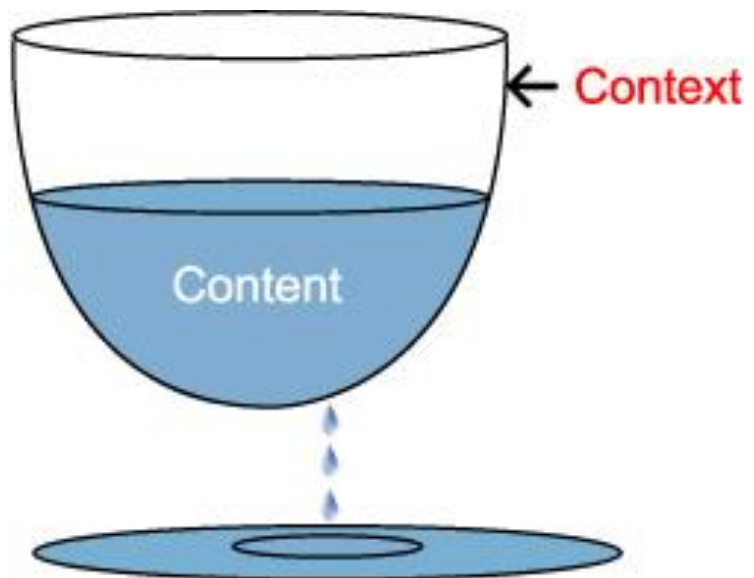
When a speech is indoors you have no chance to knock down a wall or create more space, but outdoors you have space to play with, thus allowing you to somewhat customize your speaking situation. Even so, many of the advantages to speaking indoors are challenges when presenting outdoors. For instance, you cannot control the weather outdoors, and thus must have backup plans to compensate for rain, wind, or other unforeseen nature-related obstacles that might present themselves.

You also might not have some of the comforts available in a conference room, such as electricity, thus inhibiting your ability to project your voice to a large crowd or show slides or videos to your audience. If the weather is nice or the setting is scenic, your audience may easily lose focus on you and your message. For these reasons, outdoor speaking can be more challenging than presenting indoors.

The last aspect of the speaking environment is you, the actual speaker. How you carry yourself, from your posture to how you dress, communicates a message to the audience. How you appear and carry yourself adds importance and influences the mood of the situation, so your choices in clothing and demeanor must convey the same emotional attachment and feeling you want to create for that moment.

**9.3 Context:** In any case, your content is your experience, knowledge and expertise. Anything else is preaching, not teaching. Let me be very clear before going any further; your content is secondary to the context. Let me explain...

you notice that inside the bowl is some water and that water represents the content of the bowl. Your content is your experience and knowledge that you will share with your audiences. You'll also notice that if your bowl springs even the tiniest of leaks, what



happens to all your content? It leaks out – all of it.

So, what is more important than the content? The bowl – of course! So, what does the bowl represent? Context! Your context is much more important than your content. In other words; it's not what you teach, it's how you teach it that is more important.

Let me put it this way. Most speakers and trainers try to share as much content as they can in the time they have. Whether it's for a 15 minute presentation or an entire day, most just spew out data data data! And, usually what happens after 5 or 10 minutes of boring data, most of your audience has tuned out. They're either sleeping or daydreaming or checking their Blackberries.

Too much data without appropriate context to hold it together is just plain boring. And, most people can't learn it they're bored. Data is boring. No matter how good or how powerful you think your data is, it's still boring. Therefore, the context of how you present your data becomes the most important thing.

**Did you know that most speakers are happy to have 20% of their audience paying attention? That's ridiculous. You want 100%! Anything less is less than good enough! So, how do you do that? How do you enroll and engage 100% of the audience 100% of the time?**

Context is the answer! You must learn the secrets of the most powerful speakers in order to deliver an award winning presentation! You must learn the context of how it's done. The problem is; most speakers would never reveal their most coveted secrets. I believe that the better you're able to present the better the world will be. Think of it this way; if you learn to be a better presenter then you'll be able to affect a larger portion of the population. And if enough speakers do that, imagine how much the world will change? Good speakers are hard to come by, but that's only because there is not enough good information out there for you to learn from.